USU Alumni are Honored with APA Division Awards

Two alumni of the USU Psychology behavior analysis specialization received significant awards this year from the American Psychological Association (APA).

Paul Cunningham, a 2019 doctoral graduate, received the SEAB Basic Dissertation Award from APA Division 25 for his dissertation titled “A Temporal Information-Theoretic Model of Suboptimal Choice.”

The chair of the Basic Dissertation Award committee commented on the noteworthiness of Cunningham’s dissertation, saying, “Dr. Cunningham’s work has not only helped to reconcile some of the between-species differences, but it has paved the way for us to develop a better understanding of the mechanisms responsible for the phenomenon and decision making generally.”

Cunningham was also recognized by APA Division 3 and received the Early Career Contribution Award for his work on a paper titled “Delays to food-predictive stimuli do not affect suboptimal choice in rats.”

“I am really pleased that two divisions of APA (and thus two subfields of psychology) have chosen to recognize Paul for his outstanding early career research,” said Dr. Timothy Shahan, Cunningham’s faculty mentor and the director of the Shahan Lab. “Paul generated a truly innovative and important body of theoretical and empirical work for his dissertation on suboptimal decision making, resulting in three papers in Journal of Experimental Psychology: Animal Learning and Cognition. These awards are a testament to the fact that he is a gifted scientist with a bright future ahead of him whose work spans traditional divisions of scientific inquiry in psychology.”

“I view both of these awards as recognition of all the hard work and creativity within the Shahan Lab,” said Cunningham.

In addition to Cunningham’s two awards, Meredith Berry received this year’s APA Division 25 B.F. Skinner Foundation New Basic Researcher Award. Berry is a 2012 master’s graduate from the USU Psychology behavior analysis specialization.

“This is a prestigious award, given to the very best researchers in our field, and it bodes well for the rest of Dr. Berry’s career,” said Dr. Amy Odum, Berry’s USU faculty mentor. “Dr. Berry is one of the most innovative, conscientious, and thorough researchers I’ve ever had the pleasure of working with, and I’m very proud to be one of her mentors.”

Below are listed recent APA awards to alumni of the USU Psychology behavior analysis specialization.

USU Recipients of the APA Division 3 Early Career Contribution Award:

• 2021: Dr. Paul Cunningham, class of 2019

USU Recipients of the APA Division 25 SEAB Basic Dissertation Award:

• 2021: Dr. Paul Cunningham, class of 2019
• 2019: Dr. Jillian Rung, class of 2019
• 2019: Dr. Margaret Sweeney, class of 2016

USU Recipients of the APA Division 25 B.F. Skinner Foundation New Basic Researcher Award:

• 2021: Dr. Meredith Berry, class of 2012
• 2020: Dr. Andrew Craig, class of 2017