



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

A MESSAGE FROM THE ACADEMIC DIRECTOR



Maurice Schweitzer

Cecilia Yen Koo Professor

Professor of Operations, Information and Decisions

Professor of Management

The Wharton Behavioral Lab supports behavioral research at the Wharton School. We have an extraordinary team of dedicated staff, a state-of-the art facility, and cutting-edge tools (such as eye-tracking) to support faculty research.

By the numbers: In 2024, we supported research led by 54 faculty across five Wharton departments. This past year, we supported data collection in 34 published articles and 90 working papers.

The mechanics of what we do: We continue to support both in-person and online studies. Our in-person studies are conducted on campus, and these typically involve high-touch experiences, such as eye-tracking, physio measures, face-to-face conversations, and taste tests. Our online studies typically involve lower-touch experiences, but reach large numbers of participants across the globe.

Workshops: Building on our success last year, we continued our partnership with Wharton Research Computing to host research Workshops. These workshops create a space for current and interested scholars to learn about new methods and technologies. In addition, we have continued to engage with members of the Internal Review Board to help new faculty and PhD students gain familiarity with the nuts and bolts of launching behavioral studies.

There has never been a more exciting time to conduct behavioral research at Wharton. Our exceptional staff, our incredible community of scholars, and our growing toolkit enable us to transform ideas into data. We thank all of you who are part of our community—and extend a warm welcome to anyone interested in joining us.



History

Prior to the Wharton Behavioral Lab (WBL), Wharton faculty spent a significant portion of their time recruiting participants and executing studies, thereby limiting their creative capacity to design and pose studies. At the same time, the School faced several challenges regarding behavioral research, such as recruiting new faculty in the field and allocating research dollars. In response to these growing challenges, Wharton created the WBL.

The WBL in its current form began in Spring 2005 with a single lab located in Jon M. Huntsman Hall (JMHH). The initial proposal estimated that the research volume would range between 5,000 and 14,000 participant-hours annually (with the lower number being the 2005 volume). In the first year, actual volume exceeded those estimates and a second location was added in Steinberg-Dietrich Hall (SHDH). This immediate high volume was interpreted as evidence that the WBL addressed a major deficiency in research support that had slowed the rate of research productivity and/or reduced the sample sizes used in behavioral research projects. In 2020, the on-campus volume was over 30,000 participant-hours and online volume was over 1,000,000 completed surveys/experiments. This growth since 2005 has resulted from increased numbers of faculty doing behavioral research and increased volume per researcher.

The WBL serves as a key to unlocking vast impact from the research of Wharton's faculty. Since opening in 2005, the WBL has established itself as the preeminent laboratory of its kind, attracting faculty and doctoral students from around the world. The Wharton School is the leading place for behavioral research with over 55 faculty utilizing the WBL on a regular basis.

The WBL provides faculty and doctoral students a dedicated research space, experienced staff, and financial resources to support behavioral, business-related research. The scale of the WBL enables Wharton to efficiently and profoundly boost faculty research productivity.

"The WBL allows me to think much bigger in the questions I ask and the way I can find answers, build more consequence into my studies, gain more confidence in my findings, and ultimately, do research that stands to have a bigger impact."

CAIT LAMBERTON,
ALBERTO I. DURAN PRESIDENT'S DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR,
PROFESSOR OF MARKETING





WBL Team

Meet the dedicated team members of The Wharton Behavioral Lab.



Maurice Schweitzer
Academic Director
Cecilia Yen Koo Professor
Professor of Operations, Information
and Decisions
Professor of Management



Mary Spratt
Associate Director
Scheduling, Financials, Hiring/Staff
Management, Advertising and Promotion



Robert Botto
IT Director
Lab hardware and software systems,
Research programming support,
Psychophysiological methods



Bob Stewart
Senior IT Support Specialist
Lab hardware and tech support, Qualtrics
administrative support, Evaluation and
implementation of new technologies



Patricia James Business Administrator Budgeting and financial liaison



Susan McCafferty Sr. Research Coordinator Special Panels - Online Studies Mturk/Prolific implementation, Field Studies, Reimbursements, Financials, Qualtrics liaison



Emily Rosa
Sr. Research Coordinator
On-campus studies
Session coordination and
implementation, RA hiring and training.
Cash management



Katerina Bratke
Lab Coordinator
Session coordination and implementation, RA hiring and training.



Lee Dandelias
Research Assistant
Study implementation, Participant check-in/check-out



Abigail Farina
Research Assistant
Study implementation, Participant check-in/check-out



WBL Academic Advisory Board

The Advisory Board includes leading behavioral science faculty from across the Wharton School. These scholars offer guidance, advice, and review large proposals along with Maurice Schweitzer, the academic director of the WBL.



