



# *enPSYCHlopedia*

*A Standard Deviation Above the Mean*

Vol. XV No. 2 An Award-Winning Psychology Newsletter Spring 2005

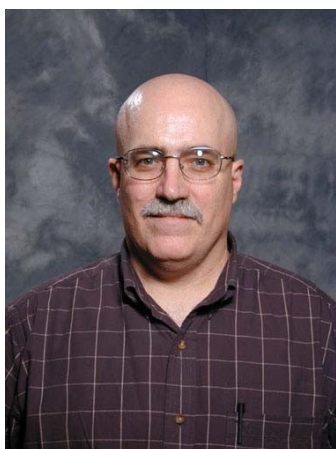
Editor: Mary W. Godwin, M.A.

## **Fifteen Years Of Supervising Undergraduate Research, an Active, Original, and Meaningful Experience**

**Lonnie Yandell, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology**

Belmont has developed an effective model of undergraduate research over the past 15 years. In Belmont's model, almost all of the research projects have originated from the students themselves. As we like to say, "You don't do our research, we do yours." I believe our students have demonstrated the importance of an active, original and meaningful undergraduate research experience.

What do I mean by "undergraduate research"? A University of Georgia self-study subcommittee entitled "Undergraduate Research: A Review of the Research Literature" (2000) reviewed a number of views of what undergraduate research is and adopted the following definition:



Dr. Yandell

"The undergraduate research experience is an **active** inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate that makes an **original** intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline that is relevant, **meaningful**, and engaging for the student."

This definition focuses on three important criteria I would like to discuss:

1. The **ACTIVE** nature undergraduate research,
2. The **ORIGINALITY** of the ideas
3. The **MEANINGFULNESS** to the student.

### **An Active Inquiry or Investigation**

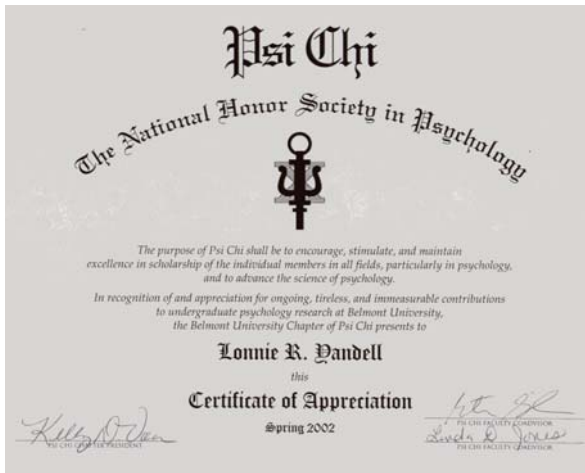
The first important criteria for undergraduate research is to provide an opportunity for students to be active in the process of research. At Belmont we offer two research courses. The first course is a basic survey of the research process, with typical textbook, lectures, activities, tests and papers. The second course consists of solely a research project.

In this second course there is no text, no lectures, no tests. The purpose of the course is for the student to experience the research process, from conceptualization to communication. There is a series of writing assignments that lead the student to at least an original research proposal and hopefully to data collection and public presentation of research.

Students see this class as involving a lot of work and as being stressful. Common comments about the course is that it is "stressful," "hard, thought provoking" and "time consuming and mind wrenching at times," yet "at the end I felt I achieved a whole lot" or it "has proved to be very rewarding."

Each year students are given the opportunity to give a piece of written advice to future students who choose to take the course. At the beginning of each class this advice is passed on to the new students. The overwhelmingly most popular piece of advice is "do not procrastinate" "start early", "stay on top of things", "stay focused", and "don't get behind".

From these comments I think it is clear that this is a challenging class that requires a lot of ACTIVE involvement.



Certificate presented to Dr. Vandell by Psi Chi for "ongoing, tireless, and immeasurable contributions to undergraduate psychology research."

### Makes an Original Intellectual or Creative Contribution to the Discipline

The next important criteria for undergraduate research is that the undergraduate "makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline." What do we mean by "original"? One valid interpretation of original research is any time an author describes the purpose and hypothesis, details their methods, reports their results, and interprets and discusses their results then the study is original. For the undergraduate, an original study is quite an accomplishment. It is important to realize that all research is based on ideas of those that come before us, and replication is an honorable and necessary aspect of scientific research. It is also important to learn that all science is based on curiosity. There is nothing more difficult to endure than to answer a question for which one has no interest. If you can lead anyone into asking a question in which they can get interested, then they often exhibit refreshing creativity.

