|  |
| --- |
| **From the Newsletter of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies MAPS - Volume 7 Number 4 Autumn 1997 - pp. 21-26** |
| **MAPS READERS FORUM AUTUMN 1997**  **Psychedelic Threads: MAPS-Forum Online**  The MAPS online mailing list, MAPS-forum, has over 230 subscribers. Recent topics of discussion have included current news, book reviews, factual questions about psychedelics or marijuana, psychedelics and marijuana in the media, ideas for research and fundraising, anthropologists as researchers of psychedelic subcultures, the importance of the amateur scientist in psychedelic research, and articles from the MAPS Bulletin. Students who have written class papers on psychedelic topics are encouraged to share their work. Questions about anything MAPS is doing, or suggestions for anything MAPS should be doing, are encouraged. General drug policy discussions (prohibition vs. legalization) are not encouraged unless they specifically relate to research. Examples of acceptable drug policy topics include: the influence of drug policy on research, or the policy implications of research. Questions are welcome at all levels of interest but posted comments should be presented at a level appropriate for a classroom or a professional meeting. Primarily, this means to assume a skeptical audience. The online forum seems like it will enrich this section of the MAPS Bulletin, the Readers Forum.  **Psychedelics 101: What the field of psychedelic research holds for you**  MAPS regularly gets inquiries from undergraduates and graduate students who are interested in entering the field of "psychedelic studies" and request a list of programs and resources to help them in their quest for an appropriate school or department. There is currently no master list of such programs and no systematic source of information.  Generally, finding a mentor or ally in one's department is an essential step. An entering student should not assume that he or she will be able to convince faculty to support a psychedelic drug research project unless their faculty profile or previous publications explicitly mention such an interest. There are, however, a number of ways of finding faculty with the right interests. The best way is to use Medline, and to search for people who have published psychological or behavioral articles on keywords such as "psychedelic, hallucinogen, LSD, psilocybin, psilocin, DMT, mescaline, or MDMA" in the past five years.  To psychology students who contact us, we generally recommend that they familiarize themselves with the field of Transpersonal Psychology, as psychedelic therapy is often explained under this paradigm. The Common Boundary Graduate Education Guide: Holistic Programs and Resources Intergrating Spirituality and Psychology is an excellent list of alternative programs which includes over 1,200 well-indexed resources. You can order it from Common Boundary at (301) 652-9495, or check on their website [www.commonboundary.org](http://www.commonboundary.org).  To respond to students of chemistry, biology and other "hard sciences," we asked Dr. David Nichols for insight. His response appears below, followed by a question that was e-mailed to MAPS, along with Rick Doblin's reply.  We will continue to try and respond to the needs of students interested in "psychedelic studies."  Sylvia Thyssen MAPS Networks Coordinator sylvia@maps.org  **Dr. Nichols comments: How does one go about performing research with psychedelics?**  Stated succinctly, you have two broad options: Medicine and Science. Under Medicine, I continue to believe that physicians with a psychiatry residency and research experience will make the greatest contributions to the field of psychedelics. This is a long and difficult row to hoe, however, and few choose it. But this option allows you ultimately to work with humans, where the results are most dramatic and have the greatest impact. Rats cannot tell you if they see the white light!  Under Science, you again have two broad options: Pharmacology and Chemistry (loosely defined). In pharmacology, one might study the behavioral effects (usually in rats) or the neurochemical effects of substances. You could choose a whole animal behavioral approach (e.g. in Dr. Mark Geyer's lab at UC-San Diego), a systems/neuronal approach (Dr. George Aghajanian at Yale who does unit cell recording... tedious but interesting), or a more molecular approach (e.g. Dr. Elaine Sanders-Bush at Vanderbilt or Dr. Bryan Roth at Case- Western Reserve) that would involve the expression of receptors, structure of receptors, etc. I do some behavioral work at Purdue, but we use behavior more as a screen to guide our chemistry.  In chemistry, my lab at Purdue is, I would argue, the major place (but perhaps I have a bias!). Dr. Richard Glennon at Virginia Commonwealth has done a lot of chemistry of psychedelics but more recently has focused on some other areas. Despite the romance and popularity that attend to natural drugs and herbal remedies, there is no academic department I know of that focuses on the ethno- pharmacology of psychoactive drugs or psychedelics. There is a big natural products group at the University of Illinois at Chicago, but they are mostly working on anticancer drugs (as, in fact, are most natural products groups these days).  