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Stuck in a Dead-End Job: Factors that Create Job Search Inertia among Low Income Workers

Christina Steidl

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**Stuck in a Dead-End Job:
Factors that create Job Search Inertia among Low Income Workers**

Christina Steidl

Associate Professor

Department of Sociology

CTC 203

256-824-2299

christina.steidl@uah.edu

RCEU20-SOC-CS-01

Project Description:

The project is a collaborative effort between faculty across multiple colleges and departments: Christina Steidl (Sociology), Wafa Orman (Economics) and William MacKenzie (Management). This project seeks to identify the factors that produce or mitigate job search inertia among low-income workers. In particular, we are interested in how low income workers decide whether or not to actively search for a new job, and what types of interventions/resources make them more likely to succeed in that search.

By the start of the RCEU, we will have collected between 500-1000 initial surveys from low-income workers in Northern Alabama. During the summer, we plan to clean and analyze this survey data; design and send a packet of job search resources to interested respondents; plan and host a career coaching and job search workshop (as a social experiment); and construct and send out a follow-up survey to respondents who received resource packets and/or attended the workshop. Follow-up surveys will focus on participants' ongoing job search activity and changes in employment.

Research results will be of interest to employers seeking either to retain their current workforce or to recruit new workers, to service providers assisting low-income workers, and to researchers studying labor market dynamics, self-efficacy and poverty.

Student Duties, Contributions, and Outcomes:

Working as a team with faculty and other student researchers, you will have the opportunity to learn about all phases of the project, however your primary responsibilities will include: (1) construction and cleaning of the survey dataset, (2) research to identify primary employers and job search resources available in Huntsville, (3) assisting in the design and production of materials to be sent to study participants and used in the workshop, (4) contributing to the development and distribution of the follow-up survey. In addition, if you are interested, you will have the opportunity to participate in statistical data analysis of the survey data and/or to help with development of the career coaching and job search workshop. In sum,

you will learn several social data research methods, including survey design and social experimental protocols, will become proficient with techniques for data management and cleaning, and will gain experience working with an interdisciplinary team of scholars and students, as well as with local community members.

Student Selection Criteria:

Students will be selected based on interest in the topic, written/oral communication skills, and familiarity with social science research practices and basic statistics. Interest in or experience with graphic design and/or publication design is a plus. Applicants must have completed at least one of the following math/statistics courses: SOC 303/304, PY 300/300L, MSC 288, or MA 385. Preference will be given to applicants who have also completed SOC 301 or PY 303.

Faculty Research Staff Mentorship:

This RCEU position will be directly supervised by Dr. Christina Steidl in the Department of Sociology (AHSS). At the beginning of each week, you will meet one-on-one with Dr. Steidl to review progress and discuss next steps, as well as broader applications of the skills you are developing. You will also be expected to attend weekly project team meetings, which will include faculty in the College of Business and other student researchers. In this way, you will have a chance to learn about all facets of the project and how your particular tasks contribute to the overall project. After constructing the survey dataset, you will likely also be meeting in-person and/or collaborating online on a daily basis with Dr. Steidl and other team members, because your tasks are largely collaborative. As such, you should plan to work on campus at least two to three days each week; the other days, you will have the option of working in the Sociology Lab (currently CTC 203, where Dr. Steidl's office is also located), at the Salmon Library, or from home using your own computer.