



Letter from the chair

Dear Alumni and Friends,

I would like to kick off the 2024-25 Academic Year by extending a warm welcome to the new members of our community: our first-year graduate students — a cohort of 18 and the largest in our recent history; our new staff including Alex Burr (Department Manager), Brenaia Blue & Kaitlyn Lopez (Undergraduate Student Advisors), and Kai Santiago (Graduate Student Advisor); and our new faculty — Mariam Aly, Gul Dölen, Hedy Kober, & Amitai Shenhav. The positive impact of their presence was felt immediately, and their contributions have already made our department stronger than ever before. Welcome!

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize Lance Kriegsfeld for stepping in as the interim Vice-Chair for Graduate Affairs for the 2024 semesters. Lance has served in this capacity on and off for a total of 7 years, which is above and beyond any call of duty, so thank you Lance! I am also grateful to Sheri Johnson who has kindly agreed to take back the reigns from Lance once she completes her sabbatical at the end of December.

Highlights from Summer and Fall 2024

Two of our junior faculty, Celeste Kidd & Jan Engelmann received tenure and were promoted to the rank of Associate Professor as of July 2024. Congratulations! In August, we welcomed the new semester with a festive department party in the BWW plaza; we have had several “coffee hours” and “baked goods” events organized by the Community Building & Cohesion (CBC) Committee with more to come in the Spring semester. Professor Emerita Bob Knight delivered his Distinguished Faculty Lecture on December 4th to a full house and we celebrated the end of the semester with a reception following his talk. Among the most memorable events was the department-wide competition organized by the CBC Committee for an original Psychology logo. We had not one, but two, winners — both designed by psychology graduate students.

Awards and Recognitions

Our Members of our community have continued to receive numerous awards and recognitions throughout 2024. Among those received by our faculty include [Mary Ainsworth Award](#) by Fei Xu; [Mentorship in Affective Science Award](#) by Iris Mauss; [Early Career Award in Developmental Science](#) by Jan Engelmann; [APA Award for Distinguished Scientific Contributions](#) by Robert Knight; [John Neale Mentor Award](#) by Sheri Johnson; and the election of Mark D'Esposito as Fellow to the [American Academy of Arts & Sciences](#). Nancy Liu, the Director of our Psychology Clinic was a recipient of the [Varda Shoham Clinical Science Training Initiative Award](#) from the Society for the Science of Clinical Psychology. The Director of our Student Services Office, Harumi Quinones, was also recognized by not one but two awards this year: the [Chancellor's Outstanding Staff Award](#) and the [Social Sciences Distinguished Service Award](#). Fellowships received by our graduate students and post-docs are too numerous to list and our community basks in their reflected glory.

In Memoriam

Professor Emerita Mary Main, a developmental psychologist world renowned for her seminal work in Adult Attachment, passed away in June 2023 at the age of 80. In July 2023, we also lost Professor Emerita Steve Palmer at the age of 75 after his long battle with a rare neurological disorder. Palmer was one of the giants of his generation in perception and cognition research. For more details about their cherished lives and esteemed careers please see Berkeley's in memoriam for [Steve Palmer](#) and [Mary Main](#).

Looking Ahead

As we approach the start of another year and the Spring 2025 semester, a number of exciting events and activities lie ahead of us: Remote graduate student interviews in January, campus visit for admitted students in March, and our annual fund-raising drive, Big-Give, in March. Additionally, our Lectureship Committee has organized three invited colloquia: *Ghiselli Lecture* by Mina Cikara (March 19), *Tryon Lecture* by John Jonides (April 2), and *Equity & Inclusion Lecture* by Laura Elenbaas (April 16). In other words, we have a lot to look forward to. As we wrap up the Fall semester, I wish everyone a restful and invigorating Holiday Season with their family, friends, and other loved ones. See you in 2025!

Ozlem Ayduk Professor and Chair

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](#).

Honors and Awards

FACULTY

Rich Ivry, Distinguished Professor of Psychology, has been awarded the 2025 Distinguished Career Award from the Society for the Neural Control of Movement. The award recognizes the important work of a prominent researcher whose contributions to neuroscience are widely acknowledged.

Fei Xu, Professor of Psychology, has received the 2024 Mary Ainsworth Award for Excellence in Developmental Science from the American Psychological Association (APA). The award recognizes mid-career developmentalists who have made outstanding contributions to developmental science. She also received the 2024-2025 Miller Professorship Award, a competitive appointment in an interdisciplinary Berkeley community.

