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Important Dates

- ◆ Fall finals: 12-12-2011
- ◆ Spring semester starts: 1-9-2012
- ◆ Deadline to apply for spring graduation: 1-23-2012
- ◆ Spring Break: 3-5-2012
- ◆ Summer registration starts: 3-19-2012
- ◆ Last day to withdraw: 4-13-2012
- ◆ WPUPC: 4-21-2012
- ◆ Spring finals: 4-24-2012
- ◆ Graduation: 5-5-2012

Eric's Welcome

My name is Eric Levine, and I am in my junior year as a psychology major with a concentration in sport psychology. I was born and raised in Chicago and found my way to RMU through a hockey scholarship. I am a goaltender on the NCAA men's Division 1 hockey team and really enjoy spending my time on the ice as well as in the classroom.

I hope anyone reading this newsletter will take enjoyment in learning more about a fundamental area: psychology. Psychology encompasses nearly all of human interaction and mental behavior, so it is my hope you will enjoy learning about a subject so relatable to everyday life. Not only do we want to spread the word about psychology, but make it known that the entire department has a lot to offer in the field of academics, research, and other opportunities.

This newsletter is sponsored by Psi Chi, the international honors society in psychology founded in 1929. I am the

current chapter president and work closely with my officers: Emily Streaker and April Bucek. Psi Chi promotes excellence in scholarship and the advancement of the science of psychology. We are a member of the Association of College Honor Societies (ACHS) and an affiliate of APA, the American Psychological Association as well as APS, the American Psychological Society.

The RMU chapter was founded in 2007 with the intent to recognize outstanding performance in the field of psychology. Currently, there are 60 members; each of whom met the qualifications of maintaining at least a 3.0 GPA in all psychology classes and ranked among the top 30 percent of their class.

I sincerely hope this newsletter will be viewed as a valuable undertaking by and for all of us interested in psychology!

Dr. Paul's Welcome

Please, get comfortable and enjoy reading through this newsletter. It is our first attempt at putting together what we thought would be of interest to psychology majors. If we got it right, great! If not, then please let us know what you would like to see changed.

We are already thinking about next semester's newsletter so we would very much appreciate it if you could send us some feedback (what you liked or didn't like). With that, maybe we can see something new in every newsletter.

Also, we are looking for contributions. Ideas for what we can add to the next newsletter to make it better.

One of the things we are planning includes interviewing one or more of our past graduates to see what they have been doing since leaving RMU.

We would also like to interview current students to hear about their plans (graduate school or career).

And speaking of graduate school, we

will want to add some advice about preparing for grad-school (when to take the GRE, when to start looking at schools, when to apply, how to go about getting letters, etc.).

One feature we hope to keep is an original brief article on a topic of interest by one of our psychology faculty. This semester, I have a short article that touches on one of my areas of interest regarding belief; in this case, belief in the effectiveness of alternative health therapies.

You will surely enjoy the interview with our newest psychologist, Dr. Monda, in the *Psychobabbles* section! And please give the scavenger hunt a try! Winner(s) will be announced on the RMU Psi Chi webpage (see p. 3).

Ultimately, we want this newsletter to be as interesting and informative as possible to our psychology majors. So please, enjoy your time in *The Psychology Couch!*

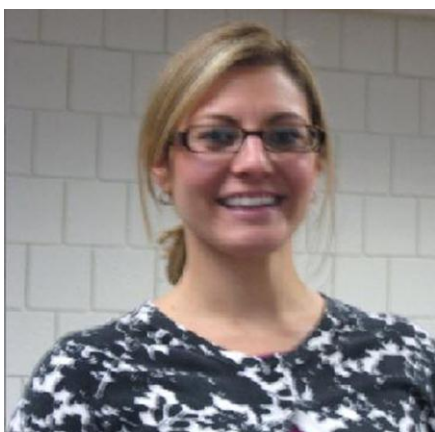
"If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail."

Abraham Maslow

2011 Psi Chi Inductees!

- ◆ Krista Anders
- ◆ April Bucek*
- ◆ Katherine Fox
- ◆ Krista Hurley
- ◆ Emily Jaskolski
- ◆ Courtney Langston
- ◆ Eric Levine*
- ◆ David Lopus
- ◆ Daniel Lutz
- ◆ Bryon Montgomery
- ◆ Mackenzie Rack-Wildner
- ◆ Tana Sanchez
- ◆ Emily Streaker*
- ◆ Cassie Wible

*Psi Chi Officer



"Focus on what you can control, because if you focus on the uncontrollable it is just wasted energy."
Samantha Monda

Research Roundup

In the future, we will be highlighting research conducted by RMU psychology students (and maybe faculty) in this section. In the meantime, here are two bits of information that might be worthwhile to any students interested in psychology research.

First, every spring semester, the faculty take students to WPUPC, which is the Western Pennsylvania undergraduate Psychology Conference. This conference is hosted by a different university each year, and will be held at Edinboro University this spring semester (April 21, 2012; the Saturday before finals).

