

THE BEHAVIORAL NEUROSCIENTIST AND COMPARATIVE PSYCHOLOGIST

Summer, 2026

*Society for Behavioral Neuroscience and Comparative Psychology (SBNCP)
Division 6 of the American Psychological Association*

SBNCP Program at the 2026 APA Convention in Washington, DC:

See below for the exciting program planned for the APA convention! Featuring 2026 Div 6 Awardees, Workshops, Invited addresses, and more!

2026 SBNCP Awards:

From Kendal Smith

The **D. O. Hebb Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award** honors a psychologist who has made distinguished theoretical and/or empirical contributions to basic research in behavioral neuroscience and/or comparative psychology.

This year's winner is **Dr. Jill Becker**, University of Michigan

The **Brenda A. Milner Award** recognizes the author of an outstanding paper in the field of behavioral neuroscience or comparative psychology.

This year's winner is **Dr. Will Whitham**, East Texas A&M University for their paper "Predator gaze captures both human and chimpanzee attention."

The **SBNCP Early Career Investigator Award** honors an early career psychologist (within 10 years of the Ph.D.) who has made a substantial contribution to the fields of comparative psychology and/or behavioral neuroscience.

This year's winner is **Dr. Francesca De Petrillo**, Newcastle University

The **Frank A. Beach Comparative Psychology Award** is given each year to recognize the best paper published in Journal of Comparative Psychology®. Each author receives a plaque at the business meeting of Division 6, held at the APA Annual Convention.

This year's winner is **Dr. Lynn Caldicott and colleagues** for their paper "The impact of training method on odor learning and generalization in dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*)"

The **D. G. Marquis Behavioral Neuroscience Award** is given each year to recognize the best paper published in Behavioral Neuroscience®. Each author receives a plaque at the Business Meeting of Division 6, held at the APA Annual Convention.

This year's winners are **Gili Karni and colleagues** for their paper "A rational information gathering account of infant habituation" and **Dr. Mahsa Moaddab and colleagues** for their paper "Paraventricular thalamic inputs to the ventral pallidum shape reward seeking during threat and fear responding in extinction"



APA Annual Convention Program Highlights

Washington, DC | August 6-8, 2026

All times listed in Eastern Time (ET)

From Program Co-Chairs Elizabeth West Niedringhaus
and Jessica Stagner Bodily

AUGUST 6-8 | WASHINGTON, DC + VIRTUAL

APA2026

Thursday, August 6, 2026

Executive Committee Meeting

- 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM
- Marriott Marquis Washington, DC – Level 4, Capitol Room

Business Meeting

- 1:00 PM – 2:00 PM
- Walter E. Washington Convention Center – Level 2, Room 204B

Hebb Award Address

- 2:30 PM – 3:30 PM
- Walter E. Washington Convention Center – Street Level, Room 152A
- Title: Sex Differences in Mechanisms of Addiction: Lessons from Animal Models
- Speaker: Dr. Jill B. Becker, PhD (University of Michigan)

Presidential Address

- 4:00 PM – 5:00 PM
- Walter E. Washington Convention Center – Street Level, Room 152A
- Title: An Attentional Hypothesis of Habit Learning
- Speaker: Dr. Eric A. Thraillkill, PhD (University of Vermont)

Friday, August 7, 2026

Milner Award Address

- 8:30 AM – 9:30 AM
- Walter E. Washington Convention Center – Level 2, Room 204B
- Title: Can't Hide Lion Eyes: Predator Gaze Captures Both Human and Chimpanzee Attention
- Speaker: Dr. Will Whitham, PhD (ETAMU)

Poster Session

- 1:00 PM – 2:00 PM
- Walter E. Washington Convention Center – Level 2, Hall D (Solutions Center)

Invited Address

- 4:00 PM – 5:00 PM
- Walter E. Washington Convention Center – Street Level, Room 146C
- Speaker: Dr. W. David Stahlman, PhD (University of Mary Washington)
- Title: "A place for everything and everything in its place: Selection as a unifying framework for adaptive behavior"

