

## Multidisciplinary Approaches to Psychedelic Scholarship (MAPS)



Thomas B. Roberts, Ph.D.

IN ADDITION TO THE PROFESSIONAL CAREER OPPORTUNITIES in the biological sciences that Dave Nichols, Ph.D. described in the *MAPS Bulletin* of Autumn 1997, students who want to study psychedelics as part of their ongoing undergraduate and graduate programs have many other non-career possibilities open to them. For seventeen years I have taught "Psychedelic Mindview" at Northern Illinois University as a special topics course in educational psychology (Riedlinger, 1988; Roberts, 1988a, 1988b), have supervised independent studies, and consulted for students' term papers and in-class presentations for other classes.

A dissertation I chaired year before last in Educational Psychology exemplifies nonbiological studies of psychedelics (Hruby, *The Varieties of Mystical Experience, Spiritual Practices, and Psychedelic Drug Use Among College Students*.) Complete citations of most resources in this article (as well as brief excerpts from them) can be found in *Religion and Psychoactive Sacraments: An Entheogen Chrestomathy* online at [www.csp.org/chrestomathy](http://www.csp.org/chrestomathy). References which are not in the *Chrestomathy* are at the end of this article. A scan through the *Chrestomathy* reveals about two dozen dissertations on psychedelics which have something to say about their entheogenic uses; these portray the wide range of scholarly and scientific interest in psychedelics from philosophy and psychology through anthropology and literature. As a specialized scholarly resource, the *Chrestomathy* lists only items that have to do with the religious uses of psychoactive plants and chemicals—*entheogens*, so it's selective in its listing, omitting nonentheogenic psychedelic items.

### Wide range of opportunities

Since psychedelic experiences are also important for the ideas they generate, there is an immense amount of scholarly work that is possible other than the design and testing of psychoactive drugs. To me, one of the most fascinating things about psychedelics is the fact that their influences range from art to zoology, from archeology to futures studies, from the neurosciences to religion. Because the human mind is used in all human intellectual activity—the arts, sciences, scholarship, and day-to-day living—a new understanding of our minds has implications for all these, and psychedelics offer a new (or renewed) view of our minds and new ways of using them (Grof, 1975, 1994). While independent studies, term papers and in-class presentations are not lifetime professional commitments, sometimes they do flavor a future career, and sometimes they develop into an area of specialization within other disciplines; the study of shamanism in anthropology and ethnobotany are examples.

You can obtain advanced degrees in a number of different fields and consider the implications of psychedelics for that field; for example, I am an educational psychologist who considers the implications of psychedelics in my professional activities on the development of

the human mind. Similarly, professors in other fields may include psychedelics as part of their work, although they aren't their major professional discipline. To students who want to earn advanced degrees with a psychedelic flavor, I recommend they attend the top-ranked graduate schools they can in their prospective fields. It is often the best schools which are most willing to take a flyer on new ideas, and in one's future teaching and research it is helpful to have attended a top graduate program, especially if one has something unusual to say.

### Options for undergrads

Undergraduates who are willing to take responsibility for their own education will find many opportunities. Most academic departments offer independent studies, directed reading courses, etc. Although supervising an independent study means extra work for professors, the joy of seeing a student who is excited about a topic usually more than offsets the extra load, and if the professor is also interested in psychedelics, he or she is likely to enjoy mentoring on this topic.

How do you go about finding a professor who might have the time and inclination to direct an independent study of psychedelics? Think of how your specific interest in psychedelics intersects with professors' professional

interests. Psychotherapy, psychology or mental health? Art or music? Anthropology, sociology, or archeology? Philosophy or religion? If your interest is in creativity or the nature of the human mind, professors from several departments may be likely possibilities.

Remember: professors, like their students, have interests beyond their classes. Just because a professor teaches, say, modern French literature, that doesn't automatically mean she or he wouldn't welcome an independent study on psychedelics, and as a student you might be pleasantly surprised to learn about *Le Club des Haschischins* (Stafford, 1992) or Sartre's mescaline experiences (Riedlinger, 1982). If the professor you first ask is unable to direct your independent study, ask her if she knows of someone else who might be interested. Departmental secretaries, especially those who have been on the job for many years, can be helpful in suggesting faculty members.

