

Undergraduate Research Assistantships and Thesis Opportunities

Department of Psychology – East Carolina University

Summer/Fall 2024 Assistantships

Calling all Pirate Scholars!

The Department of Psychology at East Carolina University offers hands-on research experience opportunities for all undergraduate students.

Our faculty members are engaged in a variety of active research programs that span a number of specializations, methodologies, populations, and designs. Undergraduate students are encouraged to become a part of this research by assisting faculty with new and ongoing projects—an experience valuable for students who are interesting in learning more about one or more areas of psychology in greater depth, becoming an informed consumer of research, and developing skills and abilities valued by employers and graduate schools.

Undergraduate research assistants typically register for supervised course credit as an elective in psychology (e.g., PSYC 4501) in the semester or session that they are involved.

Below is a list of psychology department faculty who have demonstrated a commitment to mentoring undergraduate students in scientific research practices. My colleagues and I eagerly await your applications.

After studying this document and reflecting upon your personal and professional goals, Please set aside some time to complete the online application by using the following web address:

https://ecu.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6J4zGqgm7ZgzjJc

The deadline is Friday, March 29th.

The link to the application will become inactive after the deadline, so please complete the process as soon as possible if you are interested.

For more information, please visit <http://www.ecu.edu/cs-cas/psyc/StudentResearch.cfm>

List of Faculty Mentors

Please review the following list of faculty mentors carefully. Begin by reflecting on your personal and professional **goals**, the research description that each provided, and start forming a *mental ranking* of which opportunity you believe aligns best with **your long-term goals**. What type of experience would your ideal future self be most likely to look back on fondly? Choose wisely!

Dr. Mark Bowler

Field of Specialization: Industrial/Organizational Psychology

Research Description: For research with undergraduates, I am interested in the intersection of political beliefs and psychology. For example, research looking at the association between political ideology and vaccine hesitancy.

Note: Senior thesis option only.

Available to Freshmen/Sophomores? No

Dr. Courtney Baker

Field of Specialization: Industrial/Organizational Psychology

Research Description: I am interested in how we perceive others related to their identities and social features, how others perceive us, and how this impacts the way in which we treat others and perceive discrimination. I would classify myself as a diversity, equity, and inclusion researcher, with a primary focus on aging, gender, and disability. I also look at leadership perceptions, perceptions of humor use, multitasking, and workplace mistreatment as some secondary areas of interest. Currently, my lab is focusing on what it means to age healthily in the workplace and designing some projects related to worker experiences based on their age categories. In my lab, I typically coordinate lab tasks based on the needs of the projects that are actively occurring, so it is hard to predict exactly what you'd be engaging in, but I try to give experiences across the research process. This means that tasks you could be helping with include, but are not limited to, pretesting surveys, coding data, literature searches, APA reference checks, and collecting participant data. I do require that research assistants attend a once per week lab meeting to coordinate tasks and a lab project. Each semester, my students in my lab help to develop and facilitate a lab project together and engage in the full research process based on my lab's research focus. For first time lab students, I would like that they register for the course credit and after that could volunteer in lab rather than taking course credit if they desire. Undergraduates who work in my lab for at least one semester are eligible to be considered for a senior thesis.

Available to Freshmen/Sophomores? Yes

Senior Thesis option? No

Karly M. Murphy, PhD

Field of Specialization: Clinical Health Psychology

The scientific mission of the Psycho-oncology Lab is to develop, evaluate, and disseminate psychosocial interventions that improve quality of life among cancer patients and survivors. We utilize systematic procedures for intervention development that involve patients in the process to ensure that our work is grounded in sound theory, empirical evidence, and patient experiences. Currently, we are particularly interested in developing interventions for underserved cancer patients and survivors, such as adolescents and young adults (AYAs) and individuals living in rural areas.

The educational mission of the Psycho-oncology Lab is to serve as a research training lab for graduate and undergraduate students. By participating in the lab, students will strengthen their research and professional skills while also making meaningful contributions to psycho-oncology research. Undergraduates who have worked in our lab for two semesters or more are eligible to be considered for senior thesis.

