Student Interview

Cody R. DeHaan

JUR: What kind of research are you involved in?

For the past five semesters, I’ve been doing motivation and self-determination research with Professor Richard Ryan and Netta Weinstein in the Psychology department. We do research in motivation in the domain of Self-Determination Theory, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as experiences of being in nature, reactions to stress, mindfulness and helping behaviors.

JUR: How did you become interested in this topic?

Actually, I wasn’t initially interested in research, but first semester freshman year I took a course with Professor Ryan. Toward the end of it, he announced to the class that he was looking for research assistants. I applied thinking it might be interesting, and I had an interview with Netta and she offered me a position. I actually spent my first semester running stress studies. I became interested in it after that. I wasn’t initially interested but I really grew to like it.

JUR: Is research the experience that made you decide that Psychology was the right major for you?

It definitely helped. I was torn between Computer Science and Psychology when I first started out but as I got further involved in psychology research and course material, I realized that I was interested in pursuing Psychology.

JUR: Do you think it has helped you see how the research process works?

Definitely. I had some idea about how it worked beforehand, but I didn’t understand how much work is involved on so many levels. But now when I read research, or read about research in textbooks, I have the knowledge to understand the conclusions, the process behind them, and read with a deeper understanding.

JUR: Why is research important to you?

Research is important to me because it’s something I plan to do in the future. It’s also the way in Psychology that we discover - or try to discover - how different processes actually work. You can sit down and think all day about, “how does this work,” “what motivates me to do this,” “what reasons do I have to do this” “why do I think this way about things,” “why do other people think about things this way”? Research gives you a way to take these and to prove them, to make them concrete, to test them, to actually show which ideas and theories actually hold true under certain circumstances.

JUR: Do you see that as the goal of psychological experiments?

That’s one of the goals. Definitely applying that research and helping people is one, but some of it is just fun and interesting to see - all these different things that people do and some of the reasons that might be behind them; basically, searching for what makes people tick. One of the best things is that it can be applied to people and used to make people’s lives better, whether they have a difficulty they’re suffering from, or whether they’re functioning in a healthy way and want to improve themselves.

JUR: What do you plan to do with this research in the future? Do you have any specific plans?

Well, I plan on going to graduate school after finishing undergrad. I’m not exactly sure what specific path I’d like to go down yet, but I know I’ll end up doing more research because I really enjoy it. I guess I’m just going to follow my interests and see where it takes me.

JUR: Is there anything you want to add?

I just think that people who have the ability to do research should pursue it. You know, you can look around and find an opportunity that is 2 credits, so it’s not a huge commitment. If you have the opportunity, it’s definitely something to check out – it hugely influenced my career path.

JUR: Any other advice?

Any worries you have are actually paid off by whether or not you liked the experience. You can have it be a really small time commitment, even. Most of the faculty are very open to students and to go into a professor’s office hours to talk to them to see if they have any research opportunities and might be willing to take you on. Just try to be open to new opportunities and be open to asking questions.

JUR: Are you doing your own research now?

I’m actually conducting my own research, in fact. We’re finishing up one study this semester. I’m also working on a paper with the graduate student I’m working with, Netta Weinstein, and we’re hoping to get that out soon. We’re progressing down some relatively unexplored and interesting paths, so it’ll be interesting to see how those projects turn out.