

Psychology Division Newsletter
A Publication of a Division of the Council on Undergraduate Research
Spring 2026

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 CUR Psych division! I hope this has been a rewarding and productive year for you all.

We have inspiring news to share in our spring newsletter. In case you missed Ginger Wickline's talk as this year's Mid-Career Mentor Awardee, we have a summary and a link to her talk. We also hear from this year's four student research/travel awardees about how this award and their research have impacted their careers. And we have teaching tips from our elected reps. (If you have teaching tips you would like to share, please submit to me through the CUR Psych Division website: <https://www.cur.org/membership-community/divisions/psychology-division/>)

We also have a new podcast this year, *UR Talking Psychology*!

Watch for a call in late summer for next year's round of student research/travel grants. We'd love to hear what your students are up to.

As always, if there is something that you would like to see the Psych Division do, please let us know. Or, better yet, nominate yourself or a colleague to be an elected representative for the Psych Division! Nominations open mid-June – watch for a call from CUR's National Office.

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



Podcast: UR Talking Psychology

UR Talking Psychology is the official podcast of the Psychology Division of CUR. Featuring voices from undergraduate psychology faculty, staff, and students, we seek to increase awareness of psychology as a research science and highlight the value of undergraduate research contributions. The podcast can be found at:

Podbean: <https://urtalkingpsychology.podbean.com/>

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/show/6jFyPCV4l8tioroY2U5T3E>

Apple Podcast: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ur-talking-psychology/id1884027408>

CUR Psychology Division: Mid-Career Mentoring Award

This year's award winner was Dr. Ginger Wickline of Georgia Southern University. Dr. Wickline has supervised over 75 undergraduate research projects and co-authored peer-reviewed publications with 32 undergraduate mentees. She has mentored six McNair Scholars, a national program supporting first-generation and low-income students. She has guided numerous students in presenting symposium talks and posters at regional and national conferences, including the Association for Psychological Science, the American Psychological Association, NAFSA: Association of International Educators, The Forum on Education Abroad, the National Institute for the Teaching of Psychology, and the Southeastern Psychological Association.

On March 25, 2026, the division hosted her award presentation entitled "Talk to Me: How Undergraduate Research Mentoring Parallels and Diverges from Counseling Interventions."

You can see Dr. Wickline's full talk - and the talks of other previous winners of the Mid-Career Mentor Award - on the CUR website:

<https://www.cur.org/membership-community/divisions/psychology-division/divisions-psychology-mid-career-mentoring-award/>

Meet the 2025-2026 Student Research Award 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** next fall for a call for proposals. Here are this year's winners.

Jack Arruda, University of Massachusetts, Boston

Mentor: Tashuana Blankenship



1. What was the nature of your project? For my senior year of my undergrad I was given the opportunity to create and write an honors thesis with The Early Minds Lab at The University of Massachusetts Boston. In my project, I investigated how emotions influenced children's (3 - 6 years old) memory for temporal order by using a board game paradigm called Explorer Quest. Children played a board game where, depending on our condition, they either won or lost, and after a 5-minute delay we asked children to rate how they felt at each location, and afterwards asked them to order the locations in the order they visited them on a timeline.

2. What were the easiest and hardest things about the work you did? I loved the data collection for this study, that is, interacting and meeting with families, and running participants by playing the board game with them. All data was collected at various living labs at museums which were great environments to introduce families to psychological research. The hardest part, as well as the most satisfying, was data analysis for this project. Learning

how to code in R and execute analysis with the data I collected was a taxing but very rewarding process.

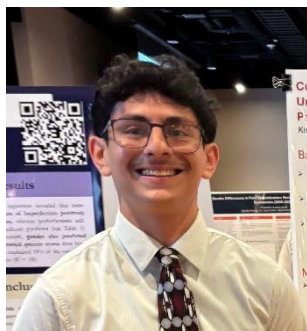
3. What kinds of things did you learn? SO MANY THINGS! This project has introduced me to how fun psychological research can be, and how rewarding as well. I learned how to be an experimenter within a study, and work with families from all different backgrounds. I learned how to organize and analyze data, and how to use these findings to present at various poster conferences, and in writing my honors thesis, and even the manuscript of the research.

