

Psychology Division Newsletter

A Publication of a Division of the Council on Undergraduate Research

Spring 2025

The Psychology Division of the Council on Undergraduate Research provides networking opportunities, activities, and resources to assist psychology administrators, faculty members, students, practitioners, and others in advancing undergraduate research.

Chair: Karen L. Gunther (Wabash College)
Newsletter Team: Amy M. Buddie (Kennesaw State University) &
Tsu-Ming Chiang (Georgia College & State University)

Greetings from the Chair

Greetings to the CUR Psych Division!

I hope everyone is hanging in there with government attacks on academia, science, and funding. And then there are the attacks on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, topics at the heart of what Psychology studies.

In this newsletter we share some very uplifting stories from this year's student research/travel awardees. We have three interesting teaching tips. Start thinking about nominating yourself or a colleague for the Mid-Career Mentoring Award – see below for more information.

Hang in there. Despite what we hear in the news, good research and good mentorship are still occurring. If anyone has tips for funding or conducting research without funds, please email them to me (guntherk@wabash.edu) – we'd love to share them in our fall newsletter!

Karen L. Gunther
CUR Psychology Division Chair
Professor of Psychology
Wabash College



CUR Psychology Division: Mid-Career Mentoring Award

Call for Nominations: The Psychology Division of the Council on Undergraduate Research requests nominations for a Mid-Career Mentoring Award. This award is for a CUR Psychology Division member who has influenced undergraduate research through their own research, through scholarly or creative projects with undergraduates, and/or through demonstrated leadership activities. The award consists of \$500. In addition, the awardee will have the opportunity to present their research mentorship style

and philosophy with the CUR community and the profile and accomplishments of the awardee will be featured on the Psychology Division's website.

Eligibility: Any member of CUR may nominate any active CUR Psychology Division member for the award. Self-nominations are also accepted. Nomination materials should elaborate on the perspectives, innovation, and value-added to undergraduate research.

Please visit the [CUR Psychology Division Mid-Career Mentoring Award website](#) for more information.

Application Deadline: October 15, 2025.

Contact the CUR Psychology MCMA-Committee Chair, Nestor Matthews (matthewsn@denison.edu), with questions.

Nominate Yourself to Be a CUR Psych Representative!

Watch for the call later this summer from the CUR National Office to nominate yourself (or a colleague) to become a CUR representative and help to shape the activities sponsored by our division. We meet over Zoom roughly monthly during the school year, and at the Annual Leadership Meeting in June. We'd love to have you join us!

Meet the 2024-2025 Student Funding Recipients!

The CUR Psychology Division offers a limited number of research (e.g., supplies or expenses) or presentation (travel/conference registration) awards for undergraduate students conducting original psychological research (~\$400-500). Watch the [CUR Psychology Division website](https://www.cur.org/membership-community/divisions/psychology-division/) (https://www.cur.org/membership-community/divisions/psychology-division/) next fall for a call for proposals. Here are this year's winners.

Mckinzie Adkins, *Midwestern State University, Texas*

Mentor: *Nicholas Maxwell*



1. What was the nature of your project? My research project with Dr. Nicholas Maxwell examined whether *Judgments of Learning* (JOLs; people's predictions about how well they'll remember information) could enhance memory for educational texts. Past research reveals that JOLs improve memory for simple word pairs, (ex: mouse:cheese) but there is less clarity about their effect on learning materials such as textbook passages. Through this research, we tested how different types of JOLs (term-specific vs. global) influenced memory performance on short-answer and multiple-choice tests using educational passages, aiming to better understand whether and when JOLs actually help students retain information.

2. What was the most challenging thing about the work you did? There were a number of mini-challenges since this was my first time conducting research. The biggest challenge, though, would be

the statistical side of data collection, since math is not my strong suit. However, Dr. Maxwell, my mentor, was an excellent helping hand in showing me the ropes within the magical world of research.

3. What kinds of things did you learn? (about your topic, about scholarship, or about yourself) I learned that simple strategies like making predictions while studying can have surprisingly complex effects depending on how we test memory. I also gained insight into the scholarly process—from building a literature review to the birth of a sound experiment. Personally, I learned how much I enjoy the investigative nature of research and that I'm capable of conducting much more research in my future.

