



DEPARTMENT CHAIR MESSAGE

Dear BYU Psychology alumni,

I hope this message finds you well and filled with the same pride that we have here in the Psychology Department at Brigham Young University. As we reflect on last year, it is my pleasure to share some exciting updates from our department.

First and foremost, I am delighted to report that our major continues to flourish. From 2022 to 2023, we experienced 7 percent growth in undergraduate student enrollment, with more young minds than ever choosing to discover truth about the intricacies of human nature through our program. It is a testament to the quality of education we provide and the incredible dedication of our faculty and staff.

The heart of our success lies in the cutting-edge research being conducted by our esteemed faculty and students. In 2022, we witnessed remarkable breakthroughs in various domains of psychology, from cognitive neuroscience to sleep psychology and everything in between. Our researchers are making significant contributions to the field by advancing our understanding of the human mind and addressing real-world issues.


We look forward to reporting next year on 2023 in coming months. In addition to sharing our accomplishments, we will report on our ambitious plans to

further enhance our department’s offerings with new courses, research initiatives, and collaborations that will continue to set us apart as leaders in psychology. We are committed to providing our students with an exceptional educational experience and ensuring that our alumni continue to take pride in their BYU psychology degrees.

We invite you to stay connected, get involved, and be part of the fantastic journey that lies ahead. We have much to celebrate. We appreciate your ongoing support for the BYU Psychology Department.



With warm regards,



Gary Burlingame
DEPARTMENT CHAIR
[Brigham Young University Psychology Department](#)

STUDENT AWARDS

Cameron Alldredge (clinical graduate student): APF Division 49 Richard Moreland Dissertation of the Year Award for “Group Therapy for Pain: A Meta-Analysis”

Upon graduating from BYU’s psychology program, Cameron Alldredge moved to Waco, Texas, to begin working as a postdoctoral fellow in the Mind-Body Medicine Research Laboratory at Baylor University. This lab is one of the world-leading research labs on clinical hypnosis, with a 20-year track record of NIH-funded studies. In this position, he spends the majority of his time involved in conducting studies on clinical hypnosis, writing manuscripts for publication, and writing new NIH grants. Since starting, Alldredge has contributed to one published book chapter and six scientific publications with 12 more in various phases of the publication process. He also teaches clinically focused courses at Baylor. He recently received the Stanley Krippner Award (excellence in hypnosis research by a student or early-career professional) from the Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis. He currently serves on the executive committee of APA Division 30: Society of Psychological Hypnosis.



Jonah Cox: Mark K. Allen Award

Jonah Cox grew up as a middle child in Lehi, Utah. In seventh grade, he fell head over heels for Laurel, who would become his wife, though it took until eighth grade for her to notice him. Through the following years, Laurel remained a steadfast influence, shaping his academic pursuits. They collaborated at a tax and consulting firm and started several side hustles, including a lucrative car rental venture. As he and Laurel now begin their family, Cox prepares to embark



on a master of accountancy program. He will attend law school in 2024, where he hopes to blend psychology, law, and business perspectives.

Cox began at BYU as a transfer student, drawn by the institution’s blend of education and values. He was the first in his immediate family to attend BYU. When he struggled with his studies, supportive professors guided him. Grateful for their unwavering expectations and challenging coursework, Cox acknowledges that his growth stemmed more from the seemingly insurmountable challenges than the anticipated ones.

Having graduated with his bachelor’s in psychology in April 2023, Cox extends gratitude to his wife, professors, and BYU for their patience and support.

Julia Dias Blankmeyer: 2023 Valedictorian

Julia Dias Blankmeyer left São Paulo, Brazil, as child with her family and immigrated to the United States where their first exposure to American culture was in Springdale, Arkansas. Her family later relocated to Rhode Island and then to Colorado, where she graduated from high school. She continued to nurture her Brazilian heritage at home while absorbing American culture at school.

