

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding for student summer interns not only created jobs for young people across the country, but may also help in creating future scientists. Grants funded by ARRA were used by National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) grantee Sohee Park, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Center for Integrative and Cognitive Neuroscience, Vanderbilt University, to hire several undergraduates to work in his laboratory this past summer.

Heath Nichols, a Vanderbilt junior majoring in psychology with a minor in neuroscience, considers his summer internship “a remarkable opportunity.” His ARRA internship allowed him to discover the intricacies of experimental procedure and design, as well as the nuances of clinical interviews.

“Learning in a classroom is one thing, but over the course of the summer, I was able to apply knowledge as a real researcher would. It gave me extreme satisfaction to learn about the paradigms of the experiments we were conducting and to even contribute in lab meetings about them,” stated Heath in a letter thanking Dr. Park for this opportunity.

Not only have Heath’s experiences taught him basic skills such as working with imaging tools and recruiting and testing patients and controls for clinical studies, but they have also aided him in reaffirming his career trajectory. As Heath said, “The things I learned this summer have been an invaluable asset in helping me attain my future goals. This research field is one that has grown even more interesting to me due to my experiences.”

Rebecca King, a senior at the University of Rochester majoring in psychology and cognitive sciences, was an ARRA summer intern at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in the Psychiatry and Neuroimaging Laboratory. NIMH grantee Martha Shenton, Ph.D., is the director of the laboratory.

“I had an active role in the research studying white matter in the brain. I was able to analyze data using several sophisticated programs in conjunction with MRI scans. I feel lucky to have had this experience,” said Rebecca.

Rebecca, as did Heath, felt that her time in the lab opened her eyes to the possibilities of a career in research. “Research is now a reality in my life and my summer experience clarified my interests,” she emphasized. An important aspect of her training was the lab reading group that met every few weeks to discuss the relevance of recently published journal papers.

Remarkable students and extraordinary opportunities combined to put specific faces on ARRA funding and attest to the importance of educational experiences paving the way for new scientists. Heath and Rebecca are but two examples of how ARRA NIMH- funded student interns encountered opportunities that were far more than “your parents” summer jobs.



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