



2013 CCE Summer Internships

CATEGORY ARCHIVES: DOES THE INCOME ACHIEVEMENT GAP BEGIN IN INFANCY?

CCE Final Presentation Poster

Posted on **September 29, 2013** by w1385@cornell.edu

[CCE Poster](#)

On September 24th, with all the other CCE interns, I was able to present my research over the summer to the group. Attached is an electronic version of my poster.

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Week 7: Organizing and Evaluating Summer 2013

Posted on **July 19, 2013** by w1385@cornell.edu

On Monday and Tuesday, we had our last infant testing for the summer. After 7 weeks of summer, we have tested 8 infants and scheduled more than 15 infants for the coming semester. As the end of summer draws near (our official last day is Aug. 2nd), we are starting to get ready for fall semester. During our regular lab meeting this week, we evaluated current tasks that we are thinking of terminating/improving. Don't task for 24 months is being removed, and Barrier task for the 12 months is being added for the 24 month olds. Also, we are planning to move the Snack Delay task for 24 months right before Snack break so that infants are not refusing to eat the snacks during the task. These detailed changes need to be done over the summer so that we don't have to spend time discussing during the semester. Once the semester begins, research assistants are busy with their classes and other commitments that it makes harder on us to make these changes.

Also, we are now in the process of updating our Master Sheet that has all the information about our past/present data. By doing so, our data will be better organized and will be more accessible even for new members of the lab. Looking ahead for the semester, I am planning on having about 2-3 new research assistants to join our group. Though many competent seniors have left, our newly added RAs have been showing great competence, so I am not too concerned about the future of the lab.

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Week 6: Summer doldrum

Posted on **July 18, 2013** by w1385@cornell.edu

It's that time. Things are all settled, everyone knows what they are doing, visits are still happening, and nothing too exciting is going on. The weather is too nice, but having air conditioning in the lab is also a nice break. As tasks in the lab becomes routine, only thing to look forward to is playing with adorable babies.

This week, we had three visits (the best way to come back from July 4th break). What I like about working in baby games is this aspect: we not only learn how to analyze data and organize lab materials, but we also get to play/interact with infants. We see how infants are living in different environments, how their cognitive/emotional development is in progress accordingly to their physical surroundings. This first-hand experience of poverty around Ithaca area, and textbook-based knowledge of infant development easily coalesce with each other to provide interesting observations for me.

I never see myself as a researcher at any point in my future: even after about 2 years of being involved in it, I still don't see myself pioneering new academic area or constantly asking new questions. Once I asked a professor in an interview about how he keeps his motivation and interest in a subject area for such a long time. He simply replied saying that interaction with undergraduate students is what drives him to think of new ideas, and lead his research to direction that he didn't expect. That, is one aspect that I like about researching. Researching is not all about sitting in a white-walled lab and staring at numbers for hours; researching, from my experience, is more rewarding and meaningful when you involve interaction. After all, we are HUMAN development majors anyways.

Oh well. For now, back to staring at my computer screen.

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Week 5: Data Analysis

Posted on **July 8, 2013** by w1385@cornell.edu

Even though this week was shorter than the other weeks due to 4th of July vacation (7/4 – 7/8) I had several days where I had to come in earlier and leave later than I usually do. Because this week, I had to organize all the data for the Grant Proposal that Professor Evans is writing, there were more assignments for me complete and assign to other people on top of all the other routine tasks we do.

Professor Evans, in this particular data analysis, wanted to analyze the following variables: Age, Gender, Income-to-Needs ratio, Income group (middle or low), Average noise level of the home environment, Crowding in the home environment (people-to-rooms ratio), Scores in Sticker Bowls and Spin the Pots task, Toy Removal task and Distractibility task.

Retrieving all these data is one job but configuring and dealing with SPSS program while CISER is down is another burden. Because our remote desktop server has been down for more than a week now, it has been very inefficient to update SPSS files which can only be accessed when CISER is active. However, by using computers in the lab that has SPSS program already installed, and by coming in hours that our lab is not crowded, I was able to finish the job on time.