Available to Freshmen/Sophomores? Yes

Christyn Dolbier, PhD

Field of Specialization: Clinical Health Psychology

Researchers in the Stress & Health Lab are looking for ambitious students interested in our area of research to join our research team during the summer and/or fall of 2024. Research conducted in the lab focuses on areas pertinent to the fields of health psychology, clinical health psychology, and clinical psychology.

Description of projects:

For summer 2024: We are recruiting two undergraduate research assistants to help with the project "Feasibility and preliminary effects of a trauma-sensitive yoga program for cardiac patients." A graduate student in the lab will be facilitating 4-week yoga programs for patients at the East Carolina Heart Institute this summer to examine the effects of yoga on posttraumatic stress, anxiety, depression, and interoception and the feasibility of offering mind-body interventions at an integrative cardiology clinic. Your role would involve attending these yoga sessions as an assistant to help with data collection (distributing surveys and completing intervention fidelity checks). It is estimated that there may be 1-4 yoga sessions per week from May-July (final schedule is pending). Patients who complete the yoga program will be invited for a post-program interview so we can learn more about their experiences and recommendations for future yoga programs. Your summer research assistant role would also involve being trained in qualitative research methods to help code the post-program interviews.

For fall 2024: We are looking for 1-2 undergraduate research assistants to help with the mindfulness-based program adaptation project. We are currently conducting a study assessing perceptions about mindfulness in young adults in the United States from diverse racial and ethnic groups. In the fall, we will use results from that study and previous literature to identify adaptations that may be needed for mindfulness-based programs to optimize their relevance and accessibility for young adults from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. Then we will prepare for the next step, which will be to conduct interviews or focus groups with young adults from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups to obtain their feedback on the identified adaptations to aid in their development. Your role would involve reviewing results/literature and contributing to discussions in which we identify needed adaptations, and assisting with document preparation for the interviews/focus groups. Depending on our progress, you may also assist with participant recruitment and retention, and qualitative data transcription and coding (although this may take place in the spring semester).

In your application, be sure to indicate if you are applying for summer and/or fall projects.

See our **lab website** for more information about our group.

<https://sites.ecu.edu/dolbierstressandhealthlab/>

Description of research assistantship:

Research assistants (RAs) read research articles related to the project they are involved with, participate in regular lab meetings, and assist with a variety of research tasks depending on the project and phase of the project (e.g., study document preparation; participant recruitment and retention; data collection, coding, entry and analysis; library research and literature reviews). Mentorship and training are provided by me and graduate students in our clinical health psychology doctoral program. Especially motivated and skilled RAs may have the opportunity to do independent research and assist with conference submissions and manuscript preparation. RAs who have worked in the lab for one semester or more are eligible to be considered for a senior thesis. RAs typically register for supervised course credit in psychology in the semesters they are involved.

(Dolbier, continued)

Preferred qualifications:

We will consider applicants at all levels (freshmen – senior) who have a solid academic record (GPA 3.0 or higher), and are detail-oriented, responsible and motivated to learn about research. We prefer that students be willing to commit at least two semesters to working in the lab, and enroll in 2-3 credits of supervised research in psychology (which corresponds to 6-9 hours of RA work per week)."

Professor Michael Baker

Website: <https://psychology.ecu.edu/people/baker/>

X/Twitter: [@PsychologyBaker](https://twitter.com/PsychologyBaker)

Fields of Specialization: Social Psychology, Personality Evolutionary Theory, Social Philosophy, Praxeology/Austrian Economic Theory, Ethics

Research Description: Thank you for investing your valuable time and effort to read and learn about the research mentorship opportunities that our program offers. The choice of a mentor is a very personal one and I appreciate you making it this far.

I am currently conducting research that explores big questions. “Big” is a term that’s defined by each individual. What’s the “biggest” question that *you* can think of? I’d love to hear **your perspective**.

In terms of “hands-on research experience”, my lab offers students the opportunity to develop **critical thinking skills** that will serve them well for as long as they choose to continue using and developing them. Readings designed to challenge the intellect will be assigned from peer-reviewed publications from a variety of physical, behavioral, and social science disciplines, as well as work from the humanities (e.g., poetry). Students will also be encouraged to generate and discover content themselves based on their personal and professional interests. My lab offers experiences collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, or even developing scientific theory!

