Graduation days

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Outstanding psychology student Annie Goddard has produced an award-winning study on how to improve children’s attitudes to those with disabilities.

Annie, who will be receiving her first-class BSc at the graduation ceremony today (Friday 21 July), used her background of working with disabled children as the basis of her final-year project.

Annie says: “My aim was to improve children’s attitudes towards their peers with disabilities by reading them stories about a non-disabled child in a friendship with a disabled child. I found that my positive intervention did make a difference.”

She looked at two different age groups and found that five-year-olds were more prejudiced compared with 10-year-olds, particularly towards children with ‘visual’ disabilities, such as cerebral palsy, rather than hidden disabilities, such as autism.

Annie, who won a dissertation prize from the British Psychological Society for her project, adds: “These findings have implications for how to develop more positive, inclusive environments, such as in schools, and how to educate children about people with disabilities.”

For the immediate future, Annie will be putting her experience to good practice as a programme specialist at a school in London for children with autism. “I may do a clinical psychology course in the future – or a postgraduate teaching course,” she adds.

Her tutor, Professor Rupert Brown, says: “Annie’s outstanding research project shows how, even at an undergraduate level, psychology can make a real contribution to the understanding and solution of social problems.”

Other students graduating today include a retired bank manager who spent his career working with numbers despite not having an academic qualification in maths, Jonathan Franklin did a lot of statistical analysis for his job at Lloyds TSB. After taking early retirement four years ago, he did an A level in Maths at South Downs College in Lewes, then applied to Sussex and is now celebrating his first-class degree.

Sean Carroll, who graduated on Thursday with a BA in English and Media Studies, was the first recipient of a special ‘alumni scholarship’ from Sussex to encourage students from non-university backgrounds into higher education. The scholarship of £1,500 per year for his three-year course came from the Sussex Fund, which is supported by donations from alumni, current and former staff and friends of the University.

“I probably couldn’t have completed the degree course without the scholarship,” says Sean. The experience has been so positive that he now hopes to take an MA at Sussex and continue into teaching and research in higher education.

Energy firms will reject nuclear, say Sussex experts

Experts at the University of Sussex Energy Group have criticised government plans, announced on 11 July, for a new generation of nuclear power stations. They argue that energy firms will not invest in new nuclear plants without further government intervention.

Dr Jim Watson, Senior Fellow in the Sussex Energy Group, said: “Liberalisation of the UK’s electricity market over the past 15 years has encouraged firms to go for the cheapest forms of power generation. This has meant large-scale investment in gas but also increasingly in wind power. Although gas prices have risen recently, these technologies are well known and energy companies are familiar with their risks.

“By contrast, nuclear investment is subject to greater financial risks because the reactor designs now being offered are new. There are signs from experience elsewhere that this is already causing problems. A reactor being built in Finland is already a year behind schedule.”

In delivering the government’s energy review, The Energy Challenge, Trade and Industry Secretary Alastair Darling said it would be for the private sector to initiate, fund, construct and operate nuclear plants and cover the cost of decommissioning and dealing with nuclear waste.

The Sussex experts point out that the huge up-front capital investment for nuclear power stations is unlikely to be forthcoming unless investors are given price guarantees for the energy they produce. In addition, there are still unresolved problems with decommissioning power stations at the end of their life and dealing with the waste.

Dr Alister Scott said: “We are in danger of repeating history. At the end of the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher – widely thought to be a ‘strong’ Prime Minister – ordered a new generation of ten new nuclear power stations. In the end she got just one – Sizewell B. We expect that this may be about to happen again. This will divert vital political and financial resources away from measures that can be taken more quickly, such as energy saving and renewable energy.”

These perspectives have been confirmed by city experts since the launch of the energy review. One senior investment banker said that he would be “amazed” if any bank would be prepared to finance a new nuclear power station. At the same time, the companies that the government assumes will be willing to build new nuclear stations are remaining cagey.

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BOOKMARK

Martin Butler (Professor of Music)
Lucifer's Banjo and Other Pieces for Piano
Oxford University Press, £12.95 (paperback)
ISBN-10: 0193724022

The publisher says: “This volume is an eclectic mix of short works composed over a number of years. Butler’s idiomatic writing for the piano is instantly appealing and captures a wide variety of moods. His musical language is at times playful, humorous, and parodic, with characterful melodic gestures and jaunty rhythms; at others it is serene and lyrical. This is a collection for those seeking new, interesting contemporary repertoire that is rewarding and hugely enjoyable to play.”

