Discrimination Claims: Midpoint Blog Post

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Hi again!

I can't believe I've already reached the mid-point of my research assistant-ship! My time in the lab and in New Orleans in general this summer is really flying by.

I've loved being able to come into the lab and work (mostly independently) towards a long-term research goal and I have definitely been working towards my learning objectives along the way. My first objective was to be able to efficiently find articles that are relevant to my research. I felt that I would gain skill in this area because

one of my first tasks as a research assistant was to find articles relevant to the study we are trying to conduct. Relevant meaning that it both provides background for the research we are doing and (often) provides evidence for why we chose the hypothesis that we did. I thought that I would be relatively good at finding good, helpful research articles as I have been doing that for papers and literature reviews throughout my undergraduate career. As I started looking for articles I realized that the process was going to be much more challenging than I initially expected. The study that I am working on with Stefanie and Dr. O'Brien looks at the likelihood of racial minorities to report discrimination claims based on the gender of the superior they report to. Because this study involves the intersection of many topics (gender, race, perception of prejudice, perceived level of prejudice, discrimination claims, likelihood to report discrimination claims, etc.) I found it very difficult to find papers that I felt were more than tangentially relevant to the study. I found many papers that spoke to one of the topics, but hardly any that related the various areas of interest the study involved. Although I found this discouraging and somewhat frustrating at first I realized that it also meant that our research is unique and has the opportunity to make a contribution to the knowledge base of the field. The best research fills a gap in the knowledge of a discipline, and my inability to find any research that related the topics that we are looking at simple means that we have an opportunity to fill a gap in the social psychology discipline!

I have not yet begun to work on some of my other learning objectives, like writing a grant application because I have been spending most of my time reading and analyzing articles as well as working on my own paper. I monitor my progress on the learning objectives in different ways. Some of them (like improving my skill in analyzing and finding research articles) are intangible, and thus I know I am reaching them simply by the experience I am gaining in my internship. Others (like the grant application and writing my own paper) are more tangible, and I will know exactly when I have completed them.

This internship has taught me a lot about the process of psychology research, and has allowed me to get involved in the research that I study every day in class. One important (an unexpected!) thing that this internship is teaching me is how to work independently towards long-term goals. Stefanie, Dr. O'Brien and I set long-term goals for the summer and I check in with them throughout my internship but I do the majority of the work on my own. I am given some day-to-day lab work (such as preparing data for coding and running participants through other experiments), but

for the most part I work independently on reading and researching articles or preparing a prospectus. This sort of independence is somewhat new to me (outside of long-term school projects) and is something I'm proud of myself for being able to do. I think that this skill is one of the most directly transferable to any career path I choose (and especially if I go on to be an attorney), as the ability to work diligently without direct supervision seems essential to being successful in the workforce. I can't wait to see what else I learn in the second half of my internship!

Until then,

Maryann