

Emotional Studies at CSUF

Students can earn \$20 in a study that evaluates anxiety

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Sometimes college can make students crazy, and they get nothing for it. But now students can earn \$20 by participating in Cal State Fullerton's emotional studies program.

Christine Scher, assistant professor of psychology, is spearheading the program in order to investigate the triggers of anxiety among college students.

"We are looking at varying levels of anxiety sensitivity ... to determine who is at risk of high-level anxiety disorders," Scher said. "We want to know how these signs trigger or lead to depressive disorders."

Scher said that the team will be evaluating physical signs of anxiety like stomach growls and shakiness. Scher is urging students to explore their inner psyche with her program.

"We don't have enough students so we welcome any who are interested. We're happy to screen anybody," Scher said. "We do pay \$20 if you qualify, and virtually everyone does."

The qualifications require that students have varying levels of anxiety sensitivity. Students who are eligible participate in exercises including a self-report, a behavioral task and other tests that Scher said she would like to keep private for now.

"We will be using certain words to evaluate the reactions of students. For example, a neutral word like 'cup,' a positive word like 'happy' and a negative word like 'fear,'" Scher said. "I don't want to reveal the rest of exactly what we are doing because that might give away the surprise."

Kyle Gravel, 25, a clinical psychology major, is a graduate research assistant who was the first student to help Scher with the research, which involves hooking up sensors to participants.

"If we give away exactly what we are doing then prospective applicants may have slanted results," Gravel said. "Usually [programs] won't hook students up to sensors at the college level, so this is a good experience."

Crystal McIndoo, 24, a psychology major, is also getting a behind-the-scenes look into the world of research studies by helping Scher. McIndoo experiences professional psychology by screening applicants, running the study and entering data.

"The students do a computer task where we hook up these sensors below their eyes and they fill out different questionnaires," McIndoo said.

Studies will continue until the end of the month as Scher is still recruiting students to participate.

Participants' reactions have been positive thus far, with students stating that it was an interesting way to break up the monotony of the school day.

"Dr. Scher began this study at Cal State San Bernardino University, so the total amount of people who have been in this is in the hundreds, but we're still recruiting," Gravel said. "The students will do it and leave, but we will not give individual results."

Upon completion of the various tasks involved, which takes about two hours, the student will receive their \$20. Students are able to receive a group evaluation upon request and, if they choose, may get involved with a follow-up study.

Scher's husband, Joel Ellwanger, an assistant professor of psychology at Cal State Los Angeles, is working with her on the project. The study began in 2002 and has gone through 17 research assistants, two from CSUF.

"We have cross-college connections with this investigation," Scher said.

With every student receiving \$20 in such a large investigation, the funds might seem like a burden. However, Scher said she has no problem paying the applicants from a startup account that is available for professional expenses.

"When a faculty member is hired, we are given a startup account in the package of goodies they offer so that we professors come and teach at Cal State Fullerton, and not somewhere else," Scher said. "They want to recruit us so they give us that money."

The study will continue until the end of the month and Scher said she would like to finish evaluating the ways in which disorders can be prevented.

"I would like to find a mechanism for changing and preventing these disorders. This could lead to potentially a self-help intervention among people who have anxiety," Scher said.

Scher said she would like everyone to follow through when they apply for the program. If students neglect to show up at their appointment time, they will not be contacted for further investigation.

"I want to complete the studies this semester," Scher said.

All students are welcome and encouraged to join the program. Interested students should call (714) 278-8428 for information and an appointment for the initial screening process, which takes place in the research lab H-624-I.