**Honors Experiential Learning Project Proposal Form – Community Engagement**

Complete and submit this proposal in your e-portfolio (for those with iWebfolio portfolios) or email to honors@uc.edu (if you do not have an e-portfolio in iWebfolio).

**Basic Information**
Full Name: Sruthi Sundaram

UC ID #: M04742976

UC Email: sundarsp@mail.uc.edu

Phone: 3307943164

College: McMicken College of Arts and Sciences

Major: Biological Sciences ---with a focus in Biomedical Studies

Title of Project: Student Mentoring (Making Sense of Language, Bearcat Buddies, and private peer tutoring)

Expected Project Start Date: January 7, 2013 ---Start of Spring Semester

Expected Project End Date: April 19, 2013 ---End of Spring Semester

**Project Information**

1. **Provide a brief overview/abstract of your proposed honors experiential learning project.**

My proposed experience is threefold and centers on mentoring students in various subjects. The material that I am helping the students with is catered to their personal needs taking into consideration both their stage in their education and their personal progress.

 The first program I am involved with is called “Making Sense of Language Arts”. This program is geared towards kindergarteners who demonstrate near or average receptive ability but below average expressive language arts skills. These students are often able to identify and understand the sounds of the letters and how they fit into words but are unable to express their knowledge well outwardly. This results oftentimes in very illegible handwriting and a failure to connect with the material well enough that the student can dictate his or her knowledge in written form. The purpose of the program is to bridge this gap between knowledge and expression by use of sensory techniques such as music, movement, art, and touch as well as community learning to create a very unique style of mentoring, vastly different from traditional tutoring. I am paired with one kindergartener with whom I will work on the comprehension of one letter a week and how it is associated with words that he knows. I will be working with this student for 1 hour per week throughout the Spring Semester.

 The second, more widely known program I am tutoring in is Bearcat Buddies. Bearcat Buddies is a program coordinated by UC’s Center for Community Engagement (CCE) and is partnered with GRAD Cincinnati, Literacy Network of Greater Cincinnati, and the Cincinnati Public Schools. The program is geared toward providing students from the urban Cincinnati school districts assistance with the core subject areas of Math and Reading, to help them meet the State of Ohio’s Education Standards at the students’ respective grade levels. Bearcat Buddies partners volunteers from UC with students in grades 1 through 12 from various inner city schools to help them achieve these goals. The purpose of Bearcat Buddies is to encourage these young students to study, work hard, and aspire toward future collegiate success by pairing them with current UC students who serve as role models to them. I will be working with two 3rd grade students from Roll Hill Academy on their Reading material for 1 hour per week throughout the Spring Semester.

 My third tutoring initiative is a private one that I was recommended for by my Chemistry professor. I am tutoring one student from my Chemistry class, who is currently learning the same material that I am, but struggling with some of the concepts. In our learning sessions, we will be going over extra problems relating to the current subject matter to enhance the intake of skills needed to apply the information in useful ways. I will be working with him on the course material for 2 to 3 hours every week for the entirety of the Spring Semester.

 My main goal for this experience is to gain insight on the meaning and value of Community Engagement. I will achieve this in two ways. First of all, I hope to improve the academic performance of my students by helping them with the concepts they struggle with the most. Second, I hope to gain a sense of diversity in my own learning by engaging in tutoring at these different levels of education. Between my three tutoring experiences, I will encompass a range from one of the most basic levels of schooling to one of the most advanced.

 Overall, my mentoring experience will be very extensive as it ranges a wide variety of different ages and schooling levels. With all the facets of my experience combined, I will be tutoring between 4 to 5 hours per week, totaling to approximately 70 hours over the course of the semester.

1. **Clearly state how each of the following elements will be exhibited in your work (refer to the first two pages of this document with the full description of what is expected in each of these areas).**
2. Substantial Content and Quality within Community Engagement Theme

My experience relates directly to the learning outcome of service, need for reciprocity, understanding of social issues, and ability to see those issues from multiple perspectives. Branching off of the need for reciprocity aspect of the first learning outcome, my experience also relates to the learning outcome of participation in the community and the understanding my role in the community. Different facets of my experience relate better to some parts of the learning outcomes than others but the overall experience really enriches my exposure to all aspects of the theme of Community Engagement. I will address the latter aspects of the first learning outcome initially and tie in my second learning outcome with the discussion of the need for reciprocity. I will discuss the service aspect last.

