

Berkeley Psychology INSIGHT

Letter from the chair

Dear Alumni and Friends,

It's an honor to write my first letter as chair for our Berkeley Psychology newsletter. I transitioned into the Chair role in July and aim to do my best to live up to the high bar set by my predecessors.

Thanks to our dedicated team of faculty & staff.

I begin this letter with gratitude for our outgoing department Chair, Serena Chen, who led us through the uncertainties of the pandemic, the UAW contract negotiations, and several important hires. As many of these responsibilities continue, she has been kind enough not only to see these tasks through but also to serve as the interim Vice Chair for Undergraduate Affairs before we welcome Allison Harvey to the role in the Spring.



I want to also acknowledge the hard work and dedication of both Sheri Johnson who served as Vice-Chair for Graduate Affairs for 2 years and Lance Kriegsfeld, who served in the same role for 5+ years and will take over again during Sheri's sabbatical. Both Sheri and Lance have been unfailing advocates for graduate students and I thank them for their dedication to the department. There are a number of people who keep the department running: Alex Mastrangelli, Tanya Robles, Jitka Horavova, Yukiko Vademann, Harumi Quinones-Austria, Judi Ray, Christine Mullarkey, Jennifer Ochoa, Zoe Xu, Emily Dandan, Fonda Yoshimoto-Reed, Julian Bain, Claire Flagg, and Hermela Araya all deserve huge thanks and appreciation. Staff perform important, often behind-the-scenes work, and I'm grateful to be part of a community that is committed to celebrating their efforts.

Strength in our community

Despite increasing conflict in the world around us, our UC Berkeley Psychology community found solace in social and academic events that brought our community together and strengthened our bonds. We welcomed the new academic year in August with a department party, celebrated Serena Chen's tenure as chair, hosted Bob Levenson's Distinguished Faculty Lecture, and, by the end of November, we had hosted 5 job talks for our latest faculty search. In early Spring, we will be interviewing for another position in Clinical Science and are already planning a slate of community and departmental events for next semester.

Fiat Lux

Our undergraduate and graduate programs were ranked No. 1 in the 2024 rankings of the U.S. News & World Report and UC-Berkeley was again the No.1 Public University in the country. I am proud to be a part of this amazing institution and department. As I humbly start my term as chair, I thank you in advance for your support. **Go Bears!**

Give to Psychology, [HERE](#)

Also please send us your stories and life updates — we feature alumni stories on our website and would love to hear from you!

And keep in touch with us via [Twitter \(X\)](#), and our [Department website](#).

Ozlem Ayduk
Professor and Chair



Honors and Awards

FACULTY

Alison Gopnik, Distinguished Professor of Psychology, has been awarded the annual [David Rumelhart Prize in Cognitive Science](#). The award honors scholars who have made fundamental contributions to the theoretical foundations of human cognition.

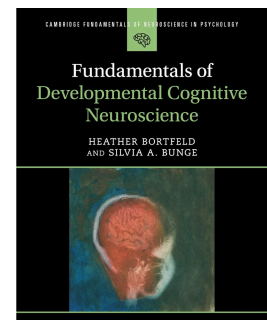
Robert Knight, Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience, has received the [Landis Award for Outstanding Mentorship 2023](#), which recognizes the contributions and importance of outstanding mentors.

Fei Xu, Professor of Psychology, was elected a [Fellow of the American Psychological Association](#) (APA) in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the science and profession of developmental psychology.

Nina Dronkers, Adjunct Professor of Psychology, received the [2023 Distinguished Career Award](#) from the Society for the Neurobiology of Language awarded to researchers who have made an outstanding and enduring contribution to research in the neurobiology of language.

Dacher Keltner, Professor of Psychology, released his newest book last January titled "[Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life](#)". It has recently been awarded Amazon's Best Book of the Year in their Science category! In his book, he discusses the mystery of awe and how new research reveals how the emotion affects our brains and our bodies.

Silvia A Bunge, Professor of Psychology, will release a new textbook titled "[Fundamentals of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience](#)", co-authored with Heather Bortfeld at UC Merced. In the new textbook, the authors provide a comprehensive survey of developmental cognitive neuroscience, setting the tone for future psychologists and neuroscientists. It will be released in January 2024.



