

FROM GHOST TOWN TO BOOM TOWN: PRODUCTIVITY IN THE LAB DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS

THE SUMMER FORUM

Lab Cohesion:
Keeping It
Together Over
the Summer

Interviewing &
Evaluating
Research
Assistants

Summer:
How to Rest,
Replenish, and
Rebalance

Tips for
Productive
Writing

Interview with
Judith A. Hall
on Summer
Productivity

Summer 2011
Edited by Mollie A. Ruben

The 2011-2012 Graduate Student Committee



President
Marina Milyavskaya
McGill University



Member-at-Large
Mollie Ruben
Northeastern University



Past President
Sean Hughes
National University
of Ireland Maynooth



Member-at-Large
Shimon Saphire-Bernstein
UCLA



Member-at-Large
Lillia Cherkasskiy
Yale University



Member-at-Large
for Undergraduate Affairs
Krista Hill
Northeastern University



Member-at-Large
Megan Johnson
Baylor University

THE SPSP GRADUATE STUDENT COMMITTEE

As a committee of and for graduate students, the SPSP GSC is committed to advocating the interests, concerns, and ideas of the SPSP graduate student caucus. The GSC serves as a link between students and established personality and social psychologists. We aim to continue beneficial programs started by our predecessors while remaining open to new ideas, so that we may evolve with the times.

CONTENTS:

Rest,
Rebalance,
Replenish
p. 12

Lab Cohesion:
Keeping It Together
Over the Summer
p. 9-10

Tips for
Productive
Writing
p. 6-7

Interview with
Dr. Judith A. Hall
p. 8

Interviewing &
Evaluating
Research
Assistants
p. 4-5

Upcoming
Conferences
p.13

Teaching &
Job Resources
p. 14

The Forum is published four times a year by the Graduate Student Committee of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology to provide a wealth of advice and support on issues directly relevant to graduate students. The Forum aims to offer strategies for graduate teaching and research, highlight funding and conference opportunities, and promote the wider values of SPSP.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER:



Hi Everyone,

Welcome to the first forum of 2011-2012. The new GSC is working hard to bring you lots of activities and resources, so I thought I would give you a taste of what we are planning. We are already working on the conference for next year, and hope to implement some new and improved GSC activities, including pre-conference workshops, a social gathering, and a 'wall of fame' for poster award winners. I hope that you will consider submitting something to the conference (submissions are typically accepted in June and July), and that we will see many of you in San Diego in 2012.

In addition to conference activities, the GSC compiles many resources which we hope are useful to you. Visit <http://www.spsp.org/student/> for resources on teaching, obtaining funding, statistics, careers, and more! And if there is a topic which is not there but which you think would interest your fellow grad students, let us know, and we would be happy to compile information and resources on the topic.

Another aim of this year's GSC is to increase its focus on undergraduate students. Many members of SPSP are undergraduates, and we plan to start catering to them through special programs at the conference, and also by compiling resources of particular interest to undergrads, such as tips for getting into grad school and listings of RA positions. We hope that this summer will be the start to an excellent new year, and that you will use the GSC as a resource for all your student needs. Please don't hesitate to let us know how we can best serve you. We would love to hear your thoughts and ideas on what we can improve (and also on what we're doing right). Send us an email (spspgsc@yahoo.com) to let us know any comments or suggestions you have, or just to introduce yourself.

I hope you have a relaxing and productive summer.

Marina Milyavskaya,
GSC president 2011-2012

Interviewing & Evaluating Undergraduate Work in the Lab

By Krista Hill

Whether it is helping to run participants, entering data, or performing literature searches, undergraduate research assistants can be the most important resource for a graduate student. However, finding the perfect research assistants is not easy and evaluating their work may be even harder. Here are a few tips and guidelines to follow for interviewing and evaluating undergraduate researchers in your lab.

Interview Questions

When interviewing candidates you want to be able to assess their interest in the lab's research, their ability to be productive, and the reasons why they want to join your lab (e.g., is it strictly for credit or do they want lab experience?).

To assess interest in your lab's research you may want to start off by asking the candidates if they know what research questions your lab is currently or has previously addressed. Most labs have their own website that an undergraduate could easily access and learn from if they were motivated to research. The best undergraduate research candidates are those who have done their homework and have done some research on the lab. A good follow up question to this one is to ask what sort of questions they have about the lab's research. If they have questions that are beyond how much work they will be required to do then this is a very good sign that they will contribute more than just time to the lab.