The fundamental text that guides our work is Human Action by Dr. Ludwig Von Mises. In this text, Mises establishes a science named “praxeology” that aims to understand the ultimate reasons for purposeful action. In other words, it aims to understand the fundamental structure of decision-making. It’s a scientific approach that, in combination with empirical findings from psychological research, yields conclusions that strike those who understand them as “profound.”

Recently, we have been focusing on how the perceived predictability of one’s childhood environment impacts the degree to which they tend to trust themselves as young adults. Our finding is that those who grow up in unstable environments tend to have a harder time feeling love for themselves and others through no fault of their own. Blaming oneself for problems and self-doubt combined with difficulty trusting others is a recipe for spiritual dissatisfaction (see Psychology of Adjustment/Counseling). The cure for this is SOCIAL SUPPORT. My philosophy is that humans should do their best to serve as emotional support animals for anyone they encounter. Associated actions will reliably make the actor themselves and others in their social environment “shine” (borrowing Lizzo’s word there).

I’m also VERY interested in TIME. I have been studying the psychological factor of **time perspective** (how one feels about their past, present, and future) which is impacted by their childhood environment. People who struggled through unstable childhoods (see Developmental Psych) tend to question themselves more than those who enjoyed the privilege of more stable environments. (See Philip Zimbardo’s TED Talk on Time here:

https://www.ted.com/talks/philip_zimbardo_the_psychology_of_time?language=en

(Baker, continued)

Speaking of Zimbardo, I'm fascinated by ethics. The social value of cooperation versus cooperation is a key interest, as are the psychology of authority and obedience. I'm curious as to why more people don't realize that obedience is always a choice. Kindness and love are sometimes said to be "contagious" and I worry that hatred might be as well. Please check out the boards outside my office (Rawl 112) to learn more. Feel free to talk to me if you have questions about literally anything.

Three senior undergraduate psychology majors are currently completing thesis projects with my guidance. Five of the hard-working and dedicated students who I am currently mentoring are presenting at ECU's Research and Creative Achievement Week next month. I have been meeting with each student individuals on a regular basis to collaborate on data analysis and presentation preparation. I hope that you will attend the RCAW event to learn more about their work. (Details here: <https://gradschool.ecu.edu/research-creative-achievement-week/>)

I also have an undergraduate protégé traveling to the Austrian Economics Research Conference in Auburn, AL very soon to co-present my theory and the work that we have been conducting together.

PLEASE NOTE: A weekly lab meeting will be held every Friday afternoon and each individual assistant is required to attend. I am very accommodating with student schedules but expect regular participation and effortful contributions from each member of the team. I work hard and I expect the students I mentor to follow my lead.

Culture is important. My lab's culture is steadfastly focused on the individual. Work to put students first. I want to get to know you and I want you to get to know me. Let's collaborate! My students and I even share musical selections sometimes. (I chose "Unwritten" by Natasha Bedingfield as my lab's song based on the upbeat melody and empowering lyrics). Our best work is the product of cooperation and efficient division of labor. Students are also provided with access to ChatGPT4.0 and encouraged to use my "best practices" when partnering and/or collaborating with an AI. This includes essential language guidelines. (e.g., You must be polite and considerate in your prompts.)

Applications for my lab are competitive as student interest is often high and space in the lab is extremely limited. I wish that I could form meaningful connections with all of you. I got tired of saying that every semester so I formed this group for students who wish to learn more about praxeology and ask any questions. **All are welcome** to join our Team on MS Teams:

<https://teams.microsoft.com/l/channel/19%3aYSn-aAUSoOLC1H1ACKkvBznbzq75YY6hFIKh3OxD-ZA1%40thread.tacv2/General?groupId=1792ec8f-34ff-4fc0-a125-78de7b6497ff&tenantId=17143cbb-385c-4c45-a36a-c65b72e3eae8>

Please consider applying to collaborate with me and explore new horizons in using science to understand yourself and others! 😊

Available to Freshmen/Sophomores? Yes

Senior thesis option available? Yes