Charter Hill Society for Psychology

The Charter Hill Society is a community of alumni dedicated to supporting UC Berkeley Psychology: its students and faculty, and each other. Members will be invited to special programming for Psychology as well as to events with Charter Hill members from around the College. Recent lectures and events have featured Nobel laureates and leading figures in Psychology and Neuroscience.

Charter Hill members make a three-year pledge to the Psychology Department of \$1,000 or more per year. Gifts directly support the students and faculty of Berkeley Psychology.

To become a member of the Charter Hill Society, make a three-year recurring commitment [here](#). (One-time gifts can also be made.)

For more information or questions, contact Anya Essiounina:
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Publications

What Children Can Do That Large Language Models Can't (Yet)

Are language-and-vision models such as GPT-4 intelligent? An alternative perspective may be that artificial intelligence (AI) models can enhance learning through efficient and powerful imitation, but are not able to innovate in the same way as humans. In their paper published in [Perspectives on Psychological Science](#), [Eunice Yi](#), [Eliza Kosoy](#), and [Alison Gopnik, PhD](#), investigate this idea by investigating the difference between how AI models and children discover new tools and novel causal structures. Interestingly, they find that children outperform AI models when there is less information to build from. While AI models can enhance information acquisition efficiency and increase productivity, they fail to innovate in the same way that human children seem to do naturally.



[Political Psychology](#)

Do whole numbers interfere with understanding fractions?

Many students struggle with mastering fractions, but what makes learning fractions so difficult? In a recent study published in [Developmental Psychology](#), [Elena Leib](#) and [Silvia A Bunge, PhD](#), along with collaborators investigated the theory that prior knowledge of whole numbers is what interferes with fraction learning. They found that students with better inhibitory control – the ability to resolve interference – had a higher understanding of fractions. They also found that whole number knowledge was not the source of interference in fraction learning. Their findings point to a pivotal role for inhibitory control in developing fraction understanding.

RESEARCH DISCOVERIES



[Perspectives on Psychological Science](#)

Intellectual Humility and Political Polarization

Political polarization is rising in the United States, threatening social harmony and the democratic process. In a recent article published in [Political Psychology](#), [Tyrone Sgambati](#) and [Ozlem Ayduk, PhD](#), study the relation between intellectual humility (i.e., an awareness of one's intellectual limitations) and political polarization. Using surveys surrounding the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election, they found that conservatives higher in intellectual humility had less extreme attitudes on hot-button political issues (e.g., abortion, gun control, etc.), while both liberals and conservatives with higher intellectual humility had more favorable feelings toward political opponents. High intellectual humility individuals, regardless of party, were also more likely to befriend people with different political affiliations. Their findings suggest that a politically diverse social network may contribute to reduced political polarization among those with higher intellectual humility.



[Developmental Psychology](#)

Publications

RESEARCH DISCOVERIES

Self-regulation and behavioral adjustment among Chinese American children in early elementary school

Children's self-regulatory abilities—those that allow them to direct their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to achieve a goal—are beneficial for academic and behavioral development. But what cultural factors predict self-regulatory abilities? In a study published in [Child Development](#), **Christopher L. Gys, Stephanie L. Haft, and Qing Zhou, PhD**, found that parents of Chinese American children in early elementary school who felt more engaged with Chinese culture compared to their own children (in terms of language, media, and relationships) reported lower self-regulation for their children. They also found that children with stronger self-regulation at 6–9 years old were less likely to have behavioral issues at home and school two years later. Their findings suggest that considering cultural gaps between parents and children is crucial for understanding its impact on children's self-regulation, which can influence behavior both at school and at home.



