

Q&A ask THE PROFESSOR

A five-minute interview with a Lycoming faculty member

What intrigues you most about the field of psychology?

I love the breadth and diversity of the field. It is virtually impossible to explore the field of psychology and *not* find something of interest. Moreover, psychological research is constantly uncovering new information and that is very exciting!

Another reason that the field is so intriguing is because our daily lives are saturated with references to psychological principles. How many adolescents get advice about relationships from their parents? How often does Oprah host a show that discusses psychological principles? How many recent articles in *Newsweek* or *Time* discuss autism? How many Google hits do you get if you type in the word Prozac? We are constantly bombarded with interesting new “facts” and ideas and the field of psychology enables students to explore, understand and think critically about this information.

Explain some of your research interests?

My general area of interest is in the development of self in young children. More specifically, I am interested in the development of perceptions of competence, self-conscious emotions, and achievement motivation. My work has focused on toddlers and most of my research has evaluated the development of learned helplessness. I am especially interested in why some highly-competent children develop an “illusion of incompetence” (i.e., an inaccurately low perception of their competence) and why some children respond to failure with negative self-appraisals, low expectations of future success, and low persistence (i.e., “learned helplessness”) whereas others see failure as a learning experience and thus maintain positive affect, expectations of future success, and persistence. My ultimate goal is to conduct a longitudinal study examining helplessness from toddlerhood into middle childhood.



Dr. Sue Kelley
Associate Professor of Psychology

One of my newest areas of research involves whether live or animated video presentations best facilitate preschoolers’ knowledge of letters and letter sounds. I conducted a pilot study during my sabbatical in spring 2008 and hope to conduct a larger study next fall. This project will provide opportunities for several Lycoming students to gain experience in collecting, analyzing and presenting data from a psychological research study.

At Lycoming, psychology ranks among the top 5 majors. What makes it so appealing?

I think one reason psychology is so appealing is because it is embedded in our culture. As mentioned previously, our daily lives are inundated with references to psychological principles. Further, we are constantly trying to figure out why people (including ourselves) do the things that they do. The introductory psychology course covers a broad range of topics and virtually every student can find some area of psychology that enables him/her to explain or understand behavior. This is very appealing and students often want to learn more.

Another reason that psychology is so appealing is because it is an incredibly

versatile major. Psychology is used in many different fields including business (How can classical conditioning be used to increase consumers’ interest in and desire for a product?), criminal justice (Which programs are most likely to reduce recidivism?), education (How can behavior modification techniques be used to manage classrooms?), and even politics (How can one create the most persuasive political message?). Psychology is practical, comprehensive and the field is constantly growing. It is not surprising to me that it is so popular, and this seems to be a trend in colleges across the country, not just at Lycoming.

What types of opportunities are there for today’s psychology majors?

Because psychology is so versatile, students who major in psychology are prepared for careers in a number of different fields. Although many careers in psychology now require graduate degrees, there are several entry-level positions (at the local, state and federal levels) available for students with a bachelor’s degree in psychology. Some of these positions are in human services, administration, community relations, public relations, advertising and marketing research, teaching, criminal justice, politics and even retail/sales.

About Kelley

Dr. Sue Kelley grew up in Williamsport and earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Penn State University. She earned a master’s and Ph.D. in developmental psychology from the University of Pittsburgh. Kelley, who began working at Lycoming in 1999, teaches introductory psychology, developmental psychology, educational psychology, experimental psychology, and the psychology of parenting. She has four children who play an active role in many of her classes.