Blankmeyer continued her education online through BYU–Hawaii during COVID-19. During this time, she met Erik, her future husband, whose talent for fostering growth mindsets and unearthing hidden potential reshaped Blankmeyer’s perspective on her own capabilities. This shift set her on a new trajectory.

She transferred to BYU, where her time as a student allowed her to explore psychology while working with several professors on research projects involving emotion expression, unconscious bias in hiring, and brain lesions. Having graduated from BYU in April 2023, Blankmeyer plans to attend medical school and specialize in psychiatry.

For her, coming to the end of a difficult journey and looking back with pride on all that she has accomplished is the most amazing feeling in the world.



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Neuroscience in Europe

Aims of the Neuroscience in Europe study abroad program:

- 1) Examine the influence of culture on the relationship between brain and behavior.
- 2) Expose students to both the rich history of psychological and neuroscience research and the vibrant contemporary research community of Europe.
- 3) Improve students’ global fluency and cultural awareness.



This program offers students an experiential learning opportunity that would be difficult to replicate on campus. It exposes students to different ways of thinking about the mind (in particular, diseases of the mind) and also helps students broaden their networks for future educational and collaborative research opportunities. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, the 2022 program was limited to Hungary, which has a strong tradition of medical and neuroscience research. In addition to taking two courses (PSYCH 381: Behavioral Neurobiology and PSYCH 370: Sensation and Perception), students



participated in experiential learning activities. For example, they visited the Semmelweis Museum of Medical History to learn about the history of research methods in neuroscience. Their tour of the Great Synagogue in Budapest helped them explore memory processes and collective memory. The students also visited art museums to observe visual processing and how artists achieve the perception of depth in their works. Students met researchers and toured active research labs at the University of Pécs, the University of Szeged, Central European University, and the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. They also toured the Brain Imaging Center at the Research Centre for Natural Sciences. Finally, students participated in a number of cultural experiences to better understand the Hungarian people and their way of life. This study abroad will be available every two years, and there are plans to expand the program to other countries in the summer of 2024.



VISITING FACULTY

Travis Blackwelder recently completed his first year of full-time teaching at BYU. He extends appreciation to his colleagues for their generosity and support and relishes the opportunity to work alongside them. A native of Delta, Utah, Blackwelder met his future wife, Collette, during his time at the Missionary Training Center. Blackwelder served a mission in the Canada Toronto Mission, where he sought always to “be an instrument in the hands of God,” as taught in Alma 29:9. After his mission, he and Collette reconnected and married. His life took a transformative turn in 2013 when he received a dual-organ transplant. The kidney and pancreas he received came from a young missionary who had tragically passed away. Blackwelder was reminded of the scripture in Alma as he was blessed by someone who had been an instrument in God’s hands, not only to share the gospel but to save Blackwelder’s life. The Blackwelders have now been married for 27 years and reside in Provo’s Grandview area. They have a three-year-old daughter, Grace, whom they adore.



RESEARCH SPOTLIGHTS

BRAIN IMAGING AND BEHAVIOR LAB

The Brain Imaging and Behavior Lab, directed by Derin Cobia, recently presented groundbreaking research at the International Neuropsychological Society’s annual meeting in San Diego, CA. The study, led by Kaitlyn Greer (PhD ’22), investigated sex differences in brain structure among individuals in the early stages of psychosis (EP). Driven by Greer’s dissertation work, the research centered on discerning distinctive brain abnormalities within the frontoparietal network (FPN), linked to cognitive control, among men and women with EP.

The study involved 111 EP individuals (68 men, 43 women) and 55 healthy comparison participants (35 men, 20 women) from an accessible dataset at Harvard. Brain scans were transformed into high-dimensional imaging maps at BYU, gauging brain surface thickness and the shape of deeper FPN regions. Comparisons were made between EP and non-EP groups, as well as between EP men and women.

Surface brain variations were marginal, yet profound differences emerged within deep-brain structures. Specifically, atypical shape patterns in EP men notably differed from those in EP women and their healthy counterparts. EP women displayed more pronounced abnormalities than



EP men, and these deviations corresponded with compromised cognitive control, particularly in women.