4. Did you make any discoveries along the way? Yes! One key finding was that *term-specific* JOLs actually improved performance on multiple-choice tests but impaired performance on short-answer tests. This suggests that the benefits of JOLs may rely on the type of test used, likely due to the way JOLs strengthen familiarity-based memory cues. This discovery adds more to our understanding of metacognitive reactivity and could inform us more on how study strategies are taught, helping both educators and students.

5. How has the project helped you in your career goals? As someone pursuing a career in marriage and family counseling, this project strengthened my research skills and definitely has deepened my appreciation for evidence-based practices. Understanding how learning strategies affect memory will help me support future clients—especially those who will be students—by promoting more effective learning habits. It also reinforced my interest in the world of people, and how to help them.

I am an eldest daughter with 8 younger siblings, and navigating on my own through college and solo-living can inflict financial barriers. In order to pay for my own tuition and living expenses, I am a waitress at a local restaurant, and I also do house cleaning and personal assistant work for 5 clients weekly. I am so thankful to have received the CUR Research and Presentation Award with the Scholarship because this made it possible for me to travel to the 2025 Southwestern Psychological Association Conference in Arkansas and present my research. Having this privilege has given me further experience in the world of research, and I was able to use the majority of my time at the conference making new connections for my future.

6. What was the most meaningful part of your research experience? The most meaningful part was seeing the impact of my work recognized through presentations and awards, such as this one. It affirmed that the questions I'm passionate about have real academic and also practical value. Collaborating with my mentor, contributing to the world of research, and realizing that I could produce publishable research as an undergraduate was incredibly empowering.

Heaven Divinity, Georgia Southern University

Mentor: Virginia Wickline



1. What was the nature of your project? The project, *Crossing Borders: Impacts of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL)*, is a study on the transition of an intercultural competence project known as Crossing Borders to an online format. Originally, Crossing Borders included in-person activities and conversations between students of two or more different countries allowing them to explore each other's cultures, with the purpose of increasing intercultural competence and reducing prejudice. Due to Covid-19 and a decline of international students on college campuses in recent years, we decided to see if Crossing Borders could be as effective as a series of virtual dialogues using the COIL method. It was also important to assess the effectiveness of the project beyond just intercultural competence, so related factors such as cultural humility and ethnocentrism were assessed as well. Students were provided with discussion prompts to explore the similarities and differences between their cultures through a series of four virtual meetings. The results of the study aligned with our expectations as many students reported feeling satisfied with the experience. They were able to learn more about another culture while building relationships with individuals they may have never met otherwise. They also reported that taking part in the project may encourage them to seek out connections with individuals of a different culture in the future. We hope to share this project with other researchers so that similar programs may be implemented at other universities and college campuses to encourage inclusivity and respect for individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

2. What was the most challenging thing about the work you did? One of the most challenging aspects of my work was coding the qualitative data into themes. As this was my first time learning about and using the thematic analysis process, it was initially difficult to determine how certain student responses aligned with the themes I identified during my preliminary analysis. I also had to collaborate with my lab partners to compare our interpretations and reach a consensus on which themes to use in the final project. Some student responses were vague or unclear, making it challenging to categorize them appropriately, or decide whether they should be excluded altogether due to a lack of clarity or development. Despite these difficulties, the experience allowed me to gain valuable insight into a new form of data analysis, which has significantly contributed to my growth as a researcher.

3. What kinds of things did you learn? (about your topic, about scholarship, or about yourself) While working on the Crossing Borders: COIL project, I learned a lot about the importance of building connections with individuals of cultural backgrounds different from my own. Through the quantitative and qualitative analysis of student experiences with the project, I observed how virtual dialogues with individuals from different countries reduced cross-cultural communication anxiety, fostered the development of friendships, and led to increases in cultural humility, cultural understanding and

overall intercultural competency. By observing and assessing these outcomes, I developed a greater appreciation for the impact that interactions among individuals from different cultural groups can have on personal and social development. This experience has both broadened my worldview and strengthened my commitment to fostering inclusivity and inclusion in the type of research I conduct. I came to understand that simply consuming food, music, or media from a culture does not compare to direct engagement and communication with someone living within it. Furthermore, this project has encouraged me to seek out more interactions with individuals from different cultural backgrounds so that I can increase my own cultural knowledge and understanding and actively work to combat the cultural biases I may hold.