Dacher Keltner, Distinguished Professor of Psychology, has been awarded the 2025 Mentor Award from the Association for Psychological Science (APS). This award recognizes psychology researchers and educators who have shaped the future directions of science by fostering the careers of students and colleagues.

Christina Maslach, Emeritus Professor of Psychology, has received the 2025 James McKeen Cattell Fellow Award from APS which recognizes researchers for a lifetime of outstanding contributions to the area of applied psychological research.

Nancy Liu, Director of our Psychology Clinic, has received the Varda Shoham Clinical Science Training Initiative award which supports programs in launching or supporting ongoing initiatives designed to effectively integrate science and practice into their training program.

Graduate Students

Annya Dahmani, Developmental PhD student, has received the Department of Defense NDSEG fellowship for her research titled "*Towards Understanding Learning and Exploration in Humans and Machines*".

Cristina Sarmiento, Developmental PhD student, has received The Sheldon Zedeck Program for Culture, Behavior and Management Study award for her research titled "Do Asian-American Infants Learn Better from Own-race Teachers than Other-race Teachers?".

Jefferson Ortega, Cognitive Neuroscience PhD student, has received the National Institutes of Health D-SPAN K99/F00 award for his research titled "*Investigating Visual Attention Mechanisms During Emotional Inferences*".

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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Department Highlights

Meet our newest faculty members: **Mariam Aly, Amitai Shenhav, Hedy Kober, & Gul Dölen**

Mariam Aly (Cognition)



Mariam Aly studies how our experiences are transformed into durable memories, and how we use our memories to guide our behavior. Her lab addresses these questions with a

multimodal approach, including behavioral studies, eye tracking, lesion studies, functional neuroimaging, computational modeling, and pharmacological manipulations. She hopes her lab's work will shed light on how differences in memory abilities – ranging from amnesia to exceptional memories – influence the ways we behave in our complex worlds.

Gul Dölen (Behavioral and Systems Neuroscience)



Research in the Dölen lab focuses on how the brain enables social behaviors through basic neurobiological processes such as neuromodulation and synaptic plasticity. In addition, they are

interested in understanding the pathophysiology of autism and schizophrenia, disorders characterized by profound social and cognitive impairments, with the ultimate goal of designing mechanism-based therapies.

Amitai Shenhav (Cognitive Neuroscience)

Amitai Shenhav studies the mechanisms that give rise to motivation and decision-making, including what makes tasks demanding and how people choose whether and how to invest effort in those tasks. His lab addresses these questions using a combination of



computational modeling and measures of behavior and neural activity (e.g., using functional magnetic resonance imaging and electroencephalography). Through the course of this work, he seeks to provide a better understanding of what drives human behavior, when and why people struggle with getting/staying motivated, and how to help them overcome these motivational barriers.

Hedy Kober (Cognitive Neuroscience)

Research in Kober's Lab takes a cognitive-neuroscience approach to clinical questions, uses state-of-the-art neuroimaging methods, and organizes around a few interrelated themes: Craving,



regulation of craving, substance use disorders, treatment for substance use disorders, neural mechanisms of change, emotion regulation in psychopathology, emotion-cognition interaction, and, mindfulness and meditation.

Publications

RESEARCH DISCOVERIES

Can toddlers use a novel tool to solve new problems?

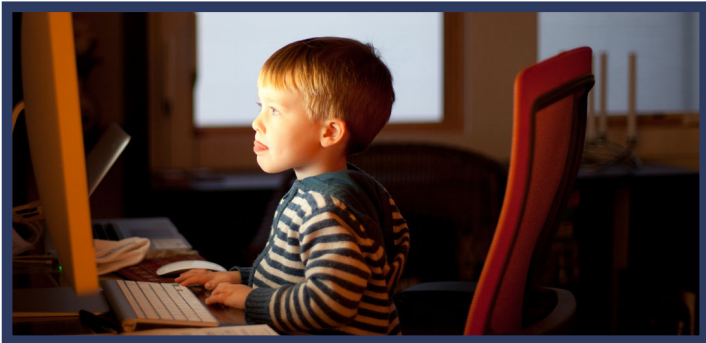
Humans are great at causal relational reasoning which is the ability to generalize learned rules of casual relationships to achieve new outcomes. Cognitive scientists have been fascinated by the question of when in development such a capacity emerges. In a recent study, **Marcel Goddu, PhD, Eunice Yiu, and Alison Gopnik, PhD** investigated this question by testing whether toddlers (24-30 months old) and preschoolers (3 years old) could use this reasoning to solve new problems. They found that toddlers quickly learned the causal patterns of a novel machine after just one to two observations and used this knowledge to successfully solve new problems. These findings demonstrate that even very young children possess sophisticated skills for understanding and interacting with the world.



