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## Phi Beta Kappa Scholar **Rochel Gelman** Visits Wilson

By Xiaomeng Li

Rochel Gelman, Professor of Psychology and Co-Director of the Center for Cognitive Science at Rutgers University, visited Wilson on October 4 and 5 as a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar.

During her stay, Gelman participated in a graduate school panel discussion, gave a public lecture in the auditorium of the Harry R. Brooks Complex for Science, Mathematics and Technology, visited several classes, talked to Women with Children program students and with students from a Child Development class at Chambersburg Area High School.

Amy Ensley, Director of the Hankey Center for the Education and Advancement of Women, arranged for Dr. Gelman's visit. Phi Beta Kappa is the nation's oldest and most widely known Academic Honor Society. Every year, there are approximately eleven Phi Beta Kappa scholars who visit different chapters across the country to give lectures and talk with faculty and students about their research.

Before going to Rutgers, Gelman taught at the University of Pennsylvania and UCLA. Early in her career, she decided to focus on finding ways to show that preschoolers and infants were conceptually more competent than assumed by existing theories. Her work on early cognitive development and learning has brought her many honors, including membership in the National Academy of Science and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She has received awards from the American Psychological Association (Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award), the Association for Psychological Science (William James Fellow) and the Society for Research in Child Development (Lifetime Contribution to the Study of Child Development).

On Monday, Oct. 4 at 6:30pm, Gelman gave a public lecture entitled "Early Cognitive Development and Beyond" in the Brooks Complex auditorium. She discussed the paradoxical fact that infants and preschoolers know much more about math and science than people thought

while older students have real problems mastering the material they are supposed to learn in these domains.

"Dr. Gelman is a remarkable woman and renowned in her field, having authored textbooks and many research articles. We are fortunate to have an opportunity to meet her and learn about her research. Her area of expertise is of interest to a broad spectrum of faculty and students at Wilson, from psychology, mathematics and the sciences, to education and the mothers and children in our Women with Children program. She is an ideal speaker for our community," said Ensley.

On Tuesday, Oct. 5, Gelman spoke to two psychology classes on campus. One of them was Learning and Memory taught by Prof. Carl Larson. The students read an article by Gelman before class. Gelman then described some of her research relevant to that article and responded to questions from the students. "Dr. Gelman's areas of expertise are developmental psychology and human learning. She has developed theoretical concepts which argue that humans may have innate capacities for learning about certain aspects of their environment, such as mathematical concepts, animate versus inanimate attributions and causality. This perspective is very different from the traditional view in the area of learning that human knowledge is largely based on simple principles of association," said Larson.

Larson also mentioned that he was impressed by the students' interaction with Gelman and hopes that similar programs could happen more often and in a variety of areas on campus, "Some areas, such as English, dance, and fine arts do bring noted individuals who augment what students hear and do in their classroom experience. It is truly important for us to pursue such experiences."

Gelman's visit was also part of the Science in Society Seminar Series that Wilson kicked off last year in order to bring prominent women in the sciences to speak at Wilson.

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