**Preparing for an independent study**

Before you ask a professor to direct your independent study, it will help to have a specific idea of exactly what topic you want to study or what question(s) you want the independent study to answer. If you know of books and articles that you'd like to include, it's helpful to have a list of them. Like most professors, my first request for an independent study is to have the students write a short one-page or two-page outline of their goals for the independent study, what they expect to do, and how they will accomplish it. Since you'll run into unexpected publications and new ideas as you go along, it's best to make your plan a working, tentative plan that is revisable if both you and your professor agree.

Some professors will let you attend a conference on psychedelics as part of an independent study, too, provided you work it into your plan for the independent study before you attend it. They'll probably want you to critique some of the sessions, read some speakers' works before or after hearing them, or involve your mind some other way in the conference. They won't, however, be able to give you academic credit for doing anything illegal, so don't even bother mentioning it.

**Finding resources**

Where should you start to look for information on psychedelics? Readers of this article have already made a good start with the *MAPS Bulletin*. Next try the MAPS website and its links to other web resources. Among books, my favorite starting place is *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered* by Lester Grinspoon and James B. Bakalar. Thanks to the Lindesmith Center, the paperback edition of this book was republished in 1997; its annotated bibliography is splendid. To use the book efficiently, look up your

Since psychedelic experiences are also important for the ideas they generate, there is an immense amount of scholarly work that is possible other than the design and testing of psychoactive drugs.

topic in the index, go to the pages indicated, note the chapter number and topical subhead, then go back to the annotated bibliography, which is organized by chapter and topic. The annotations will fill you in on the research and speed up your decision on which sources to read. Peter Stafford's *Psychedelics Encyclopedia* (1992) is another wide-ranging collection of psychedelic gems.

*Religion and Psychoactive Sacraments*, whose URL was given above, contains bibliographic citations and short excerpts from some 400 books, dissertations, and topical issues of journals (no single articles). Because many books which are primarily on nonentheogenic topics say something of interest about entheogens—psychoactive plants and chemicals *used in a religious context*—you can use it to look up information on related topics besides religion. To use the *Chrestomathy's* internal search program most efficiently, use a "stem" followed by \*. For example, *counsel\** will pick up *counselor*, *counselors*, *counseling*, etc. *Shaman* locates 21 files, while *shaman\** brings up 44 because it picks up files which contain *shamanism*, *shaman's*, etc.

**Using the library**

Most libraries also have a collection of indexes and abstracts on CDs, such as *Psyclit*, *Sociofile*, *PAIS (Public Affairs Information Service)*, and *MEDLINE*. Because psychedelics cross categories, you'll probably want to use several CDs. University libraries will also subscribe to online research services, varying from library to library. I like *Current Contents*, which indexes over 7500 journals and is published weekly. It's usually handy to search several words, e.g., *psychedelic and hallucinogen*. Don't be shy about asking reference librarians for help; that's what they're there for.

So much for broad scale psychedelic references. Here are some of my personal favorites by discipline. For out-of-print books or books not in your library, ask about interlibrary loan.

**Anthropology**

There's so much here it's hard to select even a few. Try searching *shaman\** in the *Chrestomathy*.

Furst, Peter E. (1990). *Hallucinogens and Culture*.

La Barre, Weston. (1989). *The Peyote Cult*. In each edition La Barre updates the extensive references, so go for the most recent, fifth, edition.

Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness. [www.ameranthassn.org/sac.htm](http://www.ameranthassn.org/sac.htm).

Wasson, R. Gordon; Kramrisch, Stella; Ott, Jonathan, and Ruck, Carl A. P. (1986). *Persephone's Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion*. There are both paperback and deluxe editions.

**Archaeology**

Devereux, Paul. (1997). *The Long Trip: The Prehistory of Psychedelia*.

Rudgley, Richard. (1993). *Essential Substances in Society: A Cultural History of Intoxicants in Society*.

**Arts**

Grey, Alex, with Ken Wilber and Carlo McCormick. (1990). *Sacred Mirrors: The Visionary Art of Alex Grey*.

Grushkin, Paul D. (1987). *The Art of Rock*. New York: Abbeville Press. Pages 498-503 contain a considerable bibliography.

Masters, R. E. L. & Houston, Jean. (1968). *Psychedelic Art*.

