

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: UNDERGRADUATE ENHANCED RESEARCH AND INTEGRATIVE LEARNING STIPENDS

Preparing undergraduate students who will be highly competitive on the job market and fully prepared for the challenges of top graduate schools and professional training requires transformative learning experiences that extend beyond the classroom. Hands-on involvement in research labs, community agencies, and professional meetings and workshops provides unique integrative learning experiences for students majoring in human development and family studies (HDFS) at the University of Illinois. These experiences allow students to apply classroom knowledge to “real world” challenges individuals and families confront.

Ranked #4 among 48 HDFS programs in North America (and #2 in the family science subfield), our department is well-positioned to offer immersive experiences for undergraduates. HDFS faculty rank among the world’s top scholars in their field. Their research projects and outreach efforts have direct practical implications for families, parents, schools, teachers, youth program leaders, community and health professionals, and policymakers.

OPPORTUNITY:

All faculty members in HDFS welcome the contributions of undergraduates to their research and outreach efforts, and many HDFS students participate in these on- and off-campus learning experiences. However, many students face financial barriers to participation. National studies indicate that students from low income families often have to work in positions that are unrelated to their career goals and aspirations during their college years. This, ultimately, puts them at a disadvantage compared to wealthier students who have the means to pursue unpaid internships and assistantships related to future plans.

Providing stipends to allow HDFS undergraduates to take part in integrated learning opportunities would mean that more HDFS students could:

- participate in faculty research to gain in-depth training while participating in cutting-edge projects that address complex social and health problems;
- serve as interns in community agencies and organizations to develop leadership and collaborative skills;
- attend national and international research and policy meetings or workshops to gain insights on grand challenges and emerging solutions;
- form meaningful relationships with faculty mentors, community leaders, and experts who make a visible impact on the well-being of children, adults, and families.

Offering stipends to support these learning experiences would also enhance the HDFS department’s ability to attract qualified and highly motivated prospective students into the HDFS major—students who want to make meaningful connections between theory, research, and prevention/intervention programs.



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IMPACT ON STUDENTS:

The value of immersive experiences as research assistants, community interns, and attendees at professional meetings/workshops is evident in student feedback. Typical student comments include:

- “Being part of [research] was a transformative experience, giving me the opportunity to grow and mature as a person. It taught me things that go beyond what you learn in a classroom.”
- “[Project] gave me a different perspective on research and adolescence that I would have never gained through classes. I gained skills that would be helpful in my career [as a Child Life Specialist].”
- “Attending the NCFR conference deepened my understanding of how research can be disseminated in a professional research setting, as well as calmed my anxieties regarding the process. Through observing how seasoned researchers communicate their research and present themselves, I was able to develop my own presenting style more confidently and seamlessly. I also made invaluable connections with senior researchers and professionals whose work is prominent in my field.”
- “When I applied to grad schools last fall, [my internship] was on my resume and was also one of the experiences that I wrote about in my personal statement. The graduate school admissions process is fiercely competitive, and I am absolutely certain that my experience with [my internship] helped me stand out from the crowd.”
- “This experience has affected my future career plans in a very positive way. I feel more prepared to continue learning and work with those children in my career. I have already referenced the internship as an extremely meaningful experience on multiple occasions. It has been included on my resume, on a scholarship application, and will most definitely be used in my personal statements when applying to grad school.”

RESOURCES REQUIRED:

Investment in transformative learning stipends in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Illinois supports undergraduate students in research, community involvement, and travel for professional conferences and workshops. These experiences will increase their chances of attending graduate and professional schools and securing positions that strengthen children and families in diverse contexts.



College of Agricultural, Consumer
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