Joint Social Hour (Division 6 & Division 3)

- 5:30 PM – 6:30 PM
- Marriott Marquis Washington, DC – Level 4, Independence Salon G

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APA2026

Saturday, August 8, 2026

Symposium: Paws for Service – Benefits & Challenges of Military Facility & Therapy Dogs

- 10:30 AM – 11:30 AM
- Walter E. Washington Convention Center – Level 2, Room 208

Featured Presentations:

- Title: Review of Impacts of Therapy Dogs on Military and Veterans
- Speaker: Dr. Amy M. Thrasher, PsyD (U.S. Army)
- Title: Development and Implementation of a Hospital Facility Dog Program in a Military Treatment Facility
- Speaker: Dr. Kathryn Egan, MD (Uniformed Services University)
- Title: Expeditionary Animal-Assisted Interventions in the Military
- Speaker: Dr. Todd French, DVM, MPH, DACVPM
- Title: Evaluation of Facility Dog Program Effects in High-Stress Environments
- Speaker: Lt. Col. Kristen Shear

Virtual Poster Session

- 10:00 PM – 11:00 PM
- Online

For additional details and updates, please refer to the APA Convention program.

Historian's Spotlight

Donald O. Hebb

by

Daniel Marston, PhD, ABPP

As Historian of the Society for Behavioral Neuroscience and Comparative Psychology (SBNCP), I am writing the second article in my series highlighting the individuals for whom SBNCP awards are named. This month's article focuses on Donald O. Hebb, for whom the SBNCP Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award is named.

Donald O. Hebb helped bridge psychology and neuroscience at a time when the two disciplines often operated largely independently from one another. Long before "cognitive neuroscience" became an established field, Hebb argued that behavior, learning, thought, and emotion could only be fully understood by examining how the brain organizes experience. His work helped move psychology away from simplistic stimulus-response explanations and toward a more biologically grounded understanding of learning and cognition. Even today, many of the core assumptions in neuroscience, artificial intelligence, and cognitive psychology reflect ideas that Hebb articulated decades earlier.

Throughout his career, Hebb held a number of important academic and research positions. He worked at Queen's University and at the Yerkes Primate Biology Laboratory, where his exposure to animal research further strengthened his comparative and biological approach to psychology. He eventually returned to McGill University, where he served as professor of psychology, chairman of the department, vice dean for biological sciences, and ultimately chancellor of the university. His professional reputation became international in scope. Hebb was elected a Fellow of both the Royal Society of Canada and the Royal Society of London. He also served as president of both the Canadian Psychological Association and the American Psychological Association, an unusual distinction that reflected the enormous respect he commanded across the discipline.

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Hebb's most famous contribution came through his landmark 1949 book, *The Organization of Behavior: A Neuropsychological Theory*. The book remains widely read and cited because it introduced a profoundly important idea: learning occurs through changes in the connections between neurons that repeatedly activate together. This concept eventually became popularly summarized as "neurons that fire together wire together." Although modern neuroscience has refined and expanded the theory considerably, Hebb's central insight became foundational for understanding neural plasticity, memory formation, and learning. His theories anticipated later discoveries regarding synaptic strengthening and continue to influence neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and even machine learning research. What made Hebb especially influential was not simply that he proposed a biological theory of learning, but that he attempted to explain complex psychological functioning through organized brain processes without reducing psychology to simple reflexes or instincts.

Hebb's work also helped establish him as one of the major figures in the development of neuropsychology. His interest in learning and memory centered on understanding how brain functioning related to the activities of the mind. He sought to understand how information is retained, organized, and transformed through experience. His work had wide-ranging implications for the study of learning, memory, intelligence, and brain functioning. However, his contributions were significant not only because of the theories he developed, but also because of the scientific attitude he modeled and taught to his students. Hebb emphasized that even a theory that ultimately proves incorrect still has scientific value if it is testable and capable of advancing understanding. In this way, Hebb viewed scientific progress as dependent on continual testing, revision, and openness to evidence. This had a very strong impact on how the scientific method has been viewed throughout the past century.

