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Wharton Behavioral Lab
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Annual Report

2025



the WBL

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 2025, we supported research led by 52 faculty across seven Wharton departments. This past year, we supported data collection in 25 published articles and 98 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.

Mini Conference: Building on our continued partnership with Wharton Research Computing, we hosted our first Mini Conference, featuring presentations that showcase research supported by the WBL. This event creates 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.

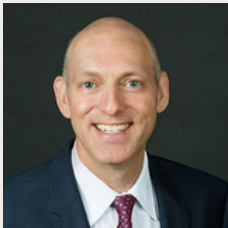
"The WBL allows me to think much bigger in the questions I ask and the way I can find answers, build more consequence into my studies, gain more confidence in my findings, and ultimately, do research that stands to have a bigger impact."

CAIT LAMBERTON,
ALBERTO I. DURAN PRESIDENT'S DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR,
PROFESSOR OF MARKETING
VICE DEAN AND DIRECTOR OF THE WHARTON UNDERGRADUATE DIVISION



WBL Team

Meet the dedicated team members of The Wharton Behavioral Lab.



Maurice Schweitzer

Academic Director

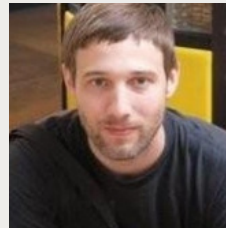
Cecilia Yen Koo Professor
Professor of Operations, Information
and Decisions
Professor of Management



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

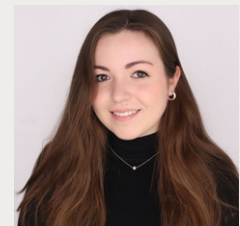
Special Panels - Online Studies
Mturk/Prolific implementation, Field
Studies, Reimbursements, Financials,
Qualtrics liaison



Emily Rosa

Sr. Research Coordinator

On-campus studies
Session coordination and
implementation, RA hiring and training,
Cash management



Katerina Bratke

Lab Coordinator

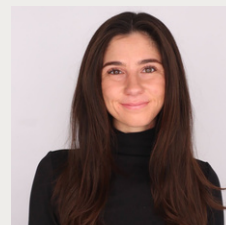
Session coordination and
implementation, RA hiring and training,



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.



Maurice Schweitzer

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



Andrew Carton

Associate Professor, Management



Judd Kessler

Howard Marks Endowed Professor,
Business Economics & Public Policy



Barbara Mellers

I. George Heyman University
Professor, Professor of
Marketing, Psychology



Michael Platt

James S. Riepe University
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.

10,157

COMPLETED SURVEYS

The WBL will continue its efforts to retain current levels while also attracting new users.

95

68 ON-CAMPUS +27 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.

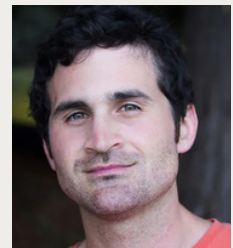


"The Computational Basis of Social Interaction"

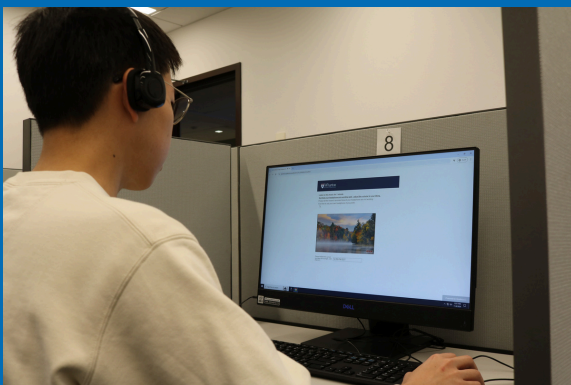
Gus Cooney, PhD

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

672,348

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS

The WBL reached over 672,348 participants conducting over 1,531 studies with online panels.

1,531

SPECIALIZED PANEL STUDIES

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

Mini Conference

Tuesday, May 6, 2025

This annual event provided an opportunity for attendees to explore innovative and forward-thinking research across a range of disciplines. Participants gained insight into how colleagues leveraged the lab's resources to advance their projects and engaged with members of the Research Programming team to better understand the support available for research initiatives.

The event also facilitated connections among faculty, scholars, students, and staff from across Penn. It brought together both long-time collaborators and individuals interested in learning more about the work taking place in the lab, contributing to an engaging and informative environment.

You can find a list of speakers along with their titles and abstracts [here](#).

