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PSY424

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Reflection

Every student encounters the time when one needs to decide his or her future goals including academic and career plans. Whether one should obtain a graduate degree or seek job opportunities is a crucial question that demands an answer from each undergraduate. As a junior student, I am facing the same questions and issues. Yet, the crucial questions in my life are what field I should choose and which career path I should follow. These questions that bothered me for a quite long time found an answer in the senior research course. Throughout the course, I was fascinated by knowledge from the research studies and by the process of conducting one. I strongly believe I have found my passion: research psychology. As a research psychologist, I can work in many different fields and conduct studies that help to improve people’s lives and can contribute to social and behavioral sciences. I can imagine myself becoming a decent researcher and data analyst. Throughout the course, I have realized the field I would like to contribute to and found my passion that became my future goal and the path that I am determined to follow. I am grateful that I have enrolled into the senior research class, as it provided me great knowledge, precious skills, and positive attitudes toward research and analysis.

The greatest knowledge I have obtained in the course is the recognition of ignorance and the importance of curiosity. Before I had a negative attitude toward ignorance, as I perceived it only as an absence of knowledge. Yet, after the discussions and readings throughout the class, I have realized that ignorance is not merely an absence of knowledge, but it is a source of knowledge. Ignorance is what makes people ask questions about the world, thrive for information, find causality, and recognize world problems. If knowledge is a huge puzzle, ignorance is an empty space without the pieces, but the empty space motivates one to find the right piece and try to complete the puzzle. It is interesting how one semester course could change my perception of knowledge and ignorance. I thrive to decrease the gap between them, but now I appreciate ignorance more and understand its importance. My second realization in this course was the importance of curiosity. While trying to conduct a study, my very first step was to come up with a question. A question based on observations and experiences: a ‘why’ question. Why do certain things work the way they are? Why do people behave the way they do? I realized that every well-known study or theory and every famous invention started with a simple question, with curiosity. If one is curious about how certain things work, one tries to find answers, and, as a result, theories or inventions are created. My specific questions were: “How do people perceive things?’, “What is perception?”, and “What influences perception?” From these general questions, the topic of my study became clear: enhancement of perceptual sensitivity.

My curiosity helped create the topic of my study, but the whole process of the experiment was a new experience and an opportunity to develop my research skills. I have obtained skills of designing a study, interpreting with participants, collecting and analyzing data. In order to create valid hypotheses, I studied numerous previous studies on the topic. Through the process of researching, I found several factors that might affect perceptual sensitivity. I have improved my research and information literacy skills. Afterwards, I focused on the design of my study. Before I perceived a research study as a strict step by step procedure. Yet, after creating my own design, I have realized that the process of a study can be flexible. Throughout the whole process, the number of my independent and dependent variables changed several times. After various changes and adjustments, I had a decent design and clear hypotheses.

Also, the course helped me to develop my communication skills. I understood that interpretation with participants is an important part of any study. I learned to focus on external variables, avoid experimenter effects, and reinforce engagement among participants. Data collection and data analyses taught me that carefulness and awareness are crucial in obtaining valid results. While putting the data in SPSS, I made two mistakes that made my results inconsistent due to huge standard deviations. I learned that the SPSS output or results can show a mistake made in data entry. I believed that putting the data into SPSS was the easiest part of the experiment. Yet, I realized that the process required great attention and care. Another valuable lesson I learned is that the significance level of the results does not equal the importance of the study. My professor once told me that a good story, not the significance level, determined a good study. Even though my results showed that only one of my key variables had a significant main effect, I could create a good story. My study showed that self-reported emotional arousal did not influence perceptual sensitivity significantly. The skills I obtained in the class were valuable, but the whole process of acquiring the skills and conducting the study thrilled me.

While researching, designing the study, and analyzing the data, I felt excitement, determination, and motivation. I have realized that becoming a research psychologist is my passion and that I want to conduct more studies in the future. The course definitely helped me to change my attitude toward research and conducting experiments. It helped me to determine my future goals. I started considering social psychology and cognitive psychology as my possible academic paths. I understood that regardless the field I choose, I would like to be a researcher. My professor introduced me to the story of finding a black cat in the dark room. He said that it is hard to find a black cat in the dark room, especially when the cat is not there. Throughout the course, I understood that the most exciting part of the research experiment was not finding the black cat, but it was figuring out whether the cat was there or not. I realized that the cat did not have to be there and it did not even have to be a cat. One of my classmates amusingly stated that he ended up finding a black dog in his room. What is in the dark room? I would like to find an answer to this question. I desire to become the light that shows the properties of the dark room to the world.

The course definitely provided me with knowledge, developed my skills, and changed my attitude toward research. I am absolutely grateful that I have enrolled into the senior research class. I also appreciate the opportunity that allowed me to conduct my own study and am looking forward to showing my results to more people. I would like to thank Psychology Department for offering the course and my professor for providing valuable information and skills.