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The influence of Hebb's work has actually increased over recent decades. This reflects, in part, psychology's broader movement away from narrow stimulus-response models of learning toward more cognitively oriented approaches that Hebb anticipated many years earlier. His work pioneered efforts to explain how the brain and mind function together rather than treating them as entirely separate domains. In many ways, he helped establish the intellectual foundation for the modern integration of psychology, neuroscience, and cognitive science.



Donald O. Hebb delivering the Hughlings Jackson Lecture in 1958. Photo courtesy of Mary Ellen Hebb.

Reprinted from Brown, R., Milner, P. The legacy of Donald O. Hebb: more than the Hebb Synapse. Nat Rev Neurosci 4, 1013–1019 (2003).

<https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn1257>

Rethinking “work-life balance”

Mario Rodriguez Jr., Div. 6 Graduate Student Representative, proposes a new perspective on “work-life balance”.

“Are you ready to give your life up to the PhD? In research there is no such thing as “work-life balance”. These words shot through my computer screen during a virtual PhD admissions interview with Dr. B. (“B” for blunt), a professor I was interested in working with. To this day, I still cannot discern if they were trying to gauge my commitment to research or get me excited about the prospect of devoting my life to something wholeheartedly. In truth, I hope it was both.

While Dr. B.’s bluntness was unexpected, what is most shocking is that more people do not embrace the reality of life as a researcher. It seems that our whole lives we assume that a developed career goes hand-in-hand with a period of time where we pretend that we don’t have a job to do; namely, a vacation. I love vacations. However, I have grown up to believe that if you do not look forward to not working, then you’re not doing it right. Remember that time in your life when finding something interesting was enough to call it a day? No grant applications, no meetings, no emails, and certainly no meetings that could have been emails. It was during these curious days that we all began to lay the foundation that was going to put us in the position we are in today as trainees, early investigators, professors, and everything in between. As science faces competing forces, a call to action is pertinent especially among those transitioning into a career in research. In this article, I offer the opportunity to rethink the meaning of “work-life balance” and even the definition of the word “work” itself.

Curiosity

The term “curious” should not only bring images of youth and naivety. Curiosity is as serious to research as food on the table is to us and our loved ones. Unprecedented forces have destabilized the state of research, and the automatic response has been to adapt accordingly so that those driving science forward may sustain a living. Unfortunately, yet understandably, this means that authentic ideas driven by curiosity are put on standby until “things work themselves out”. Now, I do not think anyone expects that the government, for example, will

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provide accommodations for the unsatisfied passions that drive scientists to show up to work every day. However, this irony should not be an excuse to put authentic ideas on standby. It seems that the current state of research enables the concept of “work-life balance” to mean something akin to “misery”. Just in case things never work themselves out, it’s important to find ways to enjoy showing up every day. Adaptation during difficult times may include compliance but it does not call for the sacrifice of your scientific curiosity.

Acknowledging responsibility

While we are far from superheroes, it imperative to understand that “with great power comes great responsibility”. This may have been what Dr. B. was alluding to: “Are you prepared to accept the responsibility of becoming a researcher?” Simply put, a good researcher is responsible for the quality of the work they produce and thereby the accuracy of knowledge the world understands. To some, this undertaking is beyond their interest and to others it is exactly up their alley. A researcher that belongs to the former category is likely to interpret a lack of work-life balance in research as dreadful, and one belonging to the latter category may be unable to make sense of the concept. Indeed, if the words “work” and “life” are synonymous, then balance naturally follows. This stands true alongside the reality that overworking is toxic, under one condition: our work has to be meaningful to us. Without meaning, what could be enjoyable, consistent effort despite unrelenting obstacles becomes what feels like an eternal chore of pushing a boulder up a mountain with no summit. To those beginning their transition into a career in research, it is necessary to consider the terms and conditions sooner than later. Once immersed in a laboratory conducting rigorous science, you will quickly find that all threads connecting to your daily tasks (big and small) will be based on integrity, detail, and consistency. Accordingly, you will become reliable, detail-oriented, and perseverant. Whether

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you consider this a burden or a blessing may be the biggest indicator of your alignment with a career in research.

