**Reflections and advice to new UGRAs from old UGRAs:**

**From Jessica (Summer, 2025): HDFS 3980**

Working for Dr. Di’s adolescent and young adult development lab has been nothing short of rewarding. I had not previously worked for a research lab, so I have gained many skills this summer. I can handle multiple tasks at once, communicate professionally, I have greater research skills, and I have learned the value of teamwork. If you are new to research and working in a lab, I would not worry too much. I was nervous at first, but Dr. Di provides space to learn and grow. If you are unsure about anything, do not be scared to ask questions! We’re all learning and growing. Dr. Di wants her research assistants to succeed, and she will help you along the way. I enjoyed being a part of her lab so much that I have decided to stay on her team for the fall of 2025 to help her with her qualitative coding study. I cannot wait to continue to build my list of skills, learn how to analyze data, and have fun doing it. I highly recommend being a part of her team!

**From Kyndal (Summer, 2025): HDFS 3980**

Serving as an undergraduate research assistant in the Adolescent and Young Adult Development Lab working on the AU College Experiences Study has been an enriching experience that gave me a closer look into the behind-the-scenes work of psychological research. While my role focused primarily on participant outreach, survey coordination, and compensation processes, it offered valuable insight into the importance of research ethics, organization, and communication. My main responsibilities included contacting potential participants, managing survey links, and ensuring participants received compensation in a timely and accurate manner. Through this work, I developed a deeper appreciation for the logistical and ethical aspects of research, especially the importance of clear communication, confidentiality, and respect for participants’ time and contributions. Even though I was not directly involved in designing or analyzing studies, being part of the research process helped me understand how participant engagement is foundational to successful data collection. I learned the importance of attention to detail, keeping accurate records, and maintaining professionalism when representing the lab in external communication. This assistantship also gave me a new perspective on how psychological research can be used to better understand and improve college student experiences. Being part of a team that values student voices and well-being has encouraged me to think more critically about the role of research in higher education and student support services. Overall, this experience strengthened my communication skills, attention to detail, and time management, all of which will support me in my future academic and professional goals

**From Conner (Summer, 2025): Volunteer**

From the beginning of the summer to the end, I feel as if I only continued to undergo both professional and personal development as a direct result of my involvement with this lab. In contrast to last semester, we managed to accomplish quite a bit this summer. I’d go as far as to say that significant progress was made, and that we reached many of our goals in the timeframe we had. I personally became more comfortable and knowledgeable of the many moving parts involved in conducting research, and in this familiarity I saw growth. I enjoyed being responsible for something and to actually see progress being made over time.

For those who may follow, I’ve found that it is imperative to take initiative where you can, but also to lean on Dr. Samek and your other research assistants where possible. Take pride in the work that you are doing, and find enjoyment in it when your hours feel mundane. Ultimately, you have the unique opportunity to work alongside an incredibly talented and driven individual, and that is not to be taken for granted. Though this lab can feel overwhelming at times, you're never truly alone. Also, on a lesser note, learn how to use Excel; it’ll save you so much time. Best of luck to you, and War Eagle

**From Aisha (Spring, 2025): HDFS 4980**

This semester, even though we were not able to do much due to issues with getting the NIH COC, I still gained a lot of skills. This semester we had the opportunity to present our research at the AU Research Symposium. I also had the opportunity to be the submitting author for the symposium, as well as design the poster for the symposium. I loved getting the chance to be creative and put the poster together. I had never done anything like this before, and it was a really great experience. I enjoyed being able to talk with students and faculty about our important findings and it was really exciting to see a whole semester’s worth of work come together. This semester we also got to learn more about research from a more technical perspective. We learned about grants, funding, and the things that go on behind the scenes when it comes to research. I also truly enjoyed our article facilitations and the discussions. Article discussions have been one of my favorite parts of our lab because I enjoy being able to read new literature and hear everyone’s ideas and thoughts. I also had the opportunity to read over our manuscript which is in progress, but that was also an interesting thing to be a part of. Overall, even though we could not do much, I had a wonderful semester, and I look forward to helping start recruitment, this summer!

**From Alyssa (Spring, 2025): HDFS 4980**

     This semester was incredibly beneficial in supplementing my research experience because our team was able to present our work from the fall semester in the Auburn Research Symposium! When I started my research endeavors, I always looked forward to having the opportunity to present my work for others to see. Presenting in this symposium with my fellow teammates was definitely a highlight of my time here at Auburn, and the implications of our research on the effect of trauma on the well-being of first-year students seemed to truly make an impression on our audience and judges. Overall, working on this project and being able to present our work was incredibly fulfilling, and I am so grateful for all of the experience I now have in the realm of qualitative research.

     Another aspect of my time in this lab I am truly grateful for is the collaboration and relationships I was able to build with Dr. Di and my fellow teammates. Sharing ideas and discussing relevant research articles every week allowed me to develop an even stronger attachment to the work we were collaborating on, and I am so thankful to have worked with such a supportive, hard-working group of people. My time in this lab will undoubtedly benefit me in my future endeavors regarding research and human development!

**From Conner (Spring, 2025): HDFS 3980**

From the beginning of the semester to the end, I feel as if I underwent both professional and personal development as a direct result of my involvement with this lab. Though little progress was actually able to be made towards the study (due to IRB withholding approval for the duration of the semester), our team still held weekly meetings, communicated regularly, and aided one another in our respective studies. I learned how to be not just a member of a group, but a stronger contributor, too. The time I spent preparing to discuss research studies, engaging in conversations about them, and developing my own was especially important to me, and it still provided us with work to be done. At the beginning of the semester, I must confess that I did not truly feel as if I was even close to obtaining the level of comprehension my other lab members had, and I feared that I would not be as successful or develop the habits I believed I could. Ultimately, though, Dr. Samek and the lab participants made this transition into research seamless, and I can at least personally attest to the fact that I feel like I have grown and gained familiarity with this area.

This was my first semester with the lab, and even despite setbacks I still thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated my time. For lack of better phrasing, it feels good to work on something bigger than yourself, especially when you are surrounded by such compassionate and intelligent people. I look forward to my continued involvement over the summer, and I encourage anyone hesitant to reach out to Dr. Samek; it has been one of the best decisions I’ve made in my time here at Auburn.

**From Jade (Spring, 2025): HDFS 3980**

This semester, I developed both personally and academically. Participating in the 2025 research symposium improved my confidence in public speaking and collaborating with others. I also grew in my Excel abilities and felt more assured in tackling coding tasks. I discovered that research requires patience, particularly when unexpected issues arise, such as when NIH regulations hinder our progress. I deeply appreciate the encouragement from my classmates and am thankful to have Dr. Di as a mentor. Overall, I am grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow with such great people!

**From Olivia (Spring, 2025): HDFS 4980**

This semester, my main tasks were qualitative coding and paper editing. The qualitative coding project was something we had been working on since Fall 2024. Qualitative coding with a team required a lot of collaboration and communication to effectively work. Additionally, the coding skills I have learned from this have helped me to better digest qualitative research papers. I also found it impactful to see the results of our coding analyses, especially because of the topic being traumatic events. The paper editing I did this semester was for a manuscript draft about the qualitative trauma project and for a social media use project I have been working on with Brianna and Dr. Di for several semesters now. The social media paper was edited after we received a revise and resubmit decision from a journal [later edit by Dr. Di: the paper has now been accepted for publication!]. I learned about the peer review process through this by getting to read and discuss feedback we got on our paper from the peer reviewers. This certainly enhanced my experience and skillset with research paper writing. Additionally, I have seen considerable growth in my ability to understand research articles after going through this process and seeing peer review first-hand.

This is my last semester in Dr. Di’s lab since I am graduating. I could only begin to explain how valuable my experience in the lab has been over the last couple years. Beyond developing skills along multiple parts of the research process (data collection, coding, writing, presentations), I have also been able to refine essential soft skills such as cooperation, adaptability, and attention to detail. I would highly recommend other students to become involved with Dr. Di’s lab. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunities and guidance Dr. Di has provided. Each semester, I have enjoyed getting to work with the people in this lab and have developed a true passion for our research interests.

