

Princeton University
Honors Faculty Members Receiving
Emeritus Status



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The biographical sketches were written by
colleagues in the departments of those honored.

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Sam Glucksberg



Sam Glucksberg is retiring this year after 44 years on the faculty of the psychology department. A pioneer in the field of experimental psycholinguistics, Sam has been a lively source of wit and wisdom for generations of Princeton students and colleagues.

Sam was born on the 6th of February in 1933 in Montreal, Canada, and emigrated to New York in 1945. He received his B.S. degree from the City College of New York in 1956, and his Ph.D. from New York University in 1960. After a brief stint on active military duty at the U.S. Army Human Engineering Laboratories, he joined the faculty at Princeton in 1963 and rose through the ranks, becoming a full professor in 1970 and serving as department chair from 1974 to 1980.

Sam trained as an experimental psychologist in the days before psychology was divided into subfields and areas of specialization. What we now call cognitive psychologists, social psychologists, developmental psychologists, and behavioral neuroscientists were all just experimental psychologists interested in different research questions. Sam has always seen the field of psychology as a unified whole, and the Department of Psychology as a seamless collection of colleagues who share a set of core values and assumptions. As one of the field's true generalists, he has made important contributions to many different research areas, including problem solving, thinking, categorization, and the psychology of language and communication in children and adults. His research is characterized by an uncompromising skepticism, a commitment to methodological rigor, and an ability to make connections across conventional research boundaries.

Over the past 20 years, Sam has pioneered the experimental

study of figurative language, focusing on metaphors, idioms, sarcasm, and irony. This research has probed how ordinary people use and understand figurative language in their everyday lives; it has also given Sam an endless store of novel utterances with which to amuse his friends and colleagues. Consider, for example, the sentence *cigarettes are time bombs*. Most people understand that sentence's intended meaning immediately, even though they have never heard the sentence before and even though the sentence, taken literally, is false. How do they do this? Sam rejects the claim, made by previous models of metaphor comprehension, that people first generate the literal meaning of the sentence and, only when that meaning fails, generate a metaphorical meaning. Instead, he argues that they automatically and effortlessly generate both the literal and metaphorical meanings in parallel. Likewise, he rejects the claim that metaphor comprehension involves a search for similarities between the topic (*cigarettes*) and the vehicle (*time bombs*). Instead, he argues that a simple categorization process is at work: Confronted with the sentence *cigarettes are time bombs*, people understand *time bombs* to name a category of things that cause damage at some unpredictable future time, and *cigarettes* to be a member of that category. This simple, elegant model can account for the wide range of data on metaphor comprehension.

Sam's contributions to the field of psychology have extended well beyond his research. Notably, he served as editor of two of the field's most prominent journals: *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General and Psychological Science*. As an editor, Sam was known for his fair and efficient decision making and his clear and incisive feedback to authors. He also participated in many professional societies, including the Society of Experimental Psychologists, and on numerous grant panels and editorial boards.

At Princeton, Sam has been an extremely successful undergraduate teacher and graduate mentor. With his impressive command of the whole of psychology and his engaging lecture

style, he has been a popular teacher of “Introduction to Psychology” and “General Psychology.” He has also drawn many students into the study of psycholinguistics with his advanced course, “Psychology of Language.” At the graduate level, he has had many students go on to successful careers in academia, and has taken great pride in their accomplishments. The “Glucksberg dinner” at the annual meeting of the Psychonomic Society has been a longstanding tradition that will certainly continue after Sam’s retirement.

In addition to all he has done for science and education, Sam has used his expertise in language and communication for the betterment of society. In recent years, he has done a fair amount of legal consulting, typically on issues that involve the adequacy and informativeness of product labels that pertain to consumer safety. He has consulted on cases involving asbestos in walls, diving boards on above-ground swimming pools, and potentially dangerous industrial equipment. This work is applied psycholinguistics of a very helpful sort, and Sam has been influential in improving the quality of product descriptions in some of these cases.

Even though Sam will officially retire, he plans to continue his active collaborations with colleagues in Italy, France, England, and Israel, collaborations that include work with linguists and philosophers, as well as psychologists. We look forward to Sam’s continuing presence in the psychology department in the years to come.