

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Regents Communication

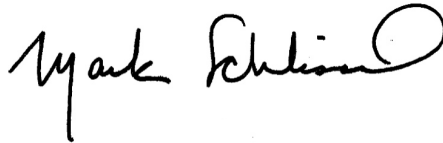
ITEM FOR INFORMATION

Subject: Henry Russel Lecturer for 2021

I am pleased to inform you that the Henry Russel Awards Faculty Advisory Committee, chaired by Dean Michael J. Solomon, met recently and selected Susan A. Gelman, the Heinz Werner Distinguished University Professor of Psychology and Linguistics, Professor of Psychology, and Professor of Linguistics, as the Henry Russel Lecturer for 2021. Professor Gelman will deliver the Russel Lecture in the Winter Term of 2021.

The Henry Russel Lectureship is the highest honor that the University bestows upon a senior member of its faculty. A description of the contributions of this extraordinary faculty member is attached.

Respectfully submitted,



Mark S. Schlissel
President

July 2020

Attachment

Susan A. Gelman

Susan A. Gelman, the Heinz Werner Distinguished University Professor of Psychology and Linguistics, Professor of Psychology, and Professor of Linguistics is a world-leading figure in the field of psychological science. For the past 30 years she has been at the forefront of research and theory on cognitive development and is among the small handful of people who have significantly moved the field forward. Her rich and diverse investigations have transformed the understanding of the process of language acquisition and conceptual development. Professor Gelman's research focuses on how children expect certain categories to have an underlying and pervasive reality that cannot be observed directly and how they use essentialist reasoning to give objects their identity and associational relationship with other objects. She argues that essentialism is an early and deeply rooted cognitive bias in children's thinking that has implications for cognitive, biological, and social domains. She has demonstrated that children have an early and powerful tendency to search for hidden, non-obvious features of objects that leads them to look beyond the obvious when they learn words, generalize knowledge, and construct causal explanations, and has upended an earlier consensus that children are concrete thinkers who focus on surface features in their environment. By showing how children learn and use generic language to construct new concepts and to recognize abstract categories, and how language serves as a mechanism for transmitting essentialist beliefs, Professor Gelman has made major contributions to understanding human rationality. An exceptionally creative and versatile researcher, she commands a wide range of methods and approaches to test her hypotheses while working with children as young as two. Her research with older children has shown how essentialist beliefs are restructured with the onset of formal learning, and she has conducted cross-cultural field studies to examine how these feature work in other languages and settings. She has published over 250 journal articles, many in the most prestigious journals in the field. Her path-breaking book, *The Essential Child: Origins of Essentialism in Everyday Thought* (2003), is a landmark volume of how essentializing reasoning emerges in childhood. Professor Gelman has earned numerous honors across her career. She has held leadership roles in several academic societies, including the Cognitive Development Society and the Society for Philosophy and Psychology. Among many recognitions, she is a fellow of the American Society of Arts and Sciences (2008), a fellow of the American Psychological Association (2011), a member of the National Academy of Sciences (2012), and has served on many editorial boards of leading journals. In 2020 she was named a William James Fellow by the Association for Psychological Science "for a lifetime of significant intellectual contributions to the basic science of psychology." Professor Gelman is an equally accomplished teacher and a mentor of graduate students who prize her enthusiasm, openness, and encouragement. She has won mentoring awards from the Rackham Graduate School and the American Psychological Association and has chaired more than a dozen dissertation committees. She also mentors many undergraduate students in successful research, inspiring them to pursue graduate studies. Professor Gelman's service has been equally extensive and exemplary, including appointments as associate dean and interim dean of LSA.

Professor Gelman earned her B.A. (1980) degree in psychology and classical Greek from Oberlin College, and her Ph.D. (1984) degree from Stanford University in psychology, with a minor in linguistics. She joined the University of Michigan in 1984 as an assistant professor of psychology, and was promoted to associate professor in 1989. In 1991 she was promoted to professor of psychology, and in 1999 she was appointed as the Frederick G.L. Huetwell Professor of Psychology. In 2012 Professor Gelman was named the Heinz Werner Collegiate Professor, and in 2013 she was named the Heinz Werner Distinguished University Professor.

As a world-renowned psychologist, and as an inspirational teacher and mentor of students, Professor Gelman's many contributions have brought distinction to the University of Michigan and the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, and she is an exceptionally worthy selection as the 2021 Henry Russel Lecturer.