**From Olivia (Fall, 2024): HDFS 4980**

My main projects this semester included implementing the PreVenture program in a middle school and working on coding for qualitative data analysis. I was excited to be able to work on PreVenture in a school since this is a project we had been trying to get going for a while. After learning about the program and becoming certified as a facilitator in spring of 2023, I felt very strongly that the program could really benefit kids. It was great to connect with the small group I facilitated and co-facilitated for. This was a great opportunity to practice my communication and empathetic listening skills. I’m looking forward to continuing to work on this project and getting feedback on how it’s working from the participant’s surveys.

The qualitative project involved thematic analysis of participants free-response answers regarding their experiences with trauma. I have enjoyed getting involved in this process by helping make the codesheet and getting to work through coding cases with the team. Reading the participant responses was very interesting to me since it shows what issues the students at our campus feel the most impacted by. This was the first time I have worked with this type of analysis; I learned how the process works and am now able to better understand the validity of qualitative analyses I read in research papers. I look forward to continuing to work on this project and seeing where the analysis leads us.

**From Alyssa (Fall, 2024): HDFS 3980**

This lab has provided me with so much knowledge and experience regarding the well-being of the first-year students present on Auburn’s campus. I have been exposed to many published research articles throughout this lab and other HDFS courses I have been enrolled in, and after this semester, I have gained a much better understanding of the actual process that goes into writing these papers. This semester, we focused on data processing, and I have gained much more experience working with data files and Excel spreadsheets as we have coded our qualitative data. I often created most of the spreadsheets which we used to input data this semester, and I feel that I am now much more proficient in utilizing Excel, which is a very beneficial skill applicable to many areas of life moving forward. I also appreciated participating in Thematic Analysis for the first time, for I now have a better understanding of how qualitative research studies are processed and categorized. Although I was unable to attend the weekly team meetings, I was still able to collaborate with many of the other undergraduate assistants either through overlapping lab hours or through remote communication. Working with them to process this data has been extremely beneficial in cultivating my teamwork skills, and I look forward to continuing to work with them next semester.

In terms of the data itself, I found it interesting how the majority of the trauma reported was due to vicarious exposure through the news or social media rather than direct experience. As of right now, the most common frequency in our code is trauma from school shootings and gun violence, and nearly all of these cases are vicarious through media. This is such a testament to how persuasive today’s media can be on adolescent mental health, and as I think about possible solutions to the rapid spread of negative media, I find myself conflicted on a solution. It is easy to think “if adolescents weren’t exposed to this media, then their mental health might not suffer as much.” While this is true, when devastating events such as gun violence happen, I still believe it is so vital to spread awareness on the issue in order to gain support in implementing change. So, other than actually changing gun policies and implementing more safety precautions nationwide, I think it is difficult to find an immediate solution to the trauma adolescents are suffering from due to negative news seen in the media. For now, as our data indicates that their trauma often induces anxiety and depression, it is clear that it is important to prioritize offering support and resources to those who may be suffering from these symptoms of trauma exposure. The first year of college is hard enough as it is, and enduring all of the stress that comes with coursework along with suffering from PTSD is a weight too great to bear alone. The unfortunate fact is that we cannot stop traumatic events from happening, whether these are national/personal events or vicarious/direct; however, we can spread awareness to these issues and find resources that might improve the mental health of those who are suffering due to these devastating events.

**From Lauren (Fall, 2024): HDFS 3980**

I have loved the opportunity to be able to work in the Adolescent and Young Adult

Development Lab. I have learned a lot of things in this lab that I have not done in other labs. For

instance, separating the trauma responses into different themes/codes, creating a codesheet

and codebook for the study, and preparing PreVenture packets. Specifically separating the codes and assisting in creating a codesheet are things that I had not known anything about before working in the lab. I am so glad I had the opportunity to learn about these things, and will now be able to continue to utilize this knowledge in my future in graduate school when conducting and assisting with research.

Working in this lab has been such an amazing experience. This is the first lab in which I

have been very passionate about what the lab is doing. Additionally, the environment and team

that is working in the lab is such a great group of people. This has been my favorite lab that I’ve

been able to be a part of. I have learned a lot, and have reinforced skills that I already knew (ex.

data entry). I can’t wait to learn more and assist in any way that I can next semester.

**From Maddy (Fall, 2024): HDFS 3980**

Through this semester in the Adolescent and Young Adult lab, I have gained significant hands-on experience with data analysis specifically focused on traumatic and challenging experiences faced by young adult minorities. This experience enhanced my technical research skills and deepened my understanding of the systematic obstacles and transitional challenges these demographics encounter.

While conducting my portion of the data analysis, I relied on my critical thinking skills and orderly mindset to ensure precision and accuracy in my work. Additionally, I used my mentor and peers to deepen my knowledge and understanding of the process, recognizing the importance of collaboration in overcoming the complexities that research brings. Working with the team enhanced my value of collaboration and allowed me to learn and utilize new problem-solving techniques that will be valuable in future work.

Additionally, my involvement with the PreVenture Program provided valuable insight into evidence-based interventions for youth. Learning about and working with the program enhanced my ability to understand and implement strategies that promote positive behavioral change in young people. This experience allowed me to actively participate in and observe how intervention-based practices operate, demonstrating their potential to impact an individual’s life.

Overall, my time in the Adolescent and Young Adult Lab, combined with my involvement in the PreVenture program, has significantly shaped my ability to conduct and understand research data while emphasizing the insightful impact of evidence-based intervention programs. These experiences enhanced my research and collaboration skills and my passion for pursuing a career dedicated to understanding and supporting underserved populations. I am excited to use what I have learned in my future academic and career life while striving to make a meaningful difference in our world.

**From Kaitlyn (Fall, 2024): HDFS 3980**

Over the course of the semester working in Dr. Di’s research lab I have had the opportunity to grow in my research and Excel skills, as well as becoming better at reading research articles. By working in the lab, I have learned a great deal about what a research team does and have been able to develop a great understanding and appreciation for the people who study research. It is not always easy and there is a lot of tedious work, but it is something I am glad to have had the opportunity to do. Prior to working in the lab, I had not done team or dyad coding, so being able to learn this new skill was a great experience. Using Excel was also something I had not had a ton of experience with before, so being able to practice and learn new skills using this software is something that could be beneficial in my future career. By having the opportunity to read numerous different research articles and facilitate a discussion of one of my own choosing, I was able to grow in this area as well. I found facilitating an article discussion to be helpful in ensuring I had a strong understanding of the article and could accurately discuss it with my peers and Dr. Di. Finally, by having the opportunity to meet with and work alongside my peers, I was able to practice my teamwork skills.

**From Aisha (Fall, 2024): HDFS 3980**

Research reflection

Being an UGRA this semester has taught me lots of valuable skills and has deepened my understanding of the research process. When I first started working here, I was a little nervous mainly because I had never done research or been a part of a research team before. But, after meeting with Dr. Di, the GRAs, and the other UGRAs I felt a lot better! This semester, we did a project on how news can cause trauma, and we used qualitative analysis. We mainly worked out of Excel, and this allowed me to strengthen my skills in it. I haven’t always been good at Excel, but I was able to get much better at it this semester. I also found the data and the responses themselves to be very intriguing. It was surprising to see how many people are affected by what is shown on the news and media. Many individuals explained that they had anxiety and stress related to what was shown on the news.

My favorite parts were definitely our weekly lab meeting and the discussions on various scholarly articles. This semester, I got much better at reading scholarly articles. I have gained a lot of skills and gotten rich experience that I never would have gotten if I did not work in this lab. I feel so much more confident in my research skills and now that I have a better understanding of all that goes into the process, I definitely have more respect for researchers. I am so excited to continue working next semester!

**From Jade (Fall, 2024): HDFS 3980**

This semester, I had the chance to work in the "Adolescent and Adult Development Lab," where I learned many new skills. As someone with no prior research experience, I am thankful to have been part of such a warm and supportive team. Working and growing with my peers has been a fun experience.

One of the most important things I gained from this opportunity was a deeper understanding of trauma. Reading about personal experiences shared by individuals has helped me view trauma in a new light, transforming my understanding of anxiety and depression. Coding these stories allowed me to break down and better understand their experiences, which also contributed to the overall goals of the “Qual Trauma Project”.’

Throughout the semester, I developed more skills. I improved my Excel skills and learned to pay closer attention to detail. I also became better at communicating with my peers, especially when discussing disagreements and working together to find solutions. A highlight of my experience was working with Aisha on a social media post about our ongoing analysis of traumatic experiences. This project gave me the chance to design, edit, and summarize some of the major themes we discovered this semester.

