

Psychology *for students*



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Edinburgh Lectures

Thursday 9 November
The Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh

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What's new in intelligence

Professor Ronan O'Carroll, *University of Stirling*
Psychology, medicine and health

Professor Stephen Reicher, *St Andrews University*
Beyond the banality of evil: Understanding the
psychological roots of tyranny and genocide

London Lectures

Monday 4 December
Kensington Town Hall, London

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Vision and the natural world

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The secret life of hormones: Androgens and
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Professor Richard Bentall, *University of Manchester*
Understanding madness

Professor Tom Ormerod, *Lancaster University*
The importance of failure for insightful thinking

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Research on the police interviewing of suspects



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Short articles (around 600 words), news, tips, quotes, cartoons and other contributions of particular relevance to students are most welcome. Send to: Nicola Hills, c/o the Society's Leicester office. E-mail: Nicola_Hills@hotmail.com

Overseas fieldwork – Supervisors, funding and ingenious pigs

BY PETER BRANNEY

It is hard to believe I was so amazed. Standing on the main street in Palmerston North, Aotearoa/New Zealand, I had to figure out how to get around and find the psychology department at Massey University. That really is not that taxing (at least, not compared to keeping a pig in a field – but more on that later).

However, I stood for a moment absolutely astonished, astounded that I had actually made it all the way from the University of Leeds. It is almost as if the simplicity of the task of map reading made me wonder if I had actually left England. Nevertheless, I had made it; I had persuaded a funder that this was a valuable part of my doctoral research. The experience of getting funding was difficult, particularly as I did not know anyone who had successfully done so before. So this article is a reflection on becoming a travelling postgraduate with two points I would make to anyone contemplating attempting the same thing.

But first it is worth considering why a student would want to travel to do research. For those postgraduate students with dependants, travel could offer more hassle than benefits. If anything, the money offered through funding is unlikely to cover any additional costs. Indeed, even for the footloose and fancy free, the money will cover very little.

Nevertheless, travelling will open up the possibility for research and training opportunities that may not be offered at the institution at which the postgraduate is a student. This could be access to technology, expensive equipment, or alternative

Massey University, New Zealand

populations for sampling. In my case, it provided the opportunity work with a senior academic who had, for some time, led a team of postgraduate students in the substantive topic of my research and who was also aware of relevant work outside of academia. The possible benefits sought should be kept in mind when searching for an academic to conduct overseas fieldwork with.

First, a good host supervisor can be found by e-mail. That is, supervisors can be found through contacts in your present department, or by looking at the authors of key articles in your area. However, if you are to travel the globe to spend only a short time in a department then a good host supervisor will be one that will be prepared to give you plenty of their time. Academics may find e-mails to be the bane of their life, so those academics that respond quickly and frequently to e-mails about ideas for a postgraduate student's research are likely to be good supervisors. When I first met my host, Dr Mandy Morgan, in her office in New Zealand I had never spoken to or met her before. All our correspondence had been via e-mail, and Mandy was always prompt and interested in my work, and proved to be an extremely helpful and considerate host supervisor.

Second, a successful funding application for overseas fieldwork will need a watertight justification. I put together my first formal application for funding with the BPS Study Visits Scheme. In a three-page cover letter, I outlined personal background details relevant to the research, the

proposed research and justifications for the travel. Unfortunately, the BPS application was unsuccessful but as a recipient of an ESRC studentship I could still apply to the ESRC for funding for up to three months. However, the ESRC application left space for a mere 300 words in which to argue that the trip was essential to the applicant's training. On reflection, the second funding application contains the clearest argument that I have so far written during my PhD. As in other areas of writing, less is sometimes more: the restrictions forced a reconsideration of the application and a more coherent argument emerged.

Now that my third PhD year has started and I entertain thoughts of writing a thesis, the time in New Zealand seems like a distant memory. As an exercise in career development it was an extremely productive experience. More generally, being a travelling PhD student offered the opportunity to experience both a different psychology department and a different supervisor, to meet researchers and other professionals related to the PhD project (in my case, policy makers), and to manage a small budget, which includes negotiations with the parent department on how any funding is spent.

Perhaps more interestingly, the overseas research was also a time to have some fun. For example, living on a small hobby farm for a month I had to contend with a hairy pig that was also an escape artist. Map reading was a lot safer.

n Peter Branney is with the Institute of Psychological Sciences, University of Leeds.

Our October issue is due to be sent to all new psychology undergrads. If you've got any advice for them about studying psychology at university or about psychology in general, post it on our online discussion forum (www.psychforum.org.uk) and we'll print the best.

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