

**2012-2013 Student Employee of the Year Winner
Patrick Edmonds – Life Span Institute**

1. Describe the job or basic responsibilities of the nominee:

Patrick is an undergraduate research assistant in the Language Acquisition Studies (LAS) lab directed by Dr. Mabel Rice. The lab is funded by two large NIH R01 awards that support longitudinal studies of children with Specific Language Impairment and typically developing children, and a large sample of twin children. The program of investigation includes collecting and processing behavioral data on children and their families, and DNA collection for genetic analyses. In the context of a longitudinal program of investigation there are constant time pressures for steady, productive activity. Patrick's primary responsibilities are scoring and entering data from standardized and experimental language, cognitive, and psychological assessments; transcribing spontaneous language samples, coding, and carrying out data analyses. Those activities require a wide range of analytic skills, including a variety of software programs for data entry, processing, and analyses. One of these systems that Patrick is trained on is to count morphemes of interest from transcriptions of language samples of young children. This requires extensive knowledge of the linguistic structure and properties of nouns and verbs of interest in our analyses, as well as customized software systems. It requires more than a month of training and a very high attention to detail on each transcript. Patrick works with over two hundred transcripts per year, a very time-consuming endeavor. Additionally, Patrick's duties have grown to include training new research assistants and assisting with a number of systems in place in the lab to monitor ongoing data calculations as part of the quality assurance program

2. Tell how this student exhibited reliability beyond your expectations:

Patrick's high level of competence and personal integrity has exhibited reliability far above expectations, at the level of full-time staff and doctoral students. Because of his careful and insightful attention to detail and his high levels of accuracy, he is the first undergraduate research assistant given access to our archival longitudinal files for specific data coding projects. He provides training to research assistants on an unusually broad range of tasks, more than many doctoral students could handle. He is attuned to the time constraints of the work as the lab presses to meet deadlines for grant proposals, progress reports, and the development of scientific papers. He volunteers to come in early, work late, or come to work over the weekend or on holidays or semester breaks to help get projects done. We can count on him to take care of tasks with very little to no supervision, which is a lot to say in a world where mistakes can jeopardize decades of data collection. If Patrick says he will get something done, he will; if he encounters unanticipated problems he will handle them well. Two examples come to mind. One morning he was in the lab early, working on data entry, and had commented that he did not feel too well and had called his family to take him to the emergency room. When questioned, he described the symptoms of acute appendicitis. It was suggested that he leave immediately but he said it would be about an hour before they would arrive, and it would occupy his mind to continue with the data entry, which he did. Later, he arrived at the emergency room and received immediate surgery for a bad appendix. He was back at work within 48 hours. Throughout this episode he was calm and composed and kept his mind focused on what needed to be done. On another occasion, a Friday afternoon before a holiday weekend, one of his peers in the lab suffered a diabetic emergency while at work. This young man, who had never had reason to disclose his diabetic condition, was fortunate to be working with Patrick that day, because Patrick noticed that his colleague was suddenly and alarmingly not well; he immediately summoned the lab manager, contacted his colleague's roommate, and worked to get the help that his colleague needed. Throughout, he maintained his calm, problem-solving approach, for which his colleague was very grateful.

3. Describe the outstanding quality of work and service excellence of your nominee:

Patrick has worked in the lab since the fall of 2008, his freshman year, and is one of the very few research assistants ever who is an expert on the scoring systems for all of the language assessment items. The protocol for both NIH awards is over 40 items that have to be scored and/or entered into the computer. While Patrick has always been diligent and responsible in his four years in the lab, he has grown tremendously from needing some direction as a freshman to his current upperclassman status where he is one step ahead and anticipates what needs to get done.

He understands the timing of lab duties and makes adjustments in his schedule accordingly. He tracks how the examiners are doing on their productivity as his workload priorities change according to their output during their data collection cycle. He is very good at checking what the current lab priorities are, being mindful of grant and university deadlines. If a problem arises in the workflow he is proactive in figuring out a solution, yet will verify with me what he proposes. The ability to balance asking for direction and striking out on one's own is a crucial skill which Patrick has mastered, as he appreciates the magnitude and importance of maintaining the continuity of two decades' worth of longitudinal data scoring and keeping the protocols intact. Patrick takes his work very seriously, and I can always trust that he has thought through completely the tasks that need to get done. He responds very well to feedback and direction. In short, he is my go-to person for almost every task that is inside and outside of our regular protocol as he is unique in his ability to be trusted with a challenging task and do excellent work.