Overall, my time in the lab has helped me gain hands-on experience with data analysis and qualitative coding. As a first-time lab member, this semester has been full of growth, new experiences, and meeting amazing people. I am very grateful for this opportunity to learn and grow. The skills I've gained are invaluable, and I look forward to next semester!

**From Olivia (Spring, 2023): HDFS 4980**

This has been my fourth semester as part of this lab! My main tasks have been helping with recruitment for our follow up on Cohort 1 from 2022 and working on a project with Brianna and Dr. Di. The project was about how personality could come into play in the association between problematic social media use and internalizing symptoms. I helped write a paper which has been submitted to a journal to hopefully be published! This helped me to develop my skills in researching and technical writing. It was so rewarding to see the paper come together after several months of work! Along with this project, I created a poster to present at the AU Research Symposium, which was a fantastic opportunity to discuss and practice presenting research. Presenting research was something that previously intimidated me, but this opportunity really helped me gain some confidence. Additionally, a project on this same topic that we worked on last semester was accepted to present at the Society for Research on Adolescence, which I am looking forward to attending in a few weeks!

I’m excited for next semester in the lab! I would advise any new UGRA’s to really get involved in this lab and stick around for a few semesters if possible to see how our research methods evolve! Each semester I’ve been here has included different projects that have cumulated to give me a more holistic view of the research process. I am sincerely thankful for all the opportunities Dr. Di has given me to help research such a relevant and impactful field!

**From Hayleigh (Spring, 2023): HDFS 3980**

I really enjoyed being part of the research team this semester. I found working together and contacting participants so rewarding. Last semester was more learning about the research so being an active part of gathering the data was so exciting. I felt excited to be apart of something that matters. I did find an aspect frustrating; when participants wouldn’t contact us back even to say they wouldn’t participate. I feel like that taught me a valuable experience though. I enjoy doing/learning new things and being a part of this research team allowed me to gain more knowledge. I know how to email and call people in a professional manner better than I did at the start of this semester, which I think is a valuable skill. I’m sad I won’t be able to continue helping out with the research progress but I am thankful for the time that I had.

**From Allsion (Spring, 2023): HDFS 3980**

I was very surprised when Dr. Di asked if I was interested in being one of her undergraduate research assistants. I felt like I didn’t know much about research or even how to read and interpret a research paper. I wanted to learn though, and being a research assistant has allowed me that opportunity.

First, I learned about the IRB and the may ethical factors that play into research and funding. Then, I learned about the recruitment process for the AU College Experiences Study and received my database with participants to begin working through. Reaching out to participants through various modes of communication (email, text, phone, mail) stepped me outside of my comfort zone. I saw how much work goes into tracking participants down so that we have a high participation rate. The other undergraduate and graduate research assistants all collaborate to all work towards the same goal and it is so satisfying to see more and more participants who have completed the survey. Dr. Di’s lab and her research have a focus on BIPOC students and their experiences, and I am glad that I was able to learn in a lab that gave unique attention to representing BIPOC students in research. Different undergraduate and graduate research assistants chose research articles pertaining to adolescents and young adults and we discussed them as a group. The lab meetings helped improve my reading and interpretation skills and gain a broader understanding of research in this field.

All of this helped me become more confident in my ability to read, understand, and critique research, and be a part of the research process. I would recommend being an undergraduate research assistant to anyone who is even slightly interested and willing to learn, do not worry about how much past experience you have with research. Dr. Di’s adolescent and young adult development lab has been great experience!

**From Olivia (Fall, 2023): HDFS 4980**

This semester, I have been working with Brianna on her project regarding social media and negative affect. One of the first things I did was learn how to write syntax in SPSS and MPlus. I had no prior experience with syntax and only some experience using these programs, so I had a lot to learn (thankfully Brianna was a great teacher!). Pattern recognition and attention to detail were vital while learning syntax. In SPSS, I learned how to recode, merge files, change value labels. In MPlus, I learned how to do latent variables, mediations, and moderations. I found it very interesting to see what happens to the data we collect from our surveys. I now better understand how the findings we include in papers or projects are obtained from the raw data we collect. The other main task of my semester has been writing a paper with Brianna about social media, personality, and internalizing. So far, I have worked on writing the methods section. I have written literature reviews before, but it is exciting to be helping with a research article. I am looking forward to continue working on this paper! Overall, it has been great to learn about how our data is analyzed and reported, and very rewarding to help with these processes. I am thankful for these opportunities to learn skills that I wouldn’t otherwise encounter in normal coursework! Excited for the next semester!

**From Hayleigh (Fall, 2023): HDFS 3980**

This semester was my first time working in any kind of undergraduate research. I was so thankful for the opportunity to be a part of this lab team. It’s one thing to check a box and complete a requirement for research and it’s a whole other to feel passionate about what you’re learning, and that’s how I felt all semester. I believe the research this team is working to obtain is so vital for understanding more about all the people in our communities and not just those of privilege. There were aspects of life that I had been ignorant to, but reading through all the materials that go into the methodology for this research was extremely illuminating. I also really enjoyed our weekly meetings where we came together as a group to discuss articles and future goals. I felt like I was really part of a team that was working towards something that matters. Overall, I really enjoyed this semester, even though I didn’t contribute much to the whole research aspect. I did get to work on the IRB form which was really fascinating. I have never contributed to such as important document before, so I got to learn/create something new.

For those who may be joining the team, I advise you to have an open mind and be willing to learn. I have just touched to surface of what there is to do in this research lab, but from what I have seen, there is a lot of work to be done always. Be ready to learn and contribute in any ways that you can. In regards to having an open mind, by reading and listening to discussion, you’ll be able to gain insights to different perspectives which is enriching. I have learned so much this semester, and I’m excited to continue learning during the next one!

**From Grace (Fall, 2023): HDFS 3980**

This semester was a great experience because I had never worked on an official document like the Institutional Review Board document before. This was an opportunity for learning and growth, as it is a very official document that requires a lot of attention to detail. It was helpful that we had a template of the previous one to go off of. Dr. Di was incredibly helpful during this process and guided us along from start to finish. This was my key event of the semester that stood out to me. I liked that this fall semester differed from the spring. In the spring, we were solely focused on the College Experiences Survey and all that went along with that, including the Fitbit survey. This fall, we explored new topics such as the IRB process, research from other labs and reviewing that material, and facilitating discussions with each other regarding research articles.

My advice to new UGRAs would be to pick a schedule that works for you that you can commit to. The work in the lab is very interesting and engaging and you’ll want to stay on top of your hours and duties. Especially when something like the College Experiences Survey is being conducted throughout the semester, you want to make sure you’re staying on top of everything, as there are a lot of moving parts. Being a part of this team has helped me develop professional skills, such as email writing and effectively communicating with people. In addition to this, I have learned skills through SPSS data collection, Excel, and Auburn financial service. Overall, it has been a very rewarding experience and the coolest part is that there is tangible data from what you’re helping with.

**From Grace (Spring, 2023): HDFS 3980**

Being a UGRA this semester has taught me so much. The biggest thing is dealing with large databases across multiple platforms. I had dealt with Excel and Word before, but I had never even heard of SPSS Statistics Data before, so that was new territory to me. I learned how to effectively manage communication with over 100 people and how to correspond in a professional manner. As for myself, I have learned the value of being a part of a team, but also working independently. Overall, this has been great experience for me and I feel so honored that I have the opportunity to be a part of this.

**From Olivia (Spring, 2023):**

Being a UGRA in this lab has given me a greater understanding of the research process. It has been interesting to learn firsthand how recruitment and correspondence with participants is conducted, and how important a study’s sample is. Learning these things has made me more confident with interpreting and discussing research articles. I have also learned to be more comfortable with emailing people, using excel, and using multiple databases at once. Using multiple databases definitely requires organization and attention to detail, any opportunity to practice or prove these skills is valuable!

I would highly recommend participating in this lab; the skills I have developed and lessons I have learned will help me in many ways. I am a biomedical sciences major and ended up in this lab through my HDFS minor, and I can make so many connections between this lab and my major/future career goal. Getting involved in research has enhanced my academic experience. Furthermore, the lab has been a great way for me to step back from my classwork during the week and focus on another task that is still productive and rewarding. I would advise future UGRAs that there is a lot to learn about the lab at first, but it quickly becomes second nature. I am so thankful for this past semester- I can’t wait to continue helping with this lab over the summer and next fall, and to see where the research goes!

