

# Research! Perform! Experience!

At Cal State Fullerton, undergrads can do it all

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**A** dozen Cal State Fullerton students are out pounding the pavement, looking for volunteer subjects trying to lose weight or stop smoking.

Working with Jie Wu Weiss, assistant professor of health science and associate director of the Center for the Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles, the students are asking questions, collecting data and documenting their findings to determine what motivates people to quit addictive behaviors.

The weight-loss study aims “to learn about the decision-making that goes into weight control — how people choose when, why and which weight-loss programs to join and how they maintain this life change,” said Monica Elsesser, a post-baccalaureate child and adolescent studies major.

The aim is similar for the smoking cessation research.

“Doing this research helps me understand real life,” Elsesser said. “The things I am learning with Dr. Weiss are giving me hands-on experience. I am not merely reading about these experiences in a book.”

Indeed. Students, from the sciences to the performing arts, gain experience through all kinds of research and work experiences

that take them into the field, preparing them for their dream jobs or graduate programs.

Weiss, who joined the faculty four years ago, involves students from all disciplines and grade levels in her research projects.

“I’m currently studying smoking and alcohol use among adolescents and youth,” she said. “I am also studying obesity

among young people. I strive to integrate teaching and research and I’m fortunate to have garnered federal grants to support student participation. I have about seven undergraduates and three graduate students working on research with me each semester.”

Weiss is one of scores of professors across campus who provide students with valuable research opportunities, President Milton A. Gordon said.

“This is one of the most important advantages of a Cal State Fullerton education,” Gordon said. “Here, undergraduates can do meaningful research as part of their education. Whether their next stop is employment or graduate study, research

experience gives our students an edge.”

It also adds heft to their resumes, Weiss added. “Research opens doors for our students.”

Lina Huynh, a senior health science major, said she has



Students Lizette Sanchez, standing, Miya Williams and Khuyen Vu, seated, work with Gregory Robinson, left, in the Social Science Research Center. PHOTO BY PATRICK O'DONNELL

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— PRESIDENT MILTON A. GORDON



From left: Mynor Lara, Roshan Kuma, Jie Weiss, Debora Smith, Li Chuah, Monica Shirley, Lina Huynh and Grace Kim

PHOTO BY STEPHEN WEISSBART

friends attending UCLA and UC Irvine who envy her research experience.

“They volunteer at hospitals to gain experience, and I can do that, too, but that’s mostly shadowing nurses,” she said. “When I go to work in the health care field, I’ll have a better understanding of people’s behaviors because of the field research I’m doing. I think that’s very valuable.”

Mynor Lara, a senior business administration major, joined Weiss’ student research team to integrate technology and data collection and is convinced the experience will improve his options for graduate school.

“I am leading the deployment of an electronic data collection system, applying concepts and theories that I have learned in class to produce a real world solution and improve the research team’s effectiveness,” he said. “I am using my knowledge on projects that will benefit society, and that experience will be helpful when I pursue graduate study.”

Students participate in research projects through various campus programs or as interns or paid assistants of faculty members.

They also work in the university’s research centers, such as the Social Science Research Center (SSRC), which presently

employs 35 telephone interviewers/research assistants on a wide range of projects. They currently are surveying tenants for the city of Los Angeles, among other projects.

The center’s mission is twofold: “To provide quality research services to nonprofit and tax-supported agencies and organizations, to answer policy-relevant questions and to improve service delivery; and to provide applied research experience to graduate and undergraduate students in the social sciences,” said SSRC director Gregory Robinson.

Several of the center’s employees in recent years have entered Ph.D. programs, he said, “and, they consistently tell us that the data analysis and technical writing skills they developed at the SSRC contributed a great deal to their success.”

The SSRC, established in 1987, conducts mailed, telephone, and web-based surveys, evaluation research, needs assessments and image studies. Student researchers have conducted surveys in Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Khmer and other languages. For more information about the center, visit <http://hss.fullerton.edu/ssrc>. Inside

*The following pages of this special report provide a glimpse of the research opportunities students have to choose from at Cal State Fullerton.*

