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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the many benefits of student research in college. The process of conducting research provides students the opportunity to learn about the research process, and going through the research process allows students to gain organizational and networking skills. Student research gives faculty members the opportunity to pursue their discipline while honing their teaching skills. Research experience, presentations, and publications by students are valued by employers and graduate schools. A side effect is that the student becomes a better consumer of research. An added benefit may be the opportunity to attend conferences and the learning possible in a conference situation. (Contains 13 references.) (SLD)

Student involvement in research: Benefits for students and faculty[1]

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Who can benefit from research experience in college? The answer is everyone—especially undergraduates, graduate students, and, of course, faculty (Kimble, 1987). The process of conducting research provides students with the opportunity to learn about the research process (Ossoff, 1998). Going through the research process allows students to gain valuable organizational and networking skills (Ossoff, 1998) and provides faculty with the need to pursue their discipline and aid their teaching. Research experience, presentations, and publications are valued by employers and graduate schools (Collins, 2001). Becoming a better consumer of research is a beneficial side effect. With all of these benefits, is it important that faculty members convince students to get involved.

Graduate School

Over time the criteria for acceptance into graduate school has become more stringent (Collins, 2001). Research experience is the key (Patricia Keith-Spiegel, 1991). Many successful applicants have published or presented research at a conference. According to Collins (2001), graduate school place less emphasis on the psychology portion of the GRE, internships, field experiences, and other nonpsychological activities. They place a great deal of emphasis on GPA, letters of recommendation, and the verbal and quantitative portions of the GRE. The idea is that if students have strong academic skills, they will learn about psychology in the graduate program. However, the top-rated activity for admission to graduate school was research experience, especially in the form of a publication or conference presentation (Collins, 2001). Likewise, in a recent study of clinical psychology programs, graduate admission directors of APA programs found that research experience or commitment to research was the most important factor (Munoz-Dunbar & Stanton, 1999).

Research experience also affects acceptance into graduate school in other ways (Collins, 2001). It allows students to discover an area of interest. Presenting research at conferences allows students to meet and interact with others who have similar interests. It can also lead to better letters of recommendation for the student who works with a faculty member.

Student involvement in faculty research

Students do not understand that they need to pursue research (Ossoff, 1998). Therefore, faculty need to convey to students the benefits of research. There are many ways to accomplish the goal. Students can get involved in a faculty member's research project. Faculty can also use the classroom to get the students interested in research (Ossoff, 1998). The instructor can also convey enthusiasm for research while teaching. On a more subtle note, faculty can display a personal interest in research. For instance, we might invite students to learn about our own projects or stop by our offices to visit (Ossoff, 1998).

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When students are directly involved in our research, authorship may be an issue. One common procedure is to allow students to be co-authors on journal articles. Faculty often let students be the primary author on poster presentations. This allows students to take more responsibility than they might otherwise have.

Student involvement in their own research

Service learning is a popular method for getting students involved in research (Ossoff, 1998). It involves having the students do a service in the community. Because the approach is "hands-on," students tend to take the activity seriously.

Guest speakers are also useful for sparking students interest in research (Ossoff, 1998). Guest speakers can even be other students who explain their research or field experience. Speakers can present in class, during psychology or Psi Chi or psychology club meetings, or to research groups.

It may be difficult to find research opportunities for students attending small colleges (Nicks, 2000; Petit, 2000). However, Nicks (2000) outlines a few of the possibilities. She suggests that faculty incorporate research into their daily duties. For example, an alumni survey was developed and analyzed by two psychology students. She also recommends that students take a research course and form research groups.

Psychology and Psi Chi clubs are ripe for research activities. I have had great success in organizing student-led research activities and helping students present their results at regional conferences. We typically meet weekly. After brainstorming sessions to determine the topic of research, I delegate responsibilities for the week. A side note to keep in mind, however, is that sometimes students are highly motivated at the beginning of a research project, but as they get busy with the activities of the semester, their motivations may wane. Careful planning is key.

