

# Department of *Psychology* NEWSLETTER

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*The Department  
of Psychology  
wishes you and  
yours a Happy  
Holiday Season!*

### *Notes from the Chair*

Dear alumni and friends,

I must confess that I cannot help but smile while I write this. It has been awhile since the Department of Psychology at NDSU has had a regular newsletter and we have so much to tell. It feels good to be able to share the news of the department with you. I'm especially looking forward to reconnecting with many of you. There are so many of you who have been important and who have contributed meaningfully to our success. I would like the opportunity to thank each one of you.

In truth, I would like this publication to be more than a newsletter. As the publication continues it should serve a few purposes. I've asked some faculty to write short descriptions of their recent research projects and findings. It is hoped that you will find these stories interesting and informative. This should not only help you keep up on the news of the department, but perhaps you'll learn something too. There are several new people in the department. It is truly remarkable how our department has changed in recent years. We have added faculty positions, hired technicians and programmers, and increased the number of graduate students. These people have brought a diversity of interests and backgrounds to NDSU, adding to the excitement and enthusiasm we all have for our work. Over time, I will make sure to introduce them to you. Finally I hope this will be a forum to which you can contribute. We would love to hear your stories and learn from you as well. In the end, this publication should serve to keep us in touch with you, you in touch with your classmates, and help us to maintain our NDSU Psychology family.

If the spirit moves you, please send me a note or story idea. I'd love to hear from you.

Paul

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## The “Middle Years” Challenges

Robert Klepac

### *“Uff Da” more appropriate than “Wow”*

I had decided for a host of reasons to leave Western Washington University, and had been looking for a job in the winter and spring of 1972. I was fortunate to get a few interviews, but nothing really turned me on. Then I received a phone call from Pat Beatty in mid-spring. “NORTH DAKOTA??” I thought, “my wife will throw something at me if I mention that.” To my amazement, she replied, “could be interesting.” Impressed by the interview I made the decision to take a chance on NDSU. An interesting position with a 30% pay increase can keep me busy while I look for another job over the next 1-3 years.

My early impressions of Fargo and North Dakota were quite mixed. According to Bill Beatty, “The Red River is the only river in the continental US that flows south to north” as if this was some kind of selling point. Beatty never explained that this meant that as the river thaws south to north, it ends up in your basement each spring. In October of 1972, I headed to my first North Dakota Psychological Association meeting amid falling snow. Upon entering and scanning the meeting room, I thought, “Nobody’s here!” I later found out that more than 75% of active members were present. Academicians and practitioners actually talked to and cooperated with each other.

I also learned many new things from my new subculture. For example, lunch is not the noon meal after all, but only a snack. Dinner is the noon meal and supper is the evening meal. I also learned to redefine such concepts as “cold, suitable outerwear for a formal Christmas party, blizzard, mosquito, and winter months.” I discovered what all those electrical plugs sticking out of automobile grills are for and that “Uff Da” is a more appropriate exclamation than “Wow.”

When I arrived in the NDSU psychology department in 1972, Clayton Rivers had been department chair and had hired Pat and Bill Beatty in 1969. In 1969 the psychology department offered a Masters in Social Science, the same degree offered by other social science departments. Between 1969 and 1972 a separate department of psychology was approved while an oppositional administrator at UND was on sabbatical. Also in ‘72, a Master’s in experimental psychology, designed largely by the Beattys was approved and inaugurated.



*Robert Klepac, former NDSU Psychology Department chair and one of the founding faculty members who built our department once Psychology split off as its own independent department, painted a light-hearted and candid picture of his NDSU tenure several years ago at a reunion of department graduate students.*

On my first day in the department, I moved into the department chair’s office. I met Bill Beatty, the department brain and an outstanding researcher in physiological psychology. He was the master as a research supervisor, mentor, and seminar leader. Beatty also filled the role of departmental curmudgeon, even in his youth. He carefully used psychological principles to convince the new and naive department chair (me!) that if he were EVER assigned to teach Introduction to Psychology, my life would be miserable and filled with complaints from students, parents administrators and state legislators.

