

# Psychological Sciences . Communiqué

Spring 2017

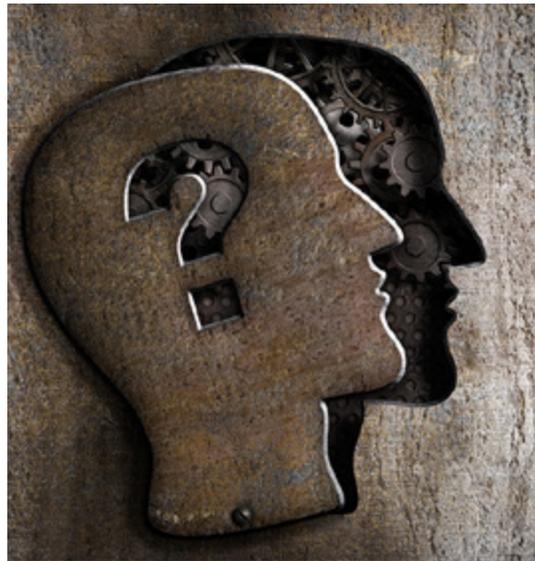
## Being Healthy, Staying Healthy Faculty Members Contribute to the Psychology of Health Behavior

By *Laura D. Scherer*  
Assistant Professor

Many people think that psychologists primarily study and treat mental health disorders. However, psychological science is relevant to health in a number of different ways, and faculty in the Department of Psychological Sciences at Mizzou have spearheaded research on questions such as how to help people quit smoking, engage in less-risky sexual behaviors, and make better decisions about medical treatments. For a department that does not have an official “health psychology” focus, the Department of Psychological Sciences has a lot of health-related research going on.

**Lynne Cooper**, Curators’ Distinguished Professor of Psychology, has made important contributions to understanding risk-taking behaviors and health. For example, Cooper has examined people’s beliefs about the consequences of drinking alcohol and how these beliefs influence the ways in which they use alcohol to cope with negative events, bolster their mood, and enhance social experiences. However, one problem with such beliefs is that they can be wrong. For example, [in a recent publication](#), Cooper and colleagues found that many peo-

ple believe that drinking improves sexual experience. But the reality is different: Young adult participants in her study actually reported fewer positive and more negative emotions on sexual occasions when they



drank than when they didn’t drink. Despite this, participants who held these beliefs actually drank more on sexual occasions than those who didn’t hold these beliefs. Cooper explains that “people’s inaccurate beliefs can lead them to drink in situations where they think alcohol will be helpful, and as a result put themselves at risk of negative alcohol-related consequences. In order to help them make better choices, we need to correct those beliefs.”

Another faculty member, Professor **Jamie Arndt**, has a long-standing interest in how thoughts about our mortality can influence health behaviors. In his research, Arndt observed that health messages can often, perhaps ironically, trigger thoughts about death, and this can have important implications for how people react to health messages. For example, when a smoker sees an advertisement reminding him that smoking causes lung cancer, this is likely to lead to thoughts about his own mortality. To explain what happens next, Arndt turned to terror management theory, which proposes that thoughts about death motivate us to bolster our sense of self-esteem and meaning. For example, people who get their self-esteem from religion may become more likely to go to service when they are reminded of death, and people who get their self-esteem from friendships may feel a greater desire to associate with friends. However, people who get their self-esteem from negative health behaviors, like smoking, may feel the urge to smoke more. Arndt and colleagues have found that messages that remind people of death often reduce the desire to smoke in the immediate term, but they can actually increase the

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## From the Chair's Desk

By Moshe Naveh-Benjamin  
Department Chair

This has been an excellent year for our department, despite challenging times at the university. Our faculty members continue to excel in all respects, enhancing our standing as a major center of psychological research and teaching. Half a dozen of our faculty members are now serving as editors and associate editors for major journals in psychology, including Curators' Distinguished Professor **Nelson Cowan**, who began his appointment in January as editor of the prestigious *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*.