I am continually amazed at students creative and varied research ideas. From studies on compulsiveness/obsessiveness, to body satisfaction to drawing self-efficacy to flashbulb memories to the metrosexual, students at Belmont have studied an amazing array of topics. The vast majority of research at Belmont has been with our undergraduate psychology research pool participants. We allow no research

on clinical populations, we discourage use of children and older people because of IRB difficulties, and we have few animal facilities which makes research on animals difficult. Even with these constraints, Belmont students have found ways to develop original and creative research studies.

### Relevant, Meaningful, and Engaging for the Student

The last important criterion of undergraduate research is that the process be "relevant, meaningful, and engaging for the student." This criterion is the most important. I have experienced at least three levels of meaningfulness in my years supervising undergraduate research. The first level involves what I'll call "personal efficacy." An example of student's comments about the class are "Awesome... I am so proud of myself" or "A huge self-esteem booster." One student expressed it this way, "One of the most rewarding experiences of my college career. I feel that I can do anything now!!!!"

A second level of meaningfulness is when I see evidence that students have gained an appreciation of the research process, including presenting ones' work publicly. Many of my students have presented their papers either orally or via posters or more often both. For most students, the prospect of orally presenting their papers is terrifying, and presenting a poster is only a little less terrifying. However, these can be some of the most meaningful experiences.

There seem to be two types of comments about the oral presentation experience. One deals with self-confidence. For example, one student said "It was a good experience. It helped me **grow as an individual**, because I gained **confidence** and **satisfaction** being proud of my **achievement**." Another student put it this way "Everyone should have to do this before they finish college. It is an invaluable experience. I could make a presentation at work with **full confidence** now." Other statements dealt with the research process. For example, one student said "I think it is a great opportunity to be **professional**. Even though I dreaded it at first, the two BURP nights put me at ease." Another student said "I'm very glad I did both BURS and MTPA!! I began to realize I was a **real researcher and had something to offer other people**."

Another expression of this appreciation of the research process is when students choose to do additional studies after the course. This has

been quite common over the years. For many, they are interested in pursuing a different problem, having gained the confidence from their first study. For a few, they develop follow-up studies and get a first hand understanding of the concept of programmatic research.

The third level of meaningfulness is that undergraduate research can be important to student's careers. Many students have expressed how important it has been to have a class that allows them to practice the research process. For example, students have stated, its "the most beneficial class of my college career" or "the most important academic experience for me so far." Another student said "A challenge, but a necessary evil. I feel that this class has been one (of) the most important ones that I have taken at Belmont."

There are three personal examples I want to share about the effect the undergraduate research experience has on my student's careers. Johnny Bolton became especially known for his ability to present complicated data in a clear and organized manner at a bank where he was employed. Of course, all he does is remember what he learned in Research II. He presents an introduction to the problem, a rationale for solving it, an approach or method, the results and a discussion. Just like a research project, if he takes it step by step it always seems to work well for Johnny. Johnny has learned some meaningful skills and the confidence to apply them in the career that he chose.

The next two examples are students who chose teaching careers. Carla Stassle is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at York College in Pennsylvania. She now supervises undergraduate researchers. While at Belmont one of her research studies placed second in the Psi Chi/Allyn & Bacon Psychology Awards competition, with the first and third place from the University of Michigan that year. Dan Corts comes from a distinguished academic family with both his father and uncle in important positions in higher education. His project in Research II class

concerned short term memory and fueled his interest in cognition. After graduating from Tennessee with a degree in cognition, Dan completed a teaching internship at Furman and now is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Augustana College in Rock Island, IL. There he supervises a very active and successful undergraduate cognition lab where his students regularly present their research, win research awards, and publish a paper from time to time.

