

Start Spreading the Science: Setting the Stage for a New Kind of Convention

September 14, 2005

Welcome back to the excitement of a new academic year. I always find September refreshing, not only for the set of new and bright faces peering around each new corner, but also from the sense of renewal a summer break can bring to the tired Spring mind. There is always a sense of newness, not only to new ideas and experiments, but also to opportunities for communicating the wonders of the psychological sciences.

As we all get ready to tackle the great and continuing scientific issues of the day, issues that range from the nature of genes and how they become expressed through nervous system circuits and up to issues of social process and moral behavior, we all want more from our professional groups and annual meetings. This year APS hopes to continue its fine tradition of providing for its membership and to set a course that will culminate in an exciting annual meeting in New York City (May 25-28, 2006).

This past year, the APS Board and a convention task force held many discussions on how to improve connectivity of our Members with the various scientific topics that captivate us all. We all seem to become more isolated from the larger intellectual questions of our time and to focus in on the specifics of our specialties. While this is sometimes necessary and warranted, many people feel our national meetings should serve a broader purpose.

Under the leadership of Leo Chalupa, University of California, Davis, a new plan for the New York meeting has been set in motion. Instead of multiple concurrent meetings, Friday will feature three themed cross-cutting programs with speakers representing different areas of psychological science which will focus on large cross cutting issues. The Annual Convention themes will be "Memory and Consciousness," "Plasticity and Change: A Lifelong Perspective," and "The Psychology of Terrorism." There will be special poster sessions tied to each of these themes. The meeting will continue to have concurrent track programming on Saturday, as well as posters, workshops, student events, awards addresses, and affiliate meetings.

In New York, being New York, the media capital of the world, I thought it would be a good opportunity to seek out leaders from the world's leading newspaper and news journals to come and discuss what the interested public finds both interesting and appalling about news from the psychological sciences. Is there too little, too much, or too sensationalized? Does the public believe all psychologists are a form of Dr. Ruth? Joining me on the panel will be author and journalist Tom Wolfe, William Safire, New York Times columnist and chairman of the Dana Foundation, Robert Bazell, chief science correspondent for NBC News, and Dan Henninger, deputy editor of The Wall Street Journal's editorial page.

We will also have Sir Michael Rutter, King's College London, as our Keynote Speaker and author Malcolm Gladwell (Blink, The Tipping Point) will deliver the Bring the Family Address.

As we make our way through this exciting upcoming year, mark your calendars now. New York will be an exciting event and early signs are that it will be heavily attended. So, again, welcome back and now it is time to go to work.

For more information on the convention, visit www.psychologicalscience.org/convention.