William Lamont (Emeritus Professor of History)
Last Witnesses: The Muggletonian History 1652–1979
Ashgate, £55.00 (hardback)
ISBN: 0754655326

Justin Champion, Professor of the History of Early Modern Ideas at Royal Holloway, says: “This is a splendid and exceptional work – vibrant, clever and very acute. It opens up the Muggletonian archive and the successive and dynamic religious experience of many individuals in a dramatic and powerful manner. Lamont brings to this endeavour all of his considerable historical understanding: this is a weighty and serious work, but one that is accessible to non-experts. It will certainly be required reading for any historian interested in the religious experience and consequences of the English Revolution. Written in an engaging, learned but crystal clear prose, it is also a very powerful insight into the difficult business of engaging with the sometimes elusive experience of past religions. It is a deeply humble work concerned above all to allow the voices from the past to speak in their own idioms unhindered by jargon or hermeneutic method.”

Sue Roe (Lecturer in Creative Writing, CCE)
The Private Lives of the Impressionists
Chatto & Windus, £18.99 (hardback)
ISBN: 0701175052

Val Hennessy in the Daily Mail says: “Their names – Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Cassatt, Renoir, Degas, Sisley and Berthe Morisor – are now very familiar to us, as are their dazzling, light-filled paintings…” In her vivid, superbly researched book, Sue Roe transports us back to their Paris…” it leaves you absolutely determined to visit art exhibitions at every opportunity and gaze at the familiar works with renewed pleasure.”

Hennetta Garnett in the Literary Review says: “This book is primarily the story of how the group met and worked closely together, supporting and encouraging each other, occasionally quarrelling…” Sue Roe has chosen a compelling subject: her book does justice and it is a pleasure to read.”

John Carey in the Sunday Times says: “What it will do, for those of us not already specialists in the period, is enormously enhance the interest of the next impressionist exhibition we go to.”

Bookmark is a regular review of new books by Sussex authors.

You can buy these books at the University Bookshop in Bramber House, or order online at www.sussexunibooks.co.uk. Staff get a 10% discount on all products in the Bookshop on production of valid ID.

Flying in tune
Buzz brings mosquito pairs together

Mosquitoes have been creating a buzz in the scientific world, with the news that their high-pitched duets before mating serve as a way of telling the girls from the boys.

Ian Russell, Professor of Neurobiology, and an academic colleague of his at the University of Greenwich report their findings in the latest issue of Current Biology.

Scientists have known for decades that the highly specialized hearing organ of male mosquitoes enables them to detect and locate females. In the meantime, females have been overlooked, mainly because their antennae are so much simpler in form.

Ian and his co-author have now demonstrated that pairs of mosquitoes alter their own ‘flight tone’ (generated by their beating wings) in response to the tone of the other. This interaction continues until the tones converge, in the case of male–female pairs, or dramatically diverge, in the case of same-sex pairs.

This communication may also hold the key to understanding how closely related species recognise members of their own kind: the authors suggest it is unlikely that identical sex-specific flight tones are shared among different mosquito species (of which there are about 3,000).

Sussex hosts Royal Commission Industrial Fellowship

The Engineering and Design department has the opportunity to build links with a leading UK manufacturer of steam products over the course of a three-year research project by a Sussex DPhil student.

Spirax Sarco Ltd will be the experimental base for Christopher Pocock, who aims to develop new technology to detect steam leakage on pipelines in order to save energy and reduce carbon emissions.

L-R: Malcolm Shirley (Royal Commission), research student Christopher Pocock, Dr William Wang (Engineering and Design) and Richard Carmichael (Spirax Sarco Ltd),

Christopher’s studies will be funded by the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851, which annually offers up to eight Industrial Fellowships – worth as much as £70,000 over three years – to the country’s brightest young engineering employees wanting to engage in research.

Dr William Wang, Lecturer in Engineering, will supervise Christopher’s research.
VC's VOICE

As I write this, I am looking forward to this week’s graduation ceremonies, first of all with a great sense of relief that the ceremonies are going ahead as normal.