**From Madison (Spring, 2022):**

This past semester, I feel like I have been able to grow the skills used in lab. Before this experience, I was not confident in my research ability at all. I can say that now I am able to confidently understand research articles and expound my thoughts on them. I have enjoyed coming to lab because it always serves as a time where I can step away from the responsibilities of school and extracurricular activities. I have truly enjoyed research so much to the point where I have considered applying it to my pharmacy school curriculum. I appreciate the things that Dr. Di has taught me in this lab. Of course, I have learned basic skills like Microsoft Excel and Word, but I have even learned how to train others and create a recorded Zoom to show others how to perform necessary tasks in the lab! I am proud of myself for continuing another great semester in the lab, and I’m proud of the UGRA team for completing a successful study!

**From Carmen (Spring, 2022):**

I am so happy I was able to participate is this type of research this semester. Over the summer I worked in pharmaceutical research, and it was completely different. Here I learned how psychological studies run versus medical studies and they are completely different. I was able to gain communication skills when it comes to inviting people to participate in a study where that be other the phone or through email. Talking to students over the phone while reading a script has helped me become more seamless with it because I’ve done it so much. I also became more familiar with excel and basic keyboard functions to aid in the process of logging information. Learning all of the factors that go into a study and all the variables that have to be measured has been very informative. I also really like what this study is about because I feel like minorities and the problems, they face especially on PWI’s campuses are overlooked. I had a lot of fun working in the lab this semester and am so thankful for this experience

**From Sophia (Spring, 2022):**

Throughout this semester, I have learned a lot through this research and research process. I have enjoyed recruiting students, speaking with the other members of the team, and participating in this research. I can not wait to see where this research goes and what it may unlock in the future. I think a larger social media presence would be a beneficial part to expanding the research and I would like to come back in the fall. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity and I look forward to our celebration on Monday!

**From Kendi (Spring, 2022):**

I have truly enjoyed working in Dr. Di’s lab this semester. The first few weeks, I was very overwhelmed and worried that I was going to make a lot of mistakes because I felt like there was so much to learn before I could start contributing to the research process. Dr. Di eased my worries however, by always being open and available to answer any questions that I might have. She also checked our work and gave us feedback which was very reassuring. Dr. Di taught me new skills that make working with computers more efficient that I will use in the future. Working with the other UGRAs was also a very great experience this semester. They were all kind, hardworking, and motivated individuals, and I’m very thankful that I got to build a relationship with all of them. Through working with Dr. Di, I was also able to get out of my comfort zone by leading a discussion about a research article to the team and making phone calls to parents and students. Being a UGRA for this semester has allowed for me to grow and enhance a lot of the skills that I will use in my future, and I cannot wait to read the results of the AU College Experiences Study!

**From Madison (Fall 2021):**

Working in Dr. Di’s lab this semester has been one of the highlights of my semester. When I first got here, I was nervous and slightly worried that I wouldn’t be able to do the tasks expected of me. After the first couple weeks, it became a breeze. Dr. Di is always able to answer any questions I have, and she makes sure we have everything needed to complete the job. Additionally, it has been great working with other productive UGRAs. This position helped me gain interest in research and feel more confident when looking at research articles. Overall, this lab has contributed to me getting out of my comfort zone and has given me more skills that I will be able to take into pharmacy school.

**From Amber (Fall 2021):**

I learned a lot from this experience, from both the lab tasks and article discussions. I have gotten to perfect my organization, planning, and communication skills. For example, I was nervous when calling people at the beginning of the semester, but now I am much more confident on the phone. I learned how to plan and organize more efficiently, and it only takes me a little bit to plan out what tasks I need to do for the day or to decide on what next step to take for a task. These soft skills are important in any profession, so I am happy that I got to work on these skills in this lab. Also, I have never been one to talk or discuss much in class, but I felt comfortable speaking out during our discussions and leading my own discussion. Discussing research articles with other UGRA’s and graduate assistants helped the information stick more, and I enjoyed seeing other people’s perspectives on our discussion material. I now understand research more and enjoyed learning about the process of it. The purpose of this lab is also very important, and I am interested in seeing what the results are!

I would advise future undergraduate assistants to come up with a system to organize the tasks. It seems like a lot at first, but I was fine after planning out my tasks for each shift. It does not have to be too detailed and can be as simple as highlighting the tasks you need to do for the shift. It also helps to ask questions! Dr. Di and the graduate assistants have always been happy to answer any questions. This helped me out a lot at the beginning when I was getting used to the lab tasks. It was not too long before lab tasks felt automatic, and I can get them done pretty quickly now.

**From Ryann (Fall 2021):**

I thoroughly enjoyed my time working in Dr. Samek’s lab this fall. I have never done anything like this before and I gained a lot of valuable experience this semester. Most of my work experience has been relationally oriented so I am glad that I gained more task-oriented, behind-the-scenes work experience. It helped me become more familiar with Excel and it sharpened my organization and communication skills. Working in the lab required me to manage my time well in order to stay on top of the tasks at hand. At the end of each day, I wrote a list of tasks that I needed to accomplish the next day. This really helped me stay organized and prevented me from forgetting anything that needed to get done. I also found it helpful to highlight or change the font color of participants in my excel spreadsheet that I needed to contact the next day so that no one slipped through the cracks. It was difficult to get into a rhythm at first but once I found a routine the work became much less overwhelming. Finally, it was very

reassuring to know that Dr. Di is always open to questions and ready to help if things are confusing or if you get lost. Communicating effectively is a key part of working in the lab and staying in communication with the other UGRAs and Di is important to everything running smoothly. Overall, this experience was very valuable to me and I not only gained a lot from it but really enjoyed it too!

**From Ashlyn (Spring 2021):**

Throughout this past semester, I was able to really grow and enhance many of my technical skills, as well as gaining more of an understanding of things during our weekly discussion meetings. This research opportunity has allowed me to become a more confident individual when I am put in a room with people that are older and a lot smarter than me. I always enjoyed coming into the lab maybe 2 to 3 times a week, and just crank out all the tasks I needed to get done because I always felt prepared for it. I soon realized that this research meant more to me than just a check of my graduation requirements or a resume booster. I gained a true appreciation for research and all the aspects that play into from participant confidentiality to IRB grant proposal steps. This semester’s work has also helped me figure out the areas I am interested in pursuing post-graduation. I could not have asked for a better professor to assist with research. Dr. Samek has always been straight-forward and told me exactly what she expects from me and how to get to those end goals. I was even able to use what I was taught last semester to assist in training the other undergraduate student on our team! I am proud of the work our team was able to accomplish this semester, and can not wait to see what happens in the future!

**From Lily (Spring 2021):**

This semester was a lot different than last semester and I personally feel like I’ve had a lot of growth in lab this semester. I had a bit of trouble last semester with technology and work load and being able to juggle everything which led me to make some careless errors. This semester I really worked on being more intentional and careful when sending emails, filling out survey reports, etc. I feel like overall I improved my skill set and feel more confident in my skills in research, lab work. I also felt that I was more confident to start discussions in the weekly lab meetings then I was last semester. Fall semester I was a bit hesitant to speak up during the lab meetings due to it consisting of mostly graduate student but I feel this semester I worked hard to be knowledgeable, prepare efficiently, and analyze research better. I’m proud of the work I completed this semester and happy I chose to take part of research this semester. I found the work to be gratifying and I enjoyed going into the lab and getting the in person research experience.

**From Lily (Fall 2020):**

Working on The College Experiences Survey was an incredible learning experience. This was an entirely new experience from any other interning I’ve done this year. Mostly because it was all online and I had to work from home this semester. This was a challenging time at some points, using a personal computer I had some trouble figuring out how to work Excel and keep track of different documents at the same time. There were times where I got confused and mixed up some things but throughout my time working with Dr. Samek I gained knowledge and experience on how to email clients, how to work Microsoft Excel and Word proficiently, I learned organization skills, and I learned time management skills. I feel like this experience has shaped me into a better worker and I think professionally it’s going to serve me well in my future. I am extremely excited for Spring Semester to be able to come into the lab to work, I’m grateful for this opportunity and to be a part of research like this, which is so relevant to everything that has happened this past year. I loved being apart of relevant research, being able to have a hand in everything.

