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Mindfulness, Self-regulatory Capacity, and Regulation of Health Behaviors - 2015 Award Winner

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As a senior psychology major, I took advantage of the research opportunities available through the laboratories operated by various department faculty. This involvement greatly increased my ability to apply classroom knowledge to applied research settings and my preparedness for graduate program applications. Additionally, I have fostered strong relationships with multiple professors and peers.

When I joined Dr. Whitney Heppner’s social psychology and wellness laboratory, I immediately sought a project to which I could significantly contribute. The semester before, she had a team piloting a study involving blood glucose levels, self-regulation, and ego depletion. I wanted a scope of experience as broad as possible, from testing participants to presentation of findings, and I quickly took position as the leader of this team. I wrote an abstract and submitted it to the Southeastern Psychological Association conference.

To build onto the existing project, I used the Galileo database to find appropriate sources. Mainly I wanted to find primary sources that described experimental procedures relevant to our methodology. For instance, we knew we wanted an ego depletion task, i.e. something a participant could do in the lab that would be cognitively taxing. When I searched through the literature, I found a study that used a crossing-out-letters task that I thought could be replicated in our laboratory. However, I had previously been met with the challenge of only finding articles that were literature reviews. To uncover the original sources, I had to specifically search for certain experiments and often utilized our inter-library loan process to gain access to more esoteric or older writings.

Throughout the year, I often would set up camp on a library computer that had SPSS software. I aggregated, analyzed, restructured, and transformed data over the course of the project, all with software provided by GCSU. Once my data was ready, I would move to a study
room to eliminate most distractions and be able to construct a detailed, aesthetically pleasing poster to take to SEPA. I made use of the APA style information available through the library, and I also used the larger tables outside the quiet areas to organize team meetings.

Having just returned from the annual SEPA conference, I can confidently confirm that my experiences with this and other research projects were some of the most influential in my readiness for graduate level work. I worked in the library throughout the whole process: during background research, throughout my grant applications, and practicing presentations. Even now, I sit with my laptop in one of the comfortable, upholstered chairs while I write this essay!