Getting into this field is extremely difficult and requires a lot of patience. You are swimming upstream because there is no recognized value to these substances at government funding agencies except as drugs of abuse. You have to find some niche to get funded. It is very hard, even for one with a respectable and already-established track record.  You can, however, enter this research with a Ph.D. that has nothing to do with psychedelics at all. My own son just completed a Ph.D. in drosophila genetics. He is now going to do a postdoctoral fellowship in a laboratory studying the molecular regulation of the 5-HT2A receptor, the site with which psychedelics seem to interact. This will take another two to three years. Although I have no idea what he will do after that, he would have the training to enter an academic path and then to study the molecular biology of any brain receptors he chose, including perhaps continuing work on the 5-HT2A receptor. Thus, he could end up doing research on psychedelics, even though he started out with fruit fly genetics.  I think one must have dedication, and motivation must be very strong to begin study for an advanced degree with the ultimate objective of doing psychedelic research. I have had three students who came here with the idea they would work in this area, and none of them have. One is now doing DNA sequencing work, another is a computational chemist, and the third became disillusioned with academic life at a small private college and went into professional pharmacy. Some begin with curiosity as a result of personal experience, but quickly lose interest, get married, have families and revert to more "normal" pur-suits once the luster wears off.  You will also find you have no real colleagues. If you were in cancer or HIV research, or were working on the human genome project, for example, you would be part of a large science community, with many colleagues of similar interest. If you do psychedelic research, and that is all you do (I have some other more mainstream research in addition to the psychedelic work), you have perhaps half a dozen people world-wide who share your research interests. Perhaps not surprisingly, you may develop a sort of cult following, but that kind of adoration is not particularly fulfilling. People occasionally tell me that my name is known all over the world in the "psychedelic community." While that may be true, it doesn't get recognition within the scientific community, which is my workplace, comprised of my peers. What you want is recognition from them that you are doing good work. You are unlikely to get it, so your rewards must come from within yourself, and you must believe that someday the value of your work will become clear to other people, because that is unlikely to occur in your own lifetime. It will help if you are the sort of person who can deal easily with delayed gratification.  I know I have painted a fairly unglamorous picture. I have done that because those who begin graduate school with the idea that psychedelic research will be glamorous and fun burn out quickly. You're simply not going to get the strokes you'd get if you did more mainstream work. If you have long term vision and believe in what you are doing, it has its rewards. I love my work. My graduate students and I have a lot of fun together. But sometimes it is lonely. I hope that someday things will turn around and someone will be grateful that I did what I did. But I think it takes a particular kind of stoic personality to survive much adversity on the strength of that kind of belief!  If you choose that path, then you are fully informed and you will not be disappointed later when you start encountering the expected obstacles.  David E. Nichols, Ph.D. President, Heffter Research Institute drdave@pharmacy.purdue.edu  Dear MAPS,  I am trying to get a handle on the big picture of how one goes about performing research with psychedelics. I have numerous lines of research that I want to pursue, beginning with some very basic research to examine baseline shifts in performance on perceptual/attentional/cognitive tasks, on up to standard experimental paradigms with the ultimate goal to implement these with MRI further down the road.  At the moment, however, I do not know how to begin step one since the certainty of my geographical location expires in two months. I assume that we would want research done in a university lab somewhere, rather than a closet-turned-lab in my own home? This relates to the issue of professional versus amateur. Certainly I can take all of the programs running on a computer here in the lab and they will run just as well on a computer in my home - there is no difference, but if that would not be considered acceptable, then I need to focus my energy towards finding a lab that will go for this.  So, my questions are: what kind of research (professional versus amateur) is MAPS interested in funding? What labs in Europe and the United States should I contact about research ideas? And what is the procedure for applying for MAPS funding for research? As much as I'd love to spend the rest of my life on a beach on a tropical island, I feel I know too much to not use what I know to further this cause.  