Utah State Psychology Department Confers 150th PhD

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Kaitlyn Browning

The Utah State University Department of Psychology recently celebrated an important milestone in its doctoral program as it awarded its 150th PhD. Kaitlyn Browning completed her dissertation, “Translational examination of alternative-response discrimination training and resurgence,” under the supervision of Dr. Timothy Shahan.

“We are thrilled to be conferring our 150th doctoral degree in psychology,” said Scott Bates, psychology department head. “Our graduates work diligently toward receiving their degrees and are committed to making a difference in the world.”

Browning, who completed her doctoral degree in psychology with an emphasis in behavior analysis, is excited to follow a path she is passionate about.

“I knew I wanted to pursue a career in psychology and research, but I wasn’t always sure what discipline to focus on for graduate school,” said Browning. “In my last semester of undergrad, I took the introductory Learning & Behavior course, and it was finally clear to me what I wanted to study in graduate school.”

Browning is now a postdoctoral research fellow at the Vermont Center for Behavior and Health at the University of Vermont in Burlington, Vermont. Her research is based on principles from behavioral economics and behavioral pharmacology, with a focus on reducing unhealthy behaviors (such as substance and tobacco abuse) that contribute to chronic disease and premature death.

The USU Psychology Department conferred its first doctoral degree in 1969 to Richard Wootton. Wootton was a Utah native who continued his legacy with a 32-year career in graduate education at Brigham Young University.

About Kaitlyn Browning

Tell us about your research.

My research has focused on behavioral relapse phenomena with an emphasis on how fundamental behavioral principles identified in the laboratory can be applied to addressing relapse of problem behavior in clinical populations. Specifically, the research for my dissertation was inspired by recent research demonstrating that discriminative stimuli (i.e., discrete stimuli that signal when a behavior will and will not be reinforced) may effectively prevent relapse of severe problem behavior in individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders. The procedures used in the clinical studies were approximated in the basic laboratory with rats as subjects to further examine the conditions under which discriminative stimuli can be used to prevent relapse.

Who influenced you the most during your time at USU?

My lab mates in Dr. Tim Shahan’s lab. I was really lucky to have the opportunity to work with and become friends with some of the most brilliant people I’ve ever met.

What advice do you have for other students in the Psychology Department?

It’s okay to slow down sometimes. In fact, it’s necessary. Graduate school is incredibly difficult, and there is this pressure to work hard 110% of the time otherwise you aren’t doing enough, but it doesn’t have to be that way. Just slow down and breathe.