Putting it together

When I asked bank tellers, cashiers, and friends how they defined the word “work”, none of their responses included anything about their occupation. Some provided a deep response about the exchange of time and energy for a good, while others described it as simply working toward something. One could argue that these responses are equal descriptions of the word “life”. This thought experiment underscores the idea that work and play overlap in their roles in our lives. If you’ve ever felt like things were going well, or expressing gratitude was becoming automatic, it’s possible that work was blending in with play and vice versa. For example, some may find the act of running after a long day’s work helpful for a variety of reasons. For some, it may serve as a mental break from a wildly stimulating laboratory and for others, it may be a space to enjoy uninterrupted bouts of productive yet rejuvenating brainstorming. In either case, running can provide mental recovery and also serve the following day’s work with a fresh mind and/or new ideas. So, is running play or work? While idealistic thinking can be criticized as being overly optimistic, it’s exciting to imagine a career in which research projects and hobbies are based on the same commitment to upholding meaning – whatever that looks like to you. Viewed with this lens, emerging here is a major opportunity to shift the public’s perception from the stereotypical workaholic “mad scientist” to a person who takes science personally and reflects that in their daily life.

Conclusion

I hope that by the end of this article, you consider how these ideas fit into your life as someone interested in research, medicine, industry, or any other workspace. I write from the perspective of a researcher because I’m a PhD student (Dr. B. would be proud), but I believe this take on

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“work-life balance” can be applied to all occupations. Frankly, there is no reason work should not be taken personally in any setting. To medical students, research trainees, and professors, there is nothing more personal than following the childhood dream to serve others, seek new knowledge, or both. While a turn of events can leave us frustrated and discouraged, remember that balance is imbedded in acceptance and commitment to a life at work.

A note to mentors:

The role of mentor includes a commitment separate to making your work-life relationship personal: mentorship. This means that the future of science depends on your ability to lead by example as much as it does on the competence of emerging investigators. The sentiment shared in this article is directed toward early researchers like me, but it does not escape any of us that we cannot succeed without the support of our mentors. For that reason, consider the way your approach to science is reflected in your research practices – from small habits to general philosophies, students notice and emulate these behaviors. Earlier it was mentioned that a perfect balance between life and work may be considered too optimistic. A contribution to this fallacy exists in the limits set by laboratory culture on a rightfully wide-eyed student looking to make a difference. As I strive toward a position in academia, I hope to witness an increase in emphasis on curiosity and making research personal.



A Message from our President

Dear Colleagues,

I appreciate the opportunity to serve Division 6 and would like to express my gratitude for being chosen to serve President in 2026. I am going to share some thoughts about service to professional organizations, specifically the place of SBNCP/Division 6 in APA, and participation in the Division 6 meeting and program. My view is optimistic toward the benefits of participation and I'll highlight the program constructed by our wonderful Program Chairs for this year's meeting in August.

Annual meetings of professional organizations create places to connect with others in the field. For students, this can be meeting peers in poster sessions and forming friendships. Meetings serve to provide participants with feedback on ideas and opportunities to receive support and advice. As careers develop, service to professional organizations creates opportunities to connect with the field. Attendance at and service to professional organizations takes effort. But in return, the benefits include a great program of activities such as the Division 6 program at the APA convention, a social media where members can share and discuss ideas, and opportunities to contribute to the field and members' scholarly work.

