Roger S Smith Undergraduate Student Researcher Award Application Form

Application, with resume, are due by March 3 to the
Faculty of Arts Undergraduate Student Services Office, 6-5 Humanities Centre.
Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.
Please confine your input to the spaces provided, using 12 font.

PART III – Proposed Research Project (to be completed by the student)

My research project would be a continuation of a study begun by Dr. Nicoladis on English monolingual's classification of seemingly (or at least grammatically) gender-neutral objects and animals as either boys or girls. Interestingly, Dr. Nicoladis' findings reveal that, in general, gender classifications tend to remain quite stable between preschool age and adulthood. Many of the findings were unexpected and remain so far unexplained; for example, one peculiar finding shows that cows are overwhelmingly characterized as masculine, while horses are characterized as feminine. Working towards an explanation of such mysterious findings would be my task.

My task would involve reviewing relevant literature, hypothesizing possible explanations, and collecting data—all valuable research experience. I would begin by reviewing the data already collected, looking for possible links between those objects that tend to be characterized as feminine and carrying out a cluster analysis to help determine family resemblances. Then, I would collect further data, in order to verify particular objects' classifications. For example, if I thought the shape or silhouette of an object to be one type of family resemblance underlying gender classification, I would collect data on further objects to test that explanation. Or, on the other hand, if I suspected objects/animals to be classified based on stereotyped associations, I might explicitly ask participants to describe associations brought to mind when they think of a cow, for example.

Minimally, the results of the research could prove valuable in understanding English monolingual's acquisition of gender when learning a second language containing gendered nouns. Moreover, determining the cultural origins of such gender classification could have implications for the ways in which individuals interact with certain groups of objects/animals depending on those objects' gender classifications.

Working in Dr. Nicoladis' lab would provide not only general research experience, but would also provide experience within an area of psychology that I find particularly compelling. During my time within psychology, I have felt drawn to those classes that tend to highlight the significant role of culture in understanding the mind, noting the ways in which cultural/symbolic systems affect our experience. Dr. Nicoladis' research emphasis on language, as well as the project's connection with the theory of language relativity (which posits the thought-structuring nature of language), presents a valuable opportunity for research within such an area.

Furthermore, beyond the stated research project, I would be interested in reviewing the relevant literature (and thereon designing a study) on language relativity and moral development. Being a psychology major/philosophy minor, such a project would be a brilliant combination of my interests: that is, my interest in philosophical ethics and my interest in developmental psychology (both driven by an overall interest in the well-being of individuals, and in determining how to best promote/cultivate pro-social, happy individuals). Dr. Nicoladis has consented that such a project could be taken up in addition to the stated project, and/or continued during individual study under her supervision in the fall or winter semester.

SIGNATURE

I hereby acknowledge that the information above is accurate and I agree to abide by the regulations governing this award.

Desirée Bouliane
Signature of Student

Desirée Bouliane
Name of Student (please print)

March 1/11
Date