

## **A Brief History of the University of Michigan Psychology Department**

Although courses with psychological content have been taught at the University of Michigan from its beginning, establishing a “founding date” for the Psychology Department is somewhat difficult. The modern field of psychology as an empirically based academic discipline is usually dated to 1879 with the founding of Wilhelm Wundt’s laboratory at the University of Leipzig. The first faculty member at Michigan specifically trained entirely within this new discipline was John Dewey, who attained a PhD in psychology from Johns Hopkins in 1884 and moved to Ann Arbor as an instructor that same year. Although Dewey was trained as a psychologist, his appointment, like those of several generations of psychology faculty, was within the Philosophy Department.

Dewey left the University briefly in 1888 to accept a position at Minnesota. He returned the next year, to become the Chairman of the Philosophy department. Thus, the appointment of an empirically trained psychologist to such an important position in 1889 might well serve as a reasonable demarcation point as the beginning of modern psychology at Michigan. Dewey remained in this position (although he increasingly turned his attention to philosophy) until 1893 when he was recruited away to the new University of Chicago.

Dewey’s tenure was marked by several significant appointments and events. Most notably, Dewey established the first psychological laboratory at Michigan in 1890, the eighth such laboratory in America. One of the people Dewey hired to direct the laboratory and teach laboratory courses was George Herbert Mead, who had studied with Wundt at Leipzig. Among the undergraduate students who were inspired by Dewey to take up psychology was James Rowland Angell, the son of the University’s President, James Burrell Angell. Angell stayed for a year of graduate study with Dewey (1891) before leaving to study with William James at Harvard, and later with Ebbinghaus in Germany. When Dewey left for Chicago, he brought both Mead and Angell with him, and together they established the “Chicago School” in psychology, which became an important precursor to the American Functionalist movement.

With Dewey’s departure, the Regents scrambled around for a couple of years to find an eminent replacement. They eventually hired Robert Wenley in 1896, and with his appointment the philosophy chairmanship reverted to an academic philosopher. But Wenley understood the importance of the emerging discipline of psychology and one of his first appointments in the spring of 1897 was Walter Bowers Pillsbury from Cornell, the second PhD student of Edward Titchener.

Wenley’s decision to hire Pillsbury also creates a substantial demarcation point in the Department’s evolution, and could also be a marker for the Department’s founding. With Pillsbury on the faculty, Wenley divided the Philosophy curriculum into two divisions: Philosophy and Psychology. While he maintained administrative control over the whole department, he essentially gave Pillsbury substantive autonomy in developing the psychology sub-division. Thus, Pillsbury became the de facto Chairman of Psychology at Michigan. This arrangement remained in place until Wenley’s death in 1929, when the Regents established the separate administrative Department of Psychology in 1930.

During his long tenure (1897-1940), Pillsbury oversaw many significant developments. In 1903 the Department obtained for its housing the old Homeopathic Hospital Building (one of the four original buildings on the Ann Arbor campus), and thus became one of the first psychology departments in the country with its own building. The department moved in 1915 to the newly constructed Natural Science Building, a testament to the status of psychology as a natural science. The department remained housed in the Natural Science Building until the late 1950s.

A second significant event of the Pillsbury era took place in 1906 with the granting of a doctoral degree to John F. Shepard, Michigan's first PhD in psychology (first of 2137 through 2008). Pillsbury was also elected to the presidency of the American Psychological Association in 1910 (the first of five Michigan faculty members to be elected APA president).

Shepard stayed on as a faculty member and he and Pillsbury dominated the Department over the next several decades. The size of the faculty grew to eight by the 1930s, mostly by retaining its own most promising PhDs. This insular approach led to a state of near morbidity in the department, with a loss of virtually all national recognition. There were some highlights. One undergraduate (stimulated into pursuing psychology by Shepard) was Clark Hull. Another student, a PhD graduate (who was retained on the faculty) was Norman R. F. Maier. Maier's research on abnormal fixations in rats became a national sensation in the mid-30s. Covered in both Time and Life magazines, it inspired E.B. White's famous New Yorker essay, The Door. Maier was awarded the University's 1939 Henry Russel Award.

