



# Assessing the Educational Quality of the Undergraduate Research Assistantship in Psychology

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## Abstract

Thirty-six current and former undergraduate Research Assistants (RAs) assessed the educational quality of their experience. Responses indicate satisfaction with the amount and educational value of data collection, and a desire for more interaction with faculty and for more data analysis and interpretation.

## Background Research

The principle purpose of the undergraduate Research Assistantship in Psychology is to train students to design and conduct research, analyze data, and interpret findings. Although some research has established the benefits of serving as an undergraduate research assistant<sup>1</sup>, no researchers have quantified what aspects of the undergraduate research assistantship are the most educational. The purpose of this study was to identify how educational the undergraduate research assistantship is and what suggestions current and former research assistants offer for improvement.

## Method

**Participants:** 36 current and former RAs who represent research conducted in Clinical, Cognitive, Community, Developmental, and Social Psychology at the University of Virginia.

**Procedure:** Participants completed a 105-item web survey, which asked them to rate how educational they found various aspects of being a research assistant and to what extent certain changes to the undergraduate research assistantship would make the experience more educational.

## Results

### **Part I: What's the One Most Educational Aspect of Being an RA?**

*(Percentage of participants for whom the task was applicable who responded for each task)*

Running Participants/Collecting Data	47.06
Discussing Careers in Psychology/Grad School	14.71
Meetings Regarding Theoretical Research Issues	8.82
Getting to Know Faculty Advisors	8.82
Discussing the Overall Research Process	8.82
Coding/Entering Data	5.88
Analyzing Data	2.94
Reading and Discussing Research Articles	2.94

### **Part II: What Changes Would Make the RA Experience More Educational?**

*Amount is "Just right":*

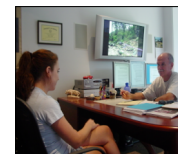
	<u>Percent</u>
Running Participants/Collecting Data	94.29
Recruiting/Scheduling Participants	80.00
Administrative Tasks	74.29
Coding/Entering Data	68.57
Attending General Lab Meetings	65.71
Meetings Regarding Methodological Issues	55.72

*Would prefer "a little more":*

	<u>Percent</u>
Reading and Discussing Research Articles	56.95
Analyzing Data	48.57
Discussing Overall Research Process with Faculty	45.45
Meetings Regarding Theoretical Research Issues	44.45
Meetings Regarding Data Analysis	38.89
Getting to Know Faculty Advisors	38.24
Discussing Careers/Graduate School with Faculty	37.14

### **Part III: What One Change Would Most Improve the Educational Quality of the RA Experience?**

*(Total percentage by category)*



**Increased Interaction with Faculty Members**

**57.57%**



**More Involvement in Data Analysis**

**33.33%**

## Conclusions

- I. RAs find data collection to be the most educational part of the experience.
- II. RAs are satisfied with the amount of data collection assigned to them.
- III. RAs desire more opportunity to interact with faculty members and more hands-on experience with data analysis and interpretation.

## Reference

<sup>1</sup> Landrum, R. E., & Nelsen, L. R. (2002). The undergraduate research assistantship: An analysis of the benefits. *Teaching of Psychology, 29*, 15-19.