Moments Pinpoint Students' Paths

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Discovering knowledge

As questions become ideas, and ideas become research projects, students start to find answers. They detail their results in research papers, which ultimately are presented alongside those of graduate students and faculty professionals in the form of posters, articles and talks at local, regional and national conferences.

“My colleagues were very surprised by how many conferences I’d been exposed to as an undergraduate,” she added. Now pursuing a Ph.D. in the applied social psychology program at Loyola University, Erickson works as a study director at Calder LaTour, a market research and strategy development firm.

Whatever the field, the undergraduate research experience is essential as students apply to graduate school.

“It opens up a lot of doors,” Bakner said. He found an interest in biopsychology before he knew the field existed, after seeing the effects of his grandmother’s stroke.

“I saw how radically that injury changed her emotions, memory and language expression,” he said. As a sophomore at Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania, he took a physiological psychology class and realized, “This is exactly what I’m interested in, the mix of behaviors, memory and language expression.” As a Linfield junior, he developed an interest in biopsychology before he knew the field existed.

“Students are creating knowledge. Rather than summarizing existing work, they are adding to the body of research that is already out there. And perhaps more importantly, Erickson said, students are strengthening the scientific community.

“We are training future scientists,” he said. “These are students who will go to graduate school and beyond and make very real contributions to the storehouse of human knowledge.”

And as they satisfy their own curiosities, students are part of a larger movement.

“Our hope is this data is contributing a small piece to the psychology community,” Sage said of his research on deception and lying. “This is just one small piece of the puzzle.”

— Laura Davis

Moments pinpoint students’ paths

Andrew Sage ‘08 masterminded a series of thefts his senior year at Linfield.

Sage, now a graduate student at Western Illinois University, directed students to steal a cell phone and deceive an interviewer. The thefts were part of a collaborative research project on deception and lying he conducted with Kay Livesay, associate professor of psychology.

During the interviews, student volunteers were asked to incorporate four nonverbal cues into their responses—fidgeting, hand movements, leg movements and shifty eyes. If they could successfully mislead the interviewer about the theft, they earned $20.

“That got them motivated to lie,” said Sage with a smile. “We found that when we incorporated the lying cues, participants were twice as likely to think that a truthful statement was a lie.”

The research project was ideal for Sage, a member of the National Guard who hopes eventually to work for the CIA. “I learned that eye witness testimonies are highly inaccurate, though they are heavily relied upon by law officials,” he said.

Emily Young ‘05 spent nearly every day of her senior year in the psychology rat lab — and her successful experiment made it all worthwhile.

After stumbling upon research about drug interactions, she wondered, “Why are cocaine and alcohol so commonly co-abused?” and decided to find out. She designed a research experiment with rats looking at the effects of these drugs when given alone and in combination.

“It was one of the coolest things I’d done at Linfield,” she said. “It actually worked. It was exciting to get results right away, especially as an undergraduate.”

As a research assistant at Oregon Health and Science University, Young is now conducting alcohol research with mice and plans to pursue a doctorate in behavioral neuroscience.

Brenda Gehrke ’99 remembers the semester that set her life’s path.

As a Linfield junior, Gehrke developed an interest in brain injury and jumped at the chance to take part in research with Lee Bakner, professor of psychology. At that time, she was one of the few students doing research at Linfield.

“It was one-on-one research and I took part in every step of the process,” said Gehrke, who went on to earn a Ph.D. in biopsychology from the University of Ken-