

2017 APS Mentor Awards

May 08, 2017



The APS Mentor Award recognizes those who have fostered the careers of others, honoring APS members who masterfully help students and others find their own voices and discover their own research and career goals. Four psychological scientists have been selected to receive the 2017 APS Mentor Award.



David M. Buss

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The University of Texas at Austin

David M. Buss, one of the founders of the field of evolutionary psychology, has mentored graduate students for more than 3 decades at Harvard University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Texas at Austin. He is renowned among his graduate students for the time, effort, and enthusiasm he invests in them. Roughly 70% of his graduate students have attained tenured or tenure-track positions at institutions ranging from high-powered research universities to small elite liberal arts colleges. Many have gone on to distinguished careers in psychology and are themselves mentoring graduate students, and three have become Chairs of their psychology departments.

An APS Fellow, Buss has written, cowritten, and edited nine books on various topics in the discipline, including human mating strategies, individual differences in personality, sexual conflict, and power dynamics. He has published more than 300 scientific articles. Buss received his PhD in psychology from the University of California, Berkeley, and took professorships at Harvard University and the University of Michigan. He currently chairs the Individual Differences and Evolutionary Psychology Area at the University of Texas.

Buss's mentorship style places tremendous value on high-quality hypothesis generation.

"In his graduate seminar he held a contest each year in which students worked to generate a new hypothesis, which they presented in class," Martie Haselton, a former student of Buss and now professor at University of California, Los Angeles, says. "The students then voted on the best hypothesis and David awarded the winner with a recent science book on a timely topic. One student went on to pursue the idea developed in David's class as a focus of his career!"

Buss also places tremendous value on developing the writing and communication skills of his mentees. “David provides extraordinary feedback on students’ drafts of papers, both suggesting possible edits and explaining the reasons why the edits improve the paper, thereby helping us to apply the advice to our future writing,” Haselton says. “My first big research paper must have gone through three dozen drafts (yes, that many!). But it paid off.”

And Buss emphasizes the critical importance of replication using different samples, different cultures, and diverse methods — especially important given the current replication crisis in some areas of psychology. Former students have gone on to conduct exceptional cross-culture research projects, deploy tightly-conducted laboratory experiments, and link hormonal assays with human mating strategies (e.g., Haselton).

Although he is passionate about his field of expertise, Buss has welcomed people from a wide range of backgrounds into his lab. While she was a PhD student in anthropology at the University of Texas, Sarah E. Hill, now an associate professor of psychology at Texas Christian University, discovered the program was not a good fit for her. She sought out alternative classes while she figured out what she wanted to pursue, and eventually settled on Buss’s evolutionary psychology graduate seminar after reading his evolutionary psychology book in an undergraduate anthropology course.

“His textbook had fundamentally changed my way of seeing the world and I couldn’t believe my good fortune to have the opportunity to take a class with the man who wrote it. This turned out to be a pivotal moment in my life,” she remembers. “I owe David a debt of gratitude for being willing to take a chance on me and allowing me (a wayward anthropologist with no psychology background) to join his lab.”

Buss also is known for holding his graduate students to high standards.

“I will never forget the insightful and inspiring comments he made on [a particular] paper, including an invitation to work together and collect data to test the ideas (our work was eventually published as sexual strategies theory),” David P. Schmitt, now Caterpillar Inc. Professor of Psychology at Bradley University, recalls. “He culminated his comments on my term paper with the phrase, ‘there is much work to be done.’ That phrase gave me chills, and it changed my life.”

Perhaps one of the most impressive aspects of Buss’s mentorship style is his encouragement of students to build their own research program rather than following strictly in his footsteps. His mentees say they appreciate his faith in their development and pursuit of rigorous projects using methodologically sound methods.

Buss “doesn’t coddle his students — he sets high expectations for them to develop important ideas themselves, but provides the feedback and guidance to bring those ideas to fruition,” writes Cari Goetz, assistant professor of psychology at California State University, San Bernadino. “That experience of having to build my own research program from scratch as a graduate student has molded me into an independent researcher.”

As APS Fellow Michael Domjan, professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, wrote in his nomination letter, “One cannot attract graduate students to an emerging field without also nurturing excitement for the discipline among undergraduates. Buss has been a master at doing that.”

Buss's key textbook, *Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of the Mind*, now in its 5th edition, has inspired undergraduates and graduate students alike. Buss sees the future of the field as resting with nurturing the talent of the young. He envisions continuing to mentor graduate students in the foreseeable future, and currently maintains an active lab inhabited by four promising graduate students.



