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Do Cover Letters Improve Responses to Job Applications?

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RCEU 2022 Project Proposal

Project Title

Do Cover Letters Improve Responses to Job Applications?

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Proposal ID   RCEU22-EH-RPW-01

Instructions are on the last page.

RCEU 2022 Project Proposal

I. Project Description

This project investigates an important and under-researched question: do job cover letters actually improve job seeker's chances of getting an interview? Job search experts often recommend cover letters, and our business and technical writing classes at UAH teach students to write them. However, there is very little empirical data to indicate whether and how cover letters improve job seekers' chances at getting an interview. Therefore, this project will answer this question using established methodologies (Darolia et. al, 2014; Bellemare et. al., 2018) to test the effectiveness of job application packages sent to real job postings with and without cover letters.

II. Student Duties, Contributions, and Outcomes

a. Specific Student Duties

The student will submit one of two versions of a fictional job application (one with a cover letter and one without) to real, relevant jobs advertised during the period of the RCEU program, and the student will use a database to log those submissions and the results of each submission. The student will statistically analyze the results to help answer the question about the effectiveness of cover letters in improving job applicants' success at getting interviews. The student will also help write the several sections of the article reporting this research.

b. Tangible Contributions by the Student to the Project _(10% of Review)_

The student will find job ads to send the job applications to, submit the job application packages, and track the results of each submission (whether or not each submission resulted in an interview invitation). This is an extremely complex process that requires internet savvy, focus, organization, and attention to detail. The experiment will not work unless a researcher can very carefully track where the job applications go, which version was sent, and what happened as a result of the submission. This process is the heart of the research, and it requires a great researcher who can carefully track the status of several documents at once. The student will also analyze the results to determine whether there are statistically significant differences between the results of the application packages. This analysis requires choosing the right statistical tests to answer the research questions. Because the faculty mentor does not have a strong background in statistics, the student will take the lead on statistical analysis. The student will also help write several sections of an academic article about the research, especially the literature review and methodology sections, and will therefore contribute as an author on the manuscript.

c. Specific Outcomes Provided by the Project to the Student _(30% of Review)_

This project will help the student learn how to conduct an experiment by adapting well-tested methods for a new purpose. This experience with experimental methodologies will be transferrable to the students' other academic and future work experiences conducting research and experiments. This research process requires that students develop and maintain a complex

database, so the student will get experience tracking and organizing data. The student will also get to apply basic statistical knowledge and practice rigorous data analysis. The student will also get academic writing experience by contributing to a scholarly article about the research. If the article gets published in a peer-reviewed journal, the student will be listed as one of the authors on that article.

III. Student Selection Criteria
Ideal candidates for this research project will meet the following criteria:
1. Excellent organizational skills
2. Strong writing skills
3. Strong attention to detail
4. Strong research skills
5. Moderate statistical knowledge

IV. Project Mentorship   *(30% of Review)*

The faculty member will prepare the student to conduct the experiment. In order to have enough time to complete the experiment, the faculty member will have already submitted an IRB application and received IRB approval before the RCEU program begins. The faculty member will therefore already have a strong knowledge of the methodology for the experiment and will show the student how to conduct the experiment and provide the necessary materials (fictional resume and cover letter, experimental email address and phone number, etc.). The faculty member will also help the student develop a database to track submissions and the results of those submissions. The faculty member will also establish the criteria for choosing effective statistical tests to guide the student in developing appropriate statistical analysis.

The faculty member will also provide extensive mentorship in writing an article for publication in a journal such as *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*. The faculty member will help the student interpret the manuscript requirements for the journal and provide several related studies that the student can describe in the literature review. The faculty member will also help the student conduct research to identify other relevant studies for inclusion in the literature review. The faculty member will provide feedback on several drafts of the student's contribution to the academic article and help the student develop effective strategies for revision. The faculty member will also offer the student guidance on the academic publishing process and help the student understand how to write and submit a manuscript to an academic journal.