For future undergraduate research assistants my advice would be to take things slow, always double check, and make sure you’re keeping track of everything. The mistakes I made this semester had to do with me not double checking things, just assuming I got it right the first time. You need to be sure that what you are doing is correct, and check for mistakes. Double checking is necessary. Also my other piece of advice is to not be afraid to ask for help. When I was struggling or wasn’t sure how to do something, I would go to Dr. Samek or Brian and ask for help or advice on how to handle something, do something, or fix something. Asking for help is better than doing something wrong.

**From Ashlyn (Fall 2020):**

Coming onto this research team, I was super nervous at first especially because we had just gotten back to Auburn for the first time really since the quarantine and everything was shut down. Everybody had to make adaptations and be flexible so I really was not sure of what I was going to be able to do with all the restrictions now. I also really had a hard time trying to find a research project that interested me since I am a pre-med major in COSAM. Therefore, I started looking for research projects through my HDFS minor and was immediately intrigued by Dr. Samek’s project! I was thankful that I was still able to join the team even though we were all a little unsure of how this fall semester was actually going to turn out. Once the semester started, everybody was so kind and understanding to one another since this was new territory for all of us. I have to say a made a few mistakes in the beginning but I was able to learn from those mistakes!

I was never one who was very tech savvy or knew much about word and excel. However, I can say now I am pretty efficient on both of those platforms and I have nothing other than this research to thank for that! I have learned so many new shortcuts and I feel very tech savvy now! I really enjoyed being able to put together the personality feedback for our participants! It was always really interesting to see how everybody’s scores differed from one another! I also enjoyed partaking in the weekly meetings where we get to discuss research articles with one another. Now half of the time, the information might have gone right over my head but it was very interesting to listen to the graduate research assistants talk about the articles and put it in their own words!

My advice would be to try not to get so overwhelmed by everything in the beginning. The tasks may seem daunting at first and I was worried how I was ever going to remember all the steps in the process. However, within the first week, it all became second nature to me! The times I was able to come into lab soon became something I looked forward to because it meant I actually got to come onto campus and work!

**From Cortney (Spring 2020):**

This semester was my second semester working in the College Experiences Study with Dr. Di and the GRAs. This semester, I took the advanced research credits, which I would absolutely recommend to any new UGRAs. I was slightly nervous at first because I haven’t had much experience writing about research, so I didn’t know how I would do on the paper. However, Dr. Di was extremely helpful throughout the entire process and I feel as if I have learned so much more about our study and data. It was really interesting to take a closer look at the data and use it to come up with potential research questions.

Apart from the paper, I have really enjoyed the recruitment process throughout both semesters in the lab. I love that I can take a few hours out of the day to focus on working through texts, email, or phone calls, and it is SO rewarding when you get through the entire list of participants on a task. I have also definitely improved upon my social skills by calling each participant and speaking with them (because this was definitely something that I had dreaded at first).

Overall, I am extremely thankful for my time working as a UGRA in the lab. This semester has been hectic, especially since all classes were moved online, but everyone from the lab works so well together that I never had any struggles with working from home. My advice to new UGRAs would be to not stress about mistakes or messing up. Even though you might have several tasks to complete within a week, it is so manageable, and everyone in the lab is incredibly understanding and helpful, so don’t be afraid to reach out for that help and advice!

**From Ashley (Fall 2019):**

When I walked into my first day in the College Experiences Study lab, I was super nervous for a couple reasons. One reason being I had never done research before and was not completely sure what to expect and the second reason being I was only a sophomore. I soon realized I had nothing to be nervous about. Everyone working in the lab was super sweet, fun to work with, and helpful when I had questions. Dr. Di is the best and during training she went over everything we needed to do in certain situations which was a huge help because sometimes you will get some cases you may not know what to do with. Another part that I was slightly nervous about was the phone calls to the participants. As one who does not like talking to people very often on the phone this task was slightly daunting, but as soon as we trained and did some practice calls, I felt more at ease. I soon became very comfortable calling the participants and ended up enjoying talking to them and explaining the process.

A few of my favorite things during this past semester of research were learning more about Excel and discussing the lab readings. Coming into the lab, I knew very little about Excel and all the shortcuts and ways to track data, but now I know so much about the way the system works and really enjoyed getting to learn and work with it this past semester. Also, during the semester we have weekly lab meetings when we gather as a group, talk about what is happening with the research and cases, as well as discuss a scientific research article. One of the lab members was assigned an article a week to pick and analyze in order to facilitate to the group. I really enjoyed our discussions and found the articles super interesting. Another task I really enjoyed learning and doing processing payment. I have always wanted to know how payment like this is processed. It was interesting to learn how to enter the information and on which forms to enter it.

Coming into research lab, just as any new experience, it is okay to be nervous. Don’t let yourself get overwhelmed. Throughout my first couple weeks in lab, I was super overwhelmed because I was nervous I was going to forget a task or mess something up. After you go through the process of training and do the tasks a few times, it gets much easier and a lot less intimidating. Remember it is okay to ask for help and if something is correct. Always make sure you are keeping track of where you are in the excel file and make sure to take your time with payment the first few times. Remember to breathe and don’t get overwhelmed. Overall, this is one of the best experiences I have participated in and have loved learning from Di.

**From Cortney (Fall 2019):**

Coming in to my first week of the College Experiences Study lab, I was nervous and had no idea what to expect. I became interested in the research that Dr. Di was conducting after taking the Adolescent Development class, but I still wasn’t sure if I was going to be able bring any beneficial skills to the lab. After the first week of training, I was already able to forget about the stresses of messing up because Dr. Di and the other UGRAs were so understanding and helpful in getting me back on the right track. Additionally, I was extremely nervous about contacting the participants myself. As someone who didn’t even like talking to my own family members on the phone, I had no idea how I was going to make it through calling 75 participants. However, with the script and instruction from Dr. Di, I became so much more comfortable with speaking with people on the phone, and it is now like a second nature. I also learned a lot about Microsoft Word and Excel. I am definitely not the most computer-savvy person in the world, so it was great to be able to refresh basic skills on Word and Excel.

My favorite part of the lab was probably the discussions of relevant research articles led by different individuals every week at the lab meetings. I have always enjoyed reading research articles, but the discussions and summaries helped me learn new ways to dissect and better understand the research. The discussions were also always extremely interesting, and I loved getting to hear everyone else’s takes on the significance of the articles.

My advice to new UGRAs would be to take a deep breath, because even though it can all seem overwhelming during the training, you will get to a point where it becomes super simple. While I was originally worried that I would be constantly stressed about making mistakes or forgetting tasks, I now look forward to coming to the lab and having the time to sit down and focus on one task instead of having to worry about all of my other obligations.

**From Emily (Fall, 2019)**

This is my second semester in the College Experiences Study lab with Professor Di (Dr. Samek) and the team. I have met friends and worked with them weekly on recruiting past study participants to complete our follow up survey. We all have worked together so nicely and helped each other out when we needed it. The weekly meetings this semester have been enjoyable to see each other and talk about important research in adolescence and emerging adulthood. We all have been able to have fun and mature conversations that have sparked my interest in research.

Before I joined this research lab, I had very little interest in pursuing research because it was overwhelming for me. I became interested in the topics we discussed in Dr. Di’s Adolescent Development class so I asked her how I could get involved in research. I am very appreciative she chose me to be a UGRA. Now, I have gained a love for research due to Di’s facilitating. She presents the research in applicable ways that relate to our age and we have interesting conversations. Each member of our team got the opportunity to review research articles and facilitate discussion during our lab meeting. This brought me out of my comfort zone to speak more than I usually do in group settings. I got to choose an article I was interested in and study and discuss with the team.

It all might seem intimidating at the start, but the tasks will become second nature to you after a while. This is a wonderful team to encourage you and help you out. Don’t be afraid to ask questions because you would rather be safe than sorry. Also, every person on the team is willing and eager to answer your questions. Get to know everybody, especially Di, because they are amazing, genuine people.