Division 6 has been active in all these areas. Nonetheless, this year there was a big drop in membership, participation in the program is low, and few plan to attend the APA meeting to participate in Division 6.

What do we get out of attending APA? American Psychological Association is a big organization and behavioral neuroscience and comparative psychology is not the main attraction, or are the Divisions adjacent to ours (e.g., Divisions 3, 25, 28). APA functions to support practice and provide accreditation to the academic programs training clinical psychologists.

This may not be news to readers over the age of 40, but the role of experimental and comparative psychology was debated in the organization in the 1980s and there was even a splinter group that is now known as the Association for Psychological Science. Google AI gives

A Message from our President

a nice summary of the whole saga. Aside from rehashing historical details, I want to raise the issue of why one would attend APA when the umbrella organization appears to not be committed to scientific psychology and even considers proposals to endorse non-scientific ideas. APA is a political organization, and this should not be surprising as an entity that represents psychology which is a broad and sometimes poorly defined discipline.

First, I will note another piece of history. APA has been a strong ally to animal research and research involving nonhuman animals including primates, birds, dogs, cats, horses, fish, marine mammals, and so on. See recent examples here:

<https://www.apaservices.org/advocacy/news/congress-animal-research-models>

<https://www.apa.org/about/policy/use-animals>

For more information of research advocacy more broadly in APA:

<https://www.apaservices.org/advocacy/issues/promoting-defending-research>

<https://www.apaservices.org/advocacy/news/psychology-priorities-labor-hhs-education-bill>

There are also examples from APS that are worth sharing here:

<https://www.psychologicalscience.org/act-now>

Second, and meant to be less dramatic, I have enjoyed attending the conventions. Our Division 6 group is full of kind, energetic, and committed people, they are fun to be around. APA has a lot going on. Most attendees are members of several divisions and attend sessions organized across different topics. This makes for the opportunity to explore areas that are not typically available at a single-track conference and find overlapping areas of interest. For example, I attended talks by John Wixted on memory and by Ellen O'Donoghue on category learning in pigeons at the Seattle 2024 meeting. Each talk relevant to Division 6 but organized as part of other programs (Divisions 3 and 25, respectively).

A Message from our President

Third, I have made unique connections as a member and participant in Division 6. I was a student member of Division 6 and had joined for the listserv which was active with announcements, opportunities, and discussions before these were pulled on to social media. Those days are gone and it gets more and more difficult to connect as time and money become scarce. The opportunity to get involved came as a surprise and I went for it with good intentions but little effort to spare. I found it fulfilling and recommend it. These organizations depend on the abilities and interest of the membership and committees, which wax and wane, but I feel like Division 6 is heading in the right direction.

I would like to reiterate my appreciation for the support of current- and past- SBNCP Presidents and Executive Committee members. Specifically, Amanda Dettmer, Jeremy Bailoo, Lauren Highfill, Lauren Robinson, Heather Hill, and Deidre Yeater. I'll add current president-elect/incoming president Olga Lipatova, our Secretary Will Whitham, and the excellent team of program chairs Elizabeth West Niedringhaus and Jessica Stagner Bodily, Treasurer Mayte Martinez Navarrete, and Awards Chair Kendal Smith have done amazing work to keep the ship going into the 2026 convention and beyond. My sincere appreciation also goes to our Historian, Dr. Daniel Marston, and our Student Representative, Mario Rodriguez, who made excellent contributions to this newsletter.

We are still seeking a Newsletter Editor. I did this one myself and it probably shows. Please consider nominating yourself or an interested colleague for this and other open positions in Division 6. The Newsletter is an important tool for disseminating the activities of our membership.

Finally, I want to highlight the Executive Committee who already support the Division and already do what I am talking about. This must have been a boring read for them, but I am not sure it gets across that APA is worth attending and an opportunity to experience high impact science and connections, as well as to advocate for what our division represents. Check it out!

Best regards,
Eric A. Thrailkill