Meanwhile, when I was compiling the data files, I happen to analyze the data for Spin the Pots task. Just to briefly revisit the task, it is a game played only with 24 month olds, testing their short-term (working) memory which is a part of executive functioning. By placing 8 “Pots” on a lazy suzan but only putting stickers in 6 of them, the infant is asked to find all the stickers throughout 12 total trials. The way that I calculated scores for the task followed exactly the same as the article that we took the task from. By subtracting total number of errors (choosing a box with no sticker) from total possible trials (12), I calculated composite score for all the infants. From this preliminary analysis which had about 30 infants, I found significant mean difference in scores between the two income groups. Middle income infants scored about 7-8 points (about 4 errors made) but low income infants scored about 4-5 points. I do not know where to go with that analysis from here yet, but it sure is an interesting finding that I stumbled upon.

Now that Data analysis for the grand proposal is done, I can go back to my original project involving spatial words. This time, I intend to analyze the Spatial Play task (infant playing with his/her mom with a snail shape-sorter for 5 minutes) by looking at the caregiver’s scaffolding behavior with infant’s success rates in getting the shapes correctly. Then, I can further analyze the data along with number of spatial words produced by the caregivers. As only have about 3 weeks of summer left with CISL, I hope to develop the coding scheme for Spatial play and start coding as soon as possible for preliminary result analysis.

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Week 4: Recruitment 101

Posted on **June 28, 2013** by w1385@cornell.edu

In our lab, a process that is as equally important as data collection or data analysis is recruitment. Yes, we recruit

infants to participate in our studies. As weird as that sounds, recruitment is not an easy job especially when you have to deal with parents looking at you suspiciously when you ask “would you like to participate in a study at Cornell University with your infant for \$150?”

Our main source of recruitment varies. We have about 30 locations where we put brochures and posters, advertising our study, along with weekly trips to Cortland County Community Action Program to table at WIC (Women, Infants and Children) office. Our weekly trips to Cortland WIC office varies by the week, but we are usually there for about 3 hours per week. Other major recruitment source is craigslist. About twice a month, we will post an advertisement on craigslist website, hoping to reach out for a diverse population around the area.

Once we have contact information of these infants, we contact the parents to see if they are interested in participating. Then, we go through few eligibility questions to determine whether they and their infants are qualified to participate in our study, and if so, schedule for a future visit. If they are not qualified for our study, we ask them if they would like to be contacted for other research opportunities by being on our database. All these procedures seem very tedious, but it is one of the most important aspect of running our lab and continuing our study.

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Week 3: Home Visit 101

Posted on **June 24, 2013** by w1385@cornell.edu

There were 2 home visits this week, one in Ithaca, Tompkins county and one in Endicott, Broome county. As we try to reach out to as many infants around the area as possible, our trips to Broome county or any other counties adjacent to Tompkins and Cortland county. As I mentioned before, our home visits to the infants' houses are scheduled at the end of their lab visit, usually within a week or so after the first visit.

When we go to the homes of these infants, the first thing we do are always the same: place the decibel meter to check the average and peak noise level of the household, have enough lightening in the living room for us to film the tasks as effectively as possible, and set up a laptop for the caregiver to participate in few computer tasks. After these set-ups, the visit begins. Usually home visits are less strenuous to the infant than the lab visits. There aren't any tasks that potentially stresses out the infant, and there aren't that many tasks to begin with. However, for the caregiver it's a different story. The caregiver has to finish 4 computer tasks; one of which is extremely difficult and, to be honest, I haven't finished one for myself. Also, the number of questions that the RAs bombard to the caregiver may add more work then they did during the lab visit.

When the visits are finally done, researchers come back to the lab and clean up/make paperwork folders. Often times, when our trips are as far as Syracuse or anywhere with good dining restaurants, our professors will gladly appreciate our hard work by paying a great meal for us. Having said that, I think I prefer home visits more than lab

visits. What more can I ask for from a job that offers me to play with cute infants, give me great dinner and actually get to know where and how these participants' living conditions are?