Pat Beatty, on the other hand, was the heart of the department. Give her seven minutes to talk about psychology with people, individually or in groups up to 1000 strong, and they would (a) know something new about our field; (b) love psychology; (c) love Pat Beatty; and (d) assume that Bill Beatty and Bob Klepac must also be nice people.

As “Boy Chairman” I was the hands and feet of the department as well as Jack of all trades, master of none. Corky Rieder and Jamshid Khalili were part-time temporary faculty for us and we had two master’s students, Chuck Scouten and Barbara Gfeller. A bevy of bright, committed and very active undergraduates studied in our

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department, including the now distinguished psychologist, Sharon Berry. We had one half-time work-study secretary as our only staff. This is a portrait of the department as I walked into it.

I was nuts! Think about it. Would you advise a very recent Ph.D. to accept a position as chair in a department that was half way across the country in a reputedly hostile physical environment? Not to mention that the previous chair had left the department for greener pastures and that there were only two regular faculty members left, with no clinical faculty. No one in the department would be above the assistant professor level or with more than 3 years of experience. I barely knew what a psychology department was let alone how to chair one. All in all, it was the best stupid decision I've ever made.

During these middle years of the department, we created the applied track in the MA program and the clinical-experimental split. Bill and Ruth Maki joined the department by this time. We made the MA a two-year program with a clinical focus on Behavior Therapy, Modification, and Assessment rather than requiring mastery of an array of theoretical orientations, or setting as our goal the training of psychometricians. We also continued to require a strong general-experimental core of courses. As a result of our hard work, our MA graduates find they are able to either pursue a Ph.D. or work in psychology according to their preference. It was also around this time that the College of Arts and Sciences split into the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and the College of Science and Math. Psychology was offered the option of joining either college. After agonizing deliberations, we finally decided that Science and Math is where we belong.

Now we must go back to the hiring of Bill and Ruth Maki. After the Bill Maki interview, we felt that he was an outstanding animal learning researcher, had a lot of grants and good publications. Lots of experience with student involvement and a master with computers were also among his strong points. One big problem. When I called to offer him the job, he told me some startling news. Since the time of the interview he had married another experimental psychologist who also needed a job.

Ruth Maki did have a very strong vita in the area of human learning and cognition which was an area we had talked about developing down the road anyway.

But....there were still obstacles. For one, there was no position available for her and no money to create one. It also didn't help that over the phone I thought she sounded like a librarian. We managed to scrape up enough money for a 3/4 position that we would try to make into a tenure track position within 1-3 years. It worked!! We wound up with two outstanding professors



*Bob Klepac (sitting) is surrounded by the 1972 faculty, which included, left to right, Patricia Beatty who recently passed away, Bill Beatty, who is now retired and living in Fargo; Ruth Maki, who just stepped down as Chair of the Psychology Department at Texas Tech, and Bill Maki, a professor at Texas Tech.*

and colleagues.

Next we hired Russ Glasgow, a clinical person tremendously skilled at choosing important clinical and health related phenomena for investigation and at conducting careful yet creative studies in those areas. Then we hired Kevin McCaul whose interests were in social psychology and health. Kevin was excellent in teaching, in his own research, and in collaborative research as well. Next was Bob Klesges, a clinical and health psychology researcher. He was better than anyone I've seen before or since at incorporating more traditional assessment instruments into good behavioral case formulations and treatment planning. Finally, there was Carl Gustavson who studied animal behavior. His research focused on conditioned taste aversion and applying laboratory findings to the *in vivo* control of predator behavior in farming areas. This group of very diverse personalities, despite inevitable occasional conflicts, showed a tolerance and respect for one another and a level of commitment to departmental goals that was an essential element responsible for the growth and development of this department.

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The students we had at that time, undergraduate and graduate alike, were a delightful group. There was tremendous variability in sophistication among our North Dakota bred students. Rex Bierley delighted in saying heretical things about psychology to ALL faculty, but especially to the clinician. Calvin Bierley was often seen in the background looking at his brother and shaking his head slightly. Sharon Berry, Verlin Hinsz, Kit O'Neill, Paul Rokke, Laura Dodge, and Nancy Bologna all made their marks on the department, to name a few. Our students were a diverse group, willing to work hard and eager to respond to the department's commitment to building excellence.