Phoebe C. Ellsworth

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University of Michigan

APS James McKeen Cattell Fellow Phoebe C. Ellsworth is a leading scientist in the field of emotion. She is one of the originators of the appraisal theory of emotion, which postulates that emotions are made up of people's appraisals of their situation along clearly specified dimensions, and that changes in emotions correspond to changes in appraisals. The theory has been applied to individual and cultural differences, evolutionary psychology, neuroscience, and more. She has also applied psychological science to the practice and understanding of law and the US criminal justice system. Her influential research on jury decision-making, attitudes toward capital punishment, and the relation between social science and law have had long-lasting, real-world impacts on the understanding of how people are affected by the law. Ellsworth, the Frank Murphy Distinguished University Professor of Law and Psychology at the University of Michigan (UM), has earned many accolades as a researcher and extensive praise as a mentor.

"Graduate school in Social Psychology at the University of Michigan starts and ends with Phoebe Ellsworth," says Patricia Chen, an assistant professor at the National University of Singapore and advisee of Ellsworth. "Precocious first-years begin their methodological training as social psychologists under her wings; dissertating last-years bring their job market aspirations along with their insecurities to her job outplacement class. And in between, Phoebe has played the role of advisor, mentor, lecturer, consultant, and counselor to numerous students who have walked through the halls of our department."

Ellsworth has been teaching and mentoring graduate students since 1972 at Yale University, Stanford University, and UM. Her advisees have advanced in their careers to positions at Harvard University, The University of Chicago, the Office of Policy and Strategy at the US Citizenship and Immigration Service, the Michigan State University College of Law, the National University of Singapore, and more. Described as being able to cite a William James passage, a book from the 1960s, and a relevant article published in *Psychological Science* as recently as last week and all within 5 minutes, Ellsworth is regarded by her advisees as one of the most knowledgeable researchers in the field.

Igor Grossmann, now an associate professor of social psychology and the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, says Ellsworth is known for her warmhearted approach to mentorship and teaching. Grossmann writes that he has heard from many students, including a large number of international students, that Ellsworth has supported intellectual development while also helping many students work through concerns that often do not have simple answers.

“I believe this norm of getting ‘Phoebe’s advice’ was established way before she became a program chair and — as I have recently heard from the current UM students — it continues until the present day,” Grossmann says.

Ed O’Brien, a former Ellsworth advisee and now an assistant professor at The University of Chicago Booth School of Business, describes a unique quality about Ellsworth’s temperament and advice: her ability to listen. “It sounds simple but it’s so rare in academia,” he adds. In a world where “everybody seems to want to talk the loudest and sound the smartest,” Ellsworth listens to her advisees and asks about their research and their personal lives, showing a true investment in the both their academic studies and their growth as human beings.

“What amazes me most about Phoebe is that her treatment of me isn’t unique,” he continues. “I would leave her office and the next student would pop in, and hours later they would be laughing and chatting and looking at new data.”

Stephanie J. Rowley and Fiona Lee, both of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, say that “Dr. Ellsworth is the rare type of mentor who allows young scholars to express [feelings] of inadequacy, and amazingly turns [those] feelings into energy for generating exciting questions and research avenues.”

Despite being a renowned and prolific researcher, Ellsworth has not forgotten what it is like to be a struggling graduate student and is always willing to help, her advisees attest.

Ellsworth “is a role model for all of us,” Rowley and Lee conclude, “and her mentoring excellence has created a more supportive mentoring climate for the entire department and profession.”

Randall W. Engle



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Georgia Institute of Technology

Over the past few decades, psychological science research has expanded dramatically, resulting in ever-increasing choices for graduate students seeking opportunities both inside and outside of academia. Although working in labs and publishing articles are important components of this process, so, too, is networking with peers who might be interested in future collaborations or discussions about research. APS Fellow Randall W. Engle understands the importance of such interactions, and one of his goals as a mentor is to ensure that his students are always able to make as many connections as possible. In his nomination letter, APS Fellow Michael J. Kane, professor of psychology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, notes that Engle's foremost motivation is to see his students succeed professionally, "regardless of whether it is as an academic in a teaching-oriented college, in a high-pressure research university, or in an industrial lab setting."

Engle, a first-generation college graduate who received his PhD from The Ohio State University, is attuned to the fact that taking such initiative does not come easily to everyone. Kane lauds Engle's efforts to bring his graduate students to conferences and to adequately prepare them for the experience: "Before departing, Randy provides them with concrete lessons on how to meet and get to know people in the student's area of interest. He teaches them, explicitly, how to actually approach someone to begin a conversation, the types of questions to ask, and how to follow up with an email after the meeting."

On his website, Engle notes that as an undergraduate he focused almost as much on zoology and math as on psychology, and suggests that this unique combination of study areas led him to a research career in experimental psychology. APS Fellow David A. Balota, Professor of Psychological & Brain Sciences and Professor of Neurology at Washington University in St. Louis, believes Engle's own career trajectory influences his encouragement of students to pursue their own interests. "I eventually did a dissertation that was relatively far afield from Randy's interest, but he fully supported this work and was very helpful in all aspects of the dissertation process," writes Balota. "Clearly, Randy was remarkable in

nurturing my research interests and development as an independent researcher. I should note that when Randy and I overlap at conferences, I can see these traits continuing. ... Randy often seems like a proud parent.”