The study implies that men and women undergoing early psychosis manifest distinct brain abnormality patterns in the FPN during the disorder’s inception. This revelation may shed light on the initial stages of cognitive control decline, which often worsens over time in the course of the illness.



MRI SCANNER UPGRADE

The MRI Research Facility at BYU upgraded their MRI scanner to a Siemens MAGNETOM Vida in the fall of 2022. The new scanner is the same field strength (3 Tesla) as the previous one, but with upgraded hardware and software that will make research with MRI faster and more reliable. New features include faster and stronger gradient coils and AI assistance in the scanning software, which should result in clearer and more reliable images from the scanner. The scanner upgrade was made possible by the generous support of the office of the BYU associate academic vice president for research and graduate studies.

LUNDWALL COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT LAB

The Lundwall Lab is dedicated to autism research. Described below are four distinct graduate projects aimed at advancing interventions for individuals and families, ultimately minimizing distress:



Dakin Stovall researches parenting children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Her recent ventures involved leading acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and emotion coaching groups for parents, successfully reducing parent distress and child behavior concerns. She shared her findings on parents’ choices in dual language immersion programs for autistic children at the International Society for Autism Research (INSAR) in Sweden in May 2023.

Maddie Gillies measures the stress levels of parents of children on the autism spectrum, using self-report questionnaires and hair cortisol levels. Her research revealed higher stress levels in parents of ASD children compared to parents of neurotypical children, although cortisol levels showed no significant differences. She presented at INSAR in May 2023.



Karys Normansell-Mossa examines how social support and gender-affirming care affect executive functioning in autistic transgender and gender diverse adults, highlighting the link between gender diversity and mental health distress. Normansell-Mossa presented at INSAR in May 2023.

Danica Limon delves into the perspectives of Hispanic parents on vaccines and healthcare for their children. Her research considers two groups: those with children diagnosed with ASD and those with typically developing children. Limon’s study is ongoing, and she anticipates presenting its findings at INSAR in Australia in May 2024.



CLINICAL COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCE AND NEUROPSYCHOLOGY LABORATORY

Michael Larson oversees BYU’s Clinical Cognitive Neuroscience and Neuropsychology Laboratory, which is dedicated to unraveling the intricacies of cognitive control. Cognitive control is the ability to manage thoughts and actions to achieve goals, which encompasses attention, working memory, decision-making, and self-control. Cognitive control aids focus, distraction resistance, and wise choices.

The lab’s efforts are focused on four key areas:

- 1) Exploring behavioral and neural manifestations of cognitive control through event-related potential and functional magnetic resonance imaging studies.
- 2) Studying developmental trajectories of cognitive control linked to neurologic insult or psychopathology such as traumatic brain injury, autism, depression, or anxiety, thereby enhancing comprehension of rehabilitation and treatment.
- 3) Researching cognitive control’s role in exercise, food behavior, and health, including response inhibition and its impact on obesity.
- 4) Ascertaining the psychometric properties of biological measures to enhance research quality and pave the way for clinical applications.

The lab studies obsessive-compulsive disorder assessment and treatment, collaborating with institutions such as the University of South Florida and Baylor College of Medicine.

Recent student-led publications cover domains such as age-related inhibitory control in older adults, interhemispheric transfer time (IHIT) and adolescent concussions, error processing in psychopathology, and the connection between inhibitory control and soda consumption. These contributions showcase dedication to advancing cognitive control understanding.


2022–23 DEPARTMENT STATS

Faculty and Staff

- 18 PROFESSORS
- 7 ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS
- 8 ASSISTANT PROFESSORS
- 1 VISITING FACULTY MEMBER
- 4 STAFF


FACULTY AWARDS

During the academic year of 2022–23, the following faculty were recognized for their contributions to BYU and the psychology profession.




