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## \$100,000 NSF Grant to Expand Psychology Studies

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October 5, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— The National Science Foundation has awarded a \$100,000 grant to Joseph Williams, associate professor of psychology at Illinois Wesleyan University, which will go toward purchasing an EEG acquisition machine, or electroencephalography machine, to expand research within the Psychology Department.

“EEG technology can help us understand how the brain processes information, and why problems might arise in memory or critical thinking,” said Williams, who teaches courses in behavioral neuroscience. “For instance, we can map out how changes in brain activity allow us to better encode and recall visual information or how changes in brain activity relate to mistakes in remembering information. The new EEG recording system will allow IWU students more in-depth exploration of the complex interaction between brain and behavior.”

EEG readings record cellular activity in the brain, which allows us to see how the brain actually processes information. “We know what can affect behavior before the tests begin – influences such as self-esteem, age, even physical fitness. We can also observe decisions. Using the EEG machine fills in the blanks in the middle, allowing us to watch subjects’ brain activity as they make decisions,” said Jason Themanson, assistant professor of psychology at IWU.

Currently, the University has an EEG acquisition machine, but Williams said its capacity is limited. “The EEG acquisition machine we have can analyze three regions of the brain at once. The new machine will be able to look at 64 regions at once,” said Williams. “This is a giant leap in our ability to answer important research questions that our students are interested in studying.”

Williams has been teaching neuroscience for eight years at Illinois Wesleyan. A specialist in the field of animal neuroscience, he has responded to a growing interest by students to conduct neuroscience research with humans as well. “Many of our students are planning to attend graduate or medical school, or have a research interest in neuroscience overall,” said Williams. “We wanted to meet that interest.”

Themanson, whose area is human neuroscience, joined the faculty this fall in response to the growing student interest in studying humans. Students will work with both professors to conduct research with the new EEG acquisition machine.

One of those students is Jen Morozink, a senior psychology major who plans to pursue graduate school in neuroscience after she graduates this spring. “Bringing a new EEG machine to IWU will allow us to conduct research with more state-of-the-art measures,” said Morozink. “One of the benefits of being at IWU is the chance to participate directly with professors on their research. I definitely feel that I have an advantage in applying to graduate school because of all of the research experience I’ve had while here.”

Williams agrees the new equipment will better prepare students. “When students leave here, they will be more viable candidates with hands-on experience as undergraduates on the same type of research instrumentation used in the majority of graduate research programs using EEG technology,” said Williams, who worked with Director of Development/Corporate and Foundation Relations Jo Porter and Assistant Director of Development/Corporate and Foundation Relations David Wolfe to secure the grant. “We hope this will help students explore how problems in the brain arise, and maybe come up with some solutions to those problems.”



*Professors Joe Williams and Jason Themanson will use the NFS grant to purchase a new EEG machine.*