Dear Psych Majors:

I’m writing to provide some important information about the honors thesis program in psychology, which offers students the opportunity to work in depth on an empirical project during the senior year. The thesis project is both intensive and demanding but it is also rewarding and often filled with new learning experiences; students should carefully consider their commitment to this year-long 3-course-credit experience during their senior year (typically one course credit in the fall, two in the spring). In psychology, the focus of the thesis is developed collaboratively through discussions with the thesis advisor and typically centers on a topic within the advisor's area of expertise. It is advantageous and sometimes necessary to have had a course with the professor in whose research area one is interested. For some types of projects, it is important to have worked in a given faculty member’s lab prior to applying to pursue thesis work in that area. **Thus, it is a good to begin considering whether you would like to do a thesis now, so that you can plan your courses appropriately and can have time to discuss the thesis process with your academic advisor and faculty you may want to work with.**

Many students have questions about the thesis process, here are some answers to frequently asked questions:

1. *When do I have to apply to do a thesis?*

Applications for juniors and sophomore Es interested in doing a thesis are due in early March, 2023. At the beginning of the spring semester an email from the chair will go out with specific instructions on the application process and the due date. **Because the process of matching students with thesis advisors only occurs once a year, Sophomore E students interested in doing a thesis must complete the application in March, 2023.**

1. *How do I decide which faculty members I’m interested in working with?*

Attached to this email are descriptions of each faculty member’s areas of interest and expertise. In some cases, these descriptions include specific research projects that a faculty member would like to see carried out, specific course prerequisites necessary to pursue honors work, or requirements for prior experience working in that lab. Email all faculty members whose research interests match your own and set up a time to discuss possible research topics with them. In these discussions you should develop a shared understanding of what topic you would work on (but you do not need to figure out the specific project/design). Thesis advising slots are limited and so you will need to identify multiple faculty members (e.g., a minimum of 3) that you would be interested in working with.

1. *How are students matched with faculty advisors?*

As part of the application process, we will ask you to submit a ranked choice of the faculty advisors you would like to work with. The department then meets to match students with advisers. Although every effort is made to accommodate student preferences, the number of advising slots for each faculty member is limited, so be sure to identify at least three faculty members you would be interested in working with. **If you list a faculty member you have not spoken with about potential thesis work, you risk failing to match at all.** The general criteria that the department uses in accepting and matching students into the honors program include course background in the area, ability to work independently, appropriate writing skills, high level of motivation, and perseverance. Due to limited availability, thesis enrollment cannot be guaranteed to all applicants in all years.

1. *What if I have questions or am unsure if a thesis is right for me?*

You can talk with your advisor or any psychology department faculty member about the thesis process. They can talk with you about the pros and cons of doing a thesis and what you should consider in deciding if a thesis is right for you. The department will also be hosting an “ask a thesis student” info session in December where you can hear from current psychology thesis students about their experience.

More information about the thesis application process will be sent out at the beginning of the spring semester. In the meantime, I encourage you to think about whether you would like to do a thesis and to begin having discussions with faculty members.

Best,

Prof. McQuade

# Faculty Research Interests for Honors Work

# Professor Baird

My research is devoted to uncovering neural and psychological mechanisms that control feeding behavior. I use modem behavioral analysis, pharmacological, and neural recording techniques to explore how various drugs and other treatments affect feeding behavior and taste coding in the brainstem. For the upcoming year I intend to use microstructural behavioral analysis methods to evaluate how direct brain application of novel neuropeptides recently implicated in obesity specifically affect feeding behavior. We will be directing these infusions to areas of the brain not previously explored for a role in obesity. These results should help to clarify the brain circuits through which obesity-related neuropeptides act and possibly how these circuits may become imbalanced in cases of obesity.

# Professor Cohen

The moment we open our eyes, we all have the subjective experience of a rich, vastly detailed visual world. However, a wide variety of results strongly suggest this is not true and that we actually aware of very little of what's going on around us. Drivers often get in accidents saying they "just didn't see" the object they drove into, viewers don't notice a plane flying in the background of a movie set in ancient Greece, and sometimes you simply can't find the object you're looking for even though it's directly in front of you. My research uses neuroimaging (fMRI) and behavioral techniques to investigate how much information we can perceive and remember from the world around us. Broadly speaking, I ask questions like: Why is some information perceived and remembered while other information goes unnoticed and is forgotten? What are the cognitive and neural factors that limit the bandwidth of memory and perception? Is information that you don't consciously perceive still processed by the brain subliminally? How much? Possible topics for thesis projects include using behavioral methods to measure what kind/how much information can be processed by the unconscious mind, as well as using a combination of behavioral and neural measures to understand how the functional organization of the brain acts as a bottleneck on perception and memory. However, there are many possibilities for thesis work in my lab for students interested in any of the aforementioned topics and questions.