4. Did you make any discoveries along the way? After analyzing the quantitative results of our project using a series of dependent samples t-tests, we found a significant change in only one of the six cultural factors we tested. Specifically, there was a notable increase in cultural humility, while no significant changes were observed in interethnic and intercultural communication apprehension, ethnocentrism, comfort zone, or ethnocultural empathy. As someone with a background primarily in quantitative research, I initially viewed these findings as a sign that our project had not been successful. However, this perspective shifted after I created frequency tables and conducted a thematic analysis of students' qualitative responses regarding their experiences with the Crossing Borders program and its perceived effectiveness. Through this qualitative analysis, I discovered that many students still reported meaningful benefits aligned with our intended outcomes. This experience helped me discover the value of qualitative research and highlighted the importance of considering both numerical data and participants' lived experiences when evaluating a program's impact.

5. How has the project helped you in your career goals? My long-term goal is to earn a PhD in clinical psychology and eventually open my own private practice, specializing in treatment for children and families. To prepare for the demands of a doctoral program, I have engaged in a few research projects during my undergraduate studies. One of the most impactful has been the Crossing Borders project, which helped me develop both qualitative and quantitative data analysis skills, particularly through the use of SPSS, and become a more well-rounded researcher. This project also emphasized the importance of cultural awareness, understanding, and humility, which I believe are essential qualities for any clinician in today's diverse society. Culturally competent research is critical in supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion, values I strongly uphold. I am committed to promoting these principles throughout my graduate studies and in my future career. Additionally, this project enhanced my ability to present data in a visually engaging and accessible manner, strengthening my communication skills both verbally and in writing. I plan to carry the knowledge and experience gained from this project into my graduate training and beyond as I work toward earning my PhD.

6. What was the most meaningful part of your research experience? The most meaningful part of my research experience was the opportunity to present our work at a national conference to a professional audience. This milestone marked a significant step in my academic journey and deepened my passion for contributing to the field of psychology. Presenting at the conference helped me refine my communication skills and engage in meaningful conversations with others who share an interest in this area of research. It was also a valuable opportunity to network and build connections with professionals and peers. Overall, the experience underscored the importance of research in psychology and the impact of sharing findings to inspire new ideas and future exploration.

Itamar Encarnacion, St. Louis University, Missouri

Mentor: Lisa Willoughby



1. What was the nature of your project? Our project is a cognitive psychology study. We were specifically interested in exploring how two kinds of semantic properties (similar vs. semantically dissimilar) sounds would interfere with participants' attention and ability to perform a numbers-related cognitive task. In the context of our study, when we were thinking of an everyday example of how different semantic properties in our surrounding environment might affect attention, we thought of a situation where someone is counting objects or money, and another person counting very close to them might throw them off. This is an example of noise affecting an activity because the noise around them is semantically similar to the task at hand. Past research has looked at this, and it's found that numbers in the background during a counting task led to decreased performance than when non-numeric words were presented to participants. Past findings have also implicated that distractions occur under tasks that require more attention.

In our study, we replicated the study design that Seli and colleagues used in 2016. We assessed participants' attention and mind-wandering using the SART task (which stands for Sustained Attention to Response Task), also known as the no-go and go task. We also sought to extend the work of Ljung and colleagues by looking at semantically similar or dissimilar sources of interferences on an attention task using the SART task. We hypothesized that semantically similar noises to the attention task would have a higher interference level than semantically dissimilar noises. We tested this hypothesis by randomly assigning participants to listen to either numbers or letters. While they listened to their assigned conditions, they would partake in the SART task. Because the SART task involves recognizing numbers on a computer screen, we anticipated that the numbers would interfere with the participants' attention more than the letter because of the semantic similarity between hearing numbers while you're examining numbers.

2. What were the easiest and hardest things about the work you did? I'd say the easiest things were working along with motivated researchers themselves who enjoyed going through the research process of a study. Especially Narjes, because it was both of our first times leading a research study to the extent to which we did, but having other people to rely on and talk about the study in itself made it a very fun experience. Additionally, having Dr. Willoughby as a mentor and learning from her as a researcher over the years, and then being able to apply those learned skills to something tangible you can present at a research conference, was a very rewarding experience.

The hardest things were the logistical and technical aspects of research that can arise while progressing through a study. Making sure materials are updated and in the lab for testing, making sure lab members collect data accordingly (especially with a computer program they may not be familiar with before coming into the lab), and collecting sufficient data can be taxing because we did have a very small sample size.