Several of our faculty have received national recognition: Professor **Debi Bell** was selected as a fellow of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies and is the 2017 chair-elect of the Council of University Directors of Clinical Psychology, and Curators' Distinguished Professor **Lynne Cooper** was elected president of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology.

In addition, several of our faculty members have received honors for their outstanding research and teaching: Professor **Bruce Bartholow** received the MU Chancellor's Outstanding Research and Creative Activity Award, and Professor **Amanda Rose** and Frederick A. Middlebush Professor **Jeff Rouder** were elected fellows in the Association for Psychological Science. As another reflection of the excellence of our junior faculty, two of our assistant professors, **Ian Gizer** and **Jeff Johnson**, were granted tenure status and promoted to the

rank of associate professor. A list of recent awards and honors recognizing our faculty and graduate students is outlined on Page 5.

Our faculty continue to seek and receive external support for their research, and this year, several of them were awarded multi-year grant support by NSF and NIH. In addition, our NIH submission for the continuation of our training grant program in addition, led by Curators' Distinguished Professor **Ken Sher**, received high scores and will hopefully be funded for an additional five years, helping us to continue attracting excellent graduate students and postdoctoral researchers. Finally, several faculty and staff members have received departmental awards, including Assistant Professor **Laura Scherer**, who received the Max Meyer Outstanding Junior Faculty Research Award; Teaching Faculty **Lisa Bauer**, who was the winner of the David G. McDonald Contributions to Undergraduate Education Award; and Assistant Teaching Professor **Julianne Ludlam**, who received the Psi Chi Outstanding Professor Award. Finally, **Delvin Mellerup** received the Chancellor's Outstanding Staff Award for 2016, and **Adrienne Vaughn**, one of our advisers, was awarded the Charity Flack Outstanding Staff Award. Congratulations to everyone!

Our staff has gone through some changes this year. **Suzanne Rutter-Hackley**, who had worked in our fiscal office, has now retired, and **Susan Jones**, who has been our grant officer, will be retiring soon. We extend to both of them our utmost gratitude for their many years of excellent and dedicated service to the department, and we wish them the best. **Jen Crowley** has stepped into Suzanne's position, and we extend to her a warm welcome. She joins our staff in providing the vital organizational infrastructure that the department requires in order to thrive in all aspects of its operation.

On the educational front, we continue to provide first-rate teaching and learning experiences to our undergraduate and graduate students. For the past several years, our department has offered a bachelor of sci-

ence (BS) degree in addition to a bachelor of arts (BA), providing a more science-intensive degree option for undergraduate students interested in pursuing certain forms of graduate study and research. There are now over 50 students who are pursuing the BS degree.

The current *Communiqué* highlights the contributions of several of our faculty members to different facets of health and health behavior. The article beginning on Page 1 describes research on risk-taking behavior and health (carried out by Cooper), on the effects of thoughts about our mortality on our health behaviors (Professor **Jamie Arndt**), on strategies to motivate people to adopt healthy behaviors (Associate Professor **Victoria Shaffer**), and on the effects of providing stories and information about treatments (for example, vaccines) on people's attitudes toward them (Scherer). Such research in our department, which involves different research perspectives on an important topic, is a good example of how both basic and applied research can contribute to our understanding of health-related behaviors that eventually can lead to evidence-based efforts to educate the public about these issues.

Our department also prides itself on its efforts to disseminate research findings to our alumni, the university community, and the public at large. Each year we organize a distinguished lecture series, open to the public, consisting of five to six lectures organized around a theme of broad interest. Well-known psychological scientists are brought in from around the country and abroad to present their research on the topic and to meet with faculty and students who share an interest in the topic. This year's topic focuses on justice and inequality, and you can read more about it on Page 4.

Honors capstone projects provide motivated undergraduate students with invaluable research experience by allowing them to work closely with faculty mentors on original research. These projects are presented by the students both in our Psychology Day

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## From the Chair's Desk

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poster sessions and at the Midwestern Psychological Association meeting in Chicago. The success of our students, several of whom received awards in last year's MPA and Psychology Day, is described on Page 5.