Both the Bearcat Buddies program and the “Making Sense of Language Arts” program demonstrate the need for reciprocity. During my time in grade school, I was given a very strong education with much personal attention by my teachers. Thus, I feel the need to give back to my community. Because I was ahead enough in all of my course material over the years, I never had the need for the tutoring services I am now giving to my students. However, my success over the years was largely because of the nurturing environment I grew up in. The younger students I work with do not have the same opportunities I had when I was their age. Thus, I feel that my role in community service is to help these students they are part of the community that helped me succeed in my childhood so that I could pursue and achieve my goals. I strongly believe that everyone deserves the basic human rights of a home, healthy environment, and education. My best contribution can be towards education, and I hope that in tutoring with Bearcat Buddies and the “Making Sense of Language Arts” program, I will also give my students the healthy environment while enhancing their educational experience in the school setting.

The last two aspects of the first learning outcome relate to social issues in the community that I work in. One of the main social issues that the first two facets of my project both relate to is the home environments that many inner city students come from. Both Rothenberg Academy and Roll Hill Academy are inner-city schools. A significant proportion of the students that attend these schools live high poverty and a large proportion of them also come from dysfunctional families. In the “Making Sense of Language Arts” program, I work with an extremely young student who is only 5 years of age. Children undergo tremendous mental growth during their early childhood, and schools can often positively influence their development. Working with a student on a one-on-one basis and catering to his strengths can help him grow positively in the learning environment. This is what the “Making Sense of Language Arts” program achieves with its use of sensory learning tactics. By participating in this program, I will be a small part of a child’s growth, which I believe is the height one could in community engagement.

Bearcat Buddies also deals with the same social issue of dysfunctional environments found in high poverty regions. I have personally noticed that one of my 3rd grade students exhibits a disinterest in the learning the course material. Her attitude has nothing to do with her capabilities, as she is a decent reader. However, the motivation to learn cannot always come from the self. It requires outside influence, especially at a young age. As I reflect on my own childhood, I remember that when I was in early grade school, any grade other than an “A” was unacceptable to my parents. This motivated me to work hard, because I knew the consequence of not achieving the “A” was some kind of punishment. As I grew up, I recognized why they had pushed me so hard and eventually they did not have instruct me to achieve high grades in school because I did so automatically. Remembering this aspect of my childhood, I hope that I can provide a similar, albeit much less harsh, motivation for my student. I believe Bearcat Buddies tutors are a perfect example of a positive influence. Since all of us have made it to college, we serve as examples of what the young students should strive for. Hopefully, with enough firm-handed pressure, we can provide the motivation that often lacks in these students’ homes and thus subsequently lead them toward success.

All of the facets of my experience directly relate to service as all of them involve bettering another person’s education. The “Making Sense of Language Arts” program in which I use sensory techniques with teaching my student how to read is an excellent representation of service. The students that are picked for this program require one-on-one attention from a single mentor to learn. They also require different teaching methods than the ones used in a traditional classroom. In their education so far, they have lagged behind because of their weakness in outwardly expressing the knowledge they gain. Overall, in the last ten years the program has existed, 80% to sometimes 100% of the students tutored using the new methods showed at or above age level appropriate language arts skills by the end of the academic year. I believe that one of the biggest factors that resulted in such high success was the personal attention and the feeling of community that was granted to these students by all the mentors. I am honored that I am given the opportunity to be one part of that service for these students.

Bearcat Buddies employs a more direct and traditional tutoring style that also very well applies to the awareness of service. The elementary school students picked for tutoring in reading already exhibit decent reading capabilities, but sometimes simply lack the connection between understanding and applying what they read. The school board uses the standards for reading set by the state of Ohio, and as tutors, our main goal is to prepare the students for the Ohio Achievement Assessment (OAA). Some of the most important aspects of this curriculum are to convey different forms of applying reading and learning from it and using important skills such as identifying context clues and themes in the reading material. These skills are very important and are useful throughout life in every field a person might pursue. Oftentimes, if these skills are not developed at a young age, severe cognitive hindrances could result in a much worse struggle at an older age. Thus, by mentoring my 3rd grade students, I will hopefully provide the connection they require to apply and learn from what they read. I believe that helping a person reach their potential is one of the greatest services that I could give to someone.

Service is also clearly exemplified by the last facet of my experience, which is the UC student I tutor in Chemistry. The service that I do in this facet is very different from the first two facets, as it involves a more personalized form that does not involve a particular set goal or style of tutoring. My aim is to help my student achieve to the level that he believes is best for him. As an adult, he has the maturity to know what he wants and to what extent he needs help. Thus, my service to him is catered entirely to his personal needs. I believe this to be one of the highest forms of service, as I will personally be able to view the success of my endeavors. Unlike the younger students, who at their age do not understand the extents of what they gain from tutoring, a fellow student who is at my level in education is more relatable. Thus, he will personally understand the gain to be received by increasing his exam scores. I hope that my service in mentoring my student will be very beneficial to him.