Being able to predict how well a research assistant will perform in your lab is an even trickier question. You may want to ask for recommendations from professors as well as previous employers to get a good idea of the candidate's work ethic. Creating a recommendation form that includes questions that specifically address the desired traits and abilities you are looking for in a candidate can be incredibly helpful for both you and the recommenders.

Finally, you want to understand why a candidate is looking to join your lab. If candidates are planning on applying to graduate school and are looking to gain experience in a lab then they probably will take the position seriously and may even end up going above and behind the job's requirements such as helping you present and write up research.

Continued on next page.

Interviewing & Evaluating

Undergraduate Work in the Lab (continued)

Evaluation

Now that you have the perfect research assistants, it is your job to provide them with a grade, but how do you know how well they are doing? Different labs evaluate undergraduate research in different ways; however, most of them consider two very important questions when assessing a research assistant. The first is how much did the research assistant contribute to the lab and the second is how much did he or she learn. Considering how busy most graduate students are, it can become very difficult to monitor the progress of your undergraduate research assistants. Here are a few suggestions to help your evaluations:

1) Create a progress chart.

On the chart put each project or activity you have your research assistants working on and ask them to check it off as they complete it. Not only will this help you monitor how far they have progressed, but the public display of productivity will motivate them to get to work as well.

2) Submit a weekly progress report.

This progress report will document what they did during the week and what they learned from it. This way you can keep track of what is going on in your lab as well as what your research assistants are learning from the lab experience.

3) Practice writing research reports.

If your research assistants are working on a specific project have them write up a research report on any findings you may have. This way they can experience what it is like first hand to write up research findings.

Most importantly, keep in mind that most undergraduates are not joining your lab because they love data entry, most are joining because they want to learn something about the research process. Therefore, when evaluating their work you may want to place more emphasis on learning than on the completion of thoughtless tasks.

Tips for Productive Writing

By Megan Johnson

Summer is often that time of year when graduate students set out to be as productive as possible. Getting that much needed writing completed usually seems possible. However, as the summer dwindles down, most students find themselves in the same spot: backed that little to no writing was completed. To help combat this common problem among graduate students, here are some helpful tips that graduate students and faculty members have found to help increase writing productivity over the summer.

1. Maintain a normal schedule.

One of the largest contributors to dips in productivity over the summer is the lack of a normal schedule. During the school year, most students have classes, teaching, and other commitments bringing them on campus to work fairly regular hours. Without that schedule, students may find themselves showing up to campus late or leaving early. To combat this, decide on a regular schedule you will keep and then stick to it. Decide on your schedule ahead of time and then maintain it. Of course, there will be some exceptions to this over the summer, but try to stick to the schedule most of the time.

2. Schedule in time for writing.

In addition to maintaining a normal schedule in general, it is important to schedule a specific time each day that is for writing and writing only. GUARD this time carefully so that other obligations do not encroach upon it. This tip is consistently the number one tip from most productive researchers (i.e., the ones publishing a large amount over their careers). If you're new to starting a writing schedule, start small. Devote an hour a day to writing. Then, over time, you can build up to longer lengths of blocked out writing time.

3. Take advantage of more "free" time.

Because most students have fewer professional obligations over the summer (lighter or no teaching load, fewer research projects, etc.), it's a great time to schedule in more writing time. Take a few extra blocks you used to devote to teaching or other obligations and block that time out for writing over the summer. You will be amazed at what those few extra hours per week will do to boost your writing productivity.

Tips for Productive Writing (continued)

4. Spread out your writing over time.

Even though you have more free time, be careful how you schedule writing into it. Almost no one can write for eight hours straight, so don't try to play catch up by cranking out hours of writing at a time. Rather, shoot for smaller, more achievable goals such as writing one to four hours a day.

5. Find a place where you write best.

One of the biggest mistakes students make is forcing themselves to write where they aren't productive. Often, due to schedule constraints such as teaching or needing to be in or around one's research lab, students are forced to write in places where they are easily disturbed or distracted. This summer, try to increase productivity by allowing yourself to write in places where you write best. Because you have fewer on campus commitments, your schedule should permit you to be more flexible on where you write. If you write best at home at your kitchen table, schedule blocks of time to write there. Maybe you write best in a coffee shop or at the library or somewhere else. Just go where you write best.