3. What kinds of things did you learn? I learned various things, especially how much work, time, and collaboration it takes just to carry out and finish one single undergraduate study. It gave me an added appreciation for psychological research and thinking about things people don't often think about or see behind the scenes when they're sitting down, reading a research article. Especially because I'm the primary investigator of my capstone this school year as well, and saw similarities between the two studies' progression.

There was the technical, problem-solving aspect of doing the study. But when it came time to present our project, I realized that another obstacle that researchers have to overcome is learning how to relate their findings and the science behind their project to something that affects or should matter to people. This might be easier with studies with a more social nature to them. But with cognitive studies, especially studies with a somewhat simple design, like ours, you have to do a bit of storytelling and elaboration from the roots of the study. That in itself requires creativity and an extensive knowledge of the science you're presenting.

4. Did you make any discoveries along the way? Unfortunately, most likely because of our small sample, we did not have statistically significant results. But we did find that some participants were subjectively more distracted by the sound of letters in our study than by the sound of numbers. If this were to be replicated and there was a statistically significant difference, these findings would be interesting because they would somewhat contradict the research that has been studied previously. During the MPA [Midwest Psychological Association] conference, Narjes and I also discussed the possible factors that could cause participants to be more or less distracted by letters or numbers. Is it dependent on someone's major? Someone's familiarity with numbers? Or any other factors?

5. How has the project helped you in your career goals? The project has helped me be a better researcher by pushing me out of my comfort zone to thoroughly study an area in psychology that I initially thought I wasn't super drawn to. But now, after the study completion, these topics are research areas that are interesting to me and I would be excited to explore further. Overall, I think this study has shown me my ability to study various areas of psychology, and it makes me excited to continue to learn more in the future.

6. What was the most meaningful part of your research experience? This research experience has allowed me to present my first research study project at a research conference. Furthering my growth as a researcher and a student. But also, it's given me some motivation to continue my academic career. This is especially important to me as I am a first-generation college student and have immigrant roots. Thus, having the experience to simply be able to perform research is in itself a small milestone for my family and me. Attending events like research conferences is also very special to us because I'm the first in my family to experience a learning experience this extensive and enriching.

Mya Falkenhain, St. Louis University, Missouri

Mentor: Katherine Luking



1. What was the nature of your project? I created a poster to showcase my data project, which examined the role of Behavioral Inhibition and Activation System (BIS/BAS) sensitivity in the relationship between early pubertal timing and the development of eating disorder (ED) symptoms in a sample of early adolescent boys and girls. This project utilized data from the Adolescent Behavioral Cognitive Development (ABCD) longitudinal study and extracted variables for pubertal status at baseline (age 9/10), BIS/BAS sensitivity at year 2, and ED symptomatology at year 4 (age 13/14). Covariate variables included BMI, sex, age, financial adversity, ethnicity, and depressive/anxiety symptoms. A binary outcome ED variable was coded to include bingeing, purging, and restrictive symptoms, and additional exploratory analyses were run to examine binge-eating specific symptoms as an outcome. A multilevel mediation model was run to explore BIS (conceptualized as punishment sensitivity) and the three BAS subscales (conceptualized as reward sensitivity; subscales include fun-seeking, reward responsiveness, and drive) as potential mediators. An indirect-only effect was observed, such that early pubertal timing influenced ED symptoms entirely through BIS sensitivity.

This project was completed in collaboration with Arlinda Shehu, a Cognitive Neuroscience PhD graduate student at Saint Louis University. I presented my poster at the Midwestern Psychological Association Conference in Chicago, Illinois on April 10th to interested professors, students, and attendees. As a part of presenting at the conference, I had the privilege of listening to other students and professors present their work.

2. What was the most challenging thing about the work you did? In the end, this project required fairly complex statistical models that I was not previously proficient in. Thankfully, Arlinda was able to navigate the majority of coding, yet we were both responsible for interpreting the results. I spent a decent amount of time learning about multilevel mediation models, and why it was necessary to consider our nested variables. When our results yielded a significant indirect mediation (for BIS only), Arlinda spent time explaining the significance of such a pattern. Together, we were able to interpret how this result translated into a shareable conclusion regarding the linkage between early pubertal timing and the development of eating disorder symptoms. Navigating these statistics was by far the most challenging part of this project, especially since I not only had to understand these analyses but also be able to explain them to others while presenting. Overall, I was grateful for this challenge, as I managed to expand my statistical knowledge and grasp more advanced concepts, especially in regards to hierarchical models.