Thanks especially to the incomparable Lord Attenborough, Sussex graduation ceremonies are very special events. I am grateful for the great efforts made by so many staff this year to ensure, after the end of the assessment boycott, that all our graduating students can participate fully and normally in these happy occasions; and I am grateful to all the staff who by their presence and their efforts make the graduation ceremonies work so well for our students and their families.

The graduation ceremonies mark not just the successful completion of students’ academic programmes, they also mark the end of the academic year and are a natural point at which to reflect on the University’s year.

This has not been an easy year for Sussex or for me personally. We have been through a bruising debate about the future of chemistry; there have been difficult discussions about cost savings and staffing reductions; the pay dispute has generated tensions and pressures; and a campaign to improve the quality of the student experience at Sussex has included the wide circulation of a highly critical film.

Debate is healthy, criticism is sometimes necessary, and I have a broad back and a thick skin, but I do hope that as we all work in the future to take forward the work of the University we consider whether it is in the interests of our staff, students and graduates for internal discussions to spill into the national media quite so readily as they have done in the past six months.

This is not the place to comment in detail on the specific issues, but it is worth reflecting on the positive aspects of our debates. The discussion on chemistry and the wider discussion on the University’s strategic plan for investment in excellence were both driven by the objective of ensuring that Sussex builds upon and develops its academic excellence and is clearly recognised as one of the country’s leading universities. I think this objective is widely shared and I think it is also widely understood that we cannot achieve this objective without facing up to difficult issues.

Many colleagues have been engaged over the past few weeks in making new academic appointments and I have been greatly encouraged by the high quality of our new appointments and by what that means for the future of the University.

As I have written before, one of the most positive aspects of the chemistry debate was the quality of the student contribution. The chemistry students were eloquent, articulate and passionate in promoting their view of the future of chemistry at Sussex and they made a crucial contribution to the debate and to the final outcome.

The ‘Sort US Out’ campaign has produced the critical film, but also a promising programme of joint work between my Executive Group and the Students’ Union Executive. Last month, I spoke at a national conference on ‘Student complaints and the student experience’ about the very positive impact of the campaign in helping the whole institution to identify and tackle the things that need to be done to ensure that all students at Sussex have an outstanding experience here. I am looking forward to working with Dan Glass and the rest of the new Students’ Union team on taking this agenda forward.

I am proud of the fact that the University of Sussex is an open and honest and self-critical institution, with staff and students who care. Let’s keep it that way.

Alasdair Smith
Vice-Chancellor

Union members say yes to pay deal

Union members in higher education have voted in favour of a three-year national pay settlement, which will give employees at Sussex a total increase of 13.1% and more to the very lowest-paid staff.

The unions representing support staff—which at Sussex are Amicus and Unison—had an overwhelming majority of ‘yes’ votes from their members. A substantial majority of members of the academic University and College Union (UCU) who voted were also in favour.

As a result of the pay deal, Sussex staff will receive an increase of 3% (or £515 if that is greater) from 1 August; this will appear in August pay packets.

A further 1% will be paid from February 2007 and another 3% from August 2007. In May 2008 an increase of 3% (or £420 if that is greater) will follow, and in October 2008 the greater of 2.5% and the Retail Prices Index (RPI) as at September 2008.

Professorial quartet receive honorary degrees

The four professors receiving honorary degrees from Sussex at this week’s graduation ceremonies all have strong connections with the University dating back many years.

In 1983 Professor Calestous Juma completed an MSc (Science Technology and Industrialisation) and subsequently a DPhil (Science and Technology Policy Studies) at SPRU. Now an internationally recognised authority on sustainable development, he is director of the Science, Technology and Globalization Program at Harvard University. He is a former Executive Secretary of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

Julian Le Grand, Professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics (LSE), completed his first degree at Sussex in 1967. He went on to do a PhD at the University of Pennsylvania before returning to Sussex, where he lectured in economics until 1977. He is widely recognised for his contribution to the academic study and practice of public policy, health systems and social exclusion.