Weldon, Michael. (1983). *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film*. New York: Ballentine Books.

**Biology, Biochemistry, Botany**

Dave Nichols' article covered the possibilities here for a professional career in biochemistry and the neurosciences, and as he suggested, MEDLINE is the primary source.

Ott, Jonathan. (1996). *Pharmactheon: Entheogenic Drugs, Their Plant Sources and History*.

Perrine, Daniel M. (1996). *The Chemistry of Mind-Altering Drugs: History, Pharmacology, and Cultural Context*.

Schultes, Richard Evans, and Hofmann, Albert. (1992). *Plants of the Gods: Their Sacred, Healing and Hallucinogenic Powers*.

**History**

Gartz, Jochen. (1996). *Magic Mushrooms Around the World: A Scientific Journey Across Cultures and Time: The Case for Challenging Research and Value Systems*.

Hofmann, Albert. (1980). *LSD: My Problem Child: Reflections on Sacred Drugs, Mysticism, and Science*.

Musto, David F. (July 1991). Opium, Cocaine and Marijuana in American History. *Scientific American*, pages 40-47.

**Law**

Boire, Richard Glen. (1997). *Sacred Mushrooms and the Law*.

Committee on Drugs and the Law, (June 1994). A Wiser Course: Ending Drug Prohibition. *The Record of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York*, Vol. 49, No. 5, pages 521-577. Wider drug policy, not specifically entheogens.

*The Entheogen Law Reporter*. P.O. Box 73481, Davis, CA. 95617.

*Hofstra Law Review*. A Symposium on Drug Decriminalization.

**Literature and Language**

ETC.: *A Review of General Semantics*. (1965). (Special issue on psychedelics.)

Graves, Robert. Each of his four books listed contains insights into entheogens; although, none of the books is wholly about them.

*Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature: Parts I and II*. (1986). (Two topical issues: Literature and Altered States of Consciousness).

Roberts, T. B. (1981). Consciousness criticism. *C.E.A. Critic* (College English Association) 44(1), 2532.

**Politics and public policy**

The best way to keep up with this vast and fast-changing field is by the Internet and current journals. Most sources combine all drugs into one category, not distinguishing their entheogenic uses from other uses.

Drug Policy Foundation.  
www.dpf.org/html/links.html. (Includes both governmental and nongovernmental links.)

Federation of American Scientists. (1997). *Principles for Practical Drug Policies*.  
www.fas.org/drugs/Principles

Lindesmith Center. www.lindesmith.org/

U. S. Government Websites.  
www.lindesmith.org/cites\_sources/cites.html

**Psychology and psychotherapy**

Grof, Stanislav. (1994). *LSD Psychotherapy*. A reprint of the 1980 edition.

Grof, Stanislav. (1993). *Realms of the Human Unconscious: Observations from LSD Research*. London: Souvenir Press (Educational and Academic). A reprint of the 1975-6 editions.

Passie, Torsten. (1997). *Psycholytic and Psychedelic Therapy Research 1931-1995: A Complete International Bibliography*.

**Religion**

Eliade, Mircea. (1987). *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. See topics listed under "Note."

Forte, Robert, ed. (1997). *Entheogens and the Future of Religion*.

Roberts, Thomas B., and Hruby, Paula Jo. (1997). *Religion and Psychoactive Sacraments: An Entheogen Chrestomathy*. www.csp.org/chrestomathy.

**Sociology and popular culture**

Beck, Jerome, and Rosenbaum, Marsha. (1994). *Pursuit of Ecstasy: The MDMA Experience*.

These writings  
and their references,  
  
the websites  
and their links,  
and the CD's and  
their resources  
will lead you along  
the paths of  
psychedelic  
scholarship.

Blum, Richard, & Associates. All of his listed works.

Saunders, Nicholas. (1997). *Ecstasy Reconsidered*.

**Women's Studies**

Palmer, Cynthia, and Horowitz, Michael. (1982). *Shaman Woman, Mainline Lady: Women's Writings on the Drug Experience*.

**Focusing on a subject**

The writings above and their references, the websites and their links, and the CDs and their resources will lead you along the paths of psychedelic scholarship. I have found, and I expect you will, that some topic will fascinate you and focus your attention. By following this you may find that you become so enamored with your topic, say, Grof's BPMs, that it occupies your mind so that eventually you find yourself habitually interpreting your experiences, the TV and movies you see, or your daily life in a BPM world. Such concentration is necessary for full involvement in an idea, and extreme, dedicated interest is the parent of specialized scholarly progress.