Our addiction and alcohol group is one of the top research groups in the country, with established success in securing federal grant money and publishing extensively in both academic and media outlets. Recently, this group's work was enhanced with a new Center of Excellence in gambling research, to be headed by Frederick A. Middlebush Professor **Wendy Slutsky**. You can read more about it on Page 4.

Our alumni continue to be a source of pride for the department. Our department benefits tremendously from alumni contributions to our research, teaching, and community involvement, and we are very grateful for their support.

Our 10<sup>th</sup> Psychology Day on April 14, 2017, will see both graduate and honors undergraduate students present their research from the current academic year. That same day, we will also be sponsoring an award ceremony to note the accomplishments of our students and faculty. Our guest speaker will be **Clay Routledge**, MA '03, a graduate alumnus in the personality/social psychology area, currently on the faculty in the Department of Psychology at North Dakota State University (see further details on Page 6). We warmly invite all of you to join us for Psychology Day this year.

Finally, I am finishing my sixth and last year as chair of the department. I thank all of you, alumni, students, staff, and faculty for your ongoing contributions to making our department successful. I wish the incoming chair, Jamie Arndt, the utmost success in his new role.

## Being Healthy, Staying Healthy

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desire to smoke a short time later, especially among people for whom smoking is a part of their identity. As a result, anti-smoking messages may often have the opposite of the intended effect on smokers' desire to quit.

If reminding people about their mortality can sometimes backfire in health messages, what strategies work to motivate people to adopt healthy behaviors? One highly influential approach is the use of stories, or narratives. Associate Professor **Victoria Shaffer** has spearheaded [research on the influence of stories](#) in communicating health information and encouraging healthy behaviors. One straightforward way of communicating health risks is to give people statistics, such as the percent chance of developing cancer or having a heart attack. The problem with this approach is that numbers are emotionally dry and lack vividness, and, as a result, it is difficult for people to truly understand the implications of risk statistics. By contrast, stories can be vivid, emotional, and memorable, and they can be highly persuasive in convincing people to adopt risk-reducing behaviors. Moreover, stories about health-related experiences can help to better communicate what a health-related experience is really like. As Shaffer notes, "these types of narratives can provide a powerful, unique window into what it is like, for example, to give blood, have a screening test, or get a medical procedure. When we know what is coming, it helps us to be more mentally and physically prepared."

However, the persuasiveness of stories can also have negative consequences. Since stories often loom larger in our minds than numbers and statistics, they can cause us to overestimate the likelihood of rare

events. For example, a story about a child who is harmed by a vaccine may reduce a parent's desire to vaccinate their children, even if that harm has only a 1-in-10-million chance of occurring. [Recent research](#) by Assistant Professor **Laura Scherer** showed that stories about vaccine harms can cause people to feel more negatively toward vaccines, even when those harms are very unlikely and potentially not even caused by the vaccine itself. More concerning, the stories negatively influenced people's vaccine attitudes, even among people who did not believe that the vaccines cause the harms. The lesson is that narrative stories must be used with caution, so that they bolster rather than overshadow objective risk information.

The work summarized here describes only a small segment of the research on psychological contributions to health currently being conducted in our department. With several scholars focusing on making important contributions to the medical literature, the Department of Psychological Sciences is positioned to become a leader in research on health psychology. For more information, contact [Lynne Cooper](#), [Jamie Arndt](#), [Victoria Shaffer](#), or [Laura Scherer](#).

## Distinguished Lecture Series in Psychology

The Department of Psychological Sciences, in conjunction with departments and units across campus, sponsors a distinguished lecture series each year. Each series consists of five to six lectures (typically three in the fall semester and three in the spring) organized around a theme of broad interest to the university, psychology alumni, and the community at large. Respected psychological scientists are brought in from around the country and abroad to present their research on the topic and to meet with faculty and students who share an interest in the topic. Past series

have focused on topics such as Conflict, Aggression, and Cooperation; Belief Systems, Their Origin, Maintenance, & Consequences; Love, Sex, and Intimacy; and the Need to Belong. All lectures are free and open to the public.