3. What kinds of things did you learn? (about your topic, about scholarship, or about yourself) I recognized the importance of studying younger populations to better understand risk factors associated with the development of eating disorders when I began interpreting the results of this project. Literature establishes the connection between early pubertal timing and eating disorders, yet

the underlying mechanisms are less clear. With this project, I was able to identify BIS sensitivity as a potential factor connecting these two constructs; a finding that hasn't been clearly documented in existing literature. This result guided my understanding of the maturation disparity hypothesis, which posits that early pubertal timing can result in psychopathology due to a mismatch between advanced biological development and premature emotional and cognitive development. I learned that increased sensitivity in neural motivational systems such as BIS/BAS in developing youth potentially help explain this theory in regards to eating disorders.

Though my project taught me a multitude about developmental risk factors and eating disorders, I also learned a lot about myself as a student, researcher, and learner. I have realized that high-level psychological research is a place where my curiosity is sparked, and I feel I can thrive. Throughout this process, it became clear that eating disorders are a key component of my research interests, and my goal of continuing on to graduate school to pursue this path was affirmed. Further, I came to recognize that a profession in psychology is a commitment to a lifetime of learning. While this conference provided me with the opportunity to learn greatly from professors and graduate students specializing in varying domains such as social and moral psychology, I also got to enact the role of teacher. Thus, even as an undergraduate, I can effectively contribute to psychological research, and I am looking forward to being immersed in a field that is constantly evolving.

4. Did you make any discoveries along the way? One of the best discoveries that emerged from this project has prompted me to consider future research hypotheses and continue developing this project further. Arlinda suggested running additional exploratory analyses to measure binge eating (BE) only symptoms as an outcome variable (rather than the all-inclusive binary ED symptom variable) in our previously significant BIS model. Interestingly, BIS was not a significant predictor when BE only symptoms were measured. This indicates that there may be a special relationship between early pubertal timing, BIS sensitivity, and restrictive behaviors. While the sample size of individuals endorsing restrictive symptoms was too small to draw any strong conclusions, this result prompted a magnitude of new research questions. I discovered that this simple poster project could take on numerous directions in the following year and could inspire future graduate school projects. For instance, I would love to re-examine my BIS-only mediation model with anorexia nervosa specific symptoms or diagnoses (in older populations) as an outcome. Further, the insignificance of BAS makes me wonder if BAS sensitivity becomes a stronger predictor at a later age or later pubertal stage.

The project itself yielded many fascinating findings, but the most impactful discovery was an insight into my own skills. With each step, from in-depth literature searches and navigating SPSS, to presenting final results, I was proud of my ability to confront challenges, think abstractly, and organize statistical information. I affirmed that I have the grit and passion to pursue complex research topics and projects.

5. How has the project helped you in your career goals? This project was a major step towards achieving my academic and career goals. After graduation, I hope to pursue a PhD in clinical psychology with an emphasis on eating disorder research and treatment. In graduate school, I would be interested in engaging in research concerning identification of developmental risk factors associated with eating disorders, particularly bulimia nervosa and anorexia nervosa. This project has given me an excellent introduction to these topics and inspired further pursuable research questions. Additionally, through this process, I have gained experience as a first author in the research setting.

With psychological research being a key component of my future education, I am grateful for the opportunity to be a leader and take an initiative on a project that highly aligns with my interests. Exposure to literature search, variable collection, statistical analysis, drawing conclusions, and presenting results has led to the development of valuable skills that I will continue to use in following years. Lastly, whether I seek a career in academia or a clinical setting, I believe that an understanding of the empirical evidence surrounding eating disorders is essential to being a competent professional. This project has not only expanded my knowledge but also solidified my commitment to addressing these complex issues with both scientific rigor and compassion.

6. What was the most meaningful part of your research experience? The most meaningful part of my research experience was the relationship I formed with my graduate mentor, Arlinda. Undergraduate experience in research conceptualization and methods is invaluable, and I would never have excelled through this project without direct guidance and instruction from Arlinda. Not only did she teach me essential skills, but she provided me with an insight into the graduate experience. I found that I turned to her for advice about everything from clinical experience and research questions to social life. Our mentor-mentee relationship taught me the importance of scientific community and the transformative impact of collaboration and shared curiosity in shaping both professional growth and meaningful research. Further, her support has instilled the confidence I needed to face this next chapter of my life. Although my senior year will encompass more independence in research endeavors, it is comforting to know Arlinda is in my corner. I am so grateful for her friendship and mentorship.