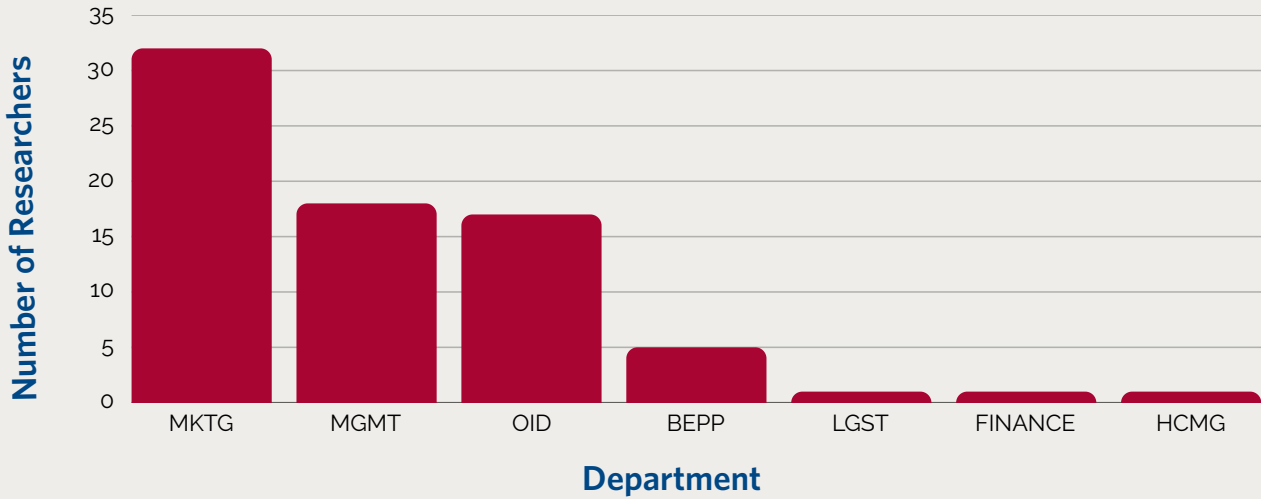
Wharton Computing's Research and Analytics

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.

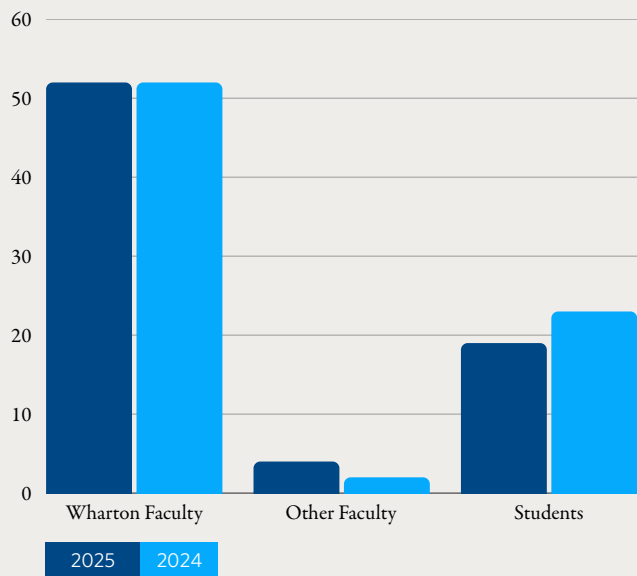
Researchers - Faculty Engagement

2025 Total Users by Department



NOTE: MKTG continues to lead with 32 PIs followed closely behind by OID and MGMT with 18. Wharton faculty members sponsor most research done by doctoral students.

2025-2024 Usage of WBL Services by User Type



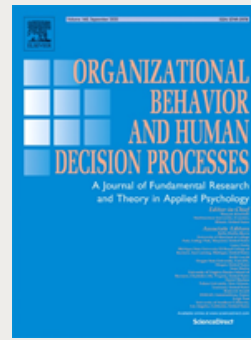
Note: Wharton Faculty includes Visiting Faculty and Post-docs

The WBL continues to see high levels of engagement from our faculty. The total number of primary investigators for CY2025 was 75. This number is comprised of 52 faculty and 23 students spanning over 7 departments.

Based on current requests for on-campus and specialized samples we expect growth to continue in 2026.