At the same time, addiction to one lens for interpreting the world can distort reality and blind one to other information. Psychedelics are but one group of psychotechnologies for exploring our minds' abilities to produce and use many mindbody states—meditation, the martial arts, sensory overload and sensory deprivation, physical routines, etc.—so psychedelics should be seen in a wider mindbody context.

**The larger context**

Perhaps the easiest error that grows from any fascinating area is failing to see that one's favorite ideas (Should I call them "addictive ideas"?) exist in a larger context. While the strengths of specialization include following an idea wherever it leads and aiding its full fluorescence, specialization's dangers are loosing track of the larger cultural network, omitting the embedding civilization, and forgetting the wider intellectual context.

My own path in studying consists of being fascinated with a specific topic for several years—Maslow's needs hierarchy, Grof's map of the human mind, entheogens—then expanding through those specific doors to larger realms, transpersonal psychology, the multistate mind, and the mystical roots of religion. A question I find handy to ask myself is, "This specific thing is one example of what larger group of similar items?"

Ken Wilber's four-quadrant approach to knowledge (1997) is a good reminder not to become stuck in any specific approach—psychedelic or nonpsychedelic; we need to include both our subjective experience and objective scientific

information, to include broad scale culture and groups, communities, or collectives of similar things. From a more inclusive perspective, Wilber sees the study of nonordinary states of consciousness (including psychedelics but not limited to them) as one of a dozen schools of consciousness research and theory (1997).

Perhaps Jack Kornfield's advice for meditators is both the most common-sensical and the rarest for psychedelicists, too:

*Meditation: Reflecting On Your Attitude Toward Altered States*

*What is your relationship to unusual and altered states in meditation [psychedelics]? As you read about these experiences, notice which ones touch you, notice where you are attracted or what reminds you of past experiences. How do you meet such experiences when they arise? Are you attached and proud of them? Do you keep trying to repeat them as a mark of your progress or success? Have you gotten stuck trying to make them return over and over again? How much wisdom have you brought to them? Are they a source of entanglement or a source of freedom for you? Do you sense them as beneficial and healing, or are they frightening? Just as you can misuse these states through attachment, you can also misuse them by avoiding them and trying to stop them. If this is the case, how could your meditation deepen if you opened to them? Let yourself sense the gifts they can bring, gifts of inspiration, new perspectives, insight, healing, or extraordinary faith. Be aware of what perspective and teaching you follow, for guidance in these matters. If you feel a wise perspective is lacking, where could you find it? How could you best honor these realms and use them for your benefit? (1993, page 134)•*

Ken Wilber's  
four-quadrant approach  
to knowledge (1997)  
is a good reminder  
not to become stuck  
in any specific  
approach—  
psychedelic or  
nonpsychedelic...

**References**

Sources not listed here can be found in *Religion and Psychoactive Sacraments: An Entheogen Chrestomathy*, [www.csp.org/chrestomathy](http://www.csp.org/chrestomathy).  
Grinspoon, L., & Bakalar, J. B. (1979/1997). *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered*. Lindesmith Center reprint. [www.drugtext.nl/TLC/pdrad.html](http://www.drugtext.nl/TLC/pdrad.html).  
Riedlinger, Thomas J. (1982). Sartre's Rite of Passage. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pages 105-123.  
Riedlinger, T. (1988). Psychedelic Schooling. *Psychedelic Monographs and Essays*, (3), 53-59.  
Roberts, T. B. (1988a). Psychedelic Research Class: A Professor's View. *Psychedelic Monographs and Essays*, (3) 62-76.  
Roberts, T. B. (1988b). Psychedelics Research: An Annotated Bibliography. *Psychedelic Monographs and Essays*, (3) 77-90.  
Wilber, Ken. (1997). An Integral Theory of Consciousness. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 71-92.

Thomas B. Roberts, Ph.D.  
Department of Educational Psychology  
Northern Illinois University  
DeKalb, IL 60115  
E-mail: P30TBR1@WPO.CSO.NIU.EDU