Spurred in part by the 2014 events in Ferguson, Missouri, this year's series presents contemporary psychological research on the topic of Justice and Inequality. The fall featured two speakers: Professor Eldar Shafir, from Princeton University, discussed his work on the mental and emotional effects of existing in a resource-deprived environment, and Professor Ara Norenzayan, from the University of British Columbia, spoke about the role of religiosity and its association with tolerance versus prejudice. Professor Vickie Mays, from UCLA, kicked off the spring semester with

her work on factors contributing to racial disparities in mental and physical health outcomes.

On March 23, Professor John Jost, from New York University, presented his work on system justification beliefs, and how these beliefs can simultaneously serve important psychological needs for the individual and perpetuate the status quo, even when the status quo is detrimental to that individual's well-being. Finally, University of California Berkeley's Professor Jack Glaser will wrap up this year's series on April 20 by sharing his work on racial inequalities in policing practices and some of the steps he and his colleagues are taking to address these issues. More information about the series, including biographies and abstracts, can be found at [events.psych.missouri.edu/lecture-series/](http://events.psych.missouri.edu/lecture-series/).



Professor Vickie Mays



Professor John Jost



Professor Jack Glaser

## Addictions Research Has Broadened Its Scope

The MU Department of Psychological Sciences has long been known as a center of excellence in addictions research. There are more faculty members with expertise in alcohol- and nicotine-use disorders than any other psychology department in the country. The department has now been

awarded a Center of Excellence in Gambling Research grant from the National Center for Responsible Gaming, with Frederick A. Middlebush Professor **Wendy Slutske** as the center director. The purpose of the award is to broaden the scope of research and training in the problem of gambling

addiction. Because gambling addiction and addictions to alcohol and nicotine often go hand-in-hand and have many similarities in their symptoms and risk factors, the center will benefit from the existing expertise in the department.

# Psychology Honors Capstone

Initially developed in the 1980s by Harris Cooper, former department chair and professor, the honors capstone program supports high-achieving seniors (> 3.50 GPA) in conducting year-long independent research with a faculty mentor. Each spring, these undergraduate scholars travel to Chicago to present their research at the Midwestern Psychological Association conference. Thirty-two students were accepted to present their posters at the 2016 MPA meeting in Chicago. It is an exciting opportunity for students to experience a scientific conference and present the results of their research. In addition to MPA, many of these scholars presented their work at Psychology Day, Life Science Week, the McNair Conference, and the

Undergraduate Research Creative Achievements Forum. These students graduate with honors in psychological sciences. The following students won additional honors for their endeavors:

**Megan Nicole Fleming**, mentored by Professor Bruce Bartholow, won the 2016 Sam C. Brown Outstanding Achievement Award.

**Kathryn Johnson**, mentored by Associate Professor David Beversdorf, won the 2016 Midwestern Psychological Association Regional Award.

**McKenzie Lee Lockett**, mentored by Professor Jamie Arndt, won the 2016 Max F. Meyer Achievement Award.

**Shelby Katherine Smith**, mentored by Professor Ann Betten-

court, won the 2016 Midwestern Psychological Association Diversity Award.

**Kaley Angelica Roberts**, mentored by Professor Charles Borduin, won the 2016 Achievement Award in Diversity and Inclusion Research.

**Emmitt Nathaniel Wright**, mentored by Associate Professor Jeff Johnson, won the 2016 Midwestern Psychological Association Regional Award.

## Awards & Honors

Professor **Bruce Bartholow** won the MU Chancellor's Award for Outstanding Research in 2016.

Professor **Debra Bell** was elected a fellow of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies.

