

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ROLES IN THE
FAMILIES ADAPTING TO DISABILITY/CHRONIC CONDITIONS PROJECT

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Initially, faculty receiving a Mentoring Environment Grant from the university recruited undergraduate students to become members of a research team studying family adaptation to disability/chronic conditions (Down syndrome, autism). After joining the team, students were oriented to the project, trained in interviewing, recruited, and then visited families who had agreed to participate. During the first visit, students interviewed each parent and school aged siblings of the child with the disability/chronic condition (CWD/CC). In some cases, if the CWD/CC was able to participate in the project, the students also interviewed that child. In addition, the students asked the parents to individually complete and then mail several questionnaires to project investigators. After data were gathered, students and faculty met every two weeks to analyze and interpret some of the qualitative data (sibling journals, photographs). After data were analyzed and comparisons made between groups of siblings (those with a brother/sister with Down syndrome or autism), the students prepared and gave presentations based at the National Conference of Undergraduate Research, the annual College of Nursing Research Conference, the Utah Council on Family Relations, the National Council on Family Relations, and the Council for Exceptional Children Annual Conference. Currently, the students and faculty mentors are in the process of completing manuscripts that will be submitted to professional journals. The experience has been worthwhile and students' comments positive; it has given them a hands on experience collecting and analyzing data, and writing and reporting information to a professional audience. It is a successful, innovative, and relevant way to learn about research. Students also indicate this experience has increased their appreciation for and fostered their ability to be a productive researcher, improved their self confidence in designing and completing their own research, and encouraged them to consider attending graduate school.

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