Greetings from the head

Well the year is almost done and the Psychology department was indeed one busy place! We continue to be amongst the most popular departments here at Mount Allison, with high demand for all of our courses. We continuously review our course offerings and strive to offer courses that reflect the breadth of study that is psychology. Although we may be small by some standards, we are proud of both the breadth and depth of study that is possible here! Further, last year saw a record number of applicants to our Honours program and many students are pursuing research opportunities through Directed Studies courses. We strive to maintain our high standards and pursuit of excellence in both teaching and research here in the Psychology Department. That is something we are all committed to, and something that we are all proud of. Go team psychology!

First Hammond House Mixer

The First Annual Hammond House Mixer was held on Monday September 30th, and was a smashing success, with 12 faculty and over 40 students present.
Editor’s Corner

This year has been a very eventful year with Mount Allison University closing down for two full half days due to weather conditions! Oh, yes, and there was that three-week interruption… Nonetheless, it has been a very busy year, with two of our faculty members securing tenure: congratulations to Nancy Garon and Genevieve Desmarais who have been promoted to the rank of Associate Professor! 

This year we had to make-do with four faculty members on sabbatical. Dr. Garon was away for the fall term while Dr. Hamilton and Dr. Claxton-Oldfield were away for the winter term and Dr. Terry Belke was on sabbatical for the entire year. Dr. McGrath and Sarah Vannier stepped in to fill some of the void! Dr. Dan McGrath furthered his reputation as “jack of all courses,” teaching a section of Intro Psychology, Conditioning, Drugs & Behaviour, and a seminar course on Psychology of Addiction, but will be leaving us for a brand new tenure-track position this summer—Congratulations Dr. McGrath! . Sarah Vannier joined us last fall, teaching Social Cognition, Sexuality in Adolescence, Personality and a section of Intro Psychology. 

Things have also been busy on the research front, with 21 students completing honours theses and 21 students completing Independent studies courses. It was a busy research day with topics ranging from wheel-running reinforcement to the development of self-control, passing through sexual health research and multisensory integration.

Student Experiences: Danielle Biss (recipient of a summer research award)

Working in the psychology department as a Summer Student Research Award recipient was a fantastic and rewarding opportunity. I was fortunate to get a head start on my honours thesis project, investigating the relative contribution of student readiness, parenting style, and academic self-regulation for predicting academic success in first year and psychosocial adjustment to campus life. Over the summer, I was able to focus intensively on recruitment and data collection of a sample of senior high school students, while also beginning my review of the relevant literature pertaining to my project. I most appreciated the flexibility of my work hours and schedule, the new skills I developed and strengthened, as well as being able to get to know the faculty better, independent from the “busyness” of classes during the school year. At Mount Allison, we’re so fortunate to have a group of faculty that cares so much for its students, with professors willing to spend countless hours of their time discussing career plans and answering graduate school questions! As a direct result of this summer, the psychology department feels like more of a community to me. I would definitely recommend other psychology students speak with their professors at the start of winter term and consider applying for a Mount Allison Summer Student Research Award!
**Student Experiences: Devon Boschel (recipient of a summer research award)**

My name is Devon Boschel and this summer I worked in the Mount Allison Sexual Health (M.A.S.H.) Laboratory under the supervision of Dr. Lisa Dawn Hamilton. I was the recipient of the Goodridge Summer Undergraduate Award, therefore I was paid by a stipend to work on a certain project for the summer. The project I was working on is also my honours project for this year, so I was really lucky to be able to get a head start on my thesis! I spent a lot of my time reading articles that pertain to my project and at the end of the summer I submitted the first draft of my thesis introduction.

Working in the psychology department this summer was a lot of fun! I arrived in the lab most days between 9-9:30am, but there was a lot of flexibility, so I would work from home some days as well. It was definitely an eventful summer in Crabtree, as the university was constructing a new road right outside the building. Sometimes it was scary being in the basement without windows when the whole building was vibrating from the jackhammer outside! But all in all, it was a great summer. I loved being in Sackville and it was amazing to have the opportunity to get a kick-start on my thesis while also helping with other experiments in the lab!