4. Did you make any discoveries along the way? We hypothesized that children (3-6 years old) would significantly perform the best given negative valences as opposed to the neutral and positive valences, as negative valences typically curate more memorable experiences. We also hypothesized that older children (4.5-6 years old) would significantly perform better than younger children (3-4.5 years old). We ran 112 participants so far out of our full 158 sample size. Preliminary analysis found that older children performed significantly better than younger children on the timeline task ($p < 0.0001$), and that children who rated their experiences as positive were significantly more likely to achieve better scores ($p < 0.05$). Meaning that more positive experiences, not negative, actually predicted better temporal memory performance in children 3-6 years old.

5. How has the project helped you in your career goals? Incredibly. This project has allowed me to present my research at various conferences in and out of the country, where I got to network with amazing scholars in the field, and find opportunities to work with labs once I graduate undergrad. Furthermore, this project has given me early experience with hand-on research which is essential in pursuing a career in psychological research. I am so excited to take everything I have learned, and the experience I gained, with me either into a post-bac position in a lab, or a master's program in cognitive psychology, both which help me eventually pursue a PhD in cognitive development.

6. What was the most meaningful part of your research experience? Definitely either meeting such amazing people within the field, or, all the things I have learned from my project in just the short year I have been working on it. The experience itself has made me all the more passionate about my place in cognitive sciences, and I am so happy to graduate with confidence and competence in my future career.

Kruz Barrera, Illinois State University, Normal
Mentor: Dan Lannin



1. What was the nature of your project? My research project sought to explore the role of exposure to ICE-related violence on Latino/a's mental health and whether a Focus on the Positive Coping style can buffer the impact of exposure to ICE-related violence.

2. What were the easiest and hardest things about the work you did? The easiest aspect of this project was sharing the findings of this study at conferences and symposiums. The hardest aspect of this project was the initial exploration of the literature and the narrowing of the research question.

3. What kinds of things did you learn? By working on this research project, I have learned how to conduct a literature review, create an online survey, clean and analyze data with SPSS syntax, and find conferences to present my research findings.

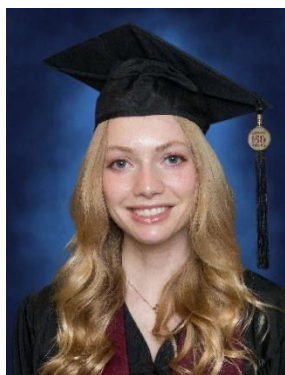
4. Did you make any discoveries along the way? Our research study found that Latino/a college students in our sample reported experiencing more exposure to ICE-related violence via the media than white college students in the sample. This then led to Latino/a college students experiencing greater distress indirectly through this media exposure.

5. How has the project helped you in your career goals? This research project has helped me pursue my goal of becoming a competent researcher. As principal investigator, I was responsible for all aspects of the project, which greatly improved my confidence in my abilities as a researcher.

6. What was the most meaningful part of your research experience? To me, the most meaningful part of this research experience was learning to fail forward and having confidence in oneself.

Katherine Ray, Texas A&M University

Mentor: Siara Rouzer



1. What was the nature of your project? My project was investigating how prenatal alcohol and/or cannabinoid exposure altered endogenous opioid receptor/peptide gene expression along the corticostriatal circuit (medial prefrontal cortex and dorsomedial striatum) and how this correlated with alcohol-seeking behavior in adulthood. My goal was to identify novel opioidergic gene targets that drive alcohol seeking in adult mice with prenatal substance exposure.

2. What were the easiest and hardest things about the work you did? The easiest part of my work was conducting the alcohol self-administration tests. Once I learned how to conduct the test, it became second nature to prepare the operant chambers, load the subjects, and select and start the correct protocols. The hardest thing about my project was explaining *why* we saw the changes in gene expression and behavior that we did. It required a lot of literature review and critical thought to come up with plausible reasons for our results, as not many studies have been conducted on mice prenatally exposed to alcohol and cannabinoids. Furthermore, not many studies included females, while the results of my project were almost entirely sex-dependent.