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Week 2: Lab Visit 101

Posted on **June 19, 2013** by w1385@cornell.edu

Since we had two lab visits (one 12 month and one 24 month olds) this week, I thought it will be interesting to go over a bit about how our lab visits are executed on a level that doesn't violate our confidentiality issues.

As I mentioned before, our project operates with two visits: one at Cornell Infant Studies Lab (CISL) and one at the homes of the participants. After the first visit (lab) is scheduled within two weeks of the first or second birthday of the infant, a research assistant will call the parent a day or two before to confirm that the infant is healthy and ready to come in and play with us. On the day of the visit, two RAs will wait for the parent at the garage of new HumEc building to encounter the baby and the parent for the first time. After the first encounter, the parent and the infant is escorted to the basement of MVR hall where CISL is located.

The first task of the day is going over the consent form. One of the RAs will carefully explain what kinds of tasks there are that can potentially stress out the infant, and acquire signature of the parent after explaining that the participant is totally voluntary. During this process, other RAs will get to play with the infant with many toys (this part is often the most exciting part of the day). After going over the consent form, the baby and the parent is finally ready to embark on the rest of the Lab Visit. The entire lab visit will last about 1.5 hrs – 2 hrs with a short snack break in the middle.

My favorite task during a lab visit is called "Spin the Pots," which is only for 24 month olds. During this task, the infant is asked to sit on a high chair with a desk, and the experimenter brings out a scarf, 8 "pots", 6 stickers and a lazy susan. Then the experimenter will put in 6 stickers in 6 pots, while placing all 8 pots on the lazy susan. The child's job is to find out where all the stickers are while the experimenter spins the lazy susan while covering it with a scarf between the "trials." The task is over once the infant finds all 6 hidden stickers or tried 12 times.

After a visit, our job is to clean the toys with disinfecting wipes and sprays and bring the parent and infant back to the garage. Then, finally, the long day is over.

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Week 1: Start of the Summer

Posted on **June 10, 2013** by w1385@cornell.edu

This week, the Baby Games project officially started our summer research session. We had two visits, one on Monday (home visit, 12 months old) and one on Friday (lab visit, 24 months old) to start our week. Along with our regular visit and recruitment processes, new RAs also began to learn different parts of the lab.

Jasmin and I have been working on planning and making agenda for the new RAs to adjust to the lab as smoothly as possible. By repeatedly teaching them how to conduct each tasks, how to greet and introduce ourselves to the parents and even how to film, new RAs were flooded with new information that they will soon be comfortable with.

Earlier in the week, the lab felt like it's been very slow to start, but by the end of the week, everyone in the project were packed with their own work to keep ourselves busy. Next week, we have a busier schedule with two more infant visits, recruitment trip to CAPCO in Cortland, NY, and meeting with professors and graduate students. As the first week draws to an end, I think everyone found their place and position in the lab while learning which tasks they will be monitoring throughout the summer research session.

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Week 0: Preparation for the Summer

Posted on **June 3, 2013** by w1385@cornell.edu

This week, the Baby Games study prepared for Summer 2013 and got ready to continue the project smoothly with all the seniors leaving. First started in 2009, the study has been around for about 4 years now under Cornell Infant Studies Lab. As a head research assistant who has been in the study for the past 1.5 years, I have been organizing files and coding schemes, planning and allotting tasks for the summer.

During this summer, there will be 5 undergraduate research assistants (RAs) including myself, 2 experienced undergraduate students, 2 new undergraduate students and 2 professors who will be in charge of running the lab. Baby Games seek to find the roots of income gap in cognitive and behavioral development starting from infancy. Using various tasks to measure children's executive functioning and maternal responsiveness, data analysis process allows us to look at two different income groups and two different age groups. Infants who participate in our study is of 12 and 24 months of age. Our data collection process happens in Tompkins, Cortland and sometimes in Broom county.

As the weather becomes hotter and summer comes closer, I am more motivated to come to the air-conditioned lab and share the excitement with other RAs in the lab. With RAs coming from different majors with one common interest that we all like playing with babies, it will be interesting to see what this group of people can accomplish over the 10 weeks of summer researching.