**Student Experiences: Tsukiko Miyata (conference travel)**

Summer is the perfect time of year to satisfy your learning appetite. Whether you already know your passion or not, summer is when we students are free to explore without having to worry about due dates and GPA. This summer, I took an advantage of such freedom and gained some insights into one of my nerdy obsessions, neuroscience. In June, I had an opportunity to attend the Centre of Vision Research Summer School at York University in Toronto. It was a one-week program with 23 students whose background varied from Psychology to Engineering and Computer Science. From lectures and labs, we were able to witness some of the most current research projects in the field, such as creating an enhanced 3D technology for the film industry and utilizing visuospatial illusions to build a training facility for astronauts. In addition to the summer school, in August I went to the conference of the Society for Music Perception and Cognition at Ryerson University, also in Toronto. It was a four-day event that consisted of presentations by researchers in the field of Music Cognition and a public lecture by Dr. Daniel Levitin, the author of *This is Your Brain on Music*. The researchers’ backgrounds included but were not limited to Musicology, Behavioural Neuroscience, Performing Arts, and Cognitive Psychology; the topics included simple tonal and rhythmic perception and performance, the establishment of the quantified musical creativity scale, emotional expression and understanding of music, and use of music in clinical settings. One of the highlights of these academic adventures was, of course, becoming good friends with other student researchers. We enjoyed karaoke nights, stand-up comedy, dance parties, and there were a lot of heated discussions about research in downtown Toronto pubs. Overall, I was very pleased with my summer experience. I was able to expand my career networks and to re-evaluate my education goals. I ended up revisiting the fundamental source of my fascination with neuroscience and gained an enriched understanding of the field.
Student Experiences: Emily Kervin and Célina Boothby (conference travel)

Emily Kervin (Psychology Honours Student – below right) and Célina Boothby (Psychology Independent Study Student – below left) attended the one day Crossroads Interdisciplinary Health Conference at Dalhousie University in Halifax on March 28, 2014. This conference was designed as an adjudicated academic forum for undergraduate and graduate (Masters and PhD) students across Atlantic Canada. It provides a yearly showcase of breakthrough health research being conducted by students from many disciplines such as kinesiology, nursing, health promotion, health philosophy, nutrition, and of course psychology. They presented their findings on Cardiovascular Health and Cognition: Health Habits and Cognitive Task Performance in Young Adults in poster-form to the attentive audience at the conference. They were honoured with Best Runner Up Poster, placing them in second place for best poster at the entire conference and received a certificate and bursary. This conference was a great opportunity for these girls as they furthered their knowledge into potential health promotion degrees within Dalhousie and other Atlantic Universities.

Thomas Williams - Our Psychology Valedictorian for the 2014 convocation

I am both honoured and excited to speak on behalf of the MTA class of 2014. It will be challenging to do justice to such a diverse and talented group of individuals, but I will do my best. Luckily, my time as a psychology student has equipped me with the gifts of concise writing, presentation skills, and a fabulous support network of staff and students.
**Psych Society for 2014-15**

Hello Everyone!

I am very excited for the Psychology Society 2014/2015! Next year we have an exec that is eager to start working to make it one of the best years yet! The exec really wants to continue to work to make the Psychology Society something that is worth being a member of. This will be done by offering fabulous events, some of which are currently offered annually, but also through great new events, and increased academic support! We hope to help students reach their potential in psychology as well as spark their interest in all of the different opportunities provided through the department and all of the awesome research that is currently being done, while also creating a strong community and network of students. Look forward to a great year!

*Heather Webster, President*

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*Célina Boothby: Financial Associate*

*Emily Jarvis: Academic Associate*

*Sarah Peverill: Communications Associate*

*Nicole Jollimore: Social Associate*
**What is an Independent Studies course?**

**Independent studies courses** (PSYC 4950 and PSYC 4951) are not regular courses where anyone can enroll. Students interested in doing an independent studies course approach a professor to discuss a possible research project, and the course is created by the professor when they agree to take on a student. This year saw twenty-one independent studies projects, with topics ranging from wheel running reinforcement to sexual health research and the self-compassion in relationships. Psychology is a very busy department indeed!

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<td>Emma Wilson-Pease</td>
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Tips for applying to graduate schools

Applying to a graduate program or a professional program is intimidating: there are a lot of choices out there! Some of our students have gone on to medical school, law school, experimental graduate programs or clinical programs, while others decided to work or travel for a year before deciding what to do. If you plan to apply to graduate school or other professional programs, here are a few things to consider.