Shira Gold, High Point University, North Carolina

Mentor: Laura Nagy



1. What was the nature of your project? My research project focused on exploring the relationships between self-criticism, depression, and nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI). We aimed to understand how these factors interact and contribute to mental health outcomes. I was involved in all stages of the project, from conceptualizing the research questions to analyzing data. The project used statistical models to explore the complex relationships between variables, examining how different forms of cognitive and emotional processing might influence NSSI behaviors. Additionally, I played a significant role in designing the poster presentation, where I worked to ensure our research findings were clearly and logically communicated to both academic and clinical audiences.

2. What was the most challenging thing about the work you did? The most challenging aspect of this project was determining the most appropriate statistical model to analyze the data effectively. I had to critically evaluate various approaches to ensure that we were capturing the complexity of the relationships between self-criticism, depression, and NSSI accurately. This required a deep understanding of the data, as well as the ability to choose the right statistical tools.

3. What kinds of things did you learn? (about your topic, about scholarship, or about yourself)

Through this project, I learned a great deal about the psychological mechanisms behind self-criticism, depression, and NSSI, and how they interact in ways that influence mental health outcomes. I gained a deeper understanding of how cognitive processes can shape emotional reactions and behaviors, which is essential in clinical practice. I learned the importance of applying rigorous statistical methods to interpret complex psychological phenomena and how research can directly inform clinical interventions. Personally, I learned how to communicate complex research findings in an accessible way and how to think critically about data and its implications, both of which are essential skills for my future in clinical psychology.

4. Did you make any discoveries along the way? One of the key discoveries from this project was the significant role that small variations in self-criticism could have on an individual's emotional reactivity and tendency toward NSSI. I found that even subtle differences in how individuals engage in self-critical thinking could predict emotional outcomes and maladaptive coping strategies, such as self-injury. This finding reinforced the complexity of psychological processes and the importance of considering individual differences when diagnosing and treating mental health conditions. It was also informative to see how theoretical concepts translated into real-world data, highlighting the practical applications of psychological research.

5. How has the project helped you in your career goals? This project has been crucial in advancing my career goals of pursuing a doctorate in clinical psychology. By gaining hands-on experience in data analysis and interpretation, I developed essential skills for conducting research that will be invaluable in both academic and clinical settings. The project also deepened my understanding of mental health topics closely aligned with my future studies, such as self-criticism and depression. Additionally, presenting the poster at the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies conference provided me with an opportunity to enhance my public speaking and communication skills, which will be critical when interacting with patients, colleagues, and the broader psychological community.

6. What was the most meaningful part of your research experience? The most meaningful part of my research experience was the opportunity to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application. By analyzing data that reflected complex psychological phenomena, I was able to better understand how research findings can directly inform clinical practice and improve mental health treatment. Additionally, presenting my research at a professional conference allowed me to communicate our findings to a wider audience, gaining feedback that further enriched my understanding of the topic. This experience reinforced my passion for clinical psychology, particularly in how research and practice can collaborate to enhance the well-being of individuals.

Anissah Groark, St. Louis University, Missouri

Mentor: Lisa Willoughby



1. What was the nature of your project? My project consisted of research based on a replication study on intentional and unintentional mind wandering. We further examined mindfulness in relation to this study. We then presented our results as a poster presentation at the Midwestern Psychological Association (MPA) Conference in Chicago.

2. What was the most challenging thing about the work you did? The most challenging thing about my project was being able to put it into words. I had never presented research or presented a poster, so it was difficult for me to explain my research in a clear and concise way. It was a challenging yet rewarding task that deepened my own understanding of the topic.

3. What kinds of things did you learn? (about your topic, about scholarship, or about yourself) I learned so much about mindfulness and mind wandering, especially how it is implicated in everyday life. I learned there are so many ways to measure and practice mindfulness, and that it is a significant area of study in positive psychology. This was my first time attending a research conference, and it was eye opening to see all the different research topics and interests. As for myself, I learned that I am capable of anything I set my mind to, even if at first, I don't think it is possible!

4. Did you make any discoveries along the way? Along the way, I discovered that I enjoy discussing my research with others and being able to take our ideas further through these interactions.