Following Pillsbury's retirement in 1940, the University administration determined that the Department needed significant transformation from outside in order to attain a national reputation. After the war they turned to 37 year old Donald Marquis to undertake the job. Marquis had been the war-time chairman of the Yale psychology department, had been a significant participant in the reorganization of the American Psychological Association, and had also served as the Director of the National Research Counsel's Office of Psychological Personnel during the war. He literally knew everybody of consequence in the discipline, and had an insider's understanding of the directions that psychology was going to take after the war.

During the next twelve years (1945-1957) Marquis engaged in one of the greatest entrepreneurial ventures in the history of academia. He created the modern Michigan Psychology Department with the size and scope that we recognize today. He was elected APA president in 1947.

Whereas pre-war psychology was grounded in experimental and physiological psychology, Marquis knew on the basis of the problems that psychology dealt with during WWII that post-war psychology would expand dramatically in the fields of social and clinical psychology. His first two appointments at Michigan were Ted Newcomb and E. Lowell Kelly. Newcomb and Kelly were instrumental in creating the modern fields of social and clinical psychology respectively after the war. Both were awarded the APA Gold Medal and both were elected president of the APA (Kelly in 1954 and Newcomb in 1955).

Kelly was instrumental in developing clinical psychology as a treatment oriented profession and was a primary figure in initiating the VA Training Program in clinical psychology. He was the

Executive Director of the famous “Boulder Conference” that defined the training procedures for the profession of clinical psychology, which almost all modern clinical curricula follow today. Michigan was at the forefront of this training, including the raising of the Psychological Clinic to world class status as a clinical training facility.

Newcomb, along with Marquis and Robert Angell (the chairman of the sociology department), established the Joint PhD Program in Social Psychology. This program dominated the field of social psychology for more than twenty years. More than 200 students graduated with PhDs from this program, many of whom became major figures in the history of social psychology.

The dominance of Michigan in social psychology emerged through , the recruitment to Michigan by Newcomb, Marquis and Angell of Rensis Likert’s Survey Research Center from the US government, and Kurt Lewin’s and Doc Cartwright’s Research Center for Group Dynamics from MIT in 1946 and 1947, respectively. These groups were combined in 1949 to form the Institute for Social Research, which from its inception has been the largest and most preeminent social science research institution in the world.

Marquis also recruited to Michigan James Grier Miller in 1955. Miller established the Mental Health Research Institute, which despite its name, has been (and continues to be under its current name, the Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience Institute) the most significant institution for understanding the neuroscience of behavior from molecular, cellular, anatomical, and clinical perspectives.

During Marquis’ tenure, eminent psychologists in all areas of psychology were added to the department. These included among many others, Art Melton (Experimental), Clyde Coombs (Mathematical), James Olds (Physiological), and Matt Alpern (Vision Research), all of whom were elected to the National Academy of Science. In addition, Marquis recruited Helen Peak in 1950 to the endowed Kellogg Chair at the University. Helen thus became the first full-time woman faculty member in the department.

By the time Marquis left the department in 1957, Michigan was the largest department in the country and was overwhelmingly acknowledged as the best and most comprehensive department in the world.

Lowell Kelly succeeded Marquis as chairman of the department. During his short chairmanship Kelly reorganized the large, unwieldy department left to him by Marquis into the “area program” structure that we have today. These semi-autonomous areas could then tailor their programs individually to enhance their particular specialties, acquire training funds and admit students. In 1961, Kelly was called away by President Kennedy to help organize the Peace Corps and he was succeeded as chairman by Wilbert J. (Bill) McKeachie.