3. What kinds of things did you learn? One of the primary takeaways from my project is that sex-differences should almost always be included in studies, with the exception of disease states that only affect one sex. Nearly every result I observed was sex-dependent, and many times the effects on both sexes were significant and in opposite directions. For example, prenatal alcohol and cannabinoid exposure caused *OPRM1* expression in the medial prefrontal cortex of males to increase and in females it decreased. The only sex-independent effect was a correlation between *OPRM1* expression in the dorsomedial striatum and ethanol consumption during an FR1 protocol, when ethanol is easily accessed. I also expanded on my understanding of what drives sex-differences, as it is not just hormones as some may think. Several neurotransmitter systems and circuitry are highly sex-dependent, with the

endogenous cannabinoid system being a prime example. Another takeaway from my project is that prenatal co-exposure to alcohol and cannabinoid does not always exacerbate the effects of single exposures, which can sometimes result in more severe behavioral symptoms.

4. Did you make any discoveries along the way? I made many discoveries throughout this project, which I discuss in detail in my undergraduate thesis titled: "Sex-Specific Effects of Prenatal Alcohol and Cannabinoid Co-Exposure on Corticostriatal Opioid Gene Expression and Associated Behaviors", which will be published after the official article from my lab is published.

5. How has the project helped you in your career goals? Conducting the work for this project, presenting it at conferences, and writing an undergraduate thesis on it has helped me tremendously to develop as a researcher. I am incredibly thankful to my mentor for allowing me to develop my own hypothesis about what genes were contributing to the behavioral changes as a result of prenatal exposures. The research experiences that followed have taught me how to critically examine scientific writing and apply what I've learned to my own project. Furthermore, writing my thesis taught me invaluable lessons about time management, effective scientific writing, and interpreting results; I now feel much more prepared for the writing workload of graduate school, which I am excited to start in the fall.

6. What was the most meaningful part of your research experience? The way that my project has developed over my years working at the lab has been incredibly meaningful and fulfilling. I began as a sophomore, when my only responsibility was to conduct alcohol self-administration tests and care for the mice. In following semesters, I interpreted the behavioral results and developed a causal hypothesis, which I was then able to investigate. Since the conclusion of data collection and analysis, I have been able to present this project at two international conferences and have completed an entire undergraduate thesis on my over 2 years of work. The freedom given to me by my mentor, Dr. Siara Rouzer, to develop and present this project has been instrumental for my academic and professional development, and it has given me the confidence to enthusiastically pursue a Ph.D. in Neuroscience.

Victoria Tirino, Kennesaw State, Georgia

Mentor: Danica Kulibert



1. What was the nature of your project? The nature of our project was looking at what factors impacted people supporting companies' diversity statements, with factors such as organizational belonging and competence, perceptions of the social/diversity movement, and perceptions of racism and civic engagement.

2. What were the easiest and hardest things about the work you did? The easiest thing about the work we did was the compiling and analyzing of the data to present, and the hardest thing was picking the bounds for each factor we compiled data on.

3. What kinds of things did you learn? I gained personal information about what kinds of factors influence the company-consumer relationship, as well as skills related to presenting research at a national conference and in a setting full of like-minded psychological peers.

4. Did you make any discoveries along the way? The biggest discovery I made along the way was learning which factors we researched had the biggest impact on peoples' support of companies.

5. How has the project helped you in your career goals? This project assisted my career goals by giving me more firsthand research collection and analysis experience, as well as giving me experience presenting findings, which are both skills I plan to utilize and develop further into my career.

6. What was the most meaningful part of your research experience? The most meaningful part of my research experience was getting to present our research at a national conference in Chicago, as it was a great learning and experience opportunity bridging the gap between undergraduate and professional research.

Teaching Tips



Incorporating Research in the Curriculum

Chrysalis L. Wright, PhD
Associate Lecturer
University of Central Florida

Undergraduate research experiences are exceptionally important in that they enhance students' understanding of the field, improve critical thinking and reasoning skills, help clarify student academic interests, and expand students' experiences at their institution. Unfortunately, it is not feasible for all students to be able to serve as a research assistant in a lab, making it challenging for some students to gain the hands-on experience they need. One way to help students gain research skills is to integrate research experiences in the classroom. This can be a task for instructors due to course modality, class size, and topic areas focused on during the course. Below are some suggestions to help.

- With large classes, students can be grouped in small teams to work collaboratively, rather than completing the task individually. This not only helps students master how to work with others but also helps instructors manage the time related to the project.
- To eliminate the desire of students to create a non-validated questionnaire to use for data collection, faculty can create pre-developed questionnaires specific to the course topics. This would include standardized measures that have proven reliability and validity and have been used in previous research. Instructors can even prepare several topic-based options, depending on the class, for students to choose from to diversify options related to research.
- To more evenly spread-out research related tasks, such as literature review searches and reviews and data collection, check point assignments to help keep students on track and to help monitor their progress can be used.