Publications

Cumulative List of Papers and Research Projects - 2025

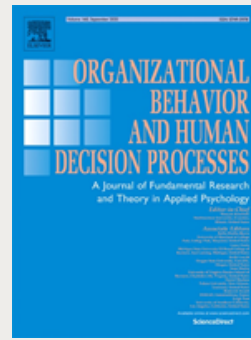


Published Articles

1. Arnett, R.D., Lee, S., Hewlin, P. (in press). A curation approach to minority identity: The costs of combining identity manifestation and suppression. *Administrative Science Quarterly*.
2. Bastani, H., Bastani, O., & Sinchaisri, W. P. (2026). Improving human sequential decision making with reinforcement learning. *Management Science*, 72(1), 733-755.
3. Boghrati, Reihane and Jonah Berger, "What Leads to Longer Word of Mouth Discussion?" Forthcoming, *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*.
4. Cascio-Rizzo, Giovanni Luca, Jonah Berger, and Mi Zhou (2025), "Talking with Your Hands: How Hand Gestures Influence Communication," Forthcoming, *Journal of Marketing Research*.
5. Chae, Rebecca, Kaitlin Woolley, and Marissa A. Sharif (2025), "Give me a Break! Categorizing Tasks: Surrounding Breaks Reduced Rumination and Improves Task Performance," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, forthcoming.
6. Ciulli, R., Lambertson, C., & Meyer, R., "Worthy of Your Binge: How Media Momentum Drives Satisfaction in Clumped Consumption." Reject and resubmit at the *Journal of Consumer Research* - in preparation for resubmission at the *Journal of Consumer Research*.
7. De Freitas, J., O—fuz-U—furalp, Z., U—furalp, A. K., & Puntoni, S. (2025). AI companions reduce loneliness. *Journal of Consumer Research*, ucaf040.
8. De La Rosa, W., Christopher J. Bechler, Hal E. Hershfield, Gwen Rino, Ryan Hatch, Chris Chan, and Eric Giannella (2026), "Improving Income Reporting: The Importance of Accounting for Mental Representations in Income Elicitation," forthcoming *Management Science*.
9. De La Rosa, W., Silverman, J., Sussman, A. B., Rino, G., Dorie, V., Hell, M., Giannella, E., & Dillman, L. (2025). Using Expenditure Reframes to Increase Interest in Claiming Government Benefits. *Journal of Marketing*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429251356992>
10. Duckworth, A.L., A. Ko, K.L. Milkman, J.S. Kay, E. Dimant, D.M. Gromet, A. Halpern, Y. Jung, M.K. Paxson, R.A.S. Zumaran, R. Berman, I. Brody, C.F. Camerer, E.A. Canning, H. Dai, M. Gallo, H.E. Hershfield, M.D. Hilchey, A. Kalil, K.M. Kroeper, A. Lyon, B.S. Manning, N. Mazar, M. Micheline, S.E. Mayer, M.C. Murphy, P. Oreopoulos, S.E. Parker, R. Rondina, D. Soman, & C.V.D. Bulte, A national megastudy shows that email nudges to elementary school teachers boost student math achievement, particularly when personalized, *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* 122 (13) e2418616122, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2418616122> (2025).
11. Feinstein, B. D. (2025). Presidential administration and the accountability illusion. *Duke Law Journal*, 74, 1791-1850.
12. Gaertig, C., & Simmons, J. P. (2026). Why (and When) Are Uncertain Price Promotions More Effective Than Equivalent Sure Discounts?. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 52(5), 1022-1042.