Students often present their own research (thesis project) but also we have had students who were simply interested to see what it was all about. So, if you are even a little bit interested in this activity, please contact Dr. Kelly, Dr. Monda, Dr. Paul, or Dr. Wheeler for more information.

Second, some of you have already participated in one or more of the super-secret CM-F2011 Experiments this past semester. We plan to have more during the upcoming semesters, so spread the word AND be on the lookout for sign-ups!

Psychobabbles with Dr. Samantha Monda

Interview by Emily Streaker & April Bucek

Dr. Monda accepted a full time position at RMU this semester (Fall 2011)! She received her doctorate in Kinesiology (Sport & Exercise Psychology) at West Virginia University in 2011. She also has a master's degree in Counseling (also from WVU). She teaches Sport Psychology and wants to develop a master's degree program for RMU.

Ψ *Who is your psychology hero (role model) and why?*

DM: *"I would have to say, Amy Kimball from UPMC. Amy Kimball was the one that introduced me to sports psychology. She is my role model because she started something on her own that no one else did and she took me under her wing."*

Ψ *If you hadn't gotten involved in psychology, what do you think you would have done otherwise?*

DM: *"Hm, well, let me put it this way, if money was not an issue, I would design my own greeting cards."*

Ψ *What would students be surprised to know about you?*

DM: *"I can bench press my own weight!"*

Ψ *What do you see as your greatest mediocrities?*

DM: *"Ha! Well, I have zero coordination; I am very clumsy and klutzy; I am always tripping over something."*

Ψ *Where did you see yourself being today five years ago?*

DM: *"I had no idea where I was going to be today, five years ago."*

Ψ *We want to pull a prank on President Dell'Omo would you help us?*

DM: *"Yes... as long as it isn't something that will get me fired."*

Ψ *Just so students know, do you respond well to crying and begging when it comes to grades?*

DM: *"Not usually. I'm sympathetic but maybe not as much during the last two weeks of class."*

Ψ *What advice would you give to a student who wanted to start a Samantha Monda fan club?*

DM: *"Don't let in the creepers. Everyone should get together and have fun partying. Ketchup must be present."*

Ψ *What TV or movie star do people most often confuse you with?*

DM: *"I have never been mistaken for a movie or TV star, just someone's misplaced cousin."*

Ψ *Thanks Dr. Monda!*

DM: *"My pleasure! It was the strangest interview I've ever had, but it was fun!"*

Faculty Cognitions: *Thoughts about “Alternative Therapies”*

Dr. Paul

I was walking through the Robinson Mall not too long ago when a gentleman called me over to his booth to sell me on a bracelet that had (what seemed to me to be) magical powers! It was called an “Energy Armor” bracelet. This isn’t a new idea. The same thing has been marketed under names such as Trion:Z, (-)Ion Balance, Q-Ray, Rayma Balanced, Core Balance, and so on. Not surprising since the business of selling pseudo-medical enhancements and treatments is a \$34,000,000,000 (yes, BILLION) industry every year just in America (Mielczarek & Engler, 2012)!



To sell their bracelet, these hucksters perform “body-magic” demonstrations that would be suitable for junior high school sleepover parties. These stand-on-one-foot demos are performed while you listen to a barrage of pseudo-scientific gibberish about “energetics toxicity” and “negative ions.” Apparently these silicone bracelets are “infused” with negative ions from volcanic ash.

You might be interested to know that the makers of the Q-Ray bracelet were convicted of fraud and ended up paying a hefty \$16 million fine. Last I heard, the makers of Power Balance bracelets were forced (in Australia, not in the U.S. yet) to publicly admit that there was no scientific evidence to support their claims and that they had engaged in misleading conduct in order to sell them. So, despite negative publicity, countless failures when scientifically tested, as well as hefty fines, these bracelets keep popping back up! Why?

One of my all-time most favorite

movies (and books) is “*Little Big Man*” which starred Dustin Hoffman. In this epic movie he teams up briefly with Mr. Merriweather who is a traveling “medicine man” selling homemade elixirs of health to gullible townsfolk across the old west. Despite being tarred and feathered as well as having assorted body parts chopped off (each time we come across this character, he is missing a bit more; an eye, then a hand, then a leg) Mr. Merriweather persists in selling his wares. Why? Because it is a booming business! Did I mention the \$34 billion per year?

Why is this area so lucrative? Why do people fall for, become attracted to, or endorse “alternative therapies” that have a much larger impact on their wallet than on their health? Such therapies include therapeutic touch, acupuncture, homeopathy, magnetic therapies, and so on. Are people just stupid?