Growth was not without problems, but the internal ones were remarkably few and thankfully easily managed. The toughest challenges came from outside the department. In 1972, one administrator said in a public forum, "The credit hours you generate are nice, but psychology

can be taught in the stadium, unlike a science." The Acting VP for Academic Affairs made a comment around 1978; "You're doing everything right, but we are a land-grant institution. You are just irrelevant to the central mission of the University." From 1972 to 1982 we grew from 3 faculty to 9 full-time faculty and one post doc resident. We had more grants than faculty members and more RA slots than students to fill them. Our Master's program was healthy and thriving and we had the largest undergraduate major in the University. We moved from "irrelevant" to being featured regularly in NDSU PR as a jewel in NDSU's crown.

One colleague at an AABT conference said to me once, "Recognize the quality of the gem that you've got, and be proud of yourselves for creating and developing it." I am fiercely proud of what we created, and of what it has become at the hands of others since I and my colleagues left.

*Check out the department website at*  
[www.psych.ndsu.nodak.edu/index.html](http://www.psych.ndsu.nodak.edu/index.html)

## *News & Awards in Psychology*

**Council to Head NDSU Libraries:** James Council, NDSU professor of psychology, has been named interim dean of libraries. Craig Schnell, North Dakota State University provost and vice president for academic affairs, has announced the appointment of James Council, professor of psychology, as the interim dean of libraries. The appointment began May 1, 2006.

**Dr. Mark Nawrot Receives the 2006 Odney Award for Excellence in Teaching:** Dr. Nawrot was chosen to receive the Odney Award, which is selected primarily on comments from students that describe a faculty member's ability to stimulate interest in subject matter, demand rigorous thought, generate enthusiastic responses and demonstrate distinctive competence. The award has been presented since 1972 in honor of the late Robert Odney, a former Fargo businessman and longtime supporter of NDSU. Dr. Nawrot received this award on May 4th, 2006.

**Dr. Michael D. Robinson Receives the James A. Meier Jr. Professor Award for 2005-2008:** The James A. Meier Award is given by the College of Science and Mathematics in recognition of excellence in research, teaching, and service. The award is for a three year term from 2005 through 2008.

**Dr. Ray Miltenberger Receives Jordan A. Engberg Presidential Professorship:** Dr. Ray Miltenberger was awarded the Jordan A. Engberg Presidential Professorship, which goes to a faculty member with the rank of professor who has a balanced academic record demonstrating excellence in teaching, research, and service. He was nominated by Dr. Kevin McCaul, professor of psychology, who wrote, "Dr. Ray Miltenberger is an award winning teacher, author, and scholar whose work is known throughout the world." Dr. Miltenberger is now at the University of South Florida.

**Dr. Kevin McCaul Named Chamber Distinguished Professor:** Dr. Kevin McCaul was awarded the title of Chamber Distinguished Professor on May 25th, 2005. This award is presented annually by the NDSU Chamber of Commerce to a professor within the University who has attained distinction within his or her chosen field.

**Waldron Award for Excellence in Research Given to Dr. Mark McCourt:** Dr. Mark McCourt was awarded the Fred Waldron Award for Excellence in Research on May 5th, 2005. This award is presented annually to the most outstanding researcher at NDSU by the NDSU Development Foundation.

## *They Yell, They Argue, and They Worry, All in the Name of Science*

Michael Robinson

Some 1000 undergraduates a year visit the research laboratory in Minard Hall (Room 120) where my graduate students and I ply our trade. There, the participants tell us how much they worry, socialize and argue with others. They also pound away at response keys, yell into microphone headsets, attempt to predict the future, bisect lines flanked by friendly or scowling faces, estimate the size of words, and so on. The lab's general focus is on relations between personality, cognition and emotion, but there are a number of specific projects going on in the lab.