5. How has the project helped you in your career goals? This project has introduced me to the world of academia and research in psychology, and it made me realize that I want to pursue research in my future career, as well as opportunities to share it with others.

6. What was the most meaningful part of your research experience? The most meaningful part of my research experience was the opportunity to discuss my topic with other members of the psychology community. I had so much fun bouncing around ideas about my topic with other students and professors, and it made me so happy to be a part of the academic world of psychology.

Teaching Tips

Chris Dabbs, PhD

**Assistant Professor, Department of Psychological Sciences and
Counseling
Valparaiso University**

How to Work With, and Not Against, Autistic Brains



This Teaching Tip was largely adapted from the forthcoming chapter in the NovaPublishers book, *Ableism, entitled: Anti-autistic ableism in higher education* co-authored by Chris Dabbs, Ph.D. and Audrey Scaer, Ph.D.

Legal frameworks within the United States and elsewhere significantly influence how institutions of higher education approach—or fail to approach—supporting autistic students. Within the United States, the foundation for legislative disability protections include the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; U.S. Department of Education, 2024), the Americans with Disabilities Act (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (U.S. Department of Education, 2025). Although there is a continued increase in a global focus towards the inclusion of disabled students, there appear to be large gaps between formal laws and policies as compared to implementation on the individual student level across nations (UNESCO, 2020). For example, within the United States, in the 1980s and 1990s, revisions to IDEA added provisions for transition services, theoretically preparing students for postsecondary education (34 CFR, 300.320 (b.1)). However, once a student graduates from high school, or ages out of the K-12 system, the specific rights guaranteed under IDEA no longer apply as these stipulations are tied to Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), which are legislatively tied to primary/secondary educational institutions. In essence, these legal realities have created higher education environments with heterogenous implementation of support for autistic students. In this Teaching Tip, I will discuss two areas of teaching that may be easily addressable to better include autistic students: understanding of autism and communication with autistics.

University and college instructors play a vital role in shaping the learning experiences of autistic students, yet they often encounter significant challenges when attempting to meet the diverse needs of the population (Martin, 2020). A fundamental issue that arises at all academic levels from contingent faculty to the highest administration is a limited understanding of autism beyond the narrow, medicalized descriptions that traditionally emphasize differences in social interaction, behavior, and (mistakenly) intellectual ability. Instructors who lack exposure to evidenced-based teaching practices (e.g., Universal Design Learning) may inadvertently perpetuate academic ableism by relying on rigid instructional practices that disadvantage autistic students—strictly timed assessments, limited modes of participation, or interactive group projects that don't account for sensory or communication needs (MacLeod & Green, 2009). Assignments that offer flexibility in due dates and multiple modes of participation (e.g., via voice, text, augmentative and alternative communication) may better serve autistic students.

A major area of difficulty concerns effective communication with students who process and express information in non-typical ways (Milton, 2012). College and university instructors, perhaps more than primary and secondary teachers, often presume that students grasp classroom norms intuitively—based, in part, by their years of classroom time that preempted college. However, autism is commonly associated with differences in pragmatics and social communication, which can lead to misunderstandings in the face of this presumption. For instance, an instructor might assume that a student who does not participate in classroom discussion is disengaged when, in fact, that student could have a neurotype that prefers internal processing or they could be experiencing challenges with rapid verbal exchanges. As professors assume commonality in communication within their instructional methods, autistic students educationally benefit less than other students related to the disproportionate cognitive efforts required for them to meet classroom demands (Stockwell et al., 2024). As students become disconnected from the curriculum, the unstructured nature of office hours

paired with similar assumptions of student understandings of such spaces can further the cycle of educational disconnect. Without training to recognize the heterogeneity of autistic communication styles, instructors may miss opportunities to develop inclusive participation strategies (e.g., online discussion forums, alternative forms of engagement, etc.).

