

# THE SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

In this issue:

Deborah Avant,  
The New Face of International Studies

Cognitive Sciences is Making  
and Measuring Waves at UC Irvine

Students Trade In Rest, Relaxation  
and Rays for Reading, Writing and Arithmetic

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Cover photograph courtesy of Frank Cancian, emeritus professor of anthropology

University of California, Irvine  
School of Social Sciences  
3151 Social Sciences Plaza  
Irvine, CA 92697-5100

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Email: [hwuebker@uci.edu](mailto:hwuebker@uci.edu)

Dean's Office  
Barbara Doshier, Dean  
(949) 824 - 6802

Development Office  
Carol Spencer, Director  
(949) 824 - 1312

Communications Office  
Heather Wuebker, Director  
(949) 824 - 1577

[www.socsci.uci.edu](http://www.socsci.uci.edu)

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## Social Sciences Dean Barbara Doshier



### New Faces

Summer is quickly drawing to a close. Soon, our walkways, classrooms and hallways will begin to fill with the hustle and bustle of student activity that will mark the beginning of the fall 2007 quarter at UC Irvine.

Returning to campus this fall are the familiar faces of our current students and faculty, many of whom – as you will quickly learn from our stories inside – have been very busy with research and community outreach projects throughout the summer.

In addition to the returning crowds will be a number of new faces. This fall, the School of Social Sciences will welcome into the classroom our largest incoming class of undergraduate freshmen.

Selected from more than 5,000 applicants, the 1,000 new faces of our freshmen class will soon discover what countless current students and alumni have already uncovered:

*When you become a part of the Social Sciences community, you are joining a diverse learning community continually captivated by the world around us.*

Along with our new undergraduates, the School is happy to note the arrival of nearly 100 graduate students from around the world who will begin their first year in our top notch Ph.D. and M.A. programs.

Joining them are the new faces of thirteen faculty whose anticipated scholarly contributions will add to the already thriving reputation of the UC Irvine School of Social Sciences.

### New Spaces

As the School continues to grow, so too does our need for additional space. In August, the University broke ground on the new Social and Behavioral Sciences Building along Pereira Drive.

With accommodations for new classrooms, offices and research labs, the new space will be a very welcome addition for the Schools of Social Sciences and Social Ecology who will both soon call the new building home.

Social Sciences has also grown our reach into cyberspace with the redesign and expansion of our School website. Featuring newly developed resources for graduate students and our alumni and friends, the site will continue to evolve in order to keep pace with our growing School.

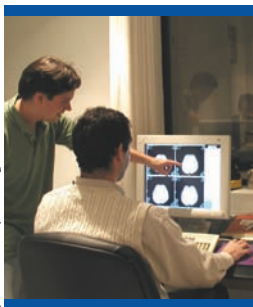
### In This Issue

Featured within this issue of our *Social Sciences Journal* are stories of our students, faculty, alumni and community members – some faces, familiar while many are new.

From highlights of studies designed to improve emergency response preparedness to research that contributes to furthering our knowledge of the human brain; from community outreach programs aimed at bringing university level knowledge into local high schools to the development of a student-led mentorship program and more – an interest and passion for the world in which we live is shared by our Social Sciences community. Nowhere is this more evident than in the selected stories of our students, faculty, alumni and community members featured within the following pages.

Stay up to date with the most current Social Sciences news at [www.socsci.uci.edu](http://www.socsci.uci.edu).

photo courtesy of Greg Hickok



## Making and Measuring Waves at UC Irvine

The Cognitive Sciences Department is making waves at UC Irvine. Ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in the nation in cognitive psychology, the department brings together scholars from a variety of disciplines including mathematics, neuroscience, philosophy, psychology and others who seek to gain a better scientific understanding of the human mind.

The department is also *measuring* waves, although they are not the type that can be detected with the naked eye. Utilizing advanced technology, faculty and students within the department study how the human mind and brain affect behavior. Their research findings and results are applicable to a host of topics ranging from autism, attention disorders and aging to homeland security and national defense issues.

### What is Cognitive Science?

“We study the mind, brain and behavior,” says Mike D’Zmura, professor and chair of the department. A multidisciplinary area of study, cognitive science research is pursued from a variety of angles, approaches and perspectives. “We have faculty who use equipment such as EEG, MEG and MRI to study the brain and its functions, while others employ mathematical modeling and statistics to study a number of areas including decision making strategy, perception, auditory and visual processing and others,” he says, emphasizing both the experimental and theoretical research performed by cognitive sciences faculty.

### Faces of Cognitive Science at UCI

The department is home to 29 faculty, many of whom have received international recognition for their distinguished research achievements. Among this group are four members of the prestigious National Academy of Sciences, nine fellows and two William James fellows of the American Psychological Society, eight fellows of the American Psychological Association and five fellows of the Society for Experimental Psychology – all of which are considered premier associations within the field of cognitive science.

“We have quite a few heavy-duty faculty in our department – faculty who are known throughout the world for their innovative research and



photo courtesy of Kristy Harris

### Can’t See the Forest for the Trees?

Don’t feel bad, says cognitive sciences professor John Serences. His research suggests that our brains are specifically wired to only take in the trees. “What someone sees is heavily influenced by what

they want to see,” he says, explaining that a person looking for a red object will see all the red objects around them, effectively tuning out objects of different colors.

Arriving at UC Irvine in January 2007, Serences’ research focuses on how expectations, goals and past experiences affect what and how we see. His research uses functional MRI (fMRI), a technique that measures changes of blood flow in the brain, to make inferences about changes in neural activity. Serences then tries to determine which parts of the brain are actively involved in making decisions and distinctions between, as in the example above, objects of different colors.

In a recent study published in *Neuron*, Serences and his coauthor presented observers with a visual display of objects moving in different directions. They asked participants to pay attention to objects moving only in a particular direction (for example, the object moving to the left). Using fMRI, they demonstrated that patterns of brain activity change systematically when people pay attention to objects moving in different directions. In addition, paying attention to one direction of motion makes the brain more responsive to other objects moving in that direction, no matter where the other objects appear – a phenomenon that has not previously been documented. Serences explains: “This increased activity in the brain is what helps you find objects you are looking for, even when you don’t know exactly where they are.”

This new discovery not only has implications for understanding how the brain generates conscious awareness, but also for understanding and diagnosing disorders of attention by providing information about the operation of a typical human brain. “By gaining a more thorough understanding of how a healthy brain functions, we will be better equipped to recognize, diagnose and treat abnormalities within the brain,” says Serences.

scholarly contributions,” says D’Zmura. “We have also hired a number of new cognitive scientists over the last few years who are quickly leaving their mark in the field as well.” Within the last three years, the department has experienced a



photos courtesy of Greg Hickok and Ramesh Srinivasan