I must say I feel very fortunate to have shared my students "active inquiry or investigation that makes an **original** intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline that is relevant, **meaningful**, and engaging for the student." I think we have developed a good model over the last 15 years at Belmont to help our students achieve this. Undergraduate research has been the most effective way I have seen for giving student a legitimate way to bolster their confidence, not only for doing research, but for doing life. For those students who do have graduate school aspirations, research experience is invaluable for gaining acceptance into graduate school and for being successful in graduate school. Even for the much larger number of students who have no desire to become professional psychologists, I believe that experiencing the research process is one of the most effective ways to learn critical thinking skills. Finally, I don't believe you can come to a deep, implicit understanding of any psychological phenomena unless you understand something about how it was discovered. To me, research methodology is the glue that holds all the disparate areas of psychology together. And as my students have taught me over the years, the effort and dedication it takes both students and faculty to be engaged in undergraduate research is well worth it.

*This article is an adaptation of the W. Harold Moon Invited Address which Dr. Yandell presented at the 17<sup>th</sup> Southeastern Conference on the Teaching of Psychology in February, 2005.*

#### **December 2005 Graduates:**

Jessie Angel  
Nathan Kosiba  
Anna Clare Turner

Jessica Bailey  
Mary Margaret Phillips

Casie Ground  
Natalie Simpson

#### **Psi Chi Induction –**

The Spring 2005 induction for new members of Psi Chi will be held on Tuesday, March 29 in the home of Dr. Giordano. Students being inducted include:

Sarah DeNeal  
Anna Garr  
April Hicks

Jessica Hughes  
Daniel Oliver

Jessica Serkin  
Rachel Work

## Dean's List --

*The following psychology majors and minors were on the Dean's List for Fall 2004.*

Stacy Anderson  
Jessie Angel  
Melinda Baker  
Sarah Cruys\*  
Sarah DeNeal  
Megan Dockery  
Radha Dunham  
Ryan Durr  
Anna Garr  
James "Gunner" Goodlad  
\*4.0 President's List

April Hicks  
Jessica Hughes  
Mary Hyatt  
Carrie Johnson  
Nathan Kosiba  
Sarah Lashley  
Eileen Marks  
Layne Murphy  
Daniel Oliver  
Mary Margaret Phillips  
Clayton Rothwell

Marcy Schroeder  
Jessica Serkin  
Emily Sheffer  
Molly Smith  
Marie Stacey  
Irena Tepavcevic  
Elise Tyler  
Shandus Valentine  
Brad Walker  
Rachel Work  
Brittany Work

## Psychology Club/Psi Chi Events in Spring 2005 -

- 01/14/05 – Officer/Club meeting
- 01/28/05 – The Interaction between Behavior and Physiology: Explorations in Drug Effects, Side Effects, and the Chronic Conditions. by Maria G. Valdovinos, Ph.D.
- 02/04/05 – Psychology Summer Opportunities with Michael Sullivan, Ph.D.
- 02/11/05 – Flower Sale
- 02/12/05 – Community service project at Family Affair Ministries
- 02/18/05 - Psychological issues and treatment in the geriatric population. By Michael Loftin, Ph.D.
- 03/04/05 – Officer/Club meeting
- 03/18/05 – Tentative date for Roy Hutton, Ph.D. to speak
- 04/01/05 – Officer/Club meeting
- 04/06/05-04/09/05 – Club helps to fund students attending the Southeastern Psychological Association conference
- 04/15/05 – Tentative date for joint convo with Tri-Beta on Neuroscience
- 04/22/05 – Officer/Club meeting
- 04/29/05 – Post-BURS party and officer elections

## Our Alumni -

**Jennifer Behnke ('99)** has been accepted into the Vanderbilt Nurse Practitioner program for Fall 2005.

**Isaac Harper ('04)** is living in Nashville and working as a case manager for the Mental Health Coop.

**Jenn Jones ('02)** is living and working in Washington, D.C. She is working in campaign finance and says that her work is exciting, especially during the recent campaigns. She says, "I'm in charge of about 400 committees, including the Democratic senatorial Campaign Committee, Emily's List, the Constitution party, and four states – Indiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, and New Hampshire. I've had the opportunity to meet a lot of interesting people, and the job is never boring."

**Samantha Spohn ('03)** plans to enroll in Nursing school in the fall to work on her RN degree. She recently completed the necessary science prerequisites for admission to a nursing program.