**From Emily (Spring 2019):**

I spoke to Dr. Samek last semester, in adolescent development class, about how I was terrible at research and I could not write a research paper to save my life. She encouraged me that I just needed to practice more and learn by doing. Before I started working as an undergraduate research assistant this semester, I had no research experience whatsoever. Dr. Samek gave me the chance to further my ability and knowledge in the particular field I am interested in- young adults and adolescence- but in a different perspective than I have ever experienced. My goal is to get my master’s degree in Counseling, and I didn’t believe I could accomplish my goal because my lack of ability (or rather, my desire) in research was holding me back. This lab has taught me a lot about myself, my work ethic, and new research skills. I am beyond appreciative of the leadership and opportunity to work on this amazing staff. Next semester will be my second semester and I can’t wait to meet the new UGRAs that join our team ☺

Some abilities you will gain as an UGRA are recruiting individuals to participate in our study by reaching out with emails, handing out fliers on campus, and making reminder phone calls to participants. The work is fair and flexible to your schedule- so even with a busy schedule, I never felt this lab was an obligation. I genuinely enjoyed coming to my shift each time. It tends to be relaxing for me to focus only on the work at hand and forgetting everything else for a few hours. Also, update: after this semester, I overcame my mental block with research. We review research studies, summarize, and discuss as a team- which helped me learn how to grow at writing research papers in my classes. Other skills I gained were database management with Microsoft Word and Excel. I did not know much about this software, but I have become comfortable with technology and organization. These skills will definitely benefit me in my future career.

I was very shy and nervous coming into this lab because I did not feel equipped and did not know what to expect. However, all nerves will subside because Dr. Samek will work with you reasonably at your own pace, and she understands that mistakes happen. She is not expecting perfection out of you. I am super appreciative of Dr. Samek believing in her HDFS students and her passion for us to learn about research. I gained an appreciation and love for research this semester that I am so grateful for.

**From Tiffani** (Spring, 2019)

This semester, as previous semesters in the lab, has been nothing short of an awesome experience. This semester in particular has been enjoyable because I had the opportunity to strengthen my leadership skills. Through training our new UGRA this semester, I was able to further strengthen my communication skills as well as my decision-making capabilities. At times, I was the person being asked the questions and expected to answer. I may not have always known the answer, but I learned how to effectively handle those situations and so many more. These skills came in handy during medical school interviews as well.

Additionally, this semester we had quite a different approach to recruiting participants. Instead of emailing potential participants, we put out fliers, emailed list-servs, and waited for a response. I was happily surprised at the amount of participation we received, and it was a breath of fresh air to know that students on our campus are still interested in research.

As always, I will finish by saying: don’t be overwhelmed. I truly believe you couldn’t be in a better position. Dr. Samek cares – she wants to see you succeed just as much as you do. Don’t be afraid of mistakes – that’s when you’ll learn and grow the most. Enjoy your time here. Don’t make it some time-consuming task you must cross off your to-do list every week. Nothing in my undergraduate career has taught me as much about myself and allowed me to grow as much as this lab did.

**From Ben** (Spring, 2019)

**HDFS 4980 reflection:**

I have been extremely grateful for the help that I have received from Dr. Samek in doing my research, she is honestly the best resource that you can go to while working on your paper. I can honestly say that the most important thing above anything else is to try and work on your paper on a weekly basis, and I can say that because it is advice that I didn’t heed. I let some of the work slide, and paid the price later on as a result. I don’t mean to scare you, the work is easily manageable, but I simply let the work pile up and before I knew it I was well behind. I can say that if I was given the chance to do it again, I would; I really enjoyed becoming knowledgeable on the subject that I chose. I wish you the best!!

**From Tiffani (Fall, 2018):**

Working in the Colleges Experiences Study lab has been such an awesome experience. If you don’t believe me, this is my second semester working in the lab. Next semester will be my third – I will let that speak for itself. With that being said, I still remember my first week (or few weeks) in the lab like it was yesterday. The first week was a bit scary. To the new UGRA(s), don’t be concerned. We literally all felt that way. The best advice I can give you is: write everything down, ask questions, and don’t be afraid to ask for help if you’ve made a mistake. Professor Samek is such a pleasure to work with and for. She wants to see us succeed as much as we’d like to see ourselves succeed. Talk to her. Get to know her. She is awesome.

One thing that you’ll have to do as a research assistant in this lab is prepare and discuss research articles at meetings throughout the semester. Don’t stress so much over those… just learn from them. You never know when it may come up again. I am completing my Psychology minor right now and was required to write a scientific paper. I had never done this before, and the only reason I did so well was because of the exposure I had to them so many times previously in this lab. Not only did reading and discussing research articles increase my knowledge of scientific articles, but they also allowed me to develop a much greater respect for the science of research.

Also, if you are considering this position (or you got the position), and you are sort of freaking out about cold-calling, just don’t. The first few times will be scary, yes. Oh, and you might have someone hang up on you from time to time. However, it really isn’t as bad as it seems. After a couple of weeks, it will come naturally, and you’ll start to see how much of an impact getting out of your comfort zone has on your life. Not only is the research that we do super interesting, but you’ll also grow as a person and improve your professional and personal skills.

**From Ben (Fall, 2018):**

This semester, I was given the added responsibilities of writing payment vouchers for participants, as well as creating a new script for calling potential participants and the excel used to track potential participants. This was added on to the other responsibilities that carried over from the previous year, namely contacting potential participants and updating the College Experiences Study’s Facebook page. I found the added responsibilities to be a very rewarding challenge, and learned a few new things along the way!

To begin, I learned a few new tricks in Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word, that I believe I will be able to carry into the future. I also improved my ability to balance multiple tasks simultaneously, as well as keep track of those tasks to be able to adequately examine when I need to work on what. These skills should serve me extremely well as I move on past college and into my adult life. Dr. Samek has provided incredible counsel, oversight, and help when asked, and has helped me grow my skills in time management. I am extremely grateful that she has allowed me to work under her for the past 3 semesters, and look forward to the new challenges that I am going to face as I take on HDFS 4980 in the coming semester!!

**From Chase (Spring 2018)**

I have worked with Di and Lucy for a year now on the College Experiences Study. I have gained so much insight on all the work that goes into research. Before working in the lab, I didn’t truly understand what all research entailed. Di has to jump through so many hoops in order to gather and interpret data for her study. I have realized how much work and time is required just to gather a small amount of information. Research isn’t fast, nor is it easy. After working with for the College Experiences Study, I have a better understanding of research procedures and so much more respect for those people working endlessly for their research. Working in the lab has also taught me about time management, organization, and responsibility. Managing school, work, and also 9 hours in the lab not only prepared me for time management skills needed to succeed in college, but also prepared me for what is to come in medical school. I met some amazing people while working for this study and also made good friends. Soak up everything you can learn from Di and Lucy, as well as your peers while working in lab. It has been a pleasure to work under such capable and intelligent women.

**From Tiffani (Spring 2018)**

Working in the Colleges Experiences Study lab was definitely one of my best decisions made during my time at Auburn University. Working with the team gave me skills I will take with me regardless of where my future takes me. To the new UGRA’s, don’t panic. The first week will be scary; just take in all of the information you can and don’t be afraid to ask questions. By the second or third week, it will start to come naturally. If you’re like me and talking on the phone to strangers seems daunting, then congratulations! You are going to LOVE this. You will feel uncomfortable at first, but you will grow immensely during this time and gain great communication skills. I even had the chance to present a poster on Alcohol Use Disorder and Greek Life at the CHS Graduate Research Symposium, which I never thought I would be doing. I truly can’t say enough good things about working alongside Lucy and Di. They are both so supportive, so understanding, and they always push us to do what they know we are capable of. I enjoyed our meetings where we discussed research articles relevant to the College Experiences Study not only because it gave me a much greater appreciation for what goes into research, but also because they really encouraged us to have our own thoughts and opinions. While everyone on the team didn’t always have the same opinion, we would still respect others, and I think that is also an important skill to take with you in the future. In addition, I further strengthened my organizational and time management skills, as we had to work around 4 other UGRA’s schedules. Overall, enjoy this great learning experience! Don’t be afraid to make mistakes, but make sure you tell someone so that it can be fixed early. Get to know Di; she is incredibly intelligent and really wants to see us succeed!

