

Description of Undergraduate Research Scholars Program

The American Psychological Association has stated that “representation of persons of color markedly decreases at each succeeding level of psychology's educational pipeline -- high school through postdoctoral studies.” Active involvement in research among undergraduates is associated with higher college retention (University of Michigan, Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program, 2018). Moreover, independent research experience is a key criterion for graduate school admission. The department of Psychological Sciences is an outstanding research department in which many students are actively engaged in mentored research. Nevertheless, the majority of psychology majors either never become involved in research or do not become involved until their senior year. Students who begin their research careers in the senior year likely miss out on opportunities for presentations and publications that would facilitate their acceptance into graduate school. Moreover, they are likely to gain only the knowledge and skills developed in one research lab.

The Undergraduate Research Scholars Program seeks to redress these and other issues by achieving four primary goals.

- Foster early exposure to scientific, mentored research among minority and first generation students.
- Allow participating students to complete an independent research project by their sophomore year.
- Diversify the community of undergraduate scholars in research labs throughout the department.
- Gain insight into barriers to minority and first generation student involvement in undergraduate research.

The program is designed to enhance the research skills and scholastic success of students historically underrepresented in college and in psychological science. The program will encourage these students to assist with empirical research, beginning in their first or second year of college, providing an experiential opportunity to learn about an array of topics psychology and diverse research methods. Thus, the program fits with the goals of progressive pedagogical approaches to science education, addressing the needs of underrepresented students, and developing an innovative approach to credit-earning opportunities.

Undergraduate scholars will engage in two main activities. First, they complete a *rotation* in at least 3 labs in the department. During this rotation semester, scholars attend weekly lab meetings for all of the weeks that they assist in each lab. Faculty mentors hold weekly lab meetings, including the faculty mentor, graduate students, and other undergraduate research assistants.

Second, undergraduate scholars meet on a weekly basis with each other and a graduate student coordinator. The graduate student facilitates group discussions about the students' experiences, and provide research-related information and training, including training on ethical conduct of research from Campus IRB and CITI certification for conducting research. In addition, during the academic year, each participating mentor presents at one of the weekly group meetings, in effect providing students with a pro-seminar on psychological science. A member of our

undergraduate advising office meets with students at least once during this semester to discuss ways to remove barriers to student involvement in research. At the end of the Fall semester, scholars choose a lab in which to work during the Spring semester.

The undergraduate scholars enroll in Psychology 2950 (“Special Problems in Psychology”) and assist in a research lab by mutual agreement among the advisor and the undergraduate scholar. This Spring semester involves gaining additional hands-on experience in the assigned research lab and may involve designing an independent research project, with the guidance of the research mentor.

The target population is undergraduate majors in psychology who are members of underrepresented groups and/or first generation college students at the University of Missouri , Columbia, who are in their first and second years, will be eligible. Students selected based on year in college, high school and/or current GPA, and interest in participating in research. Typically, 15 students are selected for the program. Students are selected for the program just prior to the Fall semester. If you are interested in learning more about this program contact Dr. Ann Bettencourt.