Currently she is in Brazil for the winter and will return to Nashville in March.

**Shannon Pflug Spoonbarger ('95)** and husband Jeff ('95) are living in Pensacola, Fl. where Jeff is a pastor. Shannon helps with bookkeeping for Jeff's non-profit corporation. She says, "My main passion is volunteering weekly at a Crisis Pregnancy Center." Jeff and Shannon have three children: Sarah (5), Hannah (3), and Joshua (1).

**Brittany Shupe Spradling ('02)** was married on January 8, 2005. She is living in Nashville and working as a child/adolescent and family case manager at Mental Health Cooperative, Inc.

**Amy VanHooydonk ('03)** is attending Mars Hill in Bothell, WA working toward a M.A. in Counseling Psychology.

**Kelly Voss ('02)** is attending law school at the University of Virginia

## Family Affairs Ministries Trip

by Laura Bear

On Saturday, February 12, around twelve members of the Psychology Club/Psi Chi, using supplies bought with the grant from the Student Government Association (SGA), went out into the community in hopes of helping those in need. We went to Family Affairs Ministries (F.A.M.), founded by Pastor Glenda Sutton, to help paint their church. F.A.M. is a non-profit organization which helps people on welfare rebuild their families and the communities they live in. F.A.M. moved into a small community in Nashville, which had been overrun by drugs, prostitution, and crime, and they started cleaning it up. They offer food services to seniors and children, after school programs for children, and educational opportunities for everyone in the community. They only have five full-time staff members so they rely heavily on volunteer help to support their mission. In order to help F.A.M. the Psychology Club went to volunteer our time to paint their church so the kids and adults would have a nice place to worship, learn and fellowship with each other. F.A.M. is repairing homes, lives, and communities; hopefully our small contribution helps them change lives.



Laura hard at work at Family Affairs Ministries

## Student Research Published

“A Measure of Drawing Self-Efficacy: A Psychometric Evaluation,” a study by Radha Dunham (Lonnie Yandell, faculty advisor), was published in the Spring, 2005 (Vol. 10, No. 1) issue of *The Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research*.

## Psi Chi Chapter Wins Regional Award

Congratulations to the Belmont Psi Chi chapter which was recently awarded the Psi Chi Regional Chapter Award for the Southeastern region for schools with under 5,000 students. The chapter received a \$500 award check and a certificate in recognition of their accomplishments.



Psi Chi officers and advisors with award check.

## A View from the Chair:

*Pete Giordano, Ph.D., Professor and Chair of Psychology*

As chair of the department, one of the things I get to do is talk with high school students who are visiting Belmont and considering a major in psychology. During this conversation, I always give them a copy of the most recent *enPSYChlopedia*. I am really proud of this department and the newsletter shows why I should be.

In this edition, Dr. Yandell writes about the value of undergraduate research and the accomplishments of our students over many years in this important domain. The newsletter also highlights the awards or accolades our students receive in terms of membership in Psi Chi (the national honor society in psychology), the Dean's list, admission to graduate school, publication, and so forth. Enclosed you will also find news about our alumni who are doing a variety of things all over the globe. Finally, the newsletter points out the activities of the Psychology Club and Psi Chi. These student-led groups are vital to the success of our department because they support the mission of the department and the success of our students in so many ways.

You can see there is much to be proud of in the Psychology Department at Belmont University!

## Let Us Hear From You!

If you are an alum reader, please take a moment to fill out the form below and drop us a line. Just mail to the address on the back of the newsletter, or contact us by e-mail at [godwinm@mail.belmont.edu](mailto:godwinm@mail.belmont.edu). We would love to hear from you and to include your update in the next edition of *enPSYCHlopedia*. If you are ever in the Nashville area, please stop by our office to meet the new faculty and see the exciting things going on here in the Psychology Department. Check out our web pages at <http://www.belmont.edu/psychology>.

### *Alumni Update*

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Graduation Year \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's name \_\_\_\_\_ Belmont grad? \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

Employment \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

Recent promotion, honor, award, etc.? \_\_\_\_\_

What else is going on with you (that you'd like to share): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

BELMONT UNIVERSITY  
1900 Belmont Boulevard  
Nashville, TN 37212-3757

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit No.  
1506  
Nashville, TN