**From Michael (Spring 2018)**

Having worked for a year in the College Experiences Study Lab, I still have nothing but positive things to say about working on such a cool project with even cooler people. Di is really one to let you grow and take on new opportunities if you prove you can handle it, such as creating and presenting new research posters and taking more leadership roles in the lab, it is just up to you to work hard and take advantage of every opportunity! My favorite part of working in the lab was the weekly meetings where we each read and presented a research article on topics that were relevant to the study project. It was so much fun to sit down every week with the team and have intelligent conversation about cutting edge research in the field! Again, I can’t overstate the skills I have picked up from working in the lab such as becoming very detail-oriented, time management, working with a team, data analysis, critical thinking, and understanding just how much goes into making research project successful.

**From Ben (Spring, 2018)**

As it is my second semester working in the College Experiences Study, I have felt very prepared for the demands working in the lab this Spring. Last semester, I had a learning curve to understanding and being able to work in the system, and I messed up a few times along the way. This semester however, I have managed to streamline how I work and find small ways to be more efficient. For example, I have found it much easier to call a number of people all in a row, then send them all their emails afterward, rather than one call per one email. I’m sure there are a number of other ways to be more efficient in this lab, but don’t feel discouraged when looking at the number of people you’re supposed to get in contact with. In fact, I have found it much better to continue following up with people I have already contacted, rather than new people because previously contacted potential participants are more likely to do the survey (I’m not sure if this is still true, but I had the highest number of survey participants despite having the lowest number of contacted potential participants for a majority of the two semester I was here). I truly enjoyed my time working here, and I know that you will as well!!!

**From Michael (Fall 2017)**

I have really enjoyed my time working with Di and the rest of the team this semester! Working in the lab has really given me an appreciation for what all goes into conducting research and how to manage my time efficiently to get through such a large volume of work. It will seem very overwhelming at first as you try and learn the protocols and get used to all the instructions, but after a week or two it becomes second nature and you will start surprising yourself with how productive you will be! Check your email constantly so you can stay on top of what’s going on during the week! Everyone on the team is extremely nice and willing to help each other whenever possible, so never be afraid to ask questions or make suggestions if you think something could be done in a better way. You must be very detail oriented, because you will be managing a large volume of cases and it is easy to let one fall through the cracks every now and then, so be mindful of that, but don’t expect to be perfect. Everyone has made some mistakes and you just have to acknowledge them and make sure it doesn’t happen again. It has really been an enjoyable experience getting to work on this project and see the excitement everyone in the lab gets when someone gets a consent form, or finishes the survey, and the skills you learn in time management, team work, being detailed oriented, communication skills, are skills you will take with you in any career you go into!

**From Allison (Fall 2017)**

Working on the College Experiences Study team has been one of the greatest experiences of my college career. My customer service skills have greatly improved, as well as my time management skills. Coming in to the first few days of lab was a bit scary and it took time to adjust and find a routine that was productive but set realistic goals. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Even if you feel like an idiot for asking many questions, it is far better to receive clarification on something that confuses you than to proceed without following the proper protocol and then having to go back and fix everything (I learned this the hard way). What helped me most to keep track of my work was having a designated “lab notebook” that I brought in during every shift. In this notebook, I tallied up all of the emails sent, calls made, voicemails left, etc during a shift. This made it easier to keep up with my progress. It was also helpful to have on hand when talking to potential participants in case I needed to take notes on any comments they made. I brought this notebook to every lab meeting as well to update Di on my progress and take notes on protocol changes, important upcoming events, etc. Also, calendars are your friends! Be sure to keep up with the Google calendar for the lab, and if you can, sync it with your other calendars to make sure there are no conflicting events. And CHECK YOUR EMAIL 24/7! Di and Lucy are constantly sending out updates that you need to be aware of, so turn on email notifications on your phone and always be on the lookout for them. Once you read an email, reply to let Di and Lucy know that you have read the email and are up to speed.

There are many things that come with the UGRA position that you should be looking forward to. The articles discussed during our lab meetings were incredibly informative, and I feel that our discussions related to these other research projects made me feel more passionately about the College Experiences Study. I also loved getting to know Di, Lucy, and the other UGRAs. We all seemed to bring different perspectives to our discussions but still maintained a common interest in the research we are conducting, which I greatly appreciated. The participants themselves can actually be fun to talk to as well. You will probably be hung up on (multiple times), and will likely have to deal with a few less than pleasant parents and student, but there were many instances in which I had meaningful conversations with participants, and even their parents, that reminded me why I am interested in the HDFS field.

Your job is not going to be easy, but it is so worth it. Good luck!!!

**From Ben (Fall 2017)**

Dr. Samek’s lab has really helped provide structure to my week ever since I joined the College Experiences Study. I have set times where I have to be here and working, and that has actually helped me better plan my week, budgeting time more effectively. I will say that it does take a few weeks to get used to the system. I know that I was always afraid of messing up an email or forgetting to mark the excel sheet correctly, but that is something that you begin to get used to after three or so weeks. Contacting 500 people or so may seem like a daunting task to begin with, but, since you can only contact maybe a dozen or so people a day, it really not that bad!! I hope you enjoy working in this lab as I have, and good luck!!

**From Chase (Fall 2017)**

This past semester working with Dr. Samek has been a great learning experience. Working for the College Experience Study has taught me how to stay organized and productive while dealing with large amounts of data, as we each were responsible for 500 participants. It seemed daunting at first because there was so much, but it quickly became easy and second-nature. Also, I have experience with cold calls, but working in the lab greatly improved these skills. Being able to confidently speak to strangers is an important skill and takes practice. In the lab, you are constantly cold calling, which will really help in the future in any career you pursue. I also learned a lot from Dr. Samek. Dr. Samek encouraged us to think critically and analyze research articles. I learned so much about the research process and how much goes into it. The lab meetings where we discuss other research were so informative and interesting. It was great to hear the other UGRA’s opinions and learn from Di. She encouraged our own opinions and thoughts. As you start working in the lab, enjoy the learning process, and use Di and Lucy as a resource. Write down everything and be as detailed as possible, it will help keep everything organized. Enjoy learning from Di!

**From MC (Spring, 2017)**

The skills gained from working in this lab are so valuable. I have learned incredible organizational skills as well as time management. Keeping up with over 60 cases forces you to ensure you are on top of each case as well as managing your time to ensure you follow up with cases that needed to be contacted that day. I learned all of the work that is put into research and that gives me so much respect for all of the studies I have seen. I loved the article discussions and summaries as it fostered an environment of critical thinking. They also kindled my interest in adolescence substance use as each person in this lab has a passion and interest in studying.

The advice I would give to new UGRAs is to utilize the recourses offered. I consider it a privilege to have worked under Di as she is passionate and incredibly gifted at what she does. She is not only extremely intelligent but very genuine in the care she has for her staff. Working with Lucy has been so much fun – she is always there to work through individual cases. If you have a question, do not hesitate to ask – each person here is more than willing to offer you guidance. I know all of the steps can seem a bit daunting at first, but continue to work at it and it will feel like a breeze by the end. Take each task one step at a time and do not worry so much about time. Quality is more important that quantity, and eventually you will be very efficient with your cases. Finally, establish your own groove to get things done. You will find what works well for you. Consider yourself lucky to be working in such a fantastic lab.

I will truly miss coming in here every week and working with y’all – thank you for being so welcoming, helpful, and understanding. Don’t be a stranger and keep in touch :)

**From Kathlene (Spring, 2017)**

This semester working in the College Experiences Study lab has been such an honor. Dr. Samek’s class on Adolescent Development is what really piqued my interest in research on adolescents and young adults- her passion and zeal for not just the data but the lives that her research effects is evident and contagious. Time management is a skill one has no choice but to sharpen in this lab, and while I’ve never been particularly detail-oriented, working with large quantities of data in excel has let me work on that. Di encourages thorough communication so that everyone is always on the same page, which has not only made life easier but also facilitated all of us working as a team. All of this made immersing myself into the research and various articles that we read about similar research studies possible and so fulfilling.

As an HDFS *minor*, I felt pretty intimidated coming into this lab simply because everyone else here already had more experience with data (just for having to have read for class, taking statistics, etc.). What I found was that those who run this lab want not only the success of their research but their researchers as well. Communicate openly and honestly with the GRA’s and Di, ask questions, be as thorough as you can, and everything will work out. Don’t be intimidated by the large volume of information- it’s really not all that it seems, and you’re taking it just a little bit at a time. Most of all, don’t focus so intently on the details of the job that you miss out on the fascinating research!! Good luck!