To combat both of the above, it would benefit autistic college students if their professors learned more about their neurotypes. I once interviewed for an academic job at the Rochester Institute of Technology, home to the National Technical Institute for the Deaf. Because of the high incidence of deafness amongst the student body, all instructional staff receive formal training on deafness, deaf culture, classroom considerations for deafness (e.g., not covering one's mouth), and other realities of teaching to a deaf population. In a similar way, as the prevalence of autistic college students increases, it may behoove us to learn more about the realities of autism, autistic culture, and ways to best meet the needs of these students with different brains. In our forthcoming clinical book, [Understanding and Affirming Autistic Clients](#), we compile a list of knowledge training—we can't alter our teaching practice to meet differing needs if we don't know what those needs are. I would recommend the following FREE trainings:

1. [University of Missouri, Thompson Center for Autism & Neurodevelopment](#) offers five free modules covering a variety of topics about autism. For college and university faculty, I would recommend Module 1, *Understanding Autism in Young Children* and Module 4, *Transition to Adulthood*.
2. [OpenLearn](#) hosts a free eight-week introductory training program about autism. For college and university faculty, I would most recommend Week 1 (*Introducing the autism spectrum*), Week 2 (*What is autism like?*), Week 4 (*Explaining autism: mind and brain*), and Week 7 (*Adulthood*).
3. The Autism Certification Center offers a paid certification. However, anyone can freely access the 90-minute module [Many Faces of Autism](#), which dispels common myths about autism through interviews with autistic people. It also offers some practical strategies for helping autistic folks. Click "Get Started" once navigated to the webpage.

Jennifer Coleman, PhD
Professor of Psychology
Western New Mexico University



Interactive Video Assignments: Knowledge Checks through Instructor Presence

If you use video as part of your supplemental teaching efforts, there are great opportunities to add instructor presence to those videos while also engaging students in ongoing comprehension checks. One of the early programs to support such functions is PlayPosit, the interactive video learning tool. Other programs, like Panopto, have added similar features recently. My institution uses the Canvas LMS and Panopto as our primary video recording, editing, and presenting tools. Since Panopto recently added the Quizzing feature, you can stop your video at any time, and add written content with true/false, multiple-choice, or essay questions. I took all of my start-of-term documents, like the syllabus, academic integrity policy, course

policies, and even the schedule of work, and turned them all into interactive videos. Each one included a message from me explaining the importance of the policy or resource, highlights of the material that should be read independently, and questions along the way to ensure students fully understood the course contract we would operate under throughout the semester. These interactive videos are things you can track to assess student engagement, and you can also integrate the video as a credit-bearing assignment. My students this term have shared with me that they feel a greater sense of early connection to me through watching the series of short, interactive videos, and I have greater confidence in their knowledge of these important documents because of their recorded results. Whether you are teaching a flipped course, fully online, or just using your LMS for distributing materials and collecting homework, you might find these powerful interactive video tools useful additions to your teaching.

Kimberly A. Rapoza, PhD
Associate Professor of Psychology
Director of the McNair Scholars Program
Mercy University

Increasing Student Reading and Engagement with Collaborative Annotation Tools

Many of us have encountered blank looks or averted eye contact when trying to engage undergraduates in discussions about the weekly assigned readings. In the back of your mind, you may suspect that the root cause of the silence enveloping the classroom is unpreparedness. Did anyone do the reading? According to research, the answer is a disappointing no. Gammerdinger and Kocher found that only 17-27% of students complete assigned readings before class¹. The problem may worsen with more technical and challenging research articles, as common reasons for reading non-compliance include lack of time, perceived difficulty, confusing terminology, and unclear value¹. While there are strategies to boost reading rates², one innovative solution is the use of collaborative annotation tools. These tools foster active learning by allowing students to interact with the material, each other, and the professor online before class. Students more at risk of not completing readings, such as first-year students, first-generation students, and non-native speakers, could particularly benefit from the opportunity to clarify misunderstandings and ask questions in a low-pressure environment. Popular platforms with free basic packages include Perusall, Hypothesis, and Kami^{3,4}. For example, Perusall allows instructors to set up a class, import journal articles, OER textbooks, webpages, or YouTube videos for commentary, and provides analytics to track student engagement. It can be integrated with learning management systems. Instructors can seed an article with pre-annotated comments or questions, split students into groups for different assigned tasks, or encourage tagging and sharing resources. Collaborative annotation sends a message to students that we are all in this together, the reading has value, and their contributions to the conversation are important. It also gives instructors



a preview of student comprehension, allowing for targeted guidance on misunderstandings or sticking points in the next class.

Sources:

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6067038/>

² <https://theconversation.com/up-to-80-of-uni-students-dont-read-their-assigned-readings-here-are-6-helpful-tips-for-teachers-165952>

³ <https://online.college.emory.edu/tools-and-technologies/collaborative-annotation-tools.html>

⁴ <https://ctl.columbia.edu/resources-and-technology/resources/activities-tools-collaborative-learning/>