Research Paper Expectations

Life Span Development Psych 201 Spring 2011

Research Project

You are encouraged to take charge of your learning! For this project, you may choose a topic pertinent to lifespan development that piques your curiosity or it personally meaningful. **How do we know what is true about human development?** As psychological scientists, we discern what is true through observation. We are engaging in a continuous cycle of questioning current knowledge and testing new ideas.

You may choose from two different research options. Option one is to critique, question, and evaluate a scholarly journal article. Option two is a service learning (community service) endeavor. This learning activity reinforces the course learning outcomes listed on your syllabus. The **learning goal** of this activity is two-fold: to develop your evaluative thinking skills and your exposure to original research. Evaluative thinking entails critical analysis of your subject matter, such as the pros and cons of an issue or strengths and weaknesses of a program. Your paper should be question-driven. You can create such a paper by following a path of inquiry. At the conclusion of your paper, many questions may remain unanswered; your results may disprove your hypothesis, or point to the need for further research. (This is okay, even desirable.) Psychology entails the ability to tolerate ambiguity.

Your proposed topic, a preliminary thesis statement, option choice, informal outline, and references are due soon. The due date is March 3; it will not be accepted after March 3. Guidelines for creating an outline are available upon request.

**Topic ideas**

Research topic options include, but are not limited to, the following examples.

- A service learning project with Colchester Youth Services or the Rose Senior Center in Norwich
- Violence prevention / character building programs for junior high school populations
- A research study of the how adolescent development is influenced by sports participation
- Outcomes associated with increasing nursing home patients’ social activity 2 hours weekly
- Changes in physical health correlated with job loss during middle adulthood – international perspective
- A service learning project at the Mystic Aquarium, Pequot Museum or in a charter school

**Type of research activity – Choose one** of these two research endeavors:

**OPTION #1 You may develop a paper which critically analyzes one research study found in a scholarly journal related to human development.**

To begin, choose a topic. Determine what age group you wish to investigate, and which aspect of development (physical, intellectual, social or emotional) upon which you will focus. Next, utilize the College’s library resources to find one research study whose results are published in a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal. It is recommended that you ask a Reference Librarian to help you find this study; it will serve as the primary research study. You will evaluate the primary research study. Thereafter, you might ponder, “What do I need to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a research study?” You could locate several research studies which are similar to the primary research article. Again, a Reference Librarian can help you find research studies similar to your primary research study. In addition, you could interview professionals in the field or explore an Internet site which provides an opposing viewpoint to the research study you are evaluating.

Your paper will need a precise thesis statement at the outset. You may want to provide a synopsis of the research study, but this summary should not exceed two pages. Option number one emphasizes evaluation of the pros and cons of both the study and the topic. It is crucial that multiple viewpoints concerning an issue are presented. Include in the paper questions that arose in your mind while investigating the research study. Option one is not a research topic paper; you will fail this assignment if you submit such a paper.
Example questions to critically analyze a study are provided for you below (Johnson, 2001):

1. What was the primary research question being investigated?
2. How was the research question examined? (This is, what methods and measurement tools were used?) You are **not expected** to interpret or understand sophisticated statistics.
3. Contemplate the research subjects. Who were the participants? Is the research population diversified in terms of socio-economic status, ethnicity, age, lifestyle and gender? Should the population have been diversified, or not, in light of the research question being investigated? Did you find evidence of ethical standards violations?
4. What interpretations were made of the findings? Was there sufficient evidence to support the conclusions? Did you find examples of bias or faculty reasoning in the article? Provide your ideas about what the article claims.
5. What are the practical implications of the research? Do the results provide information that is usable or useful?
6. If further research were done on your topic, what would you like to see explored in greater detail? What are you still thinking about? Did anything surprise you?
7. Where do you think researchers could have done a better job as social scientists? Where do you think the researchers did an excellent job?

**OPTION #2 You may volunteer for 12-15 hours throughout the semester.**

Service learning programs benefit the provider (you) and the recipient of the service equally and equal focus is given to the service being provided and the learning that is occurring. The goal of this service learning activity is to foster evaluative thinking, research skills and an understanding of course content while simultaneously benefiting the community.

You can work with children or adults, in a non-profit or for profit setting. Your goal is to scientifically examine the research subjects’ social, physical or emotional functioning. You will collect **specific** data and record **general** findings in an observational journal. Be sure to include in the journal identifying information about the research subject(s), the day, the date, time and location of the volunteer service/observation(s) took place. To obtain research data, you are encouraged to describe specific, concrete, observable behaviors. You may hypothesize about the research subjects’ emotional state. You will need to differentiate inferred descriptions of internal states from descriptions of behaviors. Examples of observable behaviors are:

- the (measurable) cognitive, physical and social benefits of elderly persons engaging in three, one hour exercise sessions each week,
- segregation patterns in a junior high school cafeteria during your service hours,
- gross motor skills or social behavior on the playground during and after school program.

The paper will include a theoretical framework related to current research literature. You will compare and contrast your findings to research published in scholarly journals. You will integrate and synthesize into your paper academic research publications.

Discuss how your service and the data collected illuminate your understanding of human development. Follow the questions below, recording entries in your informal observation journal each week. This may provide an organizational structure for your paper.