Mark Olson Neuroscience Program University of Illinois <http://www.students.uiuc.edu/~m-olson/>  Dear Mark,  Great questions. What kind of research (professional versus amateur) is MAPS interested in funding?  We don't really make a distinction between professional v. amateur but instead focus on rigorous v. lax. MAPS' priorities are:   1. Research that focuses on a therapeutic use of a psychedelic or marijuana, because this is the most accepted and quickest route, in my opinion, to some limited form of legal access to these drugs. For example, Dr. Charles Grob's proposed study on the use of MDMA in the treatment of pain and distress in cancer patients: MAPS has obtained a grant of $58,000 for this study from a family foundation. Also, the research of Evgeny Krupitsky, Ph.D. into the use of ketamine in the treatment of heroin addiction: MAPS budgeted $24,000 for this study and Heffter budgeted $15,000. Also, Dr. Donald Abrams' study of the use of smoked marijuana in HIV patients, which just received a NIDA grant in the amount of $978,000 after MAPS donated $10,000 to Dr. Abrams for his team's expenses in preparing two NIH grant applications. 2. Research that asks interesting scientific questions about the psychological, cognitive, non-physiological aspects of psychedelics or marijuana, because this helps to legitimize the study of the interaction between these drugs and consciousness. For example, the study by Benny Shanon, Ph.D. into the impact of ayahuasca on cognitive processing, for which MAPS budgeted $5,000. 3. Research into the physiological consequences of these drugs, since this helps open the door to more involvement with these drugs from the scientific community. For example, ayahuasca pharmacokinetics, conducted by J.C. Callaway, Ph.D. in Dr. Deborah Mash's lab (University of Miami) to which MAPS donated $5,000. MAPS also donated $35,000 for research into MDMA neurotoxicity in rats. However, when this research is completed, MAPS hopes that no additional animal studies will be necessary. 4. Research into the risks and benefits of the non-medical use of these drugs. For example, the follow-up study to Dr. Oscar Janiger's LSD research from 1954-1962, which was a naturalistic study. MAPS has already donated about $15,000 to this study, with about $10,000 or so to go. 5. Research into the use of psychedelics in other cultures. For example, studies with ayahuasca to which MAPS will soon donate $2,000, and studies of the use of Peyote (see pages 3-5). 6. Educational efforts. For example, the Sandoz bibliography project which is in the process of classifying and putting abstracts online for all published papers about LSD and psilocybin. MAPS is budgeting about $5,000 for this project. 7. Other interesting projects.   The key here is that MAPS has limited resources and so focuses primarily on funding pilot studies that can be used as part of larger grant applications to more traditional sources of funding. Since traditional sources of funding are reluctant to get involved, MAPS will fund larger studies as well, if resources allow. What labs in Europe and the United States should I contact about research ideas?  In Europe, the main lab doing research with psychedelics is directed by Dr. Franz Vollenweider, [vollen@bli.unizh.ch](mailto:vollen@bli.unizh.ch) (or contact Alex Gamma, [gamma@blisun1.unizh.ch](mailto:gamma@blisun1.unizh.ch)). In the United States, you can try Dr. Charles Grob, [GROB@afp76.humc.edu](mailto:GROB@afp76.humc.edu), and Dr. Reese Jones, [reese@itsa.ucsf.edu](mailto:reese@itsa.ucsf.edu).  In Israel, for cognitive psychology, try Benny Shanon at [msshanon@pluto.mscc.huji.ac.il](mailto:msshanon@pluto.mscc.huji.ac.il). Dr. Shanon conducts all his ayahuasca research in Brazil but would be a helpful consultant.  *What is the procedure for applying for MAPS funding for research?*  We pride ourselves on having the fastest, easiest grant review process. Just let me know your idea via a few paragraphs on e-mail, then we talk it over on the phone and I tell you right then or within a few days if MAPS is interested in exploring the matter further. Then we work on a protocol and a budget, perhaps getting it reviewed by some other experts. Then we make a committment pending approval, perhaps giving a small grant for trying to get approval.  Then the approval process begins. You need to get FDA approval to administer any Schedule 1 drug, and approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) either affiliated with a hospital or university, or independent.  Basically, MAPS would be interested in supporting some sort of study that you would be interested in conducting involving baseline shifts in performance on perceptual/attentional/cognitive tasks, or MRI studies (though cost starts to become a factor here). I can suggest that you contact Jon Frederick, smiile@utkux.utcc.utk.edu, the administrator of MAPS-forum, who is also interested in such a studies. It will not be easy to get permission for it, but MAPS would definitely like to help open up this field of inquiry. More specifically, MAPS can relatively easily allocate a grant of $5,000 for a specific project. A grant of $10,000 would take a bit more thought, and would need to be clearly linked to how the research would develop, and to plans to submit the data to other funders for continuation of this line of research. Grants in excess of $10,000 are possible but I would probably want to shop the protocol around to potential funders so as to try to bring in contributions specifically for the project.  