



Inside Psychology

Winter 2026

Message from the Alumni Council Chair

Greetings, my name is Deborah Bettencourt, and it continues to be one of my greatest joys to serve on the Alumni Council and support the incredible work happening across UCSB Psychological & Brain Sciences. The PBS faculty, students, research, and alumni truly exemplify the excellence and spirit of UC Santa Barbara.

Wishing you all a warm, healthy, and grateful quarter.

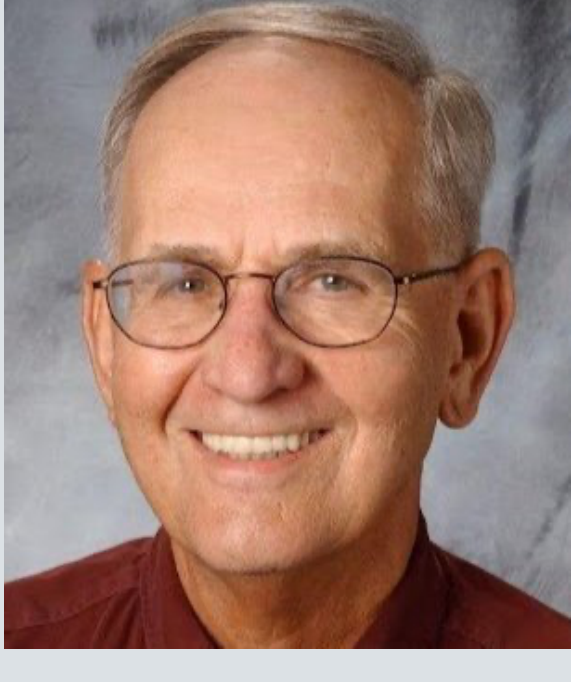
[Read the full Letter](#)



**Deborah Bettencourt, B.A. Psychology, 1989**  
Chair, **Psychological & Brain Sciences Alumni Council**

Remembering Jerry Jacobs (1934-2025)

Distinguished Professor Emeritus **Jerry Jacobs**, a pioneering figure in color-vision science and a longtime member of PBS, passed away on October 15, 2025. His decades of research fundamentally advanced our understanding of how animals perceive color and why color blindness varies across species. A respected scholar, mentor, and founding member of UCSB's Neuroscience Research Institute, Dr. Jacobs leaves an enduring legacy in vision science and in our department community.



[Read the full tribute](#)

Cutting-Edge Research from PBS Labs

Video Game Addiction in Teens Linked to Preexisting Mental Health

New research from UCSB's **Media Neuroscience Lab** finds that gaming disorder in adolescents often stems from underlying mental health conditions rather than the games themselves. Using NIH longitudinal data from over 4,000 teens, the team showed that those with depressive symptoms and social difficulties were far more likely to develop problematic gaming behaviors.



[Read the full story on \*The Current\*](#)

Cultivating Curiosity

Can curiosity be learned? New findings from UCSB's **META Lab** suggest it can. Using an app created by the Lab, participants completed small daily challenges such as asking new questions, exploring art, or trying unfamiliar activities, and showed measurable increases in trait-level curiosity after just three weeks.



The results reveal that personality traits are more flexible than once thought and that curiosity may boost creativity, reduce boredom, and enhance well-being.

[Read the full story on \*The Current\*](#)

New Insight into Split-Brain Science

A recent study from **The Miller Lab** reveals that even a very small number of fiber-connections between brain hemispheres can sustain unified consciousness. The findings challenge long-held assumptions about how many neural links are necessary to integrate the two sides of the brain.



[Read the full story on \*The Current\*](#)

NIH Backs Nancy Collins' VR Project to Strengthen Social Bonds in Later Life

Professor **Nancy Collins** has received a \$3.8 million NIH grant to study how shared virtual reality can help older adults build and maintain meaningful social connections while aging at home. The work builds on prior NIH-funded trials showing that shared VR outperforms standard video calls in supporting emotional and relational well-being.



[Read the full story on \*The Current\*](#)

Faculty Interview

Andy Alexander: Exploring the Neural Maps of Memory and Space

Since joining UCSB in 2023, **Assistant Professor Andy Alexander** has launched a lab investigating how the brain builds our sense of space and memory. His team uses cutting-edge neural recording and imaging tools to study how cortical and hippocampal circuits interact during navigation and prediction.



In this interview, Dr. Alexander reflects on his path from UC San Diego to UCSB, his discovery of "egocentric boundary vector cells," and how his lab's naturalistic experiments are revealing new insights into how brains navigate and remember.

[Read the full interview here](#)

Faculty Honors and Awards

Shelly Gable Appointed Dean of the Division of Mathematical, Life, & Physical Sciences

We are pleased to announce that **Shelly Gable** has been appointed as Susan and Bruce Worster Dean of Science) at University of California, Santa Barbara, effective July 14, 2025.



Celebrating Brenda Major's Lifetime Achievement

**Distinguished Professor Emeritus Brenda Major** of the Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences was awarded the William James Fellow Award by the Association for Psychological Science in 2025 for her groundbreaking research on stigma, prejudice, and resilience. The department hosted a reception in honor of her career and accomplishments.



The department has created the **Brenda Major and Jim Blascovich Fund for Social Psychology** to support research, mentoring, and community-building in UCSB's renowned Social Psychology Program. Blascovich, a distinguished professor and former chair, also founded the SAGE Center and co-founded the Center for Virtual Environments and Behavior.



[Read the full story on \*The Current\*](#)

From UCSB to the Professoriate: Catching up with Alumnae

Mayra del Carmen & Andrea Medrano

UCSB Psychological & Brain Sciences alumnae **Mayra del Carmen** and **Andrea Medrano** reflect on their initial years as assistant professors at Montana State University and the University of Pittsburgh, respectively.



Dr. del Carmen (top) leads the POWER Lab, studying workplace (in)visibility, classism, and mental health among marginalized workers. Dr. Medrano (bottom) directs the CREAR Lab, examining how gender-based and community violence affect well-being across Latin America.

Both emphasize community-centered, strength-based approaches that highlight resilience and social justice.

Their paths exemplify the growing impact of UCSB-trained scholars transforming psychological science through inclusive and community-engaged research.

[Read the full interview here](#)

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