

How a Summer Studentship Turned into an Eye-Opening Learning Experience

Several months ago, I was fortunate enough to be awarded the Undergraduate Research Bursary by the Experimental Psychology Society. This meant that, over the summer, I was able to spend 10 weeks looking at multisensory integration and corresponding neural correlates in neurotypical adults. Working in collaboration with Dr Ellen Poliakoff, Dr Jason Taylor, and Dr Dan Poole, I developed an EEG version of a task used to examine multisensory integration (Poole, Couth, Gowen, Warren, & Poliakoff, 2015). Since previous research using this task has demonstrated impaired multisensory processing in people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), we decided to pilot the same task with EEG in the hopes of developing a paradigm that will help us study cross-modal selective attention and its underlying neural mechanisms in people with ASD (Poole et al., 2015).

One of the reasons why I was so excited to start this project was because it would have been the first opportunity I had to actively work as part of a research team where I was given considerable research responsibilities. Through the project, I acquired a more realistic and well-informed perspective on research group dynamics and the extent of collaboration efforts needed to conduct meaningful research. I also got to experience (if only to a small degree!) what life as a researcher would entail.

Additionally, my working environment allowed for many opportunities to talk to PhD students and lecturers who are running behavioural/EEG experiments. I was able to engage in interesting conversations about current 'hot topics' in experimental psychology, in addition to receiving practical advice about my current project and future career. Altogether, this experience has been enriching in more ways than I imagined.

Without this opportunity, I would not have been able to run my own experiment. The EPS bursary has given me the freedom to fully engage in my research pursuits, and consequently the 10 weeks I spent working on the project have been a huge learning curve. The studentship has allowed me to learn as much as I can about experimental techniques (both behavioural and EEG-related), designing experiments, and analysing relatively complex data. This experience has reaffirmed my decision to pursue academic research in the future and has made me consider possible avenues of experimental research that might be of interest to me later on (e.g. neuroimaging, autism, attention). In turn, this has informed the types of Master's degrees I am applying for this year. All in all, I feel more prepared for a future career as a researcher now than I did 10 weeks ago. I strongly recommend other students to apply for this scheme!

To conclude, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my supervisors, without whom this work would not have been made possible. Ellen, Jason, and Dan – thank you for all your support and encouragement thus far. This summer project has truly been an invaluable experience.

I would also like to thank Emily Pye and Stephen Ball for training me in using EEG, and Sophie Trueman and Imca Hensels for letting me gain more experience by shadowing them – thank you!