Science & Technology

Study Hall: Winter 2018

Research briefs from alumni and faculty.

Winter 2018-19

It doesn’t pay to be nice

Kind and trusting people are more likely to fall into debt, default on loans, and declare bankruptcy because they tend to care less about money and are therefore prone to making bad financial decisions, finds Sandra Matz, an assistant professor of management at Columbia Business School. Matz’s study analyzed personality and financial data from more than three million people.

When “gluten-free” is full of it

About one-third of dishes labeled “gluten-free” in US eateries contain traces of gluten, according to a study led by Benjamin Lerner, a researcher at Columbia’s Celiac Disease Center. Lerner crowdsourced data from more than eight hundred people who tested some 5,600 dishes in restaurants around the country using handheld gluten-detection devices. He found that pizza and pasta advertised as gluten-free are the most likely to be contaminated.

Safe harbor

Myrna Weissman, a Columbia professor of epidemiology and psychiatry, has found that children are less likely to attempt suicide if religion or spirituality is important to their parents.

Votes of despair?

Anxiety about rising rates of alcohol- and drug-related deaths and suicide may have helped tilt the 2016 presidential election in favor of Donald Trump, according to a study led by Lee Goldman, the head of Columbia University Irving Medical Center, who is also an epidemiologist. Even when controlling for unemployment levels and other economic factors, Goldman and his colleagues found that support for Trump was strongest in US counties where mortality rates had increased the most sharply over the previous fifteen years.

A cool coat

A team of researchers led by Columbia engineers Yuan Yang and Nanfang Yu has created a highly reflective white paint that, when applied to buildings and rooftops, can lower internal temperatures by as much as six degrees Fahrenheit, thereby slashing cooling costs. The paint's reflectivity derives from its unique corrugated texture, which was inspired by the shiny, grooved hairs of the Saharan silver ant.

Outmaneuvering malaria

Columbia microbiologists Leila S. Ross and David Fidock have discovered that many people in Southeast Asia carry a genetic mutation that renders a popular malaria medicine, piperaquine, ineffective. The discovery is expected to save lives by helping public-health workers identify those who need alternative treatments.



Guide to school abbreviations

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