No doubt you have heard that Steve Jobs passed away recently. He was by no means a stupid person. What you may not know is the back-story of the progression of his illness. Steve Jobs was diagnosed with cancer in 2003. He was lucky that it was discovered so early. Traditional treatments were a fair bet against the form of cancer he had (an islet cell neuroendocrine tumor). But, Steve decided to try alternative therapies instead (such as acupuncture, herbal remedies, psychic consultation, strict vegan diet, etc.). These approaches changed nothing except to give the cancer time to spread.

When it comes to understanding how people come to rely on alternative treatments, probably the best summary I’ve come across was written by Dr. Barry Beyerstein who was a professor of biopsychology at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. Unfortunately for the critical thinking community, he passed away in 2007. Dr. Beyerstein pointed out seven different reasons that people (smart or otherwise) fall for useless therapies. Do a Google

search for “*Why Bogus Therapies Often Seem to Work*” and read it!

By the time you graduate from RMU with a psychology degree, you should have some good ideas as to why even smart people can be fooled. Some concepts you will know include: the placebo effect, anecdotal evidence (appeal to emotion), self-fulfilling prophecy, causal conclusions from correlational evidence, peer pressure, need for certainty, and so on. But there are also some pretty mundane explanations, too. These would include ignorance (failing to investigate claims - so this is the “buyer beware” point), outright deception (yes, some salespeople lie), poor impulse control (buy first, think later), and so on.

Ultimately, if you are interested in learning about the full range of issues associated with complementary and alternative medical treatments, I invite you to purchase (and read) James Randi’s (1989) excellent treatise on the subject as well as a book by Buckman, Sabbagh, and Sabbagh (1995)!

Resources

- Buckman, R., Sabbagh, K., & Sabbagh, K. (1995). *Magic or Medicine? An Investigation of Healing and Healers*. Amherst: Prometheus.
- Mielczarek, E. V., & Engler, B. D. (2012). Measuring mythology: Startling concepts in NCCAM grants. *Skeptical Inquirer*, 36(1), 35-43.
- Randi, J. (1989). *The Faith Healers*. Amherst: Prometheus.

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Psychology Club Update

This semester the RMU Psychology Club has done fundraising, and sold plants for horticultural therapy.

They have become involved in a long-term project with *Hope Grows*, which is new local non-profit organization that is a day/night bed and breakfast getaway for the caregivers of the elderly, terminally ill, and mentally and physically disabled. It is designed to combat the burnout associated with this emotionally draining career with the goal of helping caregivers

bring renewed strength and commitment to the people they care for. The psychology club students helped to clear the land for the gardens they are putting in as part of the restorative process. The club plans to continue its relationship with the *Hope Grows* project.

Psychology club will bring campus awareness of SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) during December which is SAD awareness month with posters and fliers to be hung up around

campus. Also, they are getting ready for the annual stress ball table which will be for all students to come and make their own stress ball to help deal with upcoming finals.

For information about the Psychology Club and its activities, please email Sharon Swatko the Psychology Club president at: sxsst31@mail.rmu.edu or Dr. Wheeler (the faculty advisor) at wheeler@rmu.edu.

DP's Scavenger Hunt

PRIZE: A package of two half-pound (giant) Reese's Peanut Butter Cups!



TASKS: Submit evidence to Psi Chi electronically: PsiChi@mail.rmu.edu. The 1st complete submission wins! (But there are runner-up prizes too!)

1. Have a picture of yourself taken

with: **Dr. Rafoth** (Dean of SESS) and **Mary Ann Polasko** (secretary).

2. Provide with the photos a fun fact, quote, or true statement from or about **Dr. Rafoth** as well as **Mary Ann Polasko** (to prove that you also interacted with them).

RULES: Any submissions that fail to follow the rules listed below will be disqualified.

• You must be wearing the same outfit in all photos.

- Evidence of "Photo-shopping" will result in disqualification.
- You may need to make an appointment with the individual (do not expect that they will drop everything for a photo-shoot).
- Your submission must be **complete** when you email it to Psi Chi (i.e., both photos and the accompanying factual statements/quotes).
- You must be able to collect your prize from Dr. Paul in person (his office is 110 Lafayette Center).

Psychology Crossword Puzzle

ACROSS

- 4 Behaviorists run these through mazes.
6 Month Psi Chi was originally founded.
9 Correlation does not imply this.
12 Current president of Psi Chi at RMU.
15 "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar."
16 Name of this newsletter.
18 Area of psychology the BS is offered in at RMU.
20 Current president of Psychology Club at RMU.
21 Faculty adviser to RMU chapter of Psi Chi.
22 Building where psychology faculty have offices.

DOWN

- 1 Occasionally taken during class.
2 Father of scientific psychology.
3 Newest professor in psychology.
5 Don't study for an exam without this!
7 The study of human behavior.
8 Sometimes used by students.
10 OCD without the "D".
11 $p < .05$.
13 Faculty adviser to RMU Psychology Club.
14 Famous child who was conditioned by James Watson to fear furry animals.
17 One of the last classes needed to graduate (120 hours in a real-world setting).
19 How many full time psychology professors at RMU?