If Marquis was the architect who drew up the plans and laid the foundation for the modern Michigan psychology department, Bill McKeachie was the contractor who constructed much of the edifice. Marquis inherited a department of eight faculty members. When he left he had grown the department to over forty. When McKeachie finished his second term as chairman in 1971 the department had over 100 faculty members with professorial titles.

There were many notable achievements beyond expansion during the decade under McKeachie's leadership. The department joined with the School of Education to establish the Combined Program in Education and Psychology, which over the last 50 years has produced hundreds of PhDs. The Center for Research in Learning and Teaching, the first teaching center in the world, was founded in 1962. In that same year, Art Melton and Paul Fitts established the Human Performance Center, which was to become a focal point for the emergence of cognitive psychology. Developmental psychology became a distinct area program within the department in 1965. The expansion during the McKeachie years brought the department to a remarkable size and comprehensiveness. McKeachie was elected president of the American Psychological Association in 1976.

With the size, scope and reputation of the department largely established by the end of the McKeachie chairmanship, it might be thought that departmental leadership in the subsequent years constituted merely a kind of "stewardship". Such a description, however, greatly underestimates the challenge that has faced the leadership of the department during this time. J. E. Keith Smith (Chair 1971-1976) often noted that the most challenging (and most frightening) day of his professional life was the day he was named chairman of the largest and greatest psychology department in the world. He asked himself, "Where do we go from here?" One of the biggest challenges that the department faced as a result of the expansion was the need for more space. By the late 1950s the department had completely outgrown its space in the Natural Science Building. Over the years, faculty and research facilities became increasingly dispersed around campus. This fragmentation greatly reduced the sense of unity and identity, not only within the department as a whole, but also within its program areas. Both Keith Smith and Warren Norman (Chair 1976-1981), who succeeded Smith as chair, dealt with the growing problem throughout their terms.

In 1981, Albert (Al) Cain began his two terms as chair of the department (Chair 1981-1991). As a result of the recession in the late 1970's and early 1980's the university was in a position of economic retrenchment. The department was forced to make an 8% budget cut resulting in the elimination of five full-time faculty positions. Despite these cuts, Cain was able to continue the tradition of growth that had been established within the department. During his term, both the areas of Psychobiology (now Biopsychology) and Cognitive and Experimental psychology (now Cognition and Cognitive Neuroscience) saw considerable growth and expansion. This growth and expansion in these areas led to the department playing a foundational role in the development of the field of Neuroscience. During this time Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky were conducting the research within the department that would ultimately win the Noble Prize in 2002. At this time, John Jonides and Ed Smith were also conducting their pioneering research on working memory, attention, and executive processing using neuroimaging techniques.

By the mid 1980's, the Psychology department was the largest department within the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts as well as the largest graduate department within Rackham Graduate School. Unfortunately, a lack of sufficient research and office space continued to afflict the Department. Faculty and graduate students within the department were housed in six different buildings all across campus. The largest portion of the Department occupied

53,000 square feet in West Quad, which was not nearly enough to house the entire body of the Department. After years of negotiation with the University's central administration, the East Engineering building (now East Hall) was identified as a possible new home for the department under Al Cain's leadership. By 1987 architects had drafted plans for the East Engineering building and the Psychology Department planned to move into their new space in the summer of 1990. Unfortunately, the move to the new building would not be completed for five more years.

Patricia "Pat" Gurin took over as chair in 1991. In doing so, she became the first woman to chair the department. Pat served two terms as chair (1991-2001) including serving as interim Dean of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts for one year. Gurin's terms as chair ushered in significant change within the department. The department finally moved into a home of its own in East Hall in 1995. Much of Gurin's first term was spent planning the move to East Hall. For the first time since the great expansion of faculty within the department, the entire department was under a single roof. This consolidation presented several challenges. After decades of being physically, administratively, and culturally separated from each other, the different areas within the department were forced to engage in a single administrative structure—the department. Gurin initiated several activities and policies designed to enhance the sense of a single departmental culture. For example, Gurin initiated a common lunch room in the fourth floor atrium where faculty could strike up conversations with researchers with similar questions but different approaches to answering those questions. During her chairmanship, faculty participated in breakout sessions during faculty meetings where researchers of different areas would discuss the future of the department to remind them of their common goal. Also, she initiated hiring practices that ensured that every new hire was approved not only by their area, but by the department as a whole. New faculty hires were expected to bridge more than one area. These activities built stronger relationships among faculty from different areas of the department – many of whom did not know each other very well despite being in the same department for more than 20 years.

