

UC SANTA BARBARA

Psychological & Brain Sciences



Inside Psychology

Summer 2025

Message from the Chair

Greetings from Santa Barbara! This has been both an exciting and a challenging year in the Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences at UC Santa Barbara. We continue to attract many undergraduate students to our programs, exceeding **3,000** students in our majors this year and graduating over **700** undergraduate students and **15** graduate students who earned PhDs this year. While meeting the challenges of educating these students, our faculty have continued to conduct groundbreaking research and win major campus, national and international awards. We welcome a new faculty member, **Laura Simone Lewis**, who will bring new expertise in comparative psychology, specializing in the evolution of social cognition. We celebrated our graduate students' research at MiniCon, our annual graduate student conference.

At the same time, we face unprecedented challenges to our research, teaching, and service missions. These challenges are due to changes

occurring at both the level of the federal government and its funding agencies as well as at the state level and its budgeting for the University of California. The net result is that we are in a period of high uncertainty about the future funding of our programs. There is no more important time than now to support higher education. We invite you to support the department by making a gift today.

Give now

We thank all of you who have helped support our department this year, and look forward to engaging with you through our *Inside Psychology* newsletter, which will now be published in this format three times per year, and our Department [LinkedIn](#) group.

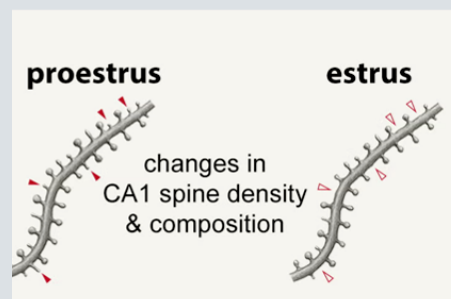


Mary Hegarty,
Department Chair

Cutting-Edge Research from PBS Labs

How Hormone Cycles Shape the Brain

New research from the **Goard Lab** reveals that natural hormone cycles reshape the brain's structure and function, with estrogen levels directly influencing memory-linked neurons in the hippocampus.



Using advanced microscopy, the team tracked how dendritic spines and neural firing patterns change across the estrous cycle in mice, offering insights into memory, plasticity, and even human cognition.

[Read the full story](#)

One Workout Can Boost Your Brain

A single bout of high-intensity exercise can sharpen your thinking. That's the finding from a new meta-analysis by UCSB's Attention Lab, led by **Barry Giesbrecht** and alumnus **Jordan Garrett**, who earned his PhD in 2024.



Vigorous activities like HIIT were shown to enhance attention, memory, and executive function, especially when done for less than 30 minutes and measured post-exercise.

[Learn about the findings](#)

Welcoming New Faculty: Laura Simone Lewis

We're thrilled to welcome **Laura Simone Lewis**, who will join PBS as a new assistant professor in 2025. A comparative psychologist and biological anthropologist, Dr. Lewis studies the evolution of social cognition in chimpanzees, bonobos, and humans.



She blends eye-tracking, thermal imaging, and deep fieldwork to reveal how we bond, cooperate, and experience emotions across species. Dr. Lewis spoke with *Inside Psychology* from the Ngamba Island Chimpanzee Sanctuary in Uganda about her research, fieldwork, and commitment to mentorship and inclusion in science.

[Read the full interview](#)

Faculty Honors and Awards

Congratulations to all!

Michael Beyeler received the *2024–25 Harold J. Plous Award*, UC Santa Barbara's highest honor for early-career faculty. His work on developing a bionic eye aims to restore high-quality vision to the blind.



[Watch a video](#)

[Read more about his work](#)

Nils Reimer has been awarded the *2024 Gordon Allport Intergroup Relations Prize* for co-authoring a groundbreaking paper on how ethnic minority adolescents come to perceive discrimination through their peer networks.



[Read the awarded paper](#)

Samantha Scudder, Assistant Teaching Professor, was honored with the *Margaret T. Getman*

Leda Cosmides, co-director of UCSB's Center for Evolutionary Psychology, has been elected a *Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)*, a rare honor awarded to less than 1% of AAAS members. She was recognized for her pioneering work using evolutionary theory to understand the architecture of the human mind.



[Read about her award](#)

Regina Lapate is a *2024 Hellman Fellow*, receiving research support for the new *Life of Memories (LiME) Project*, exploring how we remember emotional experiences.



[See her work in the Lapate Lab](#)

David Hamilton, social psychologist and emeritus professor, has been named the 2024 recipient of the *Distinguished Scientist Award* from the Society of

Service to Students Award for her exceptional dedication to student development and wellbeing.



[Read about her philosophy](#)

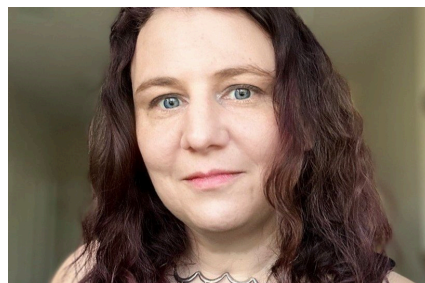
Experimental Social Psychology, one of the highest lifetime achievement awards in the field. Hamilton was instrumental in founding the modern study of social cognition, shaping how we understand memory, impressions, and group dynamics.



[Read about his legacy](#)

Alumni Council Member Spotlight: Susan Persky, Keynote Speaker at ENGAGE 2025

Susan Persky, PBS alumna and a leading researcher at the National Institutes of Health, returned to UC Santa Barbara as keynote speaker at ENGAGE 2025, and as the newest member of the PBS Alumni Council.



Now head of the Health Communication and Behavior Unit and director of the Immersive Simulation Program at the NIH's National Human Genome Research Institute, Dr. Persky shared with us about her path from UCSB grad student to national leader in virtual reality and health research.

From early work in UCSB's RECVB Lab to a 20-year career at the NIH, Persky reflects on emerging technologies, team science, and the enduring impact of mentors like Jim Blascovich and Brenda Major.

[Read the full interview](#)

MiniCon 2025: Honoring Outstanding Graduate Achievement

Each year at MiniCon, the department comes together to celebrate the exceptional research and contributions of our graduate students. This year's award recipients reflect the depth and rigor of our department, from second-year presenters to graduating scholars.



Congratulations to all of this year's honorees!

[Read about the honorees](#)

Acknowledgements to PBS donors: Thank you for your generosity

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