Associate Professor **David Beversdorf** was named chair of the NIMH-BRAINS study section in February and appointed to the Foundation for Biomedical Research NHP Research Expert Panel in 2016. He also was awarded a DoD grant for "Trial of Propranolol in Children and Youth with ASD and Predictors of Response."

**Ryan Carpenter** was named the Mark H. Thelen Outstanding Clinical Graduate Student in 2016, and he also won the Departmental Graduate Research Award this past August.

Curators' Distinguished Professor **Lynne Cooper** was elected president of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology for the 2017–19 term. SPSP is the largest organization of personality and social psychologists in the world, with over 6000 members.

Curators' Distinguished Professor **Nelson Cowan** began as editor of the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* on Jan. 1.

**Joe Deak** was a 2016 Research Society on Alcoholism Enoch Gordis Award finalist (predoctoral), and he also was awarded a Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award, National Institutes of Health for 2017–19.

Assistant Professors **Ian Gizer** and **Jeff Johnson** were both promoted to the rank of associate professor with tenure.

**Delvin Mellerup** received the Chancellor's Outstanding Staff Award for 2016.

Professor **Amanda Rose** was elected a fellow of the Association for Psychological Science (APS).

Frederick A. Middlebush Professor **Jeff Rouder** was also elected a fellow in APS.

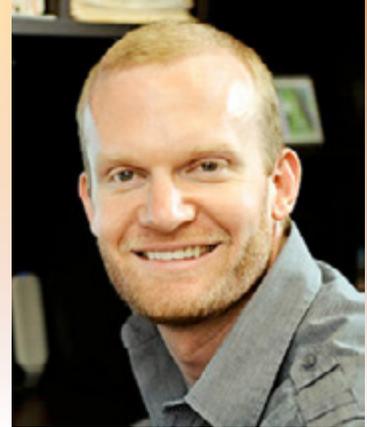
# Psychology Day 2017

## You're Invited!

**Clay Routledge**, MA '03, professor of psychology at North Dakota State University, will be the alumnus keynote speaker for the 2017 Psychology Day, Friday, April 14. His presentation is titled "The Rehabilitation of an Old Emotion: A New Science of Nostalgia."

During Psychology Day, undergraduate and graduate students will present findings from their research during the morning and afternoon poster sessions. The day will end with an awards ceremony, the keynote address, and a reception for the departmental community.

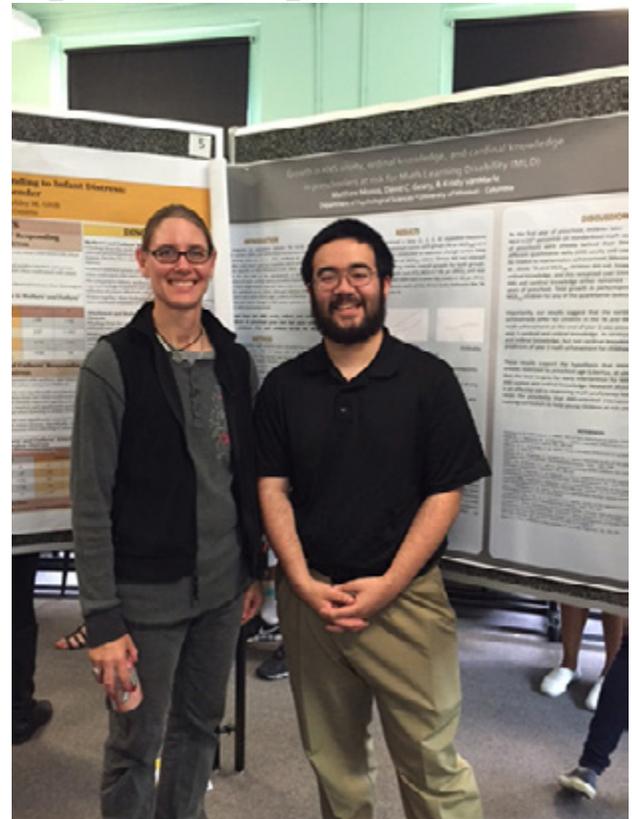
All alumni are invited to attend Psychology Day. For more information, or to let the department know you plan to attend, please contact Jaqueline Chenault at [chenaultj@missouri.edu](mailto:chenaultj@missouri.edu). Additionally, more information can be found on the department's website at [psychology.missouri.edu](http://psychology.missouri.edu).