Andrew Carton
Associate Professor, Management



Judd Kessler Howard Marks Associate Professor, Business Economics & Public Policy



Cait Lamberton
Alberto I. Duran President's
Distinguished Professor,
Marketing



Michael Platt James S. Riepe Universtiy Professor - Marketing, Psychology, Neuroscience



Marissa Sharif Associate Professor of Marketing



On Campus Studies



The WBL's state of the art on-campus labs are located in Steinberg-Dietrich Hall.

11,634

COMPLETED SURVEYS

2024 saw a return to pre-pandemic numbers in terms of participant engagement. The WBL will continue its efforts to retain current levels while also attracting new users.

111

95 ON-CAMPUS +16 REMOTE SESSIONS

The WBL has seen an increase in high touch studies in which participants are asked to engage in discussions, taste tests, physio measures and more.

A session is a group of experiments that are run at the same time in the same location.

Tools and Tech



Eye Tracking

Screen-based eye tracking cameras record eye movements and changes in pupil diameter bring to light attention, focus, and complex cognitive processes.



Audio/Video

Built-in focus room cameras with centralized network control and portable devices enable high quality sound and image recordings.



Virtual Reality

Head mounted displays allow us to present immersive virtual environments and unique participant avatars while directly collecting advanced behavioral measures.



Physio Measures

Physiological expressions of the autonomic nervous system, including Electrodermal Activity and Heart Rate Variability, help to provide insight into emotion and cognition.



Facial Coding

Automated Facial Coding from video streams, using computational methods from machine learning, identify expressions of emotion and engagement.



Study Examples

"Eye Tracking in Decision-Making"

Michael Platt

James S. Riepe University Professor, Professor of Marketing, Psychology and Neuroscience

Shakespeare wrote that "the eyes are the window to the soul." We've found that they're also the window to the mind of the decision maker. In studies run through WBL, we offered people real gambles of winning and losing money while simultaneously tracking their eyes and measuring the size of their pupils. We found that people who were more likely to reject a gamble spent more time looking at the possible loss, whereas people who focused more on potential gains were more likely to accept the bet. These biomarkers of the decision process offer the potential to help shape what people choose. Financial service companies, for example, could help customers accept more risk by physically emphasizing potential windfalls over possible losses.



"The Computational Basis of Social Interaction"

Gus Cooney, PhD

Senior Lecturer in Operations Information & Decisions

A computational revolution is transforming the social sciences, creating rigorous theoretical models of human behavior. At the Wharton Behavioral Lab, we're testing these theoretical models by analyzing hundreds of live conversations between strangers—bridging the gap between computational simulations and empirical reality. Our findings reveal striking patterns in how we misjudge social interactions: systematically underestimating others' positive impressions of us, avoiding conversations that would make us happier and better informed, and engaging in destructive negative self-talk after meeting someone for the first time. These insights explain why people hold themselves back from forming new relationships, even across group boundaries they wish to cross, and point to practical ways we can overcome the psychological barriers that limit our ability to build social connections in our personal and professional lives.



WBL in the Classroom



Wharton students in Visual Marketing (MKTG2390/7390), taught by Professor Barbara Kahn and Dr. Elizabeth (Zab) Johnson, gain a unique, hands-on opportunity exploring the power of visual marketing through real-time experiments in the Wharton Behavioral Lab that incorporate eye-tracking, collection of electrodermal activity, heart rate, and reaction time. In this session, students experience both collecting data and being a participant in experiments. Whether it is MBA students or undergraduates, this WBL session gives our students the chance to move beyond theory and concepts and engage directly with experimental design, neuroscience methods, marketing science, and consumer behavior and insights. For many, it's an unforgettable, immersive experience that brings cutting-edge marketing research vividly to life.



Specialized Panels



Specialized panels include field studies, MTurk, Prolific and Qualtrics

753,764

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS

The WBL reached over 753,764 participants conducting over 1,684 studies with online panels.

1,684

SPECIALIZED PANEL STUDIES

Researchers use specialized panels to target large sample sizes and reach specific target demographics.

Seminars

The WBL hosts a variety of seminars and workshops each year to support our researchers and educate them on new processes and technologies in the ever-evolving world of online platforms.

Here are a few examples:

Large Language Models (LLMS) and Behavioral Research, Part One

Survey-taking bots employing the latest LLM technologies, like ChatGPT, can mimic human responses to a high degree, making them very hard to detect. How do we defend against automated responses and ensure data quality? In part one of our LLM series, we will discuss the problem, and look at techniques for bot detection and response screening.

