

## DIISP Research Assistant Project

In fall 2009, DIISP launched its Research Assistant Project to accommodate undergraduate students who wish to volunteer as research assistants in the social and behavioral sciences. This project was designed with three objectives in mind: to support the students' academic goals, to broaden the DIISP Lab's array of available services to researchers, and to enhance the functionality of the DIISP Lab in its day-to-day operations.

Our primary objective is to help undergraduate students reach their own academic goals. The DIISP Lab has the personnel and resources to provide students with opportunities to explore their interests while also training them on relevant research methodologies and technologies. These experiences will, in turn, help students advance their career goals while also potentially enhancing their competitiveness when applying to graduate and professional schools. Importantly, this position is also designed to provide a starting point for students to make contacts with researchers in the behavioral and social sciences whose interests match their own—contacts that could develop into more substantial professional relationships.

Our second objective for this project is to broaden the services offered by DIISP by creating a pool of research assistants for researchers. The process of attracting, vetting, and training interested research assistants is resource-intensive and beyond the scope of many labs. However, a number of highly capable and enterprising Duke undergraduates would gladly volunteer their time and talent in exchange for the opportunity to become involved in research. Therefore, by offering research assistance as an additional service at DIISP, we can fulfill researchers' needs as a natural part of helping students further their own academic goals.

Our third objective is to enhance the research functionality of the DIISP Lab in its day-to-day operations. Researchers at the lab often require temporary assistance in their work, from technical to administrative, and it would be useful if on-hand research assistance existed for them. Thus, before students are matched with a specific researcher for a specific project, we will provide work and training opportunities within the lab. Importantly, this objective facilitates our other goals because the help provided by research assistants may foster the kinds of experiences and professional relationships that they are seeking.

To attain all three of these objectives, we must recruit students who are of the mind, motivation, and temperament to represent the broader mission of DIISP favorably. As such, we will interview and vet each potential volunteer in advance. We also intend to obtain from each student a commitment to work 4-5 hours each week for the entire semester (with the obvious exceptions), along with a regular work schedule. During the interview process, we will provide the platform for students to express their own academic goals. There is no limit to the number of semesters that students may volunteer for this lab, and in fact, we expect some students to return to us after spending a semester working for a particular researcher. To acknowledge their advanced tenure and experience, we will grant these returning students the title "Senior Research Assistant" and crystallize their training by enlisting their aid in training new research assistants and, if they desire, assigning them greater responsibilities at the lab.