Above: Undergraduate students Kathryn Hancock, left, and McKenzie Lockett discuss a research poster at Psychology Day 2016.

At right: Associate Professor Kristy vanMarle and undergraduate Matthew Monos pose in front of Monos' research poster at Psychology Day 2016.

## Psych Day 2016



# “Give Direct” Aids in Targeted Fundraising

The department continues the Give Direct initiative begun last year, allowing alumni to provide support directly through our website to specific initiatives unfolding in the department. We are very appreciative of contributions to any of these funds—they support our hard-won gains in research, applied work, and teaching. Thank you so much for your generous and broad-minded support.

## **Lizette Peterson-Homer Graduate Fellowship Fund**

The Department of Psychological Sciences established the Lizette Peterson-Homer Graduate Fellowship Fund to honor the former Curators Professor's devotion to teaching and mentoring. The memorial fund will provide financial assistance for graduate student development in these areas: research activities, specialty training at other institutions, and travel to professional conferences. In awarding the funds, special consideration will be given to graduate students who are pursuing study in the area of pediatric psychology and especially in child injury-prevention research, an important yet under-funded area to which Peterson-Homer, who passed away in 2002, was deeply committed.

## **Undergraduate Honors Capstone Travel Fund**

Students completing honors capstone projects in psychological sciences earn the distinction of graduating with departmental honors while gaining invaluable research experience with a faculty mentor conducting original research. Over the course of two semesters, students design their own studies, collect and analyze data, submit a poster proposal to a professional conference, and write a journal-

length manuscript. In late spring, students travel to the annual meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (MPA) in Chicago. There, students have the opportunity to present the results of their hard work, as well as to attend scientific seminars, network with faculty and students from other universities, and explore Chicago. This fund will provide the financial backing for the students' trips to Chicago for MPA, including staying at the conference host hotel for two nights, and driving transportation to and from Chicago.

## **Brain Imaging Center Student Research Fund**

Psychological Sciences is one of a small number of departments in the country to have our very own [Brain Imaging Center \(BIC\)](#). Established in 2008, this research-dedicated facility provides department members with opportunities to investigate the functions and structures of the human brain non-invasively. Ongoing research at the BIC includes studies examining the neural mechanisms of perceptual, motor, and cognitive functions, as well as how these processes are impacted by brain injuries, disorders, and diseases. As one might imagine, the costs required to maintain and staff such a facility are substantial and require faculty users to obtain highly competitive external grant support. There are

few sources of such funding available to graduate students, however, and this limits opportunities to include brain imaging in their research. Therefore, the purpose of the BIC Student Research Fund is to provide funds to allow students to utilize these techniques and further their research careers.

## **The Psychological Services Clinic Fund**

[The Psychological Services Clinic \(PSC\)](#), within the Department of Psychological Sciences, is driven by a commitment to public service. It is committed to (1) provide high-quality, affordable, and evidence-based mental health services to Columbia, Missouri, and the surrounding communities; (2) provide high-quality training for MU doctoral trainees in clinical psychology and related disciplines; and (3) support research that advances the understanding and promotion of psychological health. The PSC offers clinical services and research on a wide range of issues, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, conduct problems, substance use and addictions, borderline personality disorder, academic difficulties, and relationship distress. With a generous fee-assistance program, it offers services to individuals and families who otherwise would not be able to afford mental health care. Donations to this fund will help support the PSC's mission to provide affordable, evidence-based care to the community and to advance research and training in mental health services.

You may also click [mizzougivedirect.missouri.edu](http://mizzougivedirect.missouri.edu) to donate.