

Sophomore Early Research Program 2021-2022
Social Science Faculty Projects

Social Sciences: Projects in Cognitive Sciences and Linguistics, Education, Environmental Studies, Political Science, Psychology, Wellesley Centers for Women

Cognitive & Linguistic Sciences

Sabriya Fisher

Student Language and School Experiences

This research in sociolinguistics studies the language patterns of African American high school students in the Boston-area. SERP students will join a team of peer researchers to examine how language use may affect student experiences in school. Student RAs will be trained to conduct sociolinguistic interviews, transcribe audio recordings, code linguistic variables, and perform some linguistic analysis.

A successful student researcher should possess excellent oral communication skills, a high level of attention to detail and organization, and have an interest in language and/or social science. A brief (15-20-minute) transcription activity will be given as part of the interview process. Preference will be given to students who have taken Ling 114 or have completed other language coursework.

Education

Soo Hong

New Teacher Beliefs about Working with Students' Families

This project explores the experiences of new teachers and their experiences with students' families. What kinds of beliefs and attitudes do they hold about working with students' families and how do their experiences as student teachers shape their ideas about the relationships they build with families? Building upon the interdisciplinary fields of critical race, family-school interactions, and community-engaged education, students will learn to read across disciplines, analyze data within an interdisciplinary context, and learn about qualitative research methodologies within sociology, cultural studies, and anthropology.

Research assistants will review literature, prepare, analyze, and code interview and workshop data, and engage in regular research team meetings to discuss findings. This is a great opportunity to get hands-on experience on a research team and learn the ins and outs of qualitative research.

Maureen Morgan

Social Justice, Diversity, and Anti-Bias in the Early Childhood Classroom: Teaching Inclusive Excellence through Literature, Curriculum and Preschool Relationships

For this project, the SERP student will join one of the classrooms at the Child Study Center, the century-old laboratory preschool on campus. Through this hands-on experience, the SERP student will gain practical experience as a teacher and explore ways to incorporate themes of justice, diversity, and inclusion into an early childhood setting. Students will work directly with children, explore topics in children's literature, and develop curriculum activities to support, promote, and evaluate the impact that implicit teaching and environmental design have on young children's understanding of social justice, race, and inclusion. Students will meet 1-2X per month with the Faculty Director and weekly with the classroom's Lead Teacher. Students may choose to incorporate parent and teacher surveys, video and/or photo documentation, anecdotal data and/or literature review to culminate their study. This project can support one SERP student in each of our three classrooms. Opportunities are available for 1-3 students.

Environmental Studies

Beth DeSombre

Green Port Governance/Post-Policy System Evolution

1) Green Port governance - This study examines environmental governance measures adopted or enforced by the busiest 200+ ports around the world, during the period from 2005-2018, characterizing which greening measures ports take on (or do not) and when.

2) Post-policy system evolution – A book project that examines how environmental regulation, once adopted, sets up systemic changes that frequently make policies easier and cheaper to implement than initially predicted.

General social science background necessary (economics and political science especially helpful along with knowledge of environmental issues).

Jay Turner

The Matter of a Clean Energy Future

Building a clean energy future will take a lot of matter - lithium, nickel, copper, graphite, and more - for everything from batteries to wind turbines. During the 21-22 academic year, I would like to work with a SERP student to develop the content for a website on this topic, to accompany the publication of my book "Charged: A History of Batteries and Lessons for a Clean Energy Future." A student working on this project will develop interdisciplinary research skills, communication skills, and knowledge of both materials and clean energy systems, including their social justice and sustainability implications.

Political Science

Maneesh Arora

Visualizing and Characterizing Black Lives Matter Social Media Conversations

The 2014 killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO intensified debates on policing in Black and minority communities and served as a major catalyst for protest movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM). BLM was created through a hashtag on Twitter and has since been described as a social media-based protest movement. Working with a team of computer science students, I have collected millions of tweets with BLM-related hashtags from 2013-2020. Utilizing theoretical frameworks from political science and analytical tools from computer science, we will seek to understand: (1) nodes of conversation between BLM activists and supporters, (2) framing used by activists to communicate the goals of the movement, and (3) strategies used, and communicated, by BLM activists and social movement organizations and how these strategies communicated over social media correspond with the on-the-ground tactics used by movement activists and supporters. The SERP student in this project will have the opportunity to work with Prof. Maneesh Arora from the Political Science department and collaborate with Prof. Eni Mustafaraj from the Computer Science department in pursuit of such questions. Students who fulfill the SERP criteria and have familiarity with social media platforms and/or political activism are encouraged to apply.

Psychology

Angela Bahns

Thought Diversity in Friendship

The aim of this research is to explore the costs and benefits of thought diversity in friendship, defined as friends who hold dissimilar views on moral or political issues. We will use a field method to collect data from naturally occurring pairs of people in public spaces. A SERP student will join our team of researchers to assist in collecting these data, entering participant responses into a spreadsheet, and creating graphs and tables to summarize the findings.

A successful student research assistant will have an interest in studying psychology or related fields, a general understanding of survey-based research, high level of attention to detail and organization, and a willingness to travel off campus (expenses covered) on a weekly basis to collect data which involves approaching people and asking them to take a survey.

Christine Deveney

Mechanisms of Irritability in Adults

Despite indications that irritability predicts a worse clinical outcome and significant impairment, little is known about this trait, especially in adulthood. Our lab is attempting to understand the mechanisms of this trait by exploring associations between irritability in adults and difficulties recognizing facial expressions, impulsivity, cognitive flexibility, and atypical responses to feedback that they have won or lost. The SERP student will assist in designing, implementing, and potentially analyzing data from a behavioral study and may possibly assist in the development of a study using electroencephalographic (EEG) techniques to measure brain activity (contingent on COVID restrictions and the status of the Science Center renovation). Students will gain experience reading and critiquing the psychiatric and clinical neuroscience literatures, study design and analysis, and (hopefully!) data interpretation and write-up.

Tracy Gleason

Functions of Fantasy in Early Childhood

Children engage in multiple forms of fantasy play in early childhood, not the least of which includes pretend play, creation of imaginary companions, and parasocial relationships--one-sided relationships imagined with media characters. What are the functions of these forms of play? How are they similar and different, and what affordances does each have for children's social and emotional development? Students working on this project will learn the background of this area of child development, methods of systematic coding and reliability, and basic statistical analysis. Preference will be given to students who have taken or are enrolled in developmental psychology (PSYC 207).

Wellesley Centers for Women

Linda Charmaraman

Racial Equity and Digital Citizenship

Our Youth, Media, & Wellbeing Research Lab has collected nationwide survey data about attitudes regarding racial socialization, social identities, civic engagement, and digital citizenship. We are looking for a student from a data science background with strong analytical, literature review, and writing skills. She would be involved in data cleaning, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of our findings. Use of our data for class projects would be highly encouraged.