Cognition

Exposure to misinformation makes children better fact-checkers

Children are starting to use the internet, social media and AI from an early age. How do we best prepare them to counter misinformation in this digital era? A study by **Evan Orticio and Celeste Kidd, PhD** showed that 4-7 year-olds exposed to clear misinformation (as opposed to all true information) fact-checked new information more diligently and were less likely to believe other misinformation. These findings show that children can adapt their level of skepticism based on the quality of information they've seen before. Giving children controlled, first-hand experience contending with misinformation may be key to fostering critical thinking skills and building media literacy.



Nature Human Behaviour

Want to keep up with our students?

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Publications

Human goal selection strategies inform AI system learning

How do individuals select which goals to pursue, and how can AI systems learn to do the same? **Gaia Molinaro, Anne Collins PhD**, and colleagues address these questions in an article at the intersection of cognitive science and machine learning. They argue that an important factor in human goal selection is "latent learning progress," a measure of learning driven by knowledge of the surrounding environment and their actions in it. The authors suggest that leveraging a similar signal in machines might enable AI systems to autonomously pursue increasingly complex challenges. To learn more, watch PhD student Gaia Molinaro's 5-minute video explanation [here](#).

RESEARCH DISCOVERIES



NeurIPS

Social internet use and inattention

Does social-related internet use really fragment our attention as many people believe? According to the latest study published in BMC Public Health, clinical psychologists **Ashley Halkett, PhD and Stephen Hinshaw, PhD** find limited evidence for a causal impact of problematic social Internet use on symptoms of inattention among adolescent girls. Though social-related internet use and inattention were initially related, problematic social Internet use (prior to the current ubiquity of modern social media apps such as TikTok and Instagram) in adolescence did not predict greater inattention six years later, even after statistical adjustment for socio-demographic factors such as maternal education and family income. More research is needed to determine whether modern social media apps do indeed disrupt users' attention spans over time.



BMC Public Health

New research by PhD student Yi-Hsin Su and Amitai Shenhav, PhD highlighted in Berkeley News! "Hate all of the candidates? New UC Berkeley research shows how rejection can help get your vote out".

[Read more here.](#)



Incoming PhD Students 2024



Back row, left to right: **Sebastian Franck-Love**, **Maggie Vashel**, **Yi-Hsin Su**.
Second row, left to right: **Sahana Sridhar**, **Cristina Sarmiento**, **Darby Lowe**.
Third row, left to right: **Yoko Urano**, **Ziwei Cheng**, **Alexandra Serna Godoy**, **Yi-Ke Peng**.
Fourth row, left to right: **Ti-Fen Pan**, **Kimy Peterson**.
Front row, left to right: **Rishika Shah**, **Kaitlin Mae Fernandez**
Not pictured: **Emily Chau**, **Xinyi Chen**, **Nathalie Fernandez**, **Sabana Maria Gonzalez**.

Meet the Psychology Department's 2024 PhD student cohort!

This year's cohort of PhD students brings with them a wealth of diverse experiences and cultural perspectives from across the globe. Their research spans a wide range of topics, including language and cognitive development, primate reasoning, cultural transmission, socio-ecological influences on child development, emotions, systemic racism, inequality, addiction, mental health, machine learning, circadian rhythms in neurological disorders, motivation, decision-making, and cognitive control.

We're thrilled to support this talented group of scholars and look forward to sharing their contributions to psychological science!

Editor-in-Chief, Director of Design: *Jefferson Ortega*
Writers and Contributors: *Nick Nguyen, Alyson Wong, Gillian Hinako Ozawa, Cristina Sarmiento, Darby Lowe*
Faculty Editor: *Jan Engelmann, PhD*

Many thanks to *Juliana Chase, PhD* for her lasting contribution to our newsletter.

Sign up for our Insight Newsletter to stay up to date with Berkeley Psychology and be sure to follow us on Twitter and Facebook for real-time updates.