*From left to right: Sara Moeller, Scott Ode, Michael Robinson and Ben Wilowski.*

Why do some individuals worry so much and should they be relaxed instead? In general terms, chronic tendencies toward worry, as manifest in the personality trait of neuroticism, are often associated with a variety of negative outcomes such as everyday experiences of distress, vulnerability to psychological disorders, and less stable behavior over time. However, our lab has pursued the premise that chronic worriers often benefit from negative mood states. Tamir & Robinson, (2004) showed that those high in neuroticism were faster to make evaluations of new objects when they were in a negative mood state. Worriers also benefit from tendencies to recognize threatening stimuli quickly (e.g., Tamir, Robinson, & Solberg, in press). In general, these sorts of results highlight the beneficial effects of worry among individuals high in neuroticism. First year Ph.D. student Scott Ode will be contributing to this literature in the near future.

Another focus of the lab is the question of why certain individuals are more angry and aggressive than others. One perspective is that especially nice people simply don't have hostile thoughts very often. Another perspective is that especially nice people have developed cognitive skills that allow them to suppress hostile thoughts when they occur. Our lab has shown that the second perspective is correct and the first is not (e.g., Meier, Robinson, & Wilkowski, 2006). This is an important direction of research in the field because it suggests possibilities for the self-control of anger and aggression, regardless of situational factors that might make angry outbursts more likely. Third year Ph.D. student Ben Wilkowski will make important contributions to this area in the near future.

Another direction of the lab relates to affective metaphor. It is clear that pleasant events and experiences are frequently depicted as high in space (e.g., "I feel up") and light in color (e.g., "I am in a light mood"), whereas unpleasant events and experiences are frequently depicted as low in space (e.g., "I feel down") and dark in color (e.g., "I am in a dark mood"). Our lab has been pursuing the idea that such metaphor-related mappings exert a surprising power in how people represent pleasant and unpleasant events. For example, we have found that pleasant words (e.g., *trust*) are evaluated faster when they are presented higher on a computer screen, whereas unpleasant words (e.g., *deceit*) are evaluated faster when presented lower on a computer screen (e.g., Meier & Robinson, 2004). Recent Ph.D. student Brian Meier has conducted much of this research and we continue to collaborate with him in new directions for this research. Perhaps incoming Ph.D. student Sara Moeller will also inherit some of these projects.

Former graduate students Maya Tamir and Brian Meier have tenure-track professor positions at Boston College and Gettysburg College, respectively. Our lab continues to collaborate with them, although these former graduate students are also very successful on their own terms. In the 2006-2007 academic year, the lab will consist of three Ph.D. students – Ben Wilkowski, Scott Ode and Sara Moeller – along with several master's students, and 6-10 returning and new undergraduate students. The Robinson lab thrives on collaboration and the 2006-2007 academic year promises to be another excellent one. We are thrilled with the research and educational opportunities at NDSU and will do our part to continue the research and teaching excellence of the psychology department into the future.

## Faculty Additions

**Dr. Wolfgang Teder-Sälejärvi** joins our faculty team as an Associate Professor for the Center for Visual Neuroscience. Dr. Teder-Sälejärvi received his Ph.D. from the University of Helsinki, Finland in 1994, and completed his Post-doctoral Research at both UC-Davis and UC-San Diego. He came to us from the University of California, San Diego, where he served as an Assistant Project Scientist in the Department of Neuroscience at the School of Medicine. At NDSU, Dr. Teder-Sälejärvi's *Multimodal Attention Laboratory* focuses on expanding our knowledge about the neural basis of selective attention to auditory, visual, and tactile stimuli. His research uses behavioral, psychophysical, and electrophysiological (high-density electro-encephalogram, EEG) measures in order to investigate the neural basis of selective attention in ecologically valid free-field settings. Aside from research, Dr. Teder-Sälejärvi has also taught Research Methods and Advanced Cognitive Neuroscience. It is an honor to welcome Dr. Teder-Sälejärvi to the department and the Centre of Visual Neuroscience. **Recent Publication:** Teder-Sälejärvi, W.A., Di Russo, F., McDonald, J.J., & Hillyard, S.A. (2005). Effects of spatial congruity on audio-visual multimodal integration. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 17(9), 1396-1409.