Figuring out where to go

There are many different programs available, think about what you would like to do when you ‘grow up.’ You can then look at programs that take you there. Also, look at the kinds of skills and certifications specific programs give you - what will these skills and certifications allow you to do once you are done with your training? If you decide on graduate training, you should begin searching for potential supervisors early (during your third year) - this is especially important for experimental programs where you will be working closely with a supervisor. Go to universities' websites and read through the descriptions of their research areas. Once you identify supervisors you would like to work with, contact them to introduce yourself and ask if they will be taking on students in the year you plan to begin graduate work. When you do this you should clearly identify what you are currently doing (e.g., a B.A. or B.Sc. in discipline X), as well as which aspect of their research interests you and why. These researchers receive MANY request, so make yourself stand out. Even excellent students sometimes don’t get accepted in their first-choice programs. Competition can be fierce (especially in clinical programs), so have a back-up plan. Identify second and third-choice schools and programs. Consider working and volunteering for a year to further develop your skills.

Applying to graduate and professional programs

The first step to applying is to carefully look up all the requirements of the program you are applying for, such as the minimum GPA. Many schools also still require applicants to write the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), so get your hands on study guides and start studying early for both the General GRE and the topic GRE (psychology)! You will also need to prepare personal statements. This is where you verbalize how your current skills make you a good candidate for the program you are applying for. The individuals who will read your application do not know the kinds of activities your professors implement in your courses, and it is up to you to point these out and explain how these activities prepared you for your chosen program of study. First, clearly identify the courses that you have taken that are relevant to the program. (e.g., biopsychology courses for a neuroscience program, child development for an educational program, etc...). Then, clearly explain how you have developed writing skills and presentation skills through class activities (lab reports, presentations, etc...). In many universities, students only listen to lectures and write exams so people reading your application do not know whether you’ve had any additional training over and above lectures. You can also talk about being exposed to various research paradigms in your labs. It’s up to you to point out relevant experiences, explain why they are relevant, and tailor it to the program you are applying to!

Getting reference letters

All programs require reference letters, and professors get many requests, so ask early. When deciding who to ask, think about professors who can talk about more than grades, look for professors who can discuss your writing and research skills, your ability to work in groups or under pressure, or other relevant skills. When you approach professors to request letters of reference, ask if they can write a positive letter—it’s ok! Most professor will tell you if they feel they don’t know you enough or if they can’t write a strong letter and you will know what to expect. You can then either ask another professor whose knowledge will complement that of the first referee, or ask another professor altogether. When a professor accepts to write you a reference letter, provide them with ALL the important information: the description of the programs you are applying to, the deadlines for each application, a copy of your transcript and a CV. Also, make sure all the student’s section of forms are completely filled!

Hello!

Let me tell you a little bit about myself. First, I am a sex and relationships researcher. Often when I tell people what I study they ask me how I ended up doing what I do. During my second year of college I took a class called ‘Psychology of Human Sexuality.’ The professor who taught the class was wonderful. She was comfortable, straightforward, and answered every question we asked; I remember sitting in that classroom and wishing that she had been around when I was in high school. About half way through the term I decided to change my major to Psychology so I could study human sexuality. Never underestimate the power of elective credits!

It took me some time to figure out exactly what I wanted to do. For a while I volunteered with community groups providing sexual health services to youth, and I considered clinical or counseling psychology because I thought that might be a good way to get involved in sex ed. In my third year I started to get involved in research, and in my fourth year I completed an honours project (looking at toddler parent-child relationships). Very quickly I realized that research was my passion. Seriously, what could be more fun than coming up with interesting questions, finding the answers, and then sharing that knowledge with the world? Especially in a field like human sexuality where there is still so much we just don’t know!

Since becoming a sex research nerd I have conducted studies looking at sexual initiation, sexual compliance, attraction, sexual motives, and the content of free web-based pornography. This year I am working with an honours student and independent studies student who are both doing projects expanding on previous projects I have done examining young adult’s oral sex experiences. I am also still in the process of finishing up my Ph.D. at the University of New Brunswick. My dissertation focuses on how having traditional romantic beliefs (e.g., love at first sight, love overcomes all, soul mates, passion never fades) impacts how satisfied or committed we are in our romantic relationships.

Goodbye Dr. Dan McGrath!!!