# Professor Demorest

My research focuses on the role of emotion in personality. In past research I have examined

individual differences among people as to which emotions are most prevalent in a persons life

(e.g., some people are more prone to anxiety and others to sadness). I have also examined

individual differences in people’s emotion scripts, that is, the expectations people hold about how

emotions are evoked and how to respond to them. For example, some people respond to anger by

suppressing it whereas others respond to anger by acting it out aggressively. I usually study these

things by collecting emotional memories from people and then coding those memories for

thematic patterns. Recently I have collected autobiographical memories from a large number of

people about anxiety and positive emotions. Future thesis students could analyze these narratives

to see if there are individual differences in the ways people tell their emotional memories, and

whether those differences determine how they feel after telling them. Personality (PSYC 221) or

one of my seminars (PSYC 338 or 353) are strongly recommended as background.

# Professor Hart

My research explores the role of interpersonal expectations in guiding human behavior in both laboratory and applied settings. I have conducted and supervised projects examining judges' expectations and nonverbal behavior in real trials, legal decision making in civil and criminal cases, and laboratory studies examining how physical characteristics (e.g., race, gender) and nonverbal behavior affect how we perceive and respond to others. For example, a recent honors project manipulated respondents' mood to see if induced negative mood, versus positive mood, would lead people to categorize outgroup members more quickly than they categorize ingroup members. Another project compared the recognition accuracy for same- versus cross- race faces across two different cultures. ***Professor Hart is not taking thesis students in the 2022-23 academic year.***

**Professor Kneeland**

Emotions confer many benefits – they allow us to savor a beautiful sunrise, form deep connections with others, and escape from life-threatening danger. However, at pathological levels, emotions can be debilitating. My research centers on the question of why people cope with emotional distress the way that they do. Overall, my research program integrates methods in social, clinical, and health psychology to investigate how psychological factors influence emotion regulation and mental health. Much of my work focuses on emotion malleability beliefs, which are the beliefs that individuals hold about the degree to which emotions are changeable and under their control. I found that people with more malleable views of emotion have lower levels of depression and anxiety and use more effective coping strategies. Overall, my research seeks to clarify the link between emotion malleability beliefs, emotion regulation, and emotions using a variety of methodologies (e.g., longitudinal, experience sampling, experimental) and a range of study populations (e.g., college students, community members, individuals with depression). Additionally, I have developed a brief intervention to change emotion malleability beliefs, promote effective emotion regulation, and enhance resilience. Paralleling my interest in the relationship between emotion malleability beliefs and emotion regulation, I am also interested in how individuals’ beliefs about the controllability of physical pain relate to emotional distress, pain, and coping. I found that individuals who have more controllable beliefs about pain have lower anxiety and mood difficulties, lower levels of craving for substances, and less pain-related interference in their functioning. Students interested in completing a thesis with me will work on ongoing data collection projects with adult samples or will be able to analyze existing data with clinical and non-clinical populations. I strongly recommend that interested students work in my research lab junior year. Psychology 228 is strongly recommended as background.

**Professor McOuade**

My research examines social adjustment in children and adolescence. Some children are well liked, make friends easily, and are good at reading and understanding social cues. Yet other children struggle to make friends, are rejected or bullied by peers, and engage in behaviors that are harmful to others. My research seeks to understand the cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors that explain these differences in social functioning. Some of my research focuses specifically on children with Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), who often demonstrate significant social impairments and other work focuses on social impairments in children more generally. My most recent work focuses on how children's emotion regulation capacities relate to their social behavior and adjustment. To examine this, I measure differences in how children respond physiologically to social stressors (i.e. changes in heart rate) and how that relates to their social adjustment. I am interested in how external factors, such as parenting, may serve to either exacerbate or protect children who struggle to regulate their emotions. Students interested in completing a thesis with me have the opportunity to work on ongoing data collection projects with child or college participants and to add their own measures. I strongly recommend that interested students work in my research lab junior year. Staying on campus for the summer to complete data collection also may be a requirement. Psychology 228 is strongly recommended as background.