**Dr. Stephane Rainville** joins our faculty team as an Assistant Professor for the Center for Visual Neuroscience. Upon completing his Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology at the McGill University in 1999, Dr. Rainville completed two Postdoctoral Fellowships, one at the Center for Visual Science at the University of Rochester, the other at the Center for Vision Research at York University, in the 'Neurodynamics of Human Vision Laboratory'.

At NDSU, Dr. Rainville's approach to research is based on the idea that vision – and indeed the entire human brain – interacts with the environment efficiently. His research focuses on the study of visual mechanisms and their limitations but also toward a better understanding of visual environment properties. His lab uses a combination of physiological (e.g. fMRI), behavioral

(e.g. psychophysics), and modeling (neural networks, image analysis) techniques. He is currently working on a project examining visual synchrony, multi-dimensional optimization, shape perception, motion, and form-motion interactions. He teaches Neuropsychology and Research Methods. We welcome Dr. Rainville to the department and the Center of Visual Neuroscience. **Recent Publication:** Collin, C.A., Therrien, M.E., Martin, C., & Rainville, S.J.M. (in press). Spatial frequency thresholds for face recognition when comparison faces are filtered and unfiltered. *Perception & Psychophysics*.



## Faculty Additions *continued...*

**Dr. Wendy Gordon** joins our faculty team as an Assistant Professor of Developmental Psychology. Dr. Gordon received her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2002. Her research interests incorporate aspects of child social cognition, experiences, and psychological and emotional adjustment. Recently, Dr. Gordon and her research team conducted the Classroom Connections Project, which is a cross-sectional study of children's peer beliefs, self-esteem, social relationships, and perceptions of teacher's responses to negative interactions among students. Aside from research, Dr. Gordon has taught classes such as Introduction to Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Research Methods I, Child Development, as well as Advanced Research Methods (Multivariate Statistics). We welcome Dr. Gordon to the department. **Recent Publication:** Troop-Gordon, W., & Ladd, G. W. (2005). Trajectories of peer victimization and perceptions of the self and schoolmates: Precursors to psychological and school maladjustment. *Child Development*, 76, 1072- 1091.



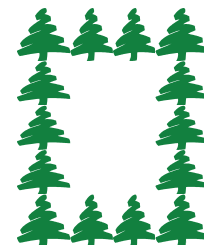
**Dr. Clayton Hilmert** joins our faculty team as an Assistant Professor of Health and Social Psychology. Upon completing his Ph.D. in Experimental Social Psychology, at the University of California, San Diego in 2003, Dr. Hilmert completed a Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he worked with Drs. Shelley E. Taylor and Christine Dunkel Schetter, and received training at the *Norman Cousins Center for Psychoneuroimmunology*. At NDSU, Dr. Hilmert's Social Psychophysiology and Health Laboratory is dedicated to examining interactions between the environment, psychology and physiology as they pertain to health and health-related outcomes. In his Social Opinions and Attitudes Laboratory, the current focus is on social foundations of opinion formation about

novel stimuli. Aside from research, Dr. Hilmert teaches Introduction to Psychology, Advanced Social Psychology and Health, and Advanced Health Psychology. We welcome him to the department. **Recent Publications:** Hilmert, C. J., Kulik, J. A., & Christenfeld, N. (2006). Positive and negative opinion modeling: The influence of another's similarity and dissimilarity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(3), 440-452. Taylor, S. E., Welch, W. T., Hilmert, C. J., Lehman, B. J., & Way, B. M. (2006). Early family environment, current adversity, the serotonin transporter (5-HTTLPR) polymorphism, and depressive symptomatology. *Biological Psychiatry*, 60(7), 671-676.

**Dr. Martin Coleman** is a visiting Assistant Professor of Social Psychology. Dr. Coleman joins us from England, where he received his Ph.D from the University of Sussex in 2005. Dr. Coleman teaches Introduction to Psychology, Research Methods and Personality Psychology. His research is focused toward a fuller exploration of the sunk cost effect to encompass topics ranging from taste preference to the rating of facial attractiveness. We welcome Dr. Coleman to the department. **Recent Presentation:** "Sunk Cost Effects on Dating Behavior". Paper presented at the 16th annual convention of the American Psychological Society, Chicago, May 2004.



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