I spent the summer of 2015 involved in a research training project, with the goal of learning more about conducting experimental research on language — including developing a research project of my own. A second goal was to learn more about the field of cognitive science more broadly. To do this, I worked with Dr. Gareth Roberts in Penn’s Cultural Evolution of Language Lab. I also attended an international cognitive science conference.

During my involvement with the lab, I became involved in several different projects in order to experience the breadth of research the lab conducts and become familiar with different stages of research. I met regularly with Dr. Roberts to work on developing a future research project of my own that would unite my interests in linguistics, culture, and cognitive science. This included learning how to find and read through existing literature and how to use it to inform my ideas, as well as planning the way a specific experiment might be set up. I also took an online course to learn how to use the Python programming language, which can be used to write software for experiments like those run in the Lab. Additionally, I helped pilot an experiment still in development and regularly ran trials and helped collect data for two ongoing studies.

From July 22 to July 25, I attended the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society in Pasadena. There, I attended many different research talks and presentations, and I met and spoke with a number of professionals in cognitive science. I gained a better idea of the way cognitive science is developing and what opportunities the field holds.

These experiences engaged me in research at many levels and taught me how to approach experimental research. I saw what the end products of cognitive science research are like, and I gained insight into what the field looks like now and where