**Professor Palmquist**

Broadly, I'm interested in questions of how children learn from others. There are two main ways that children learn about the world around them: gaining first-hand experience (e.g., tasting a lemon and figuring out that it's sour) and learning information from other people (e.g., hearing that lemons are sour, and believing what they're told). Understanding the process by which children learn from others is particularly important because much of what children need to know about the world cannot be learned through first-hand experience (e.g., the fact that the earth is round), instead, they must simply listen to others and trust what they are told. Learning from others also requires that children be discerning in terms of who they trust: they need to identify and rely on those who are knowledgeable and helpful, and identify and ignore those who are ignorant or deceptive. My research is focused on better understanding how and when children choose to learn from others. One line of my research asks whether children evaluate others' nonverbal cues (i.e., pointing gestures), in addition to their spoken language, to determine good sources of information. Another, more recent, line of my research explores the variation and complexity in how children learn from others. In this line of research, we explore whether individual differences, previous experiences, and context affect children's decisions to trust others as good sources of information. I have ongoing studies that are conducted in local preschools and with children who come into my research lab. Students interested in completing a thesis with me have the chance to work on these existing projects and develop related manipulations. I strongly recommend that interested students work in my research lab during spring semester of their junior year. Staying on campus for the summer to complete data collection may also be a requirement. PSYC 227 is strongly recommended as a background.

**Professor Sanderson**

My research is based in social psychology and specifically on the power of social norms to shape people’s attitudes and behavior, factors that lead people to misperceive such norms, and the consequences of feeling different from members of our social group.  Thesis projects could examine individuals' accuracy in perceiving others' attitudes and behaviors as well as how such perceptions (and misperceptions) influence one's own attitudes and behaviors.  For example, women see other women as thinner and as exercising more than they themselves do, which increases the risk of disordered eating, and both men and women see others as hooking up more frequently than they themselves do, which can lead to feelings of loneliness. Thesis projects could examine factors leading to such errors, the consequences of such perceptions, and/or strategies for changing these perceptions across numerous different types of health behaviors (e.g., hooking up, sleep, stress, eating and exercise behavior, etc.).  Several recent thesis projects have examined different strategies for reducing mental health stigma and increasing willingness to seek out the counseling center; projects could also examine strategies for helping people speak up in the face of bad behavior (e.g., sexual misconduct, bullying, hazing, etc.).  I have also supervised topics related to sport psychology, such as how beliefs about student-athletes influence individuals' attitudes and behavior in academic and athletic domains and strategies for increasing acceptance of reporting concussions. Most recently, my thesis students have examined the link between belongingness and well-being, including how various factors moderate this relationship (e.g., athlete status, gender, class year) and the influence of COVID on both belongingness and well-being. Psychology 220 is strongly recommended as background.

**Professor Schulkind**

My primary interests are in the field of autobiographical memory, which is memory for the events of one's life. I have recently begun to examine how one's personal identity is related to their memories for past experiences. Although many theorists believe that we know ourselves only by reflecting on our past experiences and behaviors, there are others who believe that our sense of self is entirely separate from our past experiences. Potential thesis topics might explore whether differences in personality (e.g., extraversion) and identity (e.g., I consider myself to be honest) influence the kinds of personal experiences that an individual regards as 'important'. I am also very interested in music cognition, especially how people identify melodies. Although people can easily name 100s of different songs, we know very little about how listeners distinguish 'Frosty, the Snowman' from 'Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer'. Current work in my lab is examining how expertise effects melody identification, the relationship between music and language, and whether musical training influences cognitive performance on other kinds of mental tasks. In addition to these topics, I am willing consider other questions relating to music and memory.

**Professor Turgeo****n**

My research is in the area of behavioral pharmacology. Recent work in the lab has focused on the effects of caffeine on adolescent male and female rats and humans. In rats, we have identified a number of behavioral effects following exposure to caffeine in the drinking water, some of which vary by age and sex as well as housing conditions. Current questions in the lab revolve around assessing the longevity of these effects and attempting to identify possible neural correlates to these behavioral effects. Behaviors examined in the lab include object recognition memory, elevated plus maze behavior, light/dark box behavior, marble burying and behavior in the forced swim test, an animal model for depressive-like behaviors. Studies in humans have revealed sex differences in the effects of caffeine exposure on the response to a stressor and we are continuing to describe the nature of these differences. In another line of research, students in my lab have been investigating sex differences in drawing behavior and visual processing in humans and their possible relationship to early hormone exposure.