

ENCOURAGING PROFESSIONAL CAREERS IN DISABILITIES: THE UNDERGRADUATE PIPELINE OF SOUTH CAROLINA LEND & FURMAN UNIVERSITY

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MOTIVATION

Access to services by individuals with disabilities and their families is often difficult due to the paucity of available professionals with expertise. Offering undergraduates an immersive experience in LEND activities may be one means of increasing interest in careers related to disability policy and practice.

GOALS

- Establish a partnership between SC LEND and Furman University.
- Modify existing SC LEND programming for full-time undergraduate students.
- Enhance opportunities for career exploration and professional development related to neurodevelopmental disabilities.
- Recruit eligible undergraduate students for 2017-18 pilot year.
- Monitor progress throughout the year and obtain feedback from students to inform future programming.

SELECTING STUDENTS

Eligibility

Students from all majors who would be in their junior year during the 2017-18 academic year were eligible. We focused on juniors because there was a required summer component and we wanted students to present their leadership projects the following year.

Recruiting

Information about the program was sent to Furman faculty in a number of targeted departments (e.g., Psychology, Health Sciences, Education). Because Furman has a large pre-med program, the pre-health advisor was also included in these emails. Additionally, an evening information session was held on Furman's campus in the spring semester several weeks before the application deadline.

Application Process

Interested students completed an application that included:

- Basic academic information (major, minor, GPA)
- Names of faculty references
- A two-page statement in which students wrote about their reasons for applying, their experiences with the disability community, long-term professional goals, and leadership experiences.
- A resume/curriculum vita

Students were then invited to interview with faculty from SC LEND and Furman.

Selection Process: Pilot Year 1



PROGRAMMING MODIFICATIONS

Faculty from South Carolina LEND and Furman University adapted the current South Carolina LEND programming to provide undergraduates a year-long training experience that incorporated additional mentorship and supervision. Undergraduate trainees are participating in all SC LEND activities although the sequence and timing of activities were modified because of undergraduate trainees' other commitments.

FALL & SPRING SEMESTERS

Didactic Training (modified)

Students audit Interdisciplinary Study of ASD-ND I and II. Students are expected to watch all lectures and complete lecture reflections. They have access to forums and Problem Based Learning (PBL) activities, but no formal requirements are in place for their participation. The course is not graded, nor does it carry academic credit.

In-Person Training Sessions

Students attend and fully participate in all in-person training sessions.

Small Group Mentoring (added)

Undergraduate trainees meet periodically throughout the semester with SC LEND faculty, Furman faculty, and selected SC LEND trainees who have agreed to serve as mentors. These sessions allow for additional supports that undergraduates may need to complete aspects of the curriculum (e.g., PBLs, ILTPs). They also provide opportunities for students to develop meaningful connections with local professionals who have an interest in neurodevelopmental disabilities.

Leadership Project (modified)

Undergraduate trainees will write a proposal for their leadership project during the spring semester. They will work closely with SC LEND faculty, Furman faculty, and advanced LEND trainees to develop their project goals and formulate an implementation plan.

SUMMER

The majority of programming was shifted to the summer when undergraduate students are not taking courses. They will be engaged in the program full-time (40 hours/week) for 8 weeks over the summer. They will receive a \$3500 stipend through Furman's Summer Research Fellows program, a part of The Furman Advantage.

Clinical Observations (moved)

Students will complete a minimum of 5 observations in at least 3 domains.

Community Networking (moved)

Students will complete at least 2 community networking meetings.

Leadership Project (moved)

Students will devote much of their time during the summer to completing the leadership project with the support of faculty and advanced trainees.

Mentorship (added)

Students will be connected to former SC LEND trainees based on their professional interests.

NEXT FALL SEMESTER

Orientation Session (added)

Students will present their completed Leadership Projects at the opening orientation session for the 2018-19 training year.

PARTNERING

This collaboration was facilitated by existing partnerships:

A faculty member from Furman (Hahn) and SC LEND (Kinsman) had previously worked together on several projects.

Furman University and the Greenville Health System (GHS; Greenville SC LEND location) also had an established formal relationship to provide educational and training experiences for undergraduates prior to initiating this partnership.

Furman University is providing stipends and housing for students' summer activities. The university is also furnishing funds for student travel to in-person training sessions. Funding for other costs such as materials were provided through other resources at GHS.

MOVING FORWARD

Expanded Year Two Pilot

A second pilot year of the SC LEND undergraduate pipeline is planned for 2018-19. We plan to:

- Modify program requirements based on student feedback
- Expand outreach to eligible students in order to grow and diversify the applicant pool

Assessment

We plan to track undergraduate LEND trainees in order to document ways in which the program influenced their educational and career decisions.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Training sites that are considering adding undergraduate trainees should consider the following challenges:

Finding the right partnership

Identifying the right institution with which to partner is critical. Furman has a long history of engaged learning opportunities, and students receive considerable mentoring that facilitates their participation in an advanced training program.

Balancing demands

Rather than reduce the training requirements, we decided to distribute them over a longer period of time. Asking students to commit to the program full-time over the summer allowed us to postpone some of the more time-intensive components of the training.

Study Away

Approximately 60% of students study away during their four years at Furman. Many students participate in semester-long programs during their junior year. We decided not to consider applicants who were studying away during the 2017-18 academic year, a decision that greatly reduced our applicant pool.