**From Laura (Spring, 2017)**

Working in the lab this semester has been an incredible experience. I have learned how to prioritize my tasks so that I could get everything accomplished. When I first started in the lab, I was a little overwhelmed so I had to come up with a system to make things more manageable. The strategies that I used in the lab carried over to my other classes. For example, I began having a specific time during the week where I worked on each subject; this ensured that I was getting my assignments done. My computer skills have also improved. This experience has given me the opportunity to my knowledge of excel and be more comfortable working with sensitive information electronically. Another skill that I improved throughout the semester was my cold calling skills. Working in the lab made me step out of my comfort zone and it helped me become more comfortable with my phone customer service skills. I have thoroughly enjoyed learning about this study and the details that go into conducting research. I have gotten a much better appreciation for how much work it takes to conduct a study, how to handle discreet information, and I have enjoyed sharing with others our findings. Working in the lab has given me experience working on parts of a project independently but also collaboratively as a team. I have enjoyed working with everyone on our team, especially Lucy and Rebecca because I was able to learn so much from them.

Congratulation on earning a position as a UGRA for the College Experiences and Beyond Study! Enjoy your time in the lab and try not to get overwhelmed. The instructions are extremely detailed and helpful. I encourage you to keep them open while you are working in the lab so you can refer back to them when needed. While working in the lab, try to get in a routine and stick to it each week, it really helps to make things more manageable. Make sure you check your email frequently; Di does a great job keeping everyone informed and on the same page.

**From Miranda (Fall, 2016)**

As I’m nearing the end of my time here in the lab, I’m simply amazed at how fast the time has gone! I’ve thoroughly enjoyed my time in the lab and have been challenged more than I thought I would. Although I came into this semester with what I thought were good time management and organizational skills, I was pushed to become even more organized, focused, and task-oriented than I was before. Since I am planning on attending graduate school, I am grateful not only for the research experience but also those organizational skills that I was able to learn.

To future UGRAs: enjoy your time in the lab! It really will go by so quickly, but the skills that you will gain in the lab will be invaluable to your school and professional career. Di is great about keeping everyone in the loop with the project, the article discussions are super interesting, and leading lab meetings is kind of fun! Also, try not to get overwhelmed with all of the instructions; they seem intense but they are written with such detail so that every step or question will be covered. Lastly, don’t be afraid if it takes you a couple of weeks to get the hang of working in the lab! Once you get familiar with the instructions and procedures, you will be able to work more efficiently and really enjoy your time in the lab.

**From MC (Fall, 2016)**

I have learned so much working in the College Experiences lab. I think what has helped me the most is really immersing myself into the research. I am so interested in substance use and the different causes and risk factors so being able to work in a lab that studies this topics has been so rewarding. I have learned better time management and communication skills. I had to learn how to be efficient with the time I had in the lab to ensure I was getting through cases as needed as well as ensuring I was contacting participants at the right time. Those tasks also helped me with organizational skills. You have to be very detail-oriented and task-focused to work with so many different cases and participants. I feel more comfortable public speaking, even by just conducting calls. Also, Di stressed keeping up to date on emails and the lab, so I learned to really focus on making sure I was communicating and following up with our team. I feel so thankful for all of the skills the research lab has strengthened and given me. This was an incredible experience, and I would encourage new UGRA’s to not get overwhelmed and know that once you get the process down it becomes easier. Also, Di, Lucy, and Rebecca are happy to answer questions so use them as a recourse whenever you have questions. I cannot imagine a better lab to start the research process in or a better staff to work under!

**From Savannah (Fall, 2016)**

My Experience in Dr. Samek’s lab has been wonderful! I am so grateful for this opportunity. Through this opportunity I have learned a lot of basic computer skills that I did not know before. For example, I learned a lot about Excel sheets, which will be helpful in a class I take next semester, statistics. Being in lab made me feel like I had a very important job, because I did! The graduate students and DI were so helpful and had faith in me even when I messed up. I feel like I have learned a lot about all that goes into conducting a research study. I have learned a lot about research studies through the articles we discussed as a group and also through working on The College Experiences and Beyond study. I also think I have gained some “people skills” by contacting participants through emails and phone calls. Working in the lab has taught me to work diligently and patiently. Getting in a hurry in lab can cause accidents that take even more work and valuable time to fix. I have learned time management by balancing my school and work schedule while also being in the lab for 9 hours a week. Overall, this has been a great experience and I feel it has helped me grow in a professional way. Thanks to everyone who made this semester in lab great!

**From Katie (Spring, 2016)**

Working on the College Experiences Study for you has been such a pleasure for me. I have always been more of a “back row, keep quiet” type of student. I LOVED taking your 3030 class. I truly believe that it was the first HDFS course that I took and really enjoyed. You are so passionate and work so hard at what you do, that I really admire you on a personal and professional level. Your class is what made me want to get more involved in the department, causing me to consider doing some undergraduate research. This semester has taught me so much about the research process, everything that goes into conducting a study, and myself, in general. I have learned that I’m not perfect and mistakes will be made. That’s part of the learning process. I feel like I learned how to take constructive criticism and ask for help when it is needed. I feel much more comfortable working with spread sheets, handling large amounts of various information, and have really learned how important it is to be efficient and focus on the task at hand. If I had to offer advice to future UGRA’s, it would be to take a deep breath. This position can seem intimidating at first, but trust that you will learn as you go and quickly become very comfortable in the lab! (You wouldn’t be here if you were not smart and fully capable!) I have really used my time during the lab as “quiet time.” It’s been great to be able to walk in, leave my worries at the door, and focus on what needs to be done. Get to know your lab partner… Bri has become one of my sweetest friends and I’m so thankful that the lab helped me establish a friendship with her. This really has been such an amazing semester. I hope that the future UGRA’s love the lab as much as I have. ☺

**From Bri (Spring, 2016)**

As I reflect on my work with the study this semester, I’m definitely incredibly grateful for this experience. It has taught me how to set goals and work effectively within a span of time to get them done (i.e. 10 calls, get through the rest of xls, etc.) I have learned how to take constructive criticism in a healthy way, and to move forward if I’ve made a mistake. I realize that is such an important skill, because as I move forward in my career that is going to be something I will have to do often. Additionally, this was my first time extensively working with Microsoft Excel and I’m thankful to have more experience using it. I would tell future UGRAs to not be overwhelmed when they first begin working in the lab. It might seem like a lot of different protocols but you’ll become familiar with it all before you know it. Ask lots of questions and do not hesitate to ask them. Better to ask a question and be safe then to make a detrimental mistake that could affect the integrity of the study. I would also tell them to expect constructive criticism and learn from it. It’s a helpful and beneficial thing to know what you can be doing better or if there is something you are doing incorrectly. I think what I liked best was seeing how the study progressed throughout the semester, having success in locating target participants, finding alternative addresses or phone numbers, etc. It was all so exciting!

**From Lucy (Fall, 2015)**

This has been a great experience! Although at times maybe it seems slightly overwhelming, it is really satisfying as we contact more and more participants and have more and more people complete the study! So, if you feel overwhelmed, or like there is too much to remember, just breathe- Read the instructions carefully, ask questions, and you’ll be surprised how much you can actually do! The most important thing, I think, to remember is to keep up with your e-mails and keep your excel sheet updated! Something that has been helpful for me is to have extra IRB letters of approval, user ID letters, and thank you letters already printed so when you need one or two you aren’t having to print them individually, it saves on time! Also, make sure to communicate with the other URA! Y’all will be able to help each other out, Sharonda and I would leave notes on each other’s desk and text to keep up with messages, questions, etc.

**From Sharonda (Fall, 2015)**

I would tell the new undergrads to enjoy this experience. There are classes that they have taken that will help them to understand a lot of the terminology of the study, as well as in the article discussions that they will have. They should feel free to ask all of the questions that they feel are necessary and know that all of them will be answered. I would also tell them to not worry about what they may not get done in one day because they can come back to it the next time they have hours scheduled, but work as diligently and sufficiently as possible while they are in the lab. I think that the best way to achieve all tasks in a timely manner is, after emails are read, to write out a list of reachable goals for the day (i.e., call 30 people, mail out instructions to all who have returned consent forms), this way they will feel as if they have accomplished something. Once again this is a great experience, and even though at first some of the processes and tasks may seem foreign or difficult, they are rather easy after the first 1 or 2 trial and error runs. This has been one of the best class decisions that I have made in my college career, and I think that they will face the same.