6. Take breaks – vacations, short trips, etc.

One essential but often overlooked component to productive writing is knowing when to take breaks. Take advantage of the summer schedule and allow yourself some time to unwind and catch a breather, especially after finishing a long school year. You will be amazed at how taking a long weekend or short trip will boost your productivity upon return.

7. Balance writing with other projects.

When pursuing the goal to write more, don't forget that the summer is a great time to get ahead on a variety of projects. Sit down and analyze that dataset that's been sitting there, or start sketching out and planning your next experiment. Try to make blocks of times devoted to these projects as well. The variety will help keep you focused and give

Question & Answer with Dr. Judith A. Hall

If you could give one piece of advice for students to maintain productivity during the summer what would it be?

Summer is a great time to take stock—plan future goals and projects, and evaluate your progress over the past year. Then make deadlines for the projects that you identify for the summer. That will help prevent the time from drifting by. Break down your projects into subtasks and set a deadline for each. You might also use summer to catch up on reading psychology books and journals.

What did you find most difficult as a graduate student, and what did you do to overcome it?

Like many, I suffered from the “I’m not as smart as the others” syndrome. It took me a long time to realize that my ideas and competencies were as good as other people’s. Also I was timid about branching out and learning new things. When I look back, I see that I could have gotten a lot more out of grad school than I did.

What would be your best tips to overcome procrastination during the summer?

Everyone makes ‘to do’ lists but here is a good bit of re-tuning: Don’t just have a long list of all the things you intend or need to do. That is daunting, and doesn’t give good guidance each day. Instead, make (in addition) a list of just those things you intend (realistically, mind you) to get done that day and do those things. If you exceed what’s on the list, you feel good, but even if you just do what’s on the list you still feel good. And it structures your day. Furthermore, it gets rid of a lot of anxiety (which is the source of procrastination, not laziness) because the short daily list is realistic and not overwhelming.

Because the summer months often involve intensive writing, do you have any writing tips or pointers that have proved helpful for you?

I always trick myself into getting started by telling myself that what I’m about to write is not the “real thing” and that I will throw it away. This unfreezes any anxious or perfectionistic blocks I may have. What I produce is generally not so bad and mainly needs organization more than wholesale trashing. Furthermore, once I start writing I get good new ideas about what to say, analyses to run, articles I need to read, etc. I also read over my work many, many times and go through many drafts.

What would you encourage students to get involved in over summer?

In addition to wrapping up projects, you should use this unstructured time to “think big”—not just the next study but a more long-term set of goals. And don’t develop just one idea—that is too anxiety provoking because it puts too much at stake. Develop several different hypothetical research questions or goals and do some development of each. That way you will feel like you are playing with ideas, rather than committing yourself to One Big Thing.



Judith A. Hall is a University Professor of Psychology at Northeastern University. She is author of over one hundred research articles, and 50 chapters and books. Professor Hall’s research interests include: nonverbal communication examining gender differences and dominance, measurement of interpersonal sensitivity, accuracy of decoding states and traits, and the verbal and nonverbal behavior of physicians and patients in medical visits.

Do you have any stress relieving tips that you have found useful?

The short daily to-do list is very stress relieving. Also I suggest watching baseball on TV.

Do you have any advice to help students regroup and refocus after the summer break?

I suggest that you actually take a summer break during which you don’t do any work and don’t lie awake nights worrying about work. Learning how to compartmentalize your brain so that you can control what things you think about is a lifelong strategy for good mental health. If it’s not the right time to think about something—for example you are on vacation, or you need a good night’s sleep, or the thing you are worrying about is too far in the future to make worrying useful—then train yourself NOT TO THINK ABOUT IT. Easier said than done, of course!

Lab Cohesion: Keeping It Together in the Summer

By Lillia Cherkasskiy

As summer approaches, many psychological laboratories make the switch from “school year” to “summer” mode. This is often signaled by the cessation of weekly laboratory meetings, regularly scheduled meetings with advisors, and regular 9-5 schedules in the laboratory. Although such freedom from responsibilities can be a great opportunity to “do your own thing” and work almost entirely on your own to make rapid progress on labor intensive projects such as manuscripts, it can also feel like an unwelcome absence of structure and cohesion in the laboratory. In this article, I suggest 7 strategies for imposing structure and fostering laboratory cohesion over the summer. They are presented in order from least structured to most structured, and it is my hope that they may inspire you to think of easy and useful ways to stay connected to your laboratory over the summer.

