III. Faculty Narrative

[Student name omitted] approached me about collaborating on research in the winter of 2009, and started working with me during the summer of 2009. He was interested in cognitive psychology and wanted to gain research experience. I was impressed that he approached me because he had not had a course with me. He came to my office with a list of research ideas he was interested in pursuing, which immediately set him apart from almost all other students who approach me about doing research. After some discussion, we decided that he would work on research that I was already conducting, in the hopes that it would have a better chance of being publishable. [Student name omitted] quickly revealed himself to be extremely driven and capable, and worked with increasing independence. The line of research we are working on was designed by me, but the specific project we are proposing was designed jointly in meetings between myself and the three students who work in my lab (one of whom is [student name omitted].) [Student name omitted] has also come to me with a whole new set of research ideas since he has begun working on the general question of the role of beliefs in comprehension.

The primary goal for this project is to provide [student name omitted] with the knowledge and hands-on experiences he needs to be successful when he applies for PhD programs in cognitive psychology. These programs are extremely competitive. But through our research collaboration [student name omitted] is showing that he can seek out and obtain the outside-the-classroom experiences that he needs in order to be successful. [Student name omitted]’s interest, abilities, and drive are exceptional; he has already begun to read literature with an eye towards determining who he would like to seek out as a graduate mentor. This is something that many PhD candidates never actually do. So I have no doubt that the Student Summer Scholars experience will be extremely valuable to him as he continues to gain the experience he will need.
As [student name omitted] gains more skill at statistics, analysis, and writing, he will achieve greater independence as a researcher. I try to implement a mentoring style that Vygotsky referred to as the zone of proximal development. I help students to try to go just beyond their current knowledge and abilities, while also requiring them to do as much of their own work as they are able. This involves a constant process of challenging students to learn new knowledge and skills, and I give them more and more freedom as they progress. Specifically, [student name omitted] will do more of the statistics as he learns how to organize the data and conduct the analyses. He will write many of the drafts of papers, which I will then discuss with him before he revises them.

I believe [student name omitted] to be extremely qualified for the Student Summer Scholars program. More importantly for his long-term goals, I think he has an excellent chance to be admitted into and do well in a top-notch graduate program. He has a [GPA omitted] cumulative GPA, but a [GPA omitted] GPA within psychology. His grades have also been improving over time, so I expect his GPA to be higher at graduation than it is now. In addition, [student name omitted] is an applied statistics minor, which not only will allow him to learn much-needed statistical skills, it also makes him more competitive when applying to graduate school.

In terms of previous mentoring experience, I have mentored a large number of students throughout my years at Grand Valley, including one previous Student Summer Scholar (in 2006). That student co-authored a presentation at an international conference in Scotland which was based on our summer work. I have also co-authored conference presentations with a total of 16 students, and co-authored journal articles with two of the students.