



University of Utah

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH JOURNAL

REFLECTION ON MY WORK AS A RESEARCH ASSISTANT IN DR. HIMLE'S LAB

Alexis Sheffield (Dr. Michael Himle)

Department of Psychology

Over the past year and a half, I have had the privilege of volunteering as a research assistant for Dr. Himle and his graduate students. Before I received Undergraduate Research Opportunity Project (UROP) funding from the university, I primarily entered data for a randomized controlled trial, read literature related to the ongoing studies in the lab and attended lab meetings. Shortly before my proposal was submitted, I worked on a graduate student's dissertation, providing suggestions and revisions for the method, preparing measures for the procedure and guiding child participants through their assigned activities. However, the scholarship provided by the university equipped me for my current role in the lab because it fostered my advisor's trust in my competency and demonstrated my potential as a research assistant. Further, it added to my curriculum vitae and skillset to secure my competitiveness as an applicant for full-time research assistant positions to be obtained upon my graduation in May.

As for the UROP's impact on my personal growth and development, Dr. Himle's mentorship and the guidance from the graduate students in his lab provided me with the confidence to ask new research questions about caregiver strain in children with tic disorders. The experience of writing a proposal and carrying out the analysis on previously collected data allowed me to more fully understand the research process, build on disproven hypotheses and gain knowledge of the context in which certain methodologies are more useful than others. I gained first-hand experience of the pressure of deadlines and last-minute data checking and cleaning to ensure accuracy and consistency of codes. My poster presentation at the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies annual conference granted me an opportunity to share my ideas with relevant researchers in the field of tic disorders and other obsessive-compulsive related disorders. Although my contribution to the field through this project was small, the contributions made to my education were invaluable.

Through the exploration of my research interests, I prepared for a career in scientific inquiry and completed steps toward my eventual goal of attending a PhD program in clinical psychology. Because of my increased involvement in the lab, I was assigned more challenging tasks which included contributions to a review paper, which is currently in preparation. I was also given the opportunity to develop a database for a forthcoming randomized controlled trial using SPSS software, expanding my skillset as a researcher. Currently, I am working with REDCap software to construct a database for a national survey.

Dr. Himle's and his graduate students' expertise and example facilitated realistic expectations and ambitions for a career in psychology and inspired me to dream bigger about my future contributions to the field. I will be forever grateful for their willingness to take a chance on me despite my lack of experience. Their mentorship supported and sustained my eventual belief in myself and my confidence in my abilities moving forward.