

USU Psychology Professor Amy Odum Receives Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Psychological Association

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Dr. Amy Odum, lifetime achievement award recipient from the American Psychological Association

Amy Odum, a professor of Psychology in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at Utah State University, has been selected as the 2024 recipient of a lifetime achievement award by the American Psychological Association (APA) in Division 25: Behavior Analysis for her pioneering work in delay discounting and resistance to change.

Gregory Madden, professor and program chair of behavior analysis in the Department of Psychology at USU, commended Odum for her remarkable achievement. "Amy and I have known each other for decades and we've collaborated on research for nearly as long," he said. "She is very deserving of this award and her colleagues in the Department of Psychology are proud of her accomplishment."

Odum began her research in delay discounting almost 25 years ago during a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Vermont's Human Behavioral Pharmacology Laboratory. "My mentor there was doing some of the earliest human work in delay discounting," she said. "We published a paper in 1999, with Gregory Madden as a co-author, that is now considered one of the foundational papers in this area." To date, the paper has been cited 1,770 times in published scientific articles.

"Delay discounting is the way in which rewards or events that are going to happen to us are far off so they become less valuable and, therefore, less able to motivate our behavior," explains Odum.

She believes the research has implications that can range from parenting to drug addiction therapies to quitting smoking. "Delay discounting really underlies everything when it comes to behavior and motivation. If we measure a student's delay discounting, we can predict their grades in college. The steeper they discount future rewards, the lower their GPA." She adds, "Some of my colleagues are working with preschool children in schools to help them improve their delayed decision making so they can choose what's better for them in the long run, because that's ideal."

Odum acknowledges the many people who have impacted her work over the years and sees her colleagues' influence as a major factor to her success. "I've had so many great collaborators over the years. They're the ones who really made this possible and helped shape my development and my thinking."

Conversely, her colleagues recognize the impact Odum has had on them. Madden says, "I've always found that Amy brings novel ideas to the table, and this drives the innovation of her work. Amy's current work is equally innovative. I always learn something new when I read her papers."

"Dr. Odum is an exceptional Department of Psychology faculty member known for her groundbreaking research in basic behavioral phenomena," says Scott Bates, professor and head of the Department of Psychology at USU. "She is passionate about understanding response persistence, sensitivity to delayed outcomes, and memory. She is committed to educating and engaging her students as collaborators in her laboratory. Dr. Odum is deeply deserving of this prestigious national award from the American Psychological Association."

Her colleagues have also influenced her scope of research. "I've had the opportunity to work with really

amazing graduate students who physically conduct a lot of the research,” says Odum. “I’ve always been inspired by my students’ interests, and I think that’s why, across my career, you can see different lines of thought and different topics. There are all sort of different takes on these core areas of research. I think what helps to keep my research vital and novel is that my students have a really big role in what we do.”



Dr. Odum with students from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Universidad de Guadalajara

The APA’s capstone award recognizes career accomplishments, of which Odum, in a field of historically very few women, has had many. “One of the things I’ve done that compares to this level of honor was to edit *The Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior*. The journal has been published since 1958, with no women serving as editor. I was the first woman to ever edit it.” Odum served as editor from 2015-2019. Similarly, since 2021, Odum has served as president of the Society for the Experimental Analysis of Behavior, a position few women before her have held.

When considering the award itself, Odum describes herself as a pioneer. “I never imagined when I started out that I would be a pioneer or that I would be leading the way for other women. I’m really aware that there are a lot of women who have been passed over. That’s part of the reason I take so much inspiration from the younger women and men who are coming along who treat people with equity and inclusion. This generation is the one taking the steps to recognize excellence in everyone and to support people at all phases of their career so we have more women getting to this level. That’s one thing that’s been really satisfying for me.”

In recent years, Odum has also begun to serve children and families who arrive in the U.S. as refugees by volunteering with Athletics United in Logan. She sees the opportunity to serve in the tutoring arm of Athletics United as a culmination of all her education and experiences. “It’s

taken me a long time to figure out how I want to contribute, and I feel like this is the way I can most powerfully give back to my community,” says Odum. “I’m trying to open doors for people and support them in their goals and values in the way that they want me to. I get more out of it than I give, for sure, by beginning to understand their lived perspectives and seeing how those enrich my life.”

In August 2024, the American Psychological Association will formally recognize Odum for her lifetime achievement award at its annual convention in Seattle.