1. Connection to Academic Goals and Theories

The article “Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships” states, “The quality and stability of a child’s human relationships in the early years lay the foundation for a wide range of later developmental outcomes that re­ally matter – self-confidence and sound men­tal health, motivation to learn, achievement in school and later in life” (Shonkoff, *et al.*). This statement presents the core reason for my motivation to assist in this project. My career goal is to become a physician. This career requires me to interact with many different types of people, from singers, to speakers, to geriatric patients, which requires a deep knowledge of different personality types and ways to deal with them. I believe that successful human relationships are grounded in early experience with a variety of people and from positive influences; in my early childhood, I had an exceptionally positive motivation from my parents that gave me the platform to explore a whole variety of areas, after which I finally narrowed my interests down to medicine and vocal arts. Some of the students that Bearcat Buddies and “Making Sense of Language Arts” work with do not have this positive motivation at home. Consequently, I hope to provide a part of that motivation for the students I work with. I also hope to provide them the platform to explore their strengths and their weaknesses so they, too, can recognize their future collegiate goals as I did.

The concept of charity is very important to my future career as a physician. In his article “Citizen Leader: A Community Service Option for College Students”, the writer, Gerri E. Perreault, states, “Charity helps people concretely and, in the best cases, students may learn from providing services; they may for example, become aware of the various needs that exist in their community and of the human faces behind those needs”(Perreault). The concept of charity will be well expressed in the first two facets of my proposed experience, as I will be helping students who are struggling in various ways gain an environment of care and cooperation at school. However, charity has its limitations. Perreault goes on to say that a “potentially negative outcome is an unconscious message of superiority of

the givers over the recipients” (Perreault). A better way of looking at community engagement through tutoring is through service learning: “this type of program helps students identify the causes that lie behind the human needs they are trying to address” (Perreault). The service learning approach emphasizes not only the help that a tutor would give a student but also personal learning that the tutor achieves from the experience. My hope is that I can serve as a role model that my students can look up to while they teach me to appreciate the value that I hold in their education.

There have been more direct success stories where prospective physicians have tutored grade school students to gain perspective on developing relationships. The “Teach to Learn” initiative paired medical students from Drexel University College of Medicine with 5th grade students. The medical students spent several weeks gaining experience helping the 5th graders with their school work (CEE Community Outreach Projects). Such initiatives prove the valuable experience that prospective physicians gain from working with children, developing both skills to work with a variety of personality types and social skills from the new relationships they develop. For all these reasons, I believe that this tutoring experience will largely benefit me in my future goal.

My personal development will come mostly from the skills I learn from tutoring in these various programs. The “Making Sense of Language Arts” program uses a very unique style of tutoring catered for students with difficulty expressing themselves. The program discusses the methods used to bridge the gap between intake and expression: “…uses multi-sensory techniques to build the neurology for language. Music, movement, art touch etc. provide sensory links to strengthen the underdeveloped language center of the brain. There are also phonemic awareness and comprehension components in the curriculum” (Making Sense of Language Arts). Already, in the short while that I have been tutoring in this program, I have utilized these methods and have observed not only improvement in my student’s understanding of the letters and their relationship to words, but also have noticed that he communicates with me in similar ways. I believe that my continued exposure to my student in this program and to these teaching skills will help me learn better how to understand and deal with people who have similar expressive difficulties. I predict that in a career of medicine, I will have to meet and work with patients and colleagues who have these personalities.

With Bearcat Buddies, I believe I will also learn similar skills that will be useful to me in my life. Oftentimes, I get very frustrated as one of my students this semester can be difficult to work with due to her refusal to cooperate with me and do her work. With each week, I feel an increase in my ability to use a firm hand as well as be more patient with her. Skills such as patience and strong mannerisms are necessary for success in most fields, as every career path contain obstacles that are challenging. I feel that with continued participation in Bearcat Buddies, I will learn how deal with these obstacles in more effective ways. I understand the authority that I hold in my relationship with my students, and sometimes a firm hand and a refusal to submit to laziness is required to best help a person.

Finally, the last facet of my experience will allow me to develop my own learning. Since the student I am tutoring is in the same class that I am taking, helping him work through problems helps me review the material for myself. By working with him, I have found that I have been doing more problems than I ever did before. Thus, this experience will help me further develop my own application skills by helping a peer in my class.