Large Language Models (LLMS) and Behavioral Research, Part Two

LLM technology poses problems for online research integrity, but does it also offer opportunities to behavioral researchers? In part two of our LLM series, we will look at ways LLMs can aid in experiment design, survey testing, confederate chatbot engineering, and data analysis.

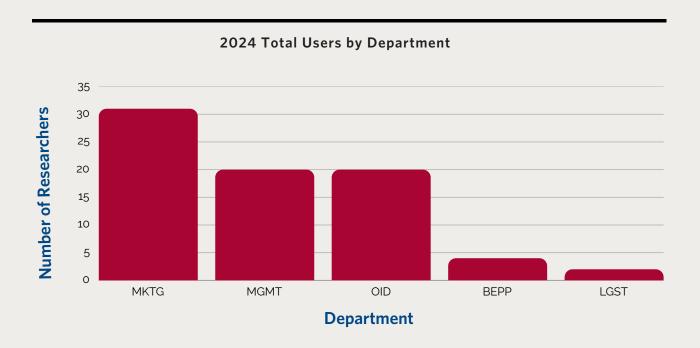
Wharton Computing's Research and Analytics

Many of our technical questions can be answered in house but we are proud to have the support of Wharton Computing's Research and Analytics.

Whatever your research computing needs, their team is dedicated to helping get the job done.



Researchers - Faculty Engagement

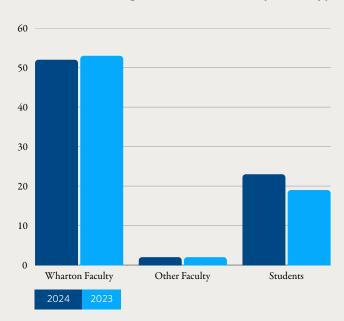


NOTE: MKTG continues to lead with 31 PIs followed closely behind by OID and MGMT with 20. Wharton faculty members sponsor most research done by doctoral students.

The WBL continues to see high levels of engagement from our faculty. The total number of primary investigators for CY2024 was 77. This number is comprised of 54 faculty and 23 students spanning over 5 departments.

Based on current requests for on-campus and specialized samples we expect growth to continue in 2025.

2024-2023 Usage of WBL Services by User Type



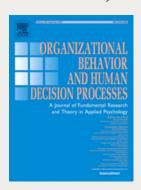
Note: Wharton Faculty includes Visiting Faculty and Post-docs



Cumulative List of Papers and Research Projects - 2024









Published Articles

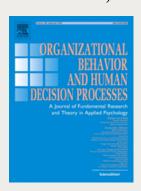
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Cumulative List of Papers and Research Projects - 2024









Published Articles continued

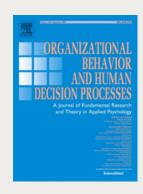
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Cumulative List of Papers and Research Projects - 2024









Published Articles continued

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Cumulative List of Papers and Research Projects - 2024

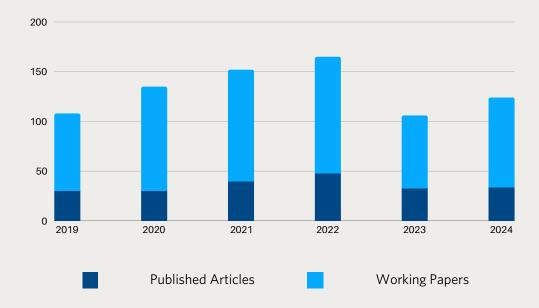








Published Articles and Working Papers Historical Data





2024 Summary



34 Published Articles 90 Working Papers



77 Active Researchers 54 Faculty, 23 Students



5 Academic Departments Mktg, Mgmt, Oid, Bepp, Lgst



On Campus Studies

- 111 Sessions
- 11,634 completed surveys
- 59% increase in completed studies from previous year.



Specialized Panels

- 1,684 studies
- 753,764 total participants

Goals looking forward....

- 1. The WBL will host a Mini Conference showcasing the work that researchers are doing in the lab. We hope to make this an annual event.
- 2. Obtain new sources of external financial support for the WBL.
- 3. Development and implementation of infrastructure software for quality control, participant characteristics database, and accounting.
- 4. Continue and increase IT and RA support of eye-tracking equipment, physiological equipment, and emotion coding software.
- 5. Broaden the scope of our seminar series working closely with Wharton Computing's Research and Analytics team.

"WBL should stand for World's Best Lab. From its space and equipment, to its staff and resources, I am extremely grateful for this invaluable asset I have to conduct my research."

MICHAEL PARKE,
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR,
MANAGEMENT AND CHARLES W. EVANS
DISTINGUISHED FACULTY SCHOLAR



