Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience, Antonio Damasio had an exceptional 2014, in which he received the most prestigious honor in the field of psychology, the Grawemeyer Award, for his major influence in contemporary psychology, as well as in the fields of neuroscience, neurology, psychiatry and philosophy. While the Grawemeyer would have been the crowning achievement for any psychologist who won it that year, a couple months later, the APA published an article in the Archives of Scientific Psychology, naming Damasio one of the 100 most eminent psychologists of the modern era.

Needless to say, if you thought he might slow down in 2015, you were very wrong. Damasio has published nine articles and three book chapters this year, ranging from topics on homeostasis and its application on economics, to neural correlates of gratitude. He has been traveling all over the world, collecting honorary degrees and making lectures in Portugal, France, Switzerland, Italy, Mexico, Canada, and throughout the United States. Recently, Antonio Damasio has been named by the Sciences Humaines in its list of the “50 key thinkers in the human sciences of the past two centuries.” Between the two lists, he finds himself alongside names such as: Albert Bandura, Jean Piaget, Sigmund Freud, and Charles Darwin. His work has now been cited over 32,000 times and his research has received continuous Federal funding for over 30 years.

Damasio is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the National Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Medicine, and the European Academy of Sciences and Arts. He is the recipient of several prizes, amongst them the Grawemeyer Award, the Honda Prize, the Prince of Asturias Award in Science and Technology and the Beaumont Medal from the American Medical Association. He has also received honorary doctorates from the Universities of Sorbonne, Aachen, Copenhagen, Leiden, Barcelona, Coimbra, Leuven and numerous others.

When Damasio isn’t too busy traveling around the world accepting awards, giving TED Talks, or making television and radio appearances, he is hard at work here at USC, co-directing the USC Dornsife Brain and Creativity Institute with his wife and colleague, Dr. Hannah Damasio. The Damasio’s have made seminal contributions to the understanding of brain processes underlying emotions, feelings, decision-making, and consciousness. For more information on the Brain and Creativity Institute, please visit the website at <www.usc.edu/bci>.

Dr. Hanna Damasio and Dr. Antonio Damasio (pictured above) received honorary degrees this summer from the Université Paris Descartes, more widely known as the Sorbonne. The Sorbonne is one of the pioneering institutions in the field of psychology and is home to many psychologists who have helped to create and shape the field—most notably Alfred Binet and Jean Piaget.


Remember to check the calendar on the front page of the department website for all upcoming events!

*If you have submissions for the Department of Psychology Newsletter, please email Daniel Paris <dparis@usc.edu>.*
Dr. Gerald Davidson was honored with a new fund created by several of his former students in order to recognize Davison’s contributions as a research advisor, clinical instructor, and mentor.

The Gerald C. Davison Award for Excellence in Exemplifying the Boulder Model will be given annually to a student in the USC Clinical Science program who has made a superior contribution to applying psychological knowledge in their clinical work.

Dr. Bosco Tjan received a grant from the National Institute of Health for a study on the relationships between retinal pathologies and their downstream impact on the central visual pathway of the human brain over the natural courses of blinding diseases and their treatments.


Dr. Norbert Schwarz was awarded the 2015 Oswald Külpe Prize. Oswald Külpe paved the way for numerous important developments, from Gestalt psychology to modern cognitive science.

Every three years the University of Würzburg awards the Oswald Külpe Prize to a researcher who has made exceptional experimental and theoretical contributions to the understanding of higher mental processes.

Dr. Donna Spruijt-Metz received the Obesity Society’s annual Pioneer Award for excellence in eHealth/mHealth research.

Spruijt-Metz is the director of the Mobile Health (mHealth) Collaboratory at USC Dornsife’s Center for Social and Economic Research. Her work meshes 21st century technologies with transdisciplinary metabolic, behavioral, and environmental research to fight childhood obesity.

Dr. Kean Hsu, (recent graduate) was awarded 1st place for his poster at the 49th Annual Convention of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) in Chicago.

His poster, "Compounded Deficits: The association between neuropsychological impairment and attention biases in currently depressed, formerly depressed, and never depressed individuals" was based on his dissertation under the direction of Dr. Gerald Davison.

Addie Timmons (Clinical Science) received a 2015 APA American Psychological Association Dissertation Research Award for her dissertation project titled: Romantic Partners’ Physiological and Emotional Coregulation in the Home Environment.

Addie is a fourth year graduate student under Dr. Gayla Margolin. Her research interests include: Couple dynamics, parent-child conflict, coregulation, and psychophysiology.

The annual Psyched 4 Jobs conference organized by the Master’s of Applied Psychology program attracted over one-hundred undergraduate attendees this year from several different universities in Southern California. In addition to conducting popular resume workshops, the students brought in speakers from entertainment, consulting, and government industries to discuss how they leverage their psychology degrees in their professions. In particular, two USC alums were featured panelists: Kendra Keyse (’12), and Laila Ajabi (’10).
The NEST Lab, directed by Dr. Darby Saxbe (captured above, as she leads a lab meeting), aims to take a biopsychosocial perspective on the understanding of health and well-being in the context of family and peer relationships. Dr. Saxbe is interested in how nature and nurture intersect – how early experiences shape the development of emotion regulation, stress responding, and social perception, and how these phenomena influence subsequent psychosocial functioning. The lab looks at questions like, “How does everyday family life affect stress hormones?” and “Do people who live together show synchrony in their fluctuations of cortisol?”

The NEST Lab is currently working on several projects, including the HATCH (Hormones, Attachment, and Childbirth) study, which looks at how the brain and body prepare for parenting. More specifically, the study explores how couples' cortisol and oxytocin levels change over pregnancy, how social support affects subjective birth experiences and perinatal medical interventions, and what neural and hormonal factors are associated with postpartum attachment. The lab is also working on an ongoing neuroimaging study looking at regions of the brain associated with theory of mind, mentalizing, and social perception to see how adolescents view themselves.

You can find more about these projects, publications, and other details about the NEST Lab, on their website: <http://dornsife.usc.edu/nestlab>.

As a result of the fascinating topics and groundbreaking research being worked on in the NEST Lab, Dr. Saxbe has become one of the most sought after graduate advisors for perspective students. She also works with the highest number of undergraduate honors students on their independent research projects. Veronica Gempis, senior honors student, explains that, “Dr. Saxbe is an incredible mentor. Aside from completing an honors thesis, I have been able to participate in great learning experiences, such as cutting placenta samples and collecting hair samples from newborns in the hospital.” Her research has also inspired a new undergraduate course in the department called Stress, Health, and the Mind-Body Connection. In its third year being offered, this course has become so popular, it is one of the first in the department to reach capacity each semester.