1. Check in via email.

Make it a priority to check in with your advisor and each of your collaborators once a week. Set aside one afternoon per week when you will write these check-in emails, and make sure to stick to that schedule so that you will be motivated to make progress on those projects (otherwise what would you write about?). Be sure to come up with a comprehensive format that works well for you. For example, I like to start with a short (2-4 item) bullet point list of what I accomplished on the project over the last week, followed by 1-3 concrete goals for the next week, followed by 1-3 questions or requests for feedback or advice. I also attach any relevant reference materials such as the dataset I have finished coding or the abstract that is ready for submission to a conference. These weekly check-in emails will keep the lines of communication open between you and your advisors and insure that everyone is on the same page with respect to the present state of the project and where it is heading.

2. Schedule a half hour weekly meeting with your advisor.

Even if you have a clear idea of what you plan to work on for the next month, having a weekly meeting is like an insurance policy in case you have questions or need some advice. I find that in anticipation of these meetings, I store up several little questions for my advisor each week that were unforeseen and I otherwise would have had to resolve without my advisor’s input. I would suggest putting in the effort necessary to make these meetings happen (even if it requires rescheduling often, sometimes having to meet via phone or skype, or going in to one or two meetings knowing that you are not as well prepared as you could be) because, like email check-ins, getting in to this habit opens and strengthens the lines of communication between you and your advisors.

Lab Cohesion: Keeping It Together in the Summer (continued)

3. Organize student-run bi-weekly laboratory meetings over the summer.

If the fellow graduate students in your laboratory are also interested in promoting laboratory cohesion over the summer, ask them if they would mind working together to set up student-run summer meetings. These could be less formal than academic year meetings, and could consist of students asking for feedback on new study ideas, practicing for conferences, discussing exciting new papers, teaching each other new statistical techniques or how to use new software, or just checking in to find out what everyone is working on. The professor running the laboratory may or may not be invited to these meetings- it depends on what needs they are addressing for the graduate students. Perhaps the students in your laboratory would like a chance to practice speaking out in research meetings without the pressure of their advisor being present. The key to making these meetings a success (having people attend) is to tailor them to the needs of the graduate students, thereby making them useful and interesting to people- and an easy way to find out what people need is by asking them.

4. Start a journal club.

If one of your summer goals is catching up on literature, consider finding out if other students in your laboratory have the same goal and if they would be interested in forming a journal club. The club could meet bi-weekly over coffee or lunch to discuss recent interesting articles. Members may all read the same articles or different ones depending on how close everyone's research interests are. Incidentally, departments may have funding to provide lunch or snacks for such activities.

5. Keep a regular 9-5 schedule.

If the other students in your laboratory disappear over the summer but you would prefer to stick to your regular, academic year schedule, do it! You might even get more work done in an empty laboratory than in a full one. Don't feel like you have to do what the older graduate students seem to be doing. And you may be surprised to see how many other students are coming back indoors to be productive after the novelty of spring sunshine wears off.

To promote laboratory cohesion, you do, after all, need to have a laboratory filled with advisors and students! So perhaps the best strategy for "keeping it together" over the summer is to stay in contact with your fellow laboratory mates, whether it is through student-run laboratory meetings, journal clubs, email check-ins, weekly lunch dates, or however else your laboratory stays connected during the academic year.

THE ENDLESS SUMMER

IN SEARCH OF THE PERFECT BALANCE

Rest, Rebalance, Replenish: Get the Most Out of the Summer

By Marina Milyavskaya

The 'academic' year is finally over –no more classes, teaching or TA duties, or undergraduate students to supervise. Although summer is still a busy time for graduate students, there are fewer external obligations and you can concentrate on what you really want to be doing. Summer also provides a good opportunity to take a break and de-stress.

As a graduate student, it is easy to immerse yourself in work and forget about everything else. This, however, can lead to burnout, and can make some people reconsider academia altogether. A recent study of graduate students has shown that worry about lack of life/work balance is one of the top reasons for abandoning academia. Before you decide that this issue is not applicable to you, ask yourself this:

Are you always worried about meeting deadlines?

Are you working over 50 hours per week?

Do you dread meetings with your advisor because you worry that you have not made enough progress for his/her liking?

Do you stay up at night distressing about whether you're doing enough?

Is academia the only activity in which you engage?