W. Ben Hill

Martin B. Hickman
Excellence in Teaching
by Adjunct Faculty Award




Ben Ogles

Martin B. Hickman
Excellence in
Citizenship Award




Blake Jones

National Excellence
in Multistate Research Award
(USDA)




Brent Slife (retired faculty)

2022 Award for Distinguished
Theoretical and
Philosophical Contributions
to Psychology (APA)




Melissa Jones

Women’s Research Initiative
Grant




Steven Luke

Mary Lou Fulton Associate
Professor Faculty Award




Wendy Birmingham

Women’s Research
Initiative Grant




Dianne Tice

Most Influential Paper of the
Year Award 2022 (*Journal
of University Teaching and
Learning Practice*)




Daniel Kay

Corecipient of the
President’s Innovation Award
for a Sleep Consortium




Kara Duraccio

Corecipient of the
President’s Innovation Award
for a Sleep Consortium



Julianne Holt-Lunstad


Selected as the lead scientist
on an advisory for the Office
of the US Surgeon General



Brock Kirwan


Coauthored an article in the
Wall Street Journal featuring
MRI work on computer
security behavior

FACULTY ADVANCEMENTS




Blake Jones

Associate professor
and continuing
faculty status (CFS)



Daniel Kay

Associate professor
and CFS




Chad Jensen

Full professor




Melissa Jones

Associate professor
and CFS



Scott Braithwaite

Full professor



Shawn Gale

Full professor

RETIRING FACULTY

Scott Steffensen

Faculty member, 2001–2023

Dee Higley

Faculty member, 2006–2022


NEW FACULTY

The Psychology Department joyfully reintroduces [Chelsea Romney](#) (BS ’15) as an assistant professor. A former psychology valedictorian at BYU, she now specializes in social psychology with a health emphasis. Her research concentrates on hormones responsive to social information. She consistently refines her classroom with inclusive practices.

Romney’s adept classroom skills have garnered attention, and her presentations have been featured at pedagogical gatherings. She emphasizes personal student engagement, exemplified by her commitment to learning names. As a member of the Psychology Department’s Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Committee, she strives to nurture a department that fosters unique voices, comfort, and growth.


After earning her bachelor of science in psychology with a statistics minor from BYU, she earned her doctorate at the University of California, Los Angeles in health psychology with a minor in quantitative psychology. As a BYU alum, she has previously taken classes from current faculty and is excited to see which professors she has in common with her students.

Romney was baptized the summer after high school, and she met her husband soon after at BYU. They share a daughter and a love for the outdoors. Her martial arts prowess is evidenced by her second-degree black belt. The Psychology Department is sincerely appreciative of her presence.



When [Stefania Ashby](#) (BS ’11) arrived at BYU as a curious freshman, the direction of her career path remained a puzzle for her. Amid this uncertainty, Ashby felt two things clearly: a resistance to education beyond a bachelor’s degree and a disinterest in psychology. However, her fascination with the intricate workings of the human brain, particularly in cognitive neuroscience, triggered a transformative shift. By her second semester, Ashby decided to major in psychology and eventually go on to get her PhD.

After Ashby’s graduation, she collaborated with Tara Niendam at UC Davis, exploring cognitive control in individuals with psychotic disorders. This experience solidified Ashby’s interest in cognitive neuroscience and neuroimaging, which eventually led her to the University of Oregon to delve into learning and memory under Dasa Zeithamova. A PhD in 2021 paved the way for her return to BYU as an adjunct lecturer and, in 2022, a full-time faculty member.



Ashby is passionate about unraveling the complexities of the human brain. Her current research involves using functional MRI and behavioral testing to understand how the brain handles misinformation encountered online. Outside the lab, Ashby enjoys paddleboarding, photography, and violin.

For Ashby, an open-door policy is important in connecting with her students. She readily discusses careers, offers grad school insights, and shares personal experiences with students. The opportunity to be back at BYU, surrounded by colleagues and brilliant students, fills her with gratitude. She considers feeling the campus spirit and intertwining academic pursuits with the teachings of the Savior profound privileges.

STAY CONNECTED



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