[Child Development](#)

The role of personal goals in how we attribute value

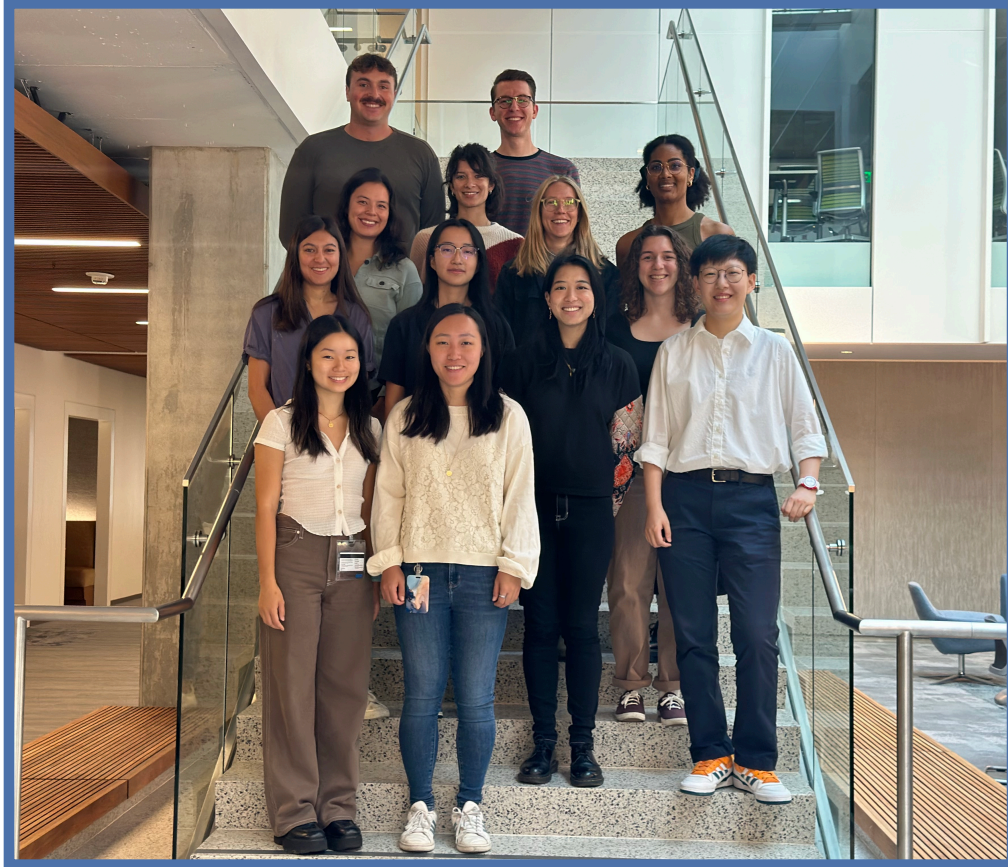
People's feelings about choice outcomes often depend on what other options are available. For example, winning \$10 feels much better when the jackpot is \$10 than \$100. This phenomenon – called context-sensitivity – is attributed to adjusting your expectations according to the range of possible outcomes. In a recent [PLoS Biology](#) article, **Gaia Molinaro and Anne Collins, PhD**, proposed an alternative view that people may evaluate the value of choice outcomes in relation to their personal goals. Analyzing data from over 1,000 individuals, they found that their new theory could explain human choice behavior just as well, if not better, than previous ones. Their findings suggest that personal goals play a bigger role in economic decision-making than previously thought.



[PLOS One](#)

Support more cutting-edge psychology research [HERE](#)

Incoming PhD Students 2023



Back row, left to right: Calder Hilde-Jones, Carter Bower.

Second row, left to right: Andrea Cladek, Nina Schoener, Lou (Lindsey) Deringer, Natalie Samuels.

Third row, left to right: Dhara Yu, Fei Dai, Deborah Qu, Kylie Cassutt, Huiwen Alex Yang.

Front row, left to right: Gillian Ozawa, Alyson Wong.

Not pictured: Yaqi Ji.

Meet the Psychology Department's 2023 PhD student cohort!

This year's cohort brings students from the United Kingdom and across the United States with diverse academic and employment backgrounds, ranging from the medical field and climate change tech startups to management consulting. They join the program eager to begin their research endeavors in language development and emotions, developing computational models of social cognition, exploring the impact of sleep on aging and dementia, the role of circadian rhythms in neurodegeneration, and developing methods for passive sensing of mental health and alleviating shame.

We're excited to welcome this talented and diverse group of students to our department, and look forward to sharing all their future accomplishments with you!

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