- Any data collection can be reduced to a few participants (around 10), especially if students are working in small groups that can later combine their collected data together.
- Elaborate data analysis and interpretation can be saved for more advanced psychology courses, such as statistics or research methods. Other courses that may not require research focused courses as pre-requisites can focus on data examination and simpler comparisons, rather than inferential statistics.
- Large courses bring a heavy grading load for faculty. To help ease this aspect of research projects, students can create a final deliverable that focuses on educating others about the topic. To avoid the need of grading written assignments for large classes, faculty can allow students to create a visual presentation, multimedia presentation, awareness campaign, or creative expression related to the topic such as a comic strip. Written assignments do not have to be accepted.

Additional resources related to offering and expanding undergraduate research experiences can be found below:

<https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psychology-teacher-network/introductory-psychology/undergraduate-advanced-data-science>

<https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psychology-teacher-network/introductory-psychology/benefits-of-research>



Creating an AI Chatbot Tutor for Research Design and Statistics in Psychology

Kimberly A. Rapoza, PhD
Associate Professor of Psychology
Mercy University

AI is changing the landscape of higher education, and new possibilities for AI seem to be popping up daily. In psychology, the research design and statistics class sequence is a place students often struggle. Students often have difficulty with how to connect research questions, hypotheses, variables, measurement, and statistical tests. While students have voiced their preference for the feedback and emotional support human tutors can provide, an AI chatbot can be helpful as additional support outside the classroom and office hours, because it can give students a 24/7 place to ask questions, check their thinking, and practice applying ideas. A well-designed chatbot can support those steps by giving plain-language explanations, relevant examples, and guided questioning that helps students think through a problem rather than just getting the answer. The key to a deeper learning experience is to use customized instructions to avoid building a chatbot that just spits out answers.

A good free place to start or experiment is with projects in your ChatGPT account. The GPT function in a project folder allows you to load in the chatbot's purpose, instructions, and

resource library. There are also other education-based chatbot platforms with free accounts or free tiers, such as Edcafe AI³. You or your department could experiment with free or low-cost versions and then decide whether to invest in a more complete or custom course embedded chatbot.

To build your ChatGPT project folder based chatbot, first gather up your resource library (i.e., slides, .pdf documents, lecture notes, class handouts, rubrics, articles or textbooks if allowed by the publisher or open source); there is a 5 document upload limit for free accounts. This will be used as the knowledge base from which examples will be drawn or questions answered. Second, under project settings create your chatbot's purpose and tutoring policy, that guides how it responds to student prompts. For example:

You are a Socratic statistics and research design tutor for students in psychology, behavioral sciences, and related fields. Your job is to help students understand statistics, research design, hypothesis development, variable identification, variable scaling, and statistical test selection in plain language. Use the uploaded materials with the Socratic method to teach. Give hints and require the student to provide their thought process. Do not give direct answers right away. Help the student connect the concept to their own project. Explain in plain language, then give a practical example, then ask guiding questions.

Then test it out with a few common questions students may ask. Once ready you can pass the link on to your class. For psychology research design and statistics courses, the real value of an AI chatbot is not that it replaces teaching or reading the textbook. It gives students another place to practice thinking, asking questions, and testing assumptions. With a well crafted tutoring policy, the chatbot can become an approachable study tool that reinforces learning outside the classroom.

References and Resources:

1. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/education/articles/10.3389/feduc.2025.1528603/full>
2. <https://help.openai.com/en/articles/10169521-projects-in-chatgpt>
3. <https://www.edcafe.ai/blog/best-ai-chatbot-makers>

Youtube Video Resources:

1. Create Custom Chatbot with Edcafe: https://youtu.be/Rq5yX_fc2Yg?si=Lr_BZC7Dl10BRakc
2. Setting up a ChatGPT project: https://youtu.be/_53H1yjR4A8?si=XiJeZvgv4FokRywK

Demo Tutor Chatbot:

https://chatgpt.com/g/g-p-69f64bd08fe88191ab9dd9e6ab90934d-psychology-research-and-stats-tutor/shared/c/69f6bebd-b564-83ea-b5c1-bea0f7521d58?owner_user_id=user-u9K4GCTlKeC5UdS8s3J878pl