Professor Aaron Sloman is among the forefront of those exploring the boundaries of artificial intelligence (AI) and philosophy. He came to Sussex in 1964 and in the early 1970s helped to develop the Cognitive Studies programme in the School of Social Sciences, which grew into the School of Cognitive and Computing Sciences. After 27 years at Sussex he went to the University of Birmingham to head its School of Computer Science.

In 1963 Donald Winch joined the then brand-new University of Sussex, where he has remained ever since, serving as a lecturer, professor, dean and pro-vice-chancellor. An economist until the 1980s, he is now Emeritus Professor of Intellectual History in the School of Humanities. His move into intellectual history was encouraged by the small group who pioneered the teaching of the subject at Sussex as an autonomous field, creating the international reputation it continues to enjoy.

From the top: Professors Calestous Juma, Julian Le Grand, Aaron Sloman and Donald Winch.
Conference hears student view from Sussex sabb

A Students’ Union sabbatical officer from Sussex has become the first student to speak at a national conference on IT and information services in higher education.

As Education Officer for 2005-06, Sophie McGinn took a particular interest in students’ access to learning resources such as computing and library services. She was an active member of both the IT and Library Consultative Groups, for example, raising students’ issues and co-ordinating feedback.

Early this month, Sophie conveyed the student perspective on learning resources to a wider audience when she gave the joint plenary address and took questions at the UCISA (Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association) User Support Conference in Cambridge.

Students’ expectations can be unrealistic, Sophie acknowledged, in a 24/7 world. The key to managing them and to meeting learning needs, she emphasised, is communication and consultation between students and staff in information services.

As well as giving the plenary address, Sophie also played an active part in a discussion group on the student experience.

The ITS Head of Client Services at Sussex, Caroline House, helped to organise the conference and says the 140 delegates found it extremely useful to hear the student perspective. “I suggested that Sophie would be a good speaker, which she was.”

History conference considers power in France

One of the largest conferences on French history ever in the UK brought nearly 80 international speakers to the Sussex campus this month. Together with another 40 delegates, they explored notions of power in France from 1500 to the present day.

France, America and Britain each provided over 20 speakers; others came from Australia, Canada, Germany, Israel, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and elsewhere.

Joint organiser Dr Chris Waine said: “Issues of power are highly topical in France these days as the Fifth Republic struggles to come to terms with increasing social unrest and growing criticism of the role played by its traditional political elites”.

The fascinating range and variety of forms of power were evident as papers considered imagery, institutions, patronage, networks, colonial relations, gender, the origins of the French Revolution and the re-establishment of civil power at the Liberation, and much else besides.

Chris and his co-organiser, Dr Peter Campbell, received help in organising the conference from the French Embassy, the British Academy, the Royal Historical Society and the OUP journal French History.

Peter will edit a special issue of French History and a book will also follow.

Size really matters

Simply folding an A4 letter in half to fit a C5 envelope will save the University 12p on postage when new charges take effect next month. From 21 August the Royal Mail will change the way its mail services are priced, so that the price is related to the size and weight of the items posted. This is known as ‘pricing in proportion’. In general it means the University will pay the same or less for smaller items of post and more for larger items. For more about pricing in proportion and how it will affect your department or unit, contact lain Monro in the Procurement Office on ext. 3308.

Chinese visit to campus

A delegation of senior managers from Beijing Jiaotong University (BJU) visited Sussex on 11 July as part of a tour of UK universities. During their visit, which was intended to give them insights into various aspects of university management and organisation, the delegates took part in sessions on the University’s international mission, its relations with China, and the development of teaching and learning at Sussex. They also enjoyed a tour of campus. On behalf of Sussex, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor John Dearlove signed a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ with BJU when he was in China in February.

Car park closures

The next stage of trenching work to replace heating pipes means that the Sussex House and Sussex House visitors’ car parks will be closed from Monday (24 July) for approximately six weeks.

ITS open day

ITS look forward to showing you their new home in ENGB 1 at an open day on Wednesday (26 July) from 12 noon to 3pm. The newly refurbished premises include a spacious open-access area and two training rooms. There will also be guided tours of the open-plan staff offices.

Villa open day

On Saturday 29 July, from 11am to 4pm, you can visit the University’s archaeological excavation project at Barcombe Roman villa. The site, and an adjacent car park, are next to St Mary’s church.