Motivated students may decide to pursue their own research as an independent study project. Often they can earn course credit. Faculty members may provide support for these projects. Likewise, graduate students may be able to supervise independent undergraduate research. In one study, doctoral students supervised undergraduates doing independent study projects. This process was very successful for all involved (Carsrud, 1986).

Class projects and lab reports can also help get students motivated to do research. Most students are required to complete their own research project during experimental psychology (Ossoff, 1998; Powell, 2000). Students can learn a great deal in this process. In my experimental psychology class, students first conduct a research project as a group. The results are analyzed in class and then students write their own papers. They later conduct their own research, going through a simplified IRB process (see Kallgren, 1996), analyze the results on their own (with my help if needed) and write an APA-style paper. I find that students think the research and writing process is going to be easy—until they actually get involved in the activities. The second paper is often superb to the first even though students generally receive less assistance from me. This tells me that the research and writing process is beneficial. At the end of the semester, students report that they have a better understanding of the research process and technical writing skills necessary for publication.

A capstone course sponsored by a business or corporation can be an excellent way to incorporate research into the curriculum. Durso (1997) describes a capstone course in which teams of seniors apply psychological knowledge to a problem outside of academia.

Students reported that the experience was enlightening and provided a good opportunity to apply what they learned in a real-life setting.

I also tell my students that they may be able to present their research at a conference or publish it in a journal (usually an undergraduate journal such as the *Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research.*) My experience is that most students are intrigued with the idea of presenting and publishing their research, unfortunately, very few actually follow through, even with my help.

Presenting/Publishing

The publishing process is full of technical and strange rules and procedures (Powell, 2000). Students may not know that they should not submit to two journals simultaneously. However, if one journal rejects their research, they can submit to another. Fortunately, it is acceptable to submit a paper that has been presented at a conference (and students can benefit from the feedback they received) (Powell, 2000). Additionally, students may not realize that rejection rates are often very high, there is usually a long publication lag time, or even that journal articles go through a review process. Foremost, however, students should know that even papers that receive an "A" may not be published because publication standards are higher than course standards (Powell, 2000). Instructors may look for writing prowess, appropriate statistical analysis, and logical hypotheses. Journals look for the contribution of the study to the literature. They don't tend to accept nonsignificant results. Another consideration is the amount of time required to publish the research. Manuscripts often require revisions in addition to the months needed to go through the review process. Students in their junior or senior years of college may not be able to publish their papers before they apply for graduate school.

Although publications in professional journals really impress graduate school admission committees, they have high rejection rates (Powell, 2000). A useful resource is the *Journals in Psychology* (APA, 1997). It has published by the APA shows rejection rates, acceptable submissions, editorial policy, etc. There are a few journals that cater to undergraduate research. These journals may be the best bet for undergraduates new to research. The *Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research* and the *Journal of Psychological Inquiry* are two examples. Student journals are less prestigious than professional journals, but have higher acceptance rates. Division 2 of APA (Teaching of Psychology) has a web site (www.lemoyne.edu/OTRP/otrpresources/otrp_undergrad.html) that shows these journals.

Another option is the National Undergraduate Research Clearinghouse (Cronk, 2001). It provides a way to disseminate undergraduate research. The submission process is automated. All manuscripts that are sponsored by faculty members are accepted.

National conferences

Lastly, trips to conferences can be very motivational. Students love a "road trip." There are many options for presenting research at conferences. National conferences, such as those held by APA and APS, are held every year and provide many opportunities for learning about the field of psychology. Presenting at a national conference looks good on a resume. It is easier to get accepted at a conference than to get published in a journal. Additionally, Psi Chi holds special poster sessions during these conferences that provide sessions for student members.