- What is the thesis statement for your paper? What are you observing and investigating?
- What are your most vivid first impressions of the work site? Describe setting, people, actions and positive or negative feelings you are having.
- Describe the person who you work with – their lives, their views, and their goals. Relate your findings to the theories found in your class text and scholarly research publications.
- What activities have you been doing with the persons with whom you have been working? How does your choice of activities relate to our class? **How do these whom you serve illustrate the theories of Erikson, Piaget, Vygotsky or other psychological theorists?** Inclusion of this information in the paper is imperative.
Describe your relationship with the clients. How do the persons with whom you work react to you? How does that make you feel?

How do you think your presence impacts the persons with whom you work? The organization? What impact has this assignment had on you?

After being in the community for several weeks, how have your initial impressions been altered? If they have not changed, describe observations that confirmed initial impressions.

Is the organization where you are working fully achieving its mission? Do you find the employing organization enriching and rewarding or ill suited to your talents?

What was learned by both you and the persons with whom you worked? Include special experiences or highlights of your learning. (Campus Compact, 2003)

How does this program compare with similar ones throughout the country? Could it be used as a national model? You are required to compare your work site to those referenced in a varied research journal articles.

What are some of the limitations of your service learning?

If you had to do again, what would you do differently?

All topics must be approved by the instructor.

Criteria for the Paper

- The paper must be presented in an acceptable scholarly writing style. For this course, that is the American Psychological Association (APA) style. Particulars regarding the title page and other formatting details are found within the APA style guidelines.

- Whenever words or ideas are not your own, you must cite the author. It is essential that you submit properly cited work. Please seek clarification if you have any doubt regarding proper citation.

- Toward the end of your essay, you may include a personal reflection concerning the reasons you chose a particular topic.

- You may utilize diverse sources of information to explore a topic, such as scholarly journals, interviews, observations and memory.

- A References (bibliography) page should be included at the end of the paper.

- Five references are the minimum requirement for the references (bibliography). At least one reference must be a peer reviewed journal article. Your class text may be listed with the references. No more than two sources may come from Internet sites.

- The expected paper length is five (5) to eight (8) pages not including the title page, abstract page and bibliography. A paper in excess of nine (9) pages or less than five (5) pages is not a final product.

- Papers must be typed in 12 point font, double-spaced, with inch margins. Please do not use plastic covers. Typeface must be legible; the College provides laser printers for students. Illegible work will be returned and a late penalty will be administered.

- You also must retain all computer documents, written notes, note cards, and references used in preparation of the paper. These will be presented to the instructor upon request. If they cannot be presented to the instructor’s satisfaction, the College’s policy on Academic Dishonesty will be followed.

- For your records and in case of loss, you should retain one copy of the paper. Back-up your work as it progresses.
**Grading**

The grading process is explicit. A detailed grading rubric will be provided. Briefly, papers are evaluated according to the following four standards:

**Purpose and thesis:** The paper demonstrates a thorough understanding of the assignment. A substantive central thesis is stated precisely. The essay uses effective strategies to engage the audience.

**Organization and Structure:** The essay unfolds in a clear, logical sequence. The transitions between paragraphs are explicit. Paragraphs are coherent and connected to the thesis statement. Sentences are stylistically varied.

**Development of Ideas:** The essay is fully supported using examples and multiple sources of sound evidence. It develops a clear perspective based on well-reasoned insights and critical analysis. Evaluative thinking is demonstrated throughout the essay.

**Grammar and Documentation:** The tone of the writing is appropriate to the assignment. Documentation of sources is consistent and accurate. Grammar, punctuation and spelling are correct. Sentence structure and verb tense are without error. Sentences are clear and concise.

**Quality Standards:** Only papers that are superior will receive a grade of A.

The paper will lose five (5) points for each weekday of lateness. Five points will be subtracted for every missing or inappropriate reference. Papers will be checked with software identifying Internet product offerings (papers for sale) and, where necessary, the College’s policy on Academic Dishonesty will be followed.

**Resources**

You can review an APA writing style manual in the College’s Writing Center. The Writing Center offers books, handouts and personal guidance about formatting your paper according to APA style guidelines. The Writing Center’s telephone number is 860-892-5713 and the E-mail address is TRWritingCenter@trcc.commnet.edu. It is strongly recommended that a Writing Center tutor review an early draft of your paper. Students who bring their draft research paper to The Writing Center three, four or five times tend to receive the highest grade on this assignment.

Three Rivers’ Reference Librarians are ready to help you locate scholarly journals related to your topic. Taking advantage of the materials housed within the Learning Resource Center as well as its multifaceted, easy-to-use web site.

Please scrupulously evaluate the credibility of Internet resources, see [http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref/research/webeval.html](http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref/research/webeval.html).

You are always welcome to stop by during office hours. You can make an appointment during office hours to discuss your ideas or review a preliminary draft of your paper before the due date.

Note from Pamela Carroll: This assignment might match any one of the following general education outcomes: humanistic inquiry, responsible citizenship (service learning option only), written communication or critical thinking.

Note from the Gen Ed Task Force: Thank you Pamela for sharing your work at the Fall 2011 PD