Well, it’s that time of year again; students and professors alike are busy wrapping up the end of term and completing exams. For me, this also spells the end of an enjoyable three years as an Assistant Professor at Mount Allison. During my time at MTA, I have had the opportunity to teach a wide variety of courses from Introductory Psychology to a seminar on addiction. In these classes, I have met many students and in some cases have seen familiar faces in a number of my courses. In addition to teaching, I also had the chance to serve as a supervisor to four wonderful honours students and numerous directed studies students. I have been very impressed with the quality of the students here as well as the research capacity of our department. Speaking of which, I would like to say a big thank you to my colleagues on faculty and staff. Throughout my time at MTA, I have always been supported and made to feel that I belonged. As a Mount A alumnus myself, I know that this university is a very special place and having had the opportunity to work here has been a dream come true. However, it’s time to move on and I am excited for the next adventure for myself and my family. Starting this summer, I will begin a tenure-track position in the Department of Psychology at the University of Calgary. This position is also gambling research chair funded by the Alberta Gambling Research Institute (AGRI). It’s a fantastic opportunity and will allow me to work side by side with some of the best gambling researchers in the country. I would like to finish by thanking everyone in the Mount Allison community for three great years. If any of my former students are in the Calgary area in the years to come, feel free to stop by and say hi. Best regards.
Special topics courses offered in 2013-2014

Social Cognition (Sarah Vannier)

This year Social Cognition was being offered as a third year special topics course. Social cognition looks at the way we think about the social world and addresses many of the same topics as social psychology: attitudes, stereotypes, attributions, identity, etc.

What makes social cognition different is that it is more interested in the processes underlying our social behaviour. It tries to answer the question of “how” these processes work by using many of the theories and methods originally developed by cognitive psychologists. For example, a social psychologist might look at the types of situations where we are most likely to use stereotypes. In contrast, a social cognitive researcher would look at whether using stereotypes helps us process information faster or more efficiently (e.g., can you memorize more information when using a stereotype).

Social cognition is a fast growing field of psychology and as we develop more sophisticated measurement techniques (e.g., computer programs, neuro-imaging) we are learning even more about the ways we think about the people and world around us.

Psychology, Science, and Science-Fiction (Geneviève Desmarais)

In the fall of 2013, Dr. Desmarais offered a special topics course on Psychology, Science, and Science Fiction. This course was generally targeted in that it did not require specific psychology courses. Instead, students were expected to have taken a variety of psychology courses, allowing them to discuss how different psychological concepts were portrayed in the sci-fi genre. Topics that were discussed included gender identity and gender roles, the neural control of behavior, predicting criminal behavior, and memory. These topics were discussed via episodes of TV shows like Star Trek: The Next Generation, Firefly, Dollhouse, Doctor Who, Torchwood, and The X-files, as well as movies like The Matrix and Minority Report. Students also discussed the representation of human perception in Robert Sawyer’s ‘Wake,’ the portrayal of social behavior in George Orwell’s ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four’ as well as the portrayal of child development and bullying in Orson Scott Card’s ‘Ender’s Game.’ The course was filled with stimulating discussions, and students; term papers included discussions of live zombie games, drug use in the book series ‘Akira’ as well as a discussion of the depiction of social marginalization and criminal behavior in science-fiction. The course was altogether very well received, and Dr. Desmarais is very eager to offer it again!

Psychology of addictions (Dan McGrath)

This year Psychology of Addictions was offered as a fourth year seminar. The course provided students with a comprehensive overview of the psychology of addiction and addiction-related issues. The course included weekly discussions of topics like historical perspectives on addiction, theories of addiction, the neurobiology of addictions, psychological and social factors affecting addictions, as well as psychological treatments for addiction. Interestingly, the course also involved a discussion of behavioural addictions focused on pathological gambling. This discussion is particularly relevant to the current societal context where many a behavior seems to become a target for ‘behavioural addiction’ - for example cell phone addictions and video game addictions.

Sexuality in Adolescence (Sarah Vannier)

Sarah Vannier also offered a fourth year seminar on the topic of sexuality in adolescence. This course provided an in-depth examination of theories and empirical research related to sexuality during adolescence and emerging adulthood (approximately ages 11 to 24). Some of the topics covered were sexual behaviour, sexual orientation, technology (e.g., social media, computer mediated communication), sexual relationships, and sexual health education.
Psychology Department Members on Sabbatical

Nancy Garon (Fall 2013)

When I was an undergraduate student, I always wondered what exactly professors did during their sabbatical. It seemed like a funny thing to have an employer provide their employees with time to do something else. When I was a graduate student, I thought I could finally figure out what happened during the “sabbatical”. Every time a professor had a sabbatical or was scheduled for one, I would ask what they did or what they were planning. Turns out the sabbatical is many things. These are some of the answers I got:

- teaching in another university
- working in another lab
- learning a new skill that would be valuable for teaching or research
- beginning a new line of research
- working on a new grant
- writing and submitting manuscripts
- time to think about their research

After all this time, I’ve arrived at this conclusion: the sabbatical is to recharge and renew, with the hope that this will translate to professors who are better researchers and educators.

