

# ¿Qué Pasa, OSU?

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# Outreach to Ohio Youth: Humanities and Cognitive Sciences Summer Institute

By Victoria Muñoz, PhD Candidate, English

From August 11th to August 15th, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and Center for Cognitive and Brain Sciences hosted its first, annual Humanities and Cognitive Sciences



High School Summer Institute, a week-long, interdisciplinary seminar for 38 Ohio high school students from various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds—the program offered \$9,000 in scholarships to encourage participation among diverse populations. Students and OSU faculty discussed big questions at the intersection of the humanities and cognitive sciences. Discussions broached the cognitive origins of creativity, the brain mechanics involved in reasoning, and the neural circuits activated by music videos.

Each day began with morning lectures from OSU faculty followed by interactive break-out sessions and afternoon discussions led by specially trained Team Leaders, a dynamic group of current OSU students from multiple disciplines. Participants visited the library, research facilities and labs in order to observe how research in cognitive science engages various academic populations. They also visited COSI (Center for Science and Industry) to explore the developmental language and cognition lab with Dr. Laura Wagner, Psychology, and her staff.

On August 12th, I attended two of the back-to-back morning lectures: The first talk, led by Dr. Angus Fletcher, English, surveyed the cognitive effects of literary forms. Dr. Fletcher explained that specialists in Narrative Theory, for which OSU's English department is renowned, celebrate such novels as Jane Austen's *Emma* because they employ free indirect discourse, a form of storytelling that switches from first-person to third-person perspective, thereby distancing the reader from the characters. As Dr. Fletcher noted, "free indirect discourse promotes a healthy society because it tends to make people more generous, helpful, and accepting of difference."

The second talk, led by HUM/COG Institute Co-Director, Dr. Zhong-Lin Lu, Psychology, explained how vision science is related to sports psychology. For example, Dr. Lu explained that the visual-cognitive interactions that occur when one observes a curveball produce an optical illusion that makes the movement of the ball more difficult to track. "The perceived break in a curveball," Dr. Lu explained, "comes from the changing direction of vision and from switching from central to periphery vision."

On August 15th, I also attended the closing lecture by Dr. Joseph Steinmetz, Executive Dean and Vice Provost of Arts and Sciences. Dr. Steinmetz's lecture surveyed recent research into the impact of marijuana on motor memory; various studies involving eye blink conditioning, a basic form of motor memory, reveal a correlation between cannabis exposure and impaired motor learning. Although currently confined to lab studies, this research yields manifold implications for scientists' growing understanding of how marijuana affects the brain.

The three presentations that I attended attest to the broad range of topics covered and the great investment of both students and faculty in the HUM/COG Summer Institute. As program participant, Bushra Ismail, reflected, "I was very happy to be a part of this program's inaugural year because I think it was such an innovative idea to combine the subjects of cognitive sciences and humanities. Intuitively you would not think there was much overlap between the two, but the students [and] group leaders were exposed to fascinating areas [in] between and came away with a deeper understanding and appreciation for both the humanities and neuroscience."

HUM/COG Institute co-Director, Dr. Frederick Aldama, English/LASER, further emphasized the program's focus on student-centered learning: "The faculty who were involved felt a deep sense of making a difference to the lives of these 38 kids...The students were meeting one another from 20-plus high schools in the Columbus area, and even from Mansfield and Yellow Springs. There was real collegiality and comradery that was built among students." Dr. Aldama envisions further growth for this program in upcoming years; the institute will soon launch an online service learning platform. This open-access learning institute will provide free lectures on humanities and cognitive sciences for teachers and learners all over the world. 