Publications

Cumulative List of Papers and Research Projects - 2025

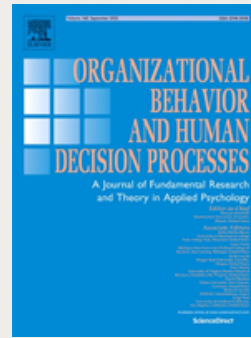


Published Articles continued

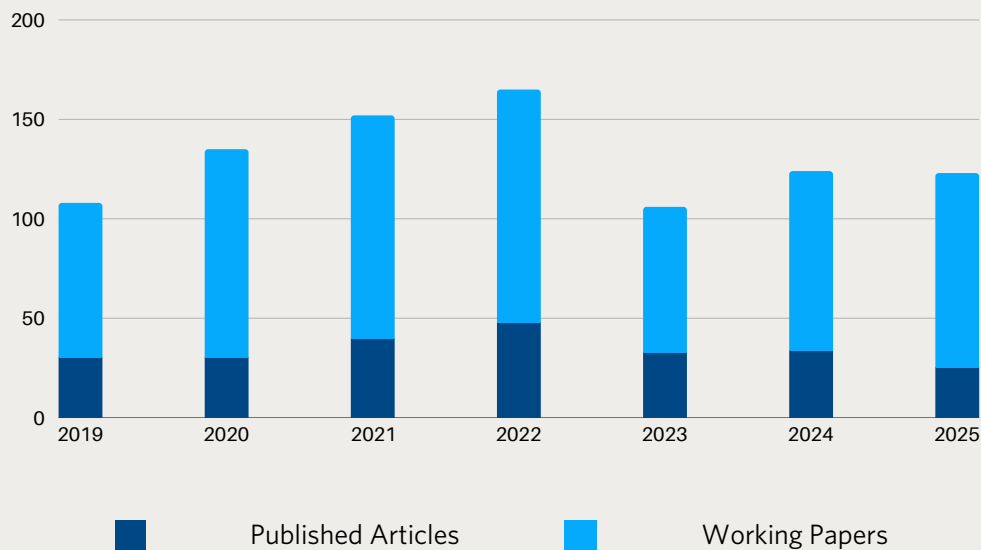
13. Gandhi, L., Kiyawat, A., Camerer, C., Watts, D. J., & Goldstein, D. G. (2025). Hypothetical nudges provide directional but noisy estimates of real behavior change. *Communications Psychology*, 3, Article 158. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44271-025-00339-x>.
14. Hu, B., & Simmons, J. P. (2025). Different methods elicit different belief distributions. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 154(2), 476-496.
15. Kirgios, E.L., Susan Athey, Angela L. Duckworth, Dean Karlan, Michael Luca, Katherine L. Milkman, Molly Offer-Westort (2025) Does Q&A Boost Engagement? Health Messaging Experiments in the United States and Ghana. *Management Science* 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2024.04405>
16. Liu, N., Hu, X. E., Savas, Y., Baum, M. A., Berinsky, A. J., Chaney, A. J., ... & Stewart, B. M. (2025). Short-term exposure to filter-bubble recommendation systems has limited polarization effects: Naturalistic experiments on YouTube. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 122(8), e2318127122.
17. Ludwig, V.U., Prieur, L., Rennie, S.M., Beswerchij, A., Weintraub, D., Berry, B., Wey, J., Candido, K., Platt, M.L. (2025). Synchronous smiles and hearts: Dyadic meditations enhance closeness and prosocial behavior in virtual and in-person settings. *Mindfulness*, 16:1719-1744.
18. Mehr, Katie, +Jackie Silverman, Marissa A. Sharif, Alixandra Barasch, and Katherine Milkman (2025) ΓÇ£The Motivating Power of Streaks: Increasing Productivity is as Easy as 1,2,3,ΓÇ¥ *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 187, 104391.
19. Melumad, S., & Meyer, R. J. (2024). How Listening Versus Reading Alters Consumers' Interpretations of News. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 62(2), 342-361. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222437241280068> (Original work published 2025)
20. Mrkva, Kellen, +Shannon Duncan, Marisa A. Sharif, and ^Stanley Zuo (2025), "Confirmation Choice Architecture: Nudging Consumers with Conditional Opportunities to Switch Subscriptions," *Journal of Consumer Research*, forthcoming.
21. Pink, S. L., Cervantez, J., Kirgios, E. L., Chang, E. H., & Milkman, K. L. (2025). Can stereotype reactance prompt women to compete? A field experiment. *Organization Science*.
22. Raj M, Berg JM, Seamans R. The artificial intelligence disclosure penalty: Humans persistently devalue AI-generated creative writing. *J Exp Psychol Gen*. 2026 Jan 8. doi: 10.1037/xge0001889. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 41505277.
23. Rocklage, Matt, Jonah Berger, and Reihane Boghrati (2025), "The Trajectory of Confidence: Experience, Certainty, and Consumer Choice," Forthcoming, *Journal of Marketing Research*.
24. Smith, Samantha N., et al. "Which group should I join? Competition drives group selection away from like-minded others." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 122 (2026): 104841.
25. Van Zant, Alex, Jonah Berger, Grant Packard, and Harry Wang (2025), "The Power of Pausing in Collaborative Conversations," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 191, 104455.

Publications

Cumulative List of Papers and Research Projects - 2025



Published Articles and Working Papers Historical Data



2025 Summary



25 Published Articles
98 Working Papers



75 Active Researchers
52 Faculty, 23 Students



7 Academic Departments
Mktg, Mgmt, Oid, Bepp, Lgst,
Finance, Hcmg



On Campus Studies

- 95 Sessions
- 10,157 completed surveys



Specialized Panels

- 1,531 studies
- 672,348 total participants

Goals looking forward....

1. The WBL will continue to host an annual Mini Conference showcasing the work that researchers are doing in the lab.
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 partnership 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