Pat Gurin also played a major role in diversifying the department. The number of faculty of color who were hired under Gurin quadrupled. At one point during her tenure as chair, there were more than 20 faculty of color. The proportion of graduate students who were from ethnic minority backgrounds exceeded 40% as well. Women faculty also became the majority during Gurin's tenure. These diversity gains were the result of purposeful efforts to broaden the perspective of the department while enhancing the department's well-deserved reputation for excellence. The efforts were a success. Gurin was able to expand the size of the department by taking full advantage of unique opportunities to hire outstanding women faculty and faculty of color from across the country. The department continues to be known as a shining example of how diversity can be used to enhance a department's reputation for excellence.

In 2001, Richard Gonzalez (Chair 2001-2007) succeeded Pat Gurin as the chair of the Department. Like Gurin, Rich Gonzalez was a social psychologist. Gonzalez continued to build on Gurin's efforts to create an environment in East Hall where interactions between faculty, as well as those between students and faculty, would happen naturally. He also worked to increase the research space within East Hall. Despite being in East Hall for less than a decade,

the department was again starting to run out of space. During his term as chair, there was significant expansion of the animal research space within the building. There was also significant change in the area structure of the department. In 2005, both the Organizational and Personality areas officially dissolved. A new area, Personality and Social Context, was formed. The new area focuses on the interplay between enduring individual characteristics and the broader social context. Many of the faculty from the old Organizational and Personality programs moved to the new Personality and Social Context area. The Experimental and Cognitive Program officially changed its name to become the Cognition and Cognitive Neuroscience area to better reflect the faculty research area and graduate training expertise.

After one term as chair, in 2006, Gonzalez passed the torch to Theresa "Terri" Lee, a biopsychologist. During her term as chair, Lee faced one of the largest economic challenges of any department chair in memory. She had to preside over a cut of approximately 3 million dollars from the department's operating budget. Impressively, Lee was able to make these cuts without the loss of any faculty positions. In fact, the department was able to make significant hires during her term. Lee also institutionalized the department's long standing diversity and faculty development efforts by appointing these duties to the Associate Chair position. (It was the first time the position was filled since Cain's tenure.) Lee also worked hard to make sure that individual faculty members within the department were receiving the recognition that they deserved from the larger field of psychology. As a result, she established a standing Awards committee for the department. The committee's charge was to identify and nominate deserving faculty for various awards within the field. In December 2011, Lee left her the university to become the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Tennessee.

Robert Sellers, a professor in the Personality and Social Context area, became chair. Sellers had been a graduate of the Personality program. He was also the first African American selected to be chair of the department. Sellers' objectives as chair were to increase the research capacity of the department while at the same time continue to build on an inclusive sense of a departmental community. During his term as chair, the department received an additional 10,000 square feet of research space with the move of the Psychological Clinics out of East Hall. There has also been a further expansion of the animal research facilities. In an effort to promote a greater sense of identity within the department, the department has established several new activities and traditions under Sellers' term as chair including the annual tailgate, the end-of-the-year Fitts Awards Celebration, and the department's own commencement ceremony. Sellers revamped the department administrative structure by adding three Associate Chairs--Associate Chair for Student Academic Affairs and Teaching; Associate Chair for Faculty Development; and Associate Chair for Facilities and Diversity. The department continues to be ranked among the top 3 departments of Psychology nationally and among the highest-ranked departments within the department.

*These remarks have been culled, paraphrased and plagiarized from the following sources:*

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