I started my sabbatical with these lofty hopes. I have been catching up on research areas that I have just not had the time to fully explore during my teaching times. I have been enjoying analyzing data and writing manuscripts. I have made some trips to the IWK to begin new research and I have been working on a new grant. What I have enjoyed the most thus far, however, is TIME to THINK and be curious about the world!

Stephen Claxton-Oldfield (Winter 2014)

If it feels like you’ve hardly seen me this past term, that’s because I’ve been on sabbatical since the beginning of January. I’ve been working mostly from home, although I do drop by the department occasionally … just to annoy my colleagues really. The first few months have been very productive … writing, submitting, and revising manuscripts for possible publication. Two revise and re-submits have been accepted for publication – one with Katie Miller (one of my last year’s honours students) looking at hospice palliative care volunteers’ attitudes toward physician-assisted suicide; the other is a study of the motivations and personal characteristics of hospice volunteers in France. I’ve also been doing lots of reading (serious stuff too … not just hockey magazines), tweaking my third-year course on death and dying, and finishing my book on hospice palliative care volunteers. In between all that, I found time to organize and host a Death Café at the Black Duck Inn on Bridge Street (in early March) … an opportunity for folks to come together for coffee, cake, and conversation about death. I am currently organizing a Hike for Hospice, which will take place on Sunday, May 4 (if you’re still around town in early May, please come out and join us). These community events I do in my capacity as Chair of the Tantramar Hospice Palliative Care Organization. Toward the end of my sabbatical, I will be doing some research in the United Kingdom … visiting and interviewing voluntary services managers/coordinators at a number of adult residential hospices. I look forward to being back in the classroom in September!
More Psychology Department Members on Sabbatical

Terry Belke (Fall 2013 / Winter 2014)

What I did this summer sabbatical!

On the DIY side, I spent 3-4 months demolishing and rebuilding my lab. In continuous use since January 1995, the lab was showing its age in the form of ever more frequent malfunctions, repairs, and hard drive failures. The rebuild was like restoring a vintage car to its former glory. Reconstruction was completed in time for Emma Laffoley and Justin Magee to test how making a thin rat fat affects her running and her sweet tooth. Two manuscripts were accepted for publication, the latter being my 50th and the 1st for three of my five student coauthors. It was published in the same journal as was my 1st as a student coauthor some 26 years ago (Pierce & Belke, 1988). I resurrected software displaying two VLTs in order to study the determinants of persistent gambling in humans as a way to address the pathological gambling problem in pigeons (Belke & Spetch, 1994). Finally, I returned to my sociological roots by developing a course that surveys explanations of criminal behavior such as I choose to do bad (rationale choice), I was born to do bad (biological), I learned to do bad (social learning), I never learned to do good (social control), and you are “bad” (labeling theory).

Lisa Dawn Hamilton (Winter 2014)

So far on my sabbatical I have done a lot of traveling, presenting, and collaborating. I spent two months in Vancouver collaborating with colleagues in the departments of Urology and Gynecology at Vancouver General Hospital. One project examines the changes in mood and relationship satisfaction that occur when a partner is using anti-androgenic drugs to treat prostate cancer. The other project is a reanalysis of some archival data looking at the relationship between psychological and hormonal variables as contributors sexual function in women. I also attended a Sexual Attitudes Reassessment workshop in Vancouver that will greatly enhance my teaching and my research on sex education. I was able to present new research at the Society for Research on Adolescence in Austin, TX and attend the Society for Sex Therapy and Research in Pittsburgh, PA. One of the most interesting experiences was spending time at a child gender clinic in Toronto, which helped me get a more nuanced understanding of gender identity development in children that I can apply to teaching Psychology of Gender.
A: Don’t worry so much, if you do it wrong it’s not the end of the world… it’s not like anyone is going to die or anything.

B: Dump your boyfriend…
Move to Montreal...

C: Maybe don’t do that in grad school...

D: You’re shamelessly anthropomorphizing!

E: I’m very close to buying you a bottle of wine...

F: I can’t wait to see what you all look like after last class bash!

Answers: 1D, 2E, 3A, 4F, 5B, 6C