Do friends complain that you have become distant, or too absorbed in your work?

Do you have weeks where you don't see anyone except your labmates?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, your scale is tipping in favour of work over life, and it maybe time to change that.

Summer is the perfect time to restore some balance into your life. Here are some things you can do to recharge your batteries:

-Sleep: now is the time to catch up on all the sleep you've been missing during the semester! Sleep enhances creativity, and you'll accomplish more at work when you're well-rested.

-Enjoy nature: research shows that being outdoors increases vitality and energy, so get out of your lab and go outside! Especially for those of us who live in a northern climate and are stuck inside all winter, summer is the time take advantage of the nice weather. Even if you need to do work, consider working in a park, or going for a walk as a break to reenergize yourself.

-Take a trip: Even if it's a weekend getaway, taking a vacation can help you clear your mind and reinvigorates you so that you can be more productive afterwards.

-Take up a new hobby: is there something you have been wanting to try all year, and never had the time for? Now is the time to sign up for that ballroom dancing class, learn a new language, start rollerblading, or anything else that you have always wanted to do but never had the time for. Who knows, you might discover a passion for a new activity that you can pursue year-round and that can add some balance into your day-to-day life.

-Read a book for fun: we are often so busy reading journal articles and academic books that we forget how enjoyable it is to pick up and read a good novel.

-Reconnect with friends: although going out for beer with your labmates and discussing the latest research may be the extent of your social contact during the semester, spending some time with your friends outside the academic context can provide a change of focus and a break from complete immersion in academia.

So take advantage of the summer months to replenish and re-energize yourself. Whatever you decide to do, have a great summer!

UPCOMING CONFERENCES:

23rd Annual Convention for the Association for Psychological Science

May 26-29, 2011

Washington, DC

General Meeting of the EASP

July 12-16, 2011

Stockholm, Sweden



EASP Pre-Conferences:

Application of Self-Regulation Approaches to Social Psychological Society

Self and Identity

Social Psychology and the Neurosciences

Writing and Communicating with the General Public

119th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association

August 4-7, 2011

Washington, DC



EASP-SPSSI Meeting on Meaning and Existential Psychology

Nov. 17-18, 2011,

Tilburg, Netherlands

EASP Meeting on Motivational Processes in Attitudes

May 25-27, 2012

Ghent University, Belgium

SPSP 2012 Annual Meeting

January 26-28, 2012

San Diego, California

The logo for the Society for Personality and Social Psychology features the text 'Society for Personality and Social Psychology' in a green, serif font, set against a background of horizontal blue and white stripes.

Go to: <http://www.conferencealerts.com/psychology.htm> for additional psychology

TEACHING & JOB RESOURCES:

Teaching

<http://www.socialpsychology.org/teaching.htm>

Your one stop shop for a variety of social psychology teaching resources, including recommended textbooks, classroom activities, demonstrations, assignments, study aids, on-line resources and much, much more!

www.teachpsychscience.org

TeachPsychScience provides a range of classroom and lab resources such as demonstrations, activities, assignments, exercises and PowerPoint presentations to facilitate teaching research methods, statistics and experimental design in Psychology.

www.gocognitive.net

The goal of the GoCognitive web project is the creation of an online center for teaching cognitive psychology and cognitive neuroscience. The website provides online demonstrations of cognitive and neurological phenomenon as well as video content related to research in neuroscience.

www.psychradio.org

A recently developed webpage that provides a host of podcasts covering all sections of social and personality psychology including Self-Esteem, Implicit Bias and Learned Helplessness.

Job Resources

We recommend joining graduate student and early career listservs for the various psychological organizations like SPSP or APA. Often, early notification of post-doctoral or faculty position openings will appear there before they are available on a university's website. Moreover, the monthly publications of the APS (observer) and the BPS (the psychologist) have job opportunity sections. Finally, the following links may be useful for finding job postings:

SPSP Student Career Center

<http://www.spsp.org/student/career.htm> **APA Job Search** – <http://jobs.psycareers.com/search.cfm>

APS Employment Network

<http://www.psychologicalscience.org/jobs/>

EASP Job Postings

http://www.easp.eu/themes/job_overs.htm **BPS Employment Section** - <http://www.psychapp.co.uk/>

Socialpsychology.org Job Forum

<http://www.socialpsychology.org/forums/jobforum/>

For Funding Opportunities Go To: <http://www.socialpsychology.org/funding.htm>.