*Links to Cited Materials:*

--------<http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fdevelopingchild.harvard.edu%2Findex.php%2Fdownload_file%2F-%2Fview%2F587%2F&ei=GfmNUPj1PImoyAHLvYCICA&usg=AFQjCNGpsAAmgDRcmOjG2rQTbkx7K9F_XA&sig2=fG7SQrq-8uyP4L4fH2lF-A>

<http://www.uc.edu/content/dam/uc/honors/docs/communityengagement/Citizen%20Leader%20-%20NASPA%20journal.pdf>

<http://webcampus.drexelmed.edu/CommunityExperience/ceeprojects.html>

 <http://www.makingsenseoflanguagearts.com/index.html>

1. Initiative, Independence and Creativity

Most of the independence in this experience will come from the methodology of teaching. I will be working with different kinds of students who are at different levels in their education, each of whom is bound to have a unique personality, background, strength, and weakness. It will take different techniques to help a student who is weak at science as opposed to reading. Consequently, I will have to be creative in the methods I use to teach different students. Also, many students have different levels of concentration. Thus, it will take a variety of approaches to work with the students effectively. I have already learned many methods of positive reinforcement. One of my students this semester in Bearcat Buddies sometimes has very clever ways of getting out of the work I try to make her do. After a few times, when I noticed myself answering too many of the questions posed about the reading material, I began to make her read over the text again and again, occasionally pointing out some hints to point her in the correct direction. Afterwards, she gave up trying to convince me to do her work. I have also learned techniques to help my students better answer short answer and multiple choice questions, such as deductive reasoning, process of elimination, and the identification of key words in a sentence. The sensory focus teaching method that I use with my kindergartener in the “Making Sense of Language Arts” program is completely new to me, but after a few weeks I have developed some of my own methods of enforcing my student’s understanding of the letter we work on each week, such as crafting the letter physically out of play dough and having my student trace out the curves and physically hold the letter while he pronounces the sound it makes. I have noticed that the addition of this component has helped him write the letter more legibly. My work with the Chemistry classmate who I tutor is completely derived by my own creation catering to his needs. I have noticed that the practice of many problems better reinforces the material we learn in class. Consequently, we spend majority of the time going through all the possible types of problems that could appear on the exam relating to the topic we are working on.

Because of the wide variety of subject matter and age levels of students, there are resources which I might have to consult if I face any problem with students that I am not able to fix. Luckily, with each program, we have an advisor that is experienced with the material and with all of the students. In the “Making Sense of Language Arts” program, each tutor was trained by a single advisor, who attends all of the sessions, so getting help is very simple. I have not had any unfixable issues with any of my students so far, and hope that all of my students will continue to progress without suffering from any serious setbacks.

1. Reflection & Dissemination

In addition to the required reflective essay, I will maintain a journal to reflect every week on what I have learned from each facet of my experience. In this journal I will detail some of the techniques I used to teach the subject material as well as what I learned from the experience. Since the different tutoring programs are so different, my personal learning from them will be different and thus will provide a good variety of skills that might be useful for me in my future. I will also document some of the observations I made of my students and what I inference about their behaviors including possible influences different societal factors. After the experience is over, I will post some of the journal entries on my learning portfolio in digital format. I will conclude my reflection by summing up the journal entries with a paragraph on what I achieved overall with the experience. In this section, I will detail how I believe I achieved my goal of gaining insight on the meaning and value of community engagement. So far in my experience I have already learned about my students’ lives from all the details they share with me about their weekly activities. Their stories have helped me to appreciate my role in their education. At the end of the experience, I hope to take away a greater knowledge of the value of community engagement, especially in the educative arena.

For my dissemination, I hope to present my findings to a CCE info session in the spring. While the specific details of this must still be worked out, I have a clear idea of what I hope to achieve from this dissemination. First of all, I would like to inform CCE about the “Making Sense of Language Arts” program and the value of sensory teaching. The techniques I have learned from this program are completely new to me, and I am continuously astonished at how effective they are. Second of all, I would like to promote Bearcat Buddies as a great volunteering experience to more UC students. I believe CCE is the best platform to achieve that as they are most directly involved with student volunteering experiences. Lastly, I would like to inform CCE about my overall tutoring experience. I hope that after learning about my experience, CCE may work toward developing more tutoring programs and incorporating different styles of teaching into these programs. I will be contacting Fran Larkin, the program coordinator of CCE about details of when and where I might be able to do this at the end of the spring semester.

1. Advisor (list the person’s name, title, and contact information)

Fran Larkin: Program Coordinator at the University of Cincinnati’s Center for Community Engagement (CCE)

Email Address: larkinfp@UCMAIL.**UC**.EDU

General Email: bearcatbuddies@gmail.com

Phone Contact: 5135561503

1. Budget (if applicable)

N/A – All rides to and from Roll Hill Academy each week are provided by CCE. Rides to Rothenberg Academy are provided by a fellow tutor. I tutor my Chemistry student on campus.