4. Give details of a time in which your nominee showed extraordinary initiative:

There are many instances that come readily to mind as examples of when Patrick has shown initiative above and beyond what one would typically expect if one were to look simply at his job description. Patrick has a keen ability to notice when something is amiss in the lab - whether it is a scoring convention, filing procedure, or unusual patterns in the data or how an entry is entered into the database system - and brings it to my attention. For instance, after Patrick was trained on counting the coded morphemes, he realized there had been some slight unplanned change, or drift, in how the morphemes had been counted among different persons over the years. This would have been easy for someone to ignore and not be bothered with the extra work as it would likely not have been noticed unless a full audit of several thousand language samples was undertaken. Since Patrick understands the importance of having a stable scoring measure across different time periods, he immediately briefed me on what the issue was. He then helped create a schema for going back and reworking those samples that could have been affected. This is just one of several examples where he has noted possible inconsistencies from archival scoring systems to current scoring systems and brings them to my attention. Additionally, he suggests how to rectify those situations and creates documentation to maintain consistency in the future.

5. How does this employee's attitude exceed your expectations?

Patrick willingly takes on repetitive and tedious tasks, and has never complained about any task, no matter how mundane or difficult. He maintains the highest level of professionalism and shows a sense of respect for the importance of the work he is doing. He is a very good steward of the resources in the lab, understanding that the data collection efforts of the lab are lost if the data are not scored, entered or stored according to protocol for which they were designed. As noted above, he happily takes on new, innovative projects in the lab; completes them with high levels of competence; and shows flexibility in his work schedule in order to do so. He is unfailingly a good citizen in the lab, thoughtful of his fellow lab members and of the ways to move the work forward, on levels ranging from the mundane to the highly informed. Besides the attention to detail on morpheme counting and other tasks given to him, he has spearheaded many organization efforts in the lab. These include creating the documentation of scoring criteria (a highly skilled and highly valued process), reorganizing file cabinets, volunteering for the more complicated photocopying and filing jobs, and acting as a mentor to the other undergraduates. He has earned the respect from other employees, including students, staff, doctoral students, and the Principal Investigator of the lab. Patrick also has taken it upon himself to be the lab cleaner and organizer, labeling the various storage areas for office supply items and doing dishes in the lab kitchen when others have been negligent in cleaning up after themselves, and organizing items for recycling. Finally, Patrick has a keen sense of humor and has been known to leave trails of notes for others in the lab with humorous sayings to add to their day.

6. How does this employee display exceptional professionalism in his or her duties?

Because of Patrick's attention to detail, professionalism, and reliability, he was a natural candidate to test out a prototype for a new iPhone application that was developed in our lab. This application is an offshoot of one of the grammar judgment tasks on semantics developed in this lab. Patrick took this app out on campus and in the

community to test how well different persons could use this app. He documented how easy or difficult it was in maneuvering through the controls, how well a person could understand the recorded voice, and he simulated a variety of situations in which to troubleshoot potential problems. In addition, he willingly volunteered to arrive at work at 7:00 am to meet with off-duty members of the housekeeping staff so they could also participate in the pilot testing of this application. He thoroughly documented what worked well and what did not work well with the app and provided detailed feedback and suggestions to the application programmer and the Director of the lab. His careful attention to detail and rapport with the people he encounters have contributed to making this project move forward successfully. On all counts, he represents this lab and University extremely well in dealing with students, faculty, staff, and community members.

7. What unique contribution has this employee given to your department?

Patrick has worked in the lab for over four years. When he graduates this May and moves on, we will miss him both personally and professionally. He has raised the bar for what we can expect from our student hourly personnel. His willingness to take on all tasks no matter how big or small, and his attention to detail on tasks both complex and mundane, is unsurpassed. He has been assigned work normally reserved for graduate students and full-time staff and does those tasks with skill and aplomb. Patrick has blurred the lines between what a typical student hourly does and what our doctoral students or full-time staff employees do. For example, a few months ago one of the full-time staff resigned with very little notice, leaving the other staff having to take on her work in addition to their own. As our data collection is bound by time-sensitive protocols, this was to become a huge burden on our staff. Patrick, however, was able to fill in and do some of those tasks with next to no supervision; this never been done by an undergraduate before in the eight years I have been in the lab. This is just one of many examples of how we have come to rely upon Patrick for a host of reasons and his presence in the lab will be sorely missed.