Regional conferences

Regional conferences generally have higher acceptance rates than national conferences. EPA, SWPA, and MPA are a few examples of regional conferences. Regional meetings are listed in the *American Psychologist,* the *APA Monitor*, the APS Observer, and the *Eye on Psi Chi* (see the Psi Chi web site at www.psichi.org/content/conventions/reg_conv.asp.)

Student conferences

Student conferences may be less intimidating than the other options. They are designed to give students a chance to present research. They typically cover a few states. Most require that a faculty member sponsor the students' papers. They usually have a featured speaker or social event. Student conferences are listed in the Teaching of Psychology and on the Psi Chi web site (www.psichi.org/content/conventions/other_conv.asp).

In-house conferences

Finally, there may be a college or university event developed to show student research. At Stephen F. Austin State University and California University of Pennsylvania, experimental psychology students prepare posters of their research projects. Awards are given for the top research posters.

Overall benefits

Overall, students involved in research report enjoying the independence and responsibility of working on research and being intellectually stimulated (Goodlad, 1998). They also report that the opportunity to talk with others conducting research (postgraduates, coworkers, and research assistants) helps them feel accepted and successful (Goodlad, 1998).

Funding Student Research

Funding research is typically an ongoing process. In addition to the usual sources of funding-raising, students may receive funding from their college or university. Sometimes a simple letter to the dean results in a small research budget. Student research may also be eligible for a grant or award. A list of Psi Chi sponsored awards and grants follows:

Psi Chi Awards and Grants for Students
(See http://psichi.org/content/awards/graduate.asp and
http://www.psichi.org/content/awards/completelist_awards.asp)

Awards

Psi Chi/Erlbaum Awards in Cognitive science
Deadline April 1
$500 for undergraduate
$500 for graduate
Best empirical study in the area of cognitive science
Abstracts, photographs and brief biographies are published in *Eye on Psi Chi*

Psi Chi/APA Edwin B. Newman Graduate Award
Deadline is February 1
Travel expenses to attend APA convention
Three-year subscription to an APA journal of choice
Two engraved plaques (winner & winner's Psychology Dept.)
Abstracts, photographs and brief biographies are published in *Eye on Psi Chi*
Award is presented during the prestigious APA/APF awards
ceremony at APA convention

Psi Chi National Convention Research Awards
Deadline December 1
$300 undergraduate and graduate given out at the award ceremony
8 awards, 4 at APA and 4 at APS convention
For students who present at Psi Chi sessions of APA or APS

Hunt Research Awards
Deadline October 1
$3,000
Up to 3 awards
Question must be directly related to Psi Chi mission

Psi Chi/J.P. Guilford Undergraduate Research Awards
Deadline May 1
$1,000 first place, $650 second place, $350 third place
Papers, photographs and brief biographies are published in *Eye on Psi Chi*

Psi Chi/Allyn & Bacon Psychology Awards
Deadline April 1
$500 first place, $300 second place, $200 third place
Best empirical research paper
Abstracts, photographs and brief biographies are published in *Eye on Psi Chi*

Psi Chi/Cousins National Chapter Award
Deadline February 1
Presented to one chapter a year for scholarship in psychology
$3,500 and travel expenses to APA

Psi Chi Regional Chapter Awards
Deadline December 1
$500
Presented to two chapters per region that best achieve Psi Chi's purpose

Psi Chi Regional Research Awards
Deadlines vary
$300 undergraduate/graduate
For students who present at Psi Chi sessions at regional conventions

Psi Chi/Florence L. Denmark National Faculty Advisor Award
Deadline December 1
$500
For a faculty advisor who achieves Psi Chi's purpose

Psi Chi Web site Awards
Deadline February 1
$200 each for 3 chapters
For chapters with excellent web sites

Grants

Psi Chi Undergraduate Research Grants
Deadline October 1
Up to $1,500 to fund research (a total of $45,000 is given out yearly)

Faculty Advisor Research Grants
Deadline June 1
For faculty advisors and co-advisors who have been active in Psi Chi for one year
To provide research funds
Two grants per region per year
Up to $2,000

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