

Reflective Essay

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During our time in university, undergraduate students are expected to learn something about themselves and how they might give back to their community. Students learn their strengths and how they may improve upon their weaknesses. In my experience, post-secondary has been an exciting and intriguing journey. Specifically, research has created an invigorating environment that has allowed me to develop many skills. In this page, I will discuss my research journey and how it has set me up for future success.

I began classes at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) in 2019, but it was not until my second year of university that I became curious about research. It seemed like an incredibly daunting and nerve racking activity to take part in. Traditionally, research seemed like a place for only professors. In my mind, undergraduate students were to learn in the classroom without doing any sort of outside projects or research. It was not until I began taking a second year Abnormal Psychology course taught by Denise Weisgerber that I began to entertain my curiosity. At the time, I was taking this course online due to the COVID-19 pandemic; without anytime to hangout with friends or go to public places, all of my time was dedicated to learning. I became increasingly passionate for anything psychology-related and one day, I went to Professor Weisgerber's office hours and asked her about how to get involved with research at TRU. Little did I know, this one encounter would ignite and begin my research journey. Denise mentioned so many great opportunities and positions for me to engage in research and during this conversation my preconceived notions of research being intimidating and exclusive began to dissipate. The excitement she had when talking about research was contagious and I soon began to share this same excitement.

After our chat, Denise put me in touch with Dr. Catherine Ortner. By this time, I had completed both PSYCH 2100 (Analysis of Psychological Data) and PSYCH 2110 (Research

Methods in Psychology). These courses provided me with an introduction to psychological research in a classroom setting.

During the summer of 2021, I sent my first email to Dr. Ortner, inquiring about any opportunities she had in the Emotions Lab. Dr. Ortner promptly emailed me back and we had our first meeting to discuss my research interests and she provided me with potential opportunities. After this meeting, Dr. Ortner offered me an opportunity to take a Research Apprentice course with her (PSYCH 2910). This Research Apprenticeship was my first taste of working with a professor one-on-one and allowed me to gain skills outside of a traditional classroom setting. This position entailed working on a previous Honours student's study, investigating how the emotion regulation strategy of reappraisal is associated with the personality trait of openness. Assignments in this course involved writing an annotated bibliography, a proposal, and a final thesis. Needless to say, this experience allowed me to improve upon so many skills. One skill that I noticed had especially improved was my academic and professional writing. This skill transferred to not only my academic classes but it also helped me write better resumes and applications for other positions. In addition, this experience prepared me to enter into the Honours program; specifically, I was able to progress into working more independently on research and other projects.

After my Research Apprenticeship in Fall 2022, Dr. Ortner offered me a Research Assistant (RA) position continuing the study and beginning to code the qualitative portions of the study during the 2023 winter semester. In addition to coding, I also submitted a proposal to the virtual Society of Affective Science (SAS) Conference, with Kole Lawrence, the previous Honours student that created this study. This provided me an opportunity to share our research and engage in knowledge mobilization. I was incredibly thankful to have this opportunity to present our research. Overall, both the Research Apprentice and RA positions

were incredibly valuable experiences for me. Not only did I learn how to conduct and run a virtual study, I also learned how to share knowledge and improve my academic writing.

Next, I applied and became Dr. Ortner's Honours student during the 2022/2023 school year. During the summer of 2022 Dr. Ortner and I brainstormed some potential projects and one we were both incredibly passionate about was focusing on emotion regulation in content moderators. Throughout the summer, I read research articles and books that provided anecdotal evidence for the harsh realities of a content moderator's job. I was so excited to research this population and see how we could possibly provide new and innovative literature on ways in which we can improve counselling services for these individuals. In my experience, I am so much more invested in research when my research has an impact on someone's life and I feel so motivated and inspired when there is a possibility of helping someone or a group of people. Specifically in the content moderator population it was incredibly evident their professions lead to severe psychological impacts.

Myself, Dr. Ortner, and Hayleigh Armstrong (another Honours student) co-created this Honours Project. We first created an annotated bibliography, an ethics application, a thesis proposal/defense, thesis defense, and lastly a thesis report. My Honours experience was valuable to me because it provided me a space to grow so many skills. For example, my writing skills improved greatly. Moreover, Honours provided me an opportunity to experience the rigorous process of constant revision and to improve upon my writing each time. Additionally, the proposal defense and Honours defense presentation provided me an opportunity to develop my presenting skills. Both of these presentations were quite daunting, however, through the inoculation process, doing presentations multiple times for faculty members allowed me to get more comfortable sharing my research.

In addition to my defense presentations, my Honours partner and I also presented our Honours research project at the 2023 SAS conference in Long Beach, California. This

experience was incredibly valuable. Not only was I able to network with many mentors in the field of emotion science, but I was also able to share my research and take part in the knowledge mobilization process. In my experience, the most rewarding aspect of the research process is taking part in knowledge mobilization. I have found that presenting on my own research has allowed me to be more confident and improve upon my own self awareness.

Overall, my experience engaging in the research process has been extremely exciting and valuable for my future endeavors. In the future, I hope to pursue a Masters and PhD in Counselling Psychology, specifically in relation to potential work with the 2SLGBTQPIA+ community. In addition, I would also like to teach at a university and do research. Being that 2SLGBTQPIA+ individuals often represent a marginalized, underserved, and underrepresented population, I believe there are innumerable opportunities to transform research projects into valuable tools to provide more effective support, resources, and context. Lastly, engaging in research at TRU has provided me the skills to pursue many different unique research avenues in the future. I look forward to exploring these avenues and making a difference!