

features

AU home to one of the largest studies in psychology

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Reporter

Ashland University is now home to one of the largest studies in the history of psychology.

A facial perception study involving 11,481 participants from 130 institutions across 48 different countries was made public earlier this month.

And it all began at AU. This marks the completion of the first study done by the Psychological Science Accelerator, an idea birthed from AU Associate Professor of Psychology Christopher Chartier.

This study is a way to conduct larger tests on human psychology across the world, Chartier said.

“The PSA is essentially a collection of over 500 labs at this point that all collaborate at selecting, preparing and studying different psychological studies,” Chartier said. “We come up with studies, select the most interesting ones and then complete the study.”

The facial perception study was the first one for the PSA and asked those who participated in it to look at 120 different faces and rate them on 13 different traits such as intelligence and attractiveness in a quick judgement.

“We asked that participants in this study make snap judgements off no other information besides a single and still photograph of a person,” Chartier said.

He said the faces used in the study were all from London since they have a very diverse popula-



Christopher Chartier and the 11 psychology students who helped to launch the Psychological Science Accelerator.

SUBMITTED BY CHRISTOPHER CHARTIER

was admiring a solar eclipse.

“Back when the eclipse happened, it was life changing for me,” Chartier said. “I was just amazed by the accuracy and precision that we could predict that happening with. This made me realize that I was interested in finding as precise predictions in human psychology.”

Trying to find a study that could be replicable was also a huge mo-

The study all began with the students at AU, Chartier said.

“We used a whole bunch of Psychology 101 students as our guinea pigs,” he said. “We had a team of students who would work with me to help me prepare materials for the studies, give ethical reviews and collect data in the labs. Students had to oversee everything.”

Lewis, the senior lab coordina-

who helped to publish the study are getting really beneficial experiences.

“The students have had to step up to a grad student research level,” Chartier said. “The networking that has happened is really good for them. They are corresponding with faculty across the world and I think that is really beneficial.”

Senior Dana Awila, another psychology major who co-authored a paper explaining the PSA said that the study helped to give her research experience.

“I had zero knowledge about research psychology before this study,” Awila said. “All of my research knowledge is from Chris and this study.”

She said it also helped to make her feel like she was making a difference.

“It made me feel like what I was doing has purpose and helped to show me what my purpose was more clearly,” Awila said.

Lewis also said the study has been extremely beneficial for her.

“It is really good because I have a step against other graduates in the field,” she said. “I’ve gotten to present at a lot of conferences and working with Chris has given me a lot of opportunities because people recognize his work.”

While the study and PSA have both been successful, they have not come without their challenges.

The coordination to pull off such a massive study involved a lot of work, Chartier said.

“There are hundreds of people contributing, but to take the lead on organizing this is a lot of labor that goes somewhat unrecognized. It is tough to transmit all these materials,” he said. “Funding for this is also difficult because of how non-traditional it is.”

Even though there have been hurdles to overcome, seeing the

PSA and first study come out of it is what has made it worth it, Chartier said.

“While this project took two years to become what it is today, that’s actually fast in scientific academia,” he said. “Frankly it’s been a lot of fun.”

Chartier sees the PSA as a long term project, he said.

“This is going to be a long term devotion,” Chartier said. “I think this is hopefully what I’ll spend my entire career working on.”

Currently, there are a few other studies taking place as a part of the PSA.

“There will be hundreds more of these studies,” Chartier said. “There are other studies currently going on now like prejudice studies and how we ascribe knowledge to other people. There are also other studies still in infancy. We have studies all across the research lifestyle.”

Looking ahead, Chartier has multiple goals for the PSA.

“I think we can get to a point where we are an efficient and successful research consortium where we can release a monthly well conducted and rigorous research study,” he said. “I want to keep expanding upon what we have.”

Chartier also wants to continue to build upon AU’s research center.

“I’m trying to get grant money so I would be able to do this and potentially get more people involved,” he said.

Chartier said he wants to see AU be the driving force behind this.

“I want us to become a thriving and successful research center,” Chartier said. “I think we could be internationally recognized as the thing to do as an undergraduate psychology student.”



The research study was performed in the Dwight Schar College of Education building.

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tion. There were hundreds of people working on this particular study.

“We got nearly 134 different labs to participate in this study,” he said. “There were groups of hundreds of us that worked in research institutions and academics contributing to this.”

The results of the study were surprising to hear, Chartier said.

“Original findings in psychology suggested that there’s only two dimensions to predict these judgements in valence and dominance,” he said. “We used a much bigger and more diverse sample for this study. We found that when you started to branch outside of North America, there are interesting new patterns across different continents and populations that don’t stick to that two dimensional model.”

Chartier thinks that these judgements are shaped by cultural contacts.

“What we value in these contacts here is a lot different compared to other cultures. The idea that this data set could help us find some answers is really amazing,” Chartier said.

The idea for the PSA itself struck Chartier back in 2017 when he

tivating factor, he said.

“There’s a big movement now to improve the replicability of psychology studies,” Chartier said. “It’s been revealed that it can be quite difficult to get the same results of a study in a different lab. This really struck a nerve with how we could improve this.”

Chartier began by launching the PSA network with a single blog post two years ago. The PSA did not really take off until he shared information about it on Twitter.

“What started happening was the post went academically viral on Twitter,” Chartier said.

At this point, he decided to share the study with major psychological societies and that is when it really began to take off.

AU senior and psychology major Savannah Lewis, a co-author of the facial perception study, could not believe that the study had grown to be so big, she said.

“I remember Chris emailed us over the summer with the idea and I just thought he was doing something minor,” Lewis said. “When we got the idea, it sounded cool but I still questioned if that was a thing that we could actually pull off.”

tor for the psychology department this year, said that there were many layers to this study that she had to tackle, she said.

“I managed a lot of the studies here,” Lewis said. “There were just so many jobs to do like keeping log sheets and making sure that labs across the world were doing the same procedures that we were.”

Chartier said that the students



Chartier in the International Collaboration Research Center.

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