Like most accomplished academics, Engle has a busy schedule to maintain (among other things, he is Editor of the APS journal *Current Directions in Psychological Science*). Nevertheless, his students remember him as someone who took the time to foster their professional development and who generously shared his own research experiences. Anne C. McLaughlin, director of the Learning, Aging, & Cognitive Ergonomics Lab at North Carolina State University, writes, “I’m astonished at how much effort and time he put into mentoring. He genuinely seemed to enjoy hashing out research designs [and] interpreting outcomes, [giving] me access to his database of pretested low- and high-working-memory capacity research participants, and freely [sharing] the measures he developed in his lab.” This generosity extends outside of the lab to his inclusion of students at conferences; another letter writer noted that he not only prepares his mentees in advance but takes time during the meeting itself to introduce them to others with similar lines of research.

Engle goes above and beyond with his mentorship by giving his students — and students outside his lab who often seek him out — thoughtful and wide-ranging career advice. Thomas S. Redick, head of the Purdue Applied Cognition Lab, remembers that Engle was “a fantastic source of information about nonscholarship topics, including applying and interviewing for jobs, navigating through department politics, and searching for funding avenues.” Balota adds that Engle continues to take an interest in his career: “The mentoring clearly did not stop at the end of graduate school. I have asked for his advice over the years, and I know he has been supportive of my career.”

Former students also praised Engle’s commitment to a sound, methodologically rigorous science and the importance he placed on good writing. Redick writes, “Randy’s directness, his honesty, is probably what I appreciate most about him — you always know where you stand with him. That meant when he returned a manuscript to me with feedback that it wasn’t my strongest work, I knew he truly thought I could do better.” This aspect of his mentorship, while perhaps daunting for young graduate students, served them well in the long run; Redick added that when Engle suggested he apply for a prestigious academic position, he knew it meant Engle thought he was up to the job.

In all, Engle’s mentees paint a picture of a caring, generous, and exacting adviser who always keeps his students’ long-term goals in mind while still managing to focus on their current projects. In this role, he contributes invaluable resources to future psychological scientists.



Paul L. Harris

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Harvard University

APS Fellow Paul L. Harris is one of the world's most recognized theoreticians and researchers in developmental psychology. His work examines children's understanding of their own emotions and the critical role of imagination in children's cognitive development. He currently is studying whether children rely on their own observation or trust instead what others tell them, as well as when and how children become aware of conflicting information.

In letters supporting his nomination for the award, Harris's former students and mentees consistently point to his honesty, openness, and his generosity of time.

"From seemingly simple things like answering every single email I have ever sent him, to providing consistently insightful and incredibly constructive feedback on countless drafts of our papers, he has proved to be exactly the kind of exceptional mentor he is reputed to be," writes APS Fellow Cristine Legare, a cognitive scientist at the University of Texas at Austin who first sought Harris's help on a research project in 2007.

APS Fellow Melissa A. Koenig, who directs the Early Language and Experience Lab at the University of Minnesota's Institute of Child Development, recalls her experience seeking Harris's assistance when she, while preparing for her dissertation, was developing a postdoctoral research proposal for the National Institutes of Health.

"Paul responded immediately with enthusiasm and, from there, we began a collaboration that has been the most fruitful, encouraging, and stimulating of my career," Koenig says in her letter of support.

Mentees remarked on the indispensable guidance Harris provided in improving their writing. They describe him as an exacting editor who provides not only broad, conceptual comments but also line edits focusing on word choice.

“Paul has immense editorial skills that he used on any piece of writing that I submitted,” says APS Fellow Denis Mareschal, a former student of Harris and now codirector of the Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development at Birkbeck, University of London. “However preliminary they might have been, all my drafts were carefully edited for clarity and readability. This was invaluable in helping me hone my scientific writing skills, but also clearly demonstrated that he devoted considerable time to the material that I produced.”

All of the scientists who wrote letters in support of the nomination credit Harris with inspiring their mentoring approaches with their own students.

“The fact that Paul’s approach to mentorship is being emulated across the world highlights Paul’s remarkable impact on the development of young scholars,” Koenig and Boston University scholar Kathleen H. Corriveau note in their letter.

Many of Harris’s mentees also describe his guidance as thoughtful and reverent.

“As a student of Paul’s, there is an inescapable truth with which you are routinely confronted: You are worthy of respect,” wrote Marc de Rosnay, a Senior Lecturer at the University of Sydney, who was Harris’s supervisee at both the University of Oxford and at Harvard University. “Paul’s conduct and attitude have an insidious and pervasive effect ... it infuses the expectations that you hold for yourself. It also trickles down across generations as you try to emulate such standards for your own students.”