That's about enough for now. If you have any other questions, just ask. MAPS would like to help you get started on some research project. MAPS is also planning to include a new section on its web page that will list projects related to psychedelic research that are in need of funding.  Rick Doblin MAPS President [rick@maps.org](mailto:rick@maps.org)  **From Sweden**  I wanted to do something about psychedelic drugs and their effects, but without breaking the law. As I couldn't find any study in Swedish about what kinds of experiences people have had, in Spring 1997 I decided to do one. All I could find in Swedish was about "crisis," "psychosis" and harmful effects. My original paper in Swedish is 50 pages. Here is a short summary in English.  **Summary**  *Psychedelic Drugs - A study of drug-induced experiences related to Stanislav Grof's model of the human unconscious*  Psychedelic drugs provide a lot of puzzling experiences. LSD-assisted psychotherapy has been evaluated by Stanislav Grof and he also proposes a new expanded model of the human unconscious. The purpose of this study was to provide information about experiences obtained by illegal drug users and evaluate if these are consistent with Grof's descriptions. Fifteen anonymous drug users answered a questionnaire about use, experiences, circumstances and influences of their life. It included detailed questions about out-of-body experiences, telepathy, identification with other people or animals, seeing unknown buildings and landscapes, contact with "extra terrestrial creatures," bliss, fear, ego-loss and so on. I also had question about if they believed in "some kind of God" and "some kind of life after death" and if these beliefs had changed after they used psychedelics.  All of them had some experiences similar to Grof's descriptions. Transpersonal experiences were reported more often by the "heavy" users. Such experiences were also more likely to be reported by those who have practiced some other conciousness-expanding technique (like meditation), by those who described themselves as spiritual seekers and by those who make some form of ritual or mental preparation part of their experience. More users reported positive than negative effects regarding social relations with their families and general quality of life and also about their attitudes towards death. This study could be a basis for an expanded study, which could serve as a starting point for a discussion about therapeutic potentials of these substances.  This study also provides general information about Grof's model, the history of LSD and also some about psychedelic research worldwide.  Many people at my university have found my study and the results interesting. None had ever heard that psychedelics have therapeutic potential. Now I'm trying to get ideas for a new study for next year, probably something with floating-tanks. I would appreciate all kinds of ideas and suggestions for this, and also for contact with others with serious interest in related research. Not many people here are interested in such questions, so I really appreciate MAPS.  Anette Kjellgren  **The MAPS Bulletin in prison**  People who receive MAPS in prison are occasionally denied access to the Bulletin, or to enclosures that are perceived by prison officials as promoting drug use. The following is excerpted from a letter about such a situation:  I wrote you back in January or February to tell you that the prison officials had confiscated a MAPS publication. I told you that I was filing an Administrative Remedy to appeal that decision and I sent you a copy.  Well, the Warden denied my Administrative Remedy saying the publication was a threat to security and that it promoted drug use. So I sent another Administrative Remedy to the regional administrator in Atlanta. After several weeks of delay, they gave the publication to me (it was the Summer 1996 issue) and asked if I would withdraw my appeal. Since I got what I had wanted, I went ahead and withdrew the appeal. I'm told that this is the first time someone won on this issue (at FCI Jesup) in seven years.  I'm not sure that you care, but since I said that I would keep you updated, I wanted to make sure I did. Enclosed are the most pertinent papers from the process. I really enjoy your publications and I appreciate the work you do.  Mark Small 41690-004 IBL FCI Yazoo City P.O. Box 5000 Yazoo City, MS 39194-5000  **National Institutes of Health Research on Ecstasy**  Interested in participating in research? Researchers at the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions and the National Institutes of Health are collaborating to investigate the long-term effects of (+-) 3,4 Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA, "Ecstasy") on brain serotonin neurons.  Participants will stay in a clinical research facility for five days and four nights and receive a volunteer fee of $500.00 (or one hundred dollars per test day). Johns Hopkins University arranges and pays for travel. Meals are provided. No MDMA is actually given during the course of testing.  MDMA has been shown to produce long-lasting damage to serotonin cells in rats and monkeys. We hope to learn whether the use of this drug produces similar damage in humans, and if so, whether there are behavioral consequences. Serotonin is involved in the regulation of many behaviors including mood, hunger, pain perception, sleep, and cognition.  Over the course of the 5-day study, subjects will participate in a variety of psychological and biological tests that evaluate serotonin functioning.  In order to be eligible for this research project, volunteers must be between 18-65 years of age and agree not to take illicit drugs for a period of three weeks prior to the first day of the study. Please note that we will conduct blood and urine tests.  If you are currently using Esctasy or have used it in the past, we would be interested in hearing from you.  For more information, please contact:  Victoria Ellison the National Institutes of Health [victoriae@sparky.nimh.nih.gov](mailto:victoriae@sparky.nimh.nih.gov) 301-550-2588  or  Kelly Lowe Johns Hopkins University [klowe@welchlink.welch.jhu.edu](mailto:klowe@welchlink.welch.jhu.edu) 410-550-2596  The URL for this research is:  [www.welch.jhu.edu/~klowe](http://www.welch.jhu.edu/~klowe)  **Hats off to the list administrator**  I would like to take this opportunity to express my pleasure in the range, diversity, and content of the MAPS-forum. Nowhere on the Internet have I found the depth of discussion which has been presented here on a topic of such pressing national interest. Special regards to Jon Frederick for undertaking the task of forum moderator. Most graduate students would not have either the maturity or the time to do the quality job which he has done. Well done, hats off.  Received via e-mail  **The importance of amateur research**  I am not a scientist. However, we were all raised and educated in a culture that values "Science" as the primary tool of our age. But Science is just that - a tool. Keep in mind the saying, "When the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a lot like a nail."  Science is based on the ability to quantify. Human behavior is notably difficult to quantify because of the vast number of variables that must be accounted for. We are not objects, but a complex symbiosis of interactive "systems." And taking a cue from Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, the method used (to study a particular phenomena) directly determines not only the type of result, but affects the subject as well. When the reason we are investigating these substances is to get a better picture of how the brain works, (that's quantifiable...) then scientific inquiry is the best tool we have for the job. But... Perhaps not all inquiry into entheogens is meant to be "scientific" inquiry. I would propose and suggest perhaps, "poetic" inquiry, "mystical" inquiry, "noetic" or "gnostic" inquiry could also provide us with some valuable results. Much of the "amateur" research that is being carried on falls into these categories.  Hofmann and Shulgin (both scientists) have proposed that the reintroduction of entheogens into the stream of human activity at this point in history may be some sort of "response message" or antidote to our dangerous infatuation with some of the "fruits" of science. The purpose of this message may well be to alert us to become more aware of those areas that cannot be defined and quantified by science.  I would like to know what those "researchers" who use the poetic, mystical or gnostic approach to entheogens have "learned." This may provide us with useful information. Reading (or listening to) the personal accounts of many explorers one so often encounters the phrase "I learned a lot," or, "It taught me so much," that it has become a psychedelic clichŽ. I would like to know, what is it you learned? What was that "so much" you were "taught?" How has that affected your life and your day-to-day? Can it be distilled into twenty (or 100) words and can you share it with the rest of us?  Knowing that "n" milligrams of substance "x" will precipitate response "y" in the brain certainly has its value. But, what else? How did you acquire this new knowledge you refer to? What was the method of transmission? Did you hear disembodied voices? Who or what is it that speaks to you? What is the content of the message? Are there common themes in the experiences of numerous reporters? What are those themes? Are those themes affected by cultural background or are they "universal?"  One last thought about amateurs: Consider the role of the "outlaw" (or "amateur researcher") in the history of humanity. Since the first arboreal primate descended to the ground ("looks like some good fruit laying down there...") while his family called from the limbs above, "get back up here, the lions will eat you," every significant step on our long road from those trees has been made by an "outlaw" or "amateur researcher" (and miscellaneous other misfits) who defied conventional wisdom, challenged the dominant paradigm and made each important incremental step that is part of what we have come to call "progress." Looking back through history at that first "amateur researcher" who climbed down from the tree, aren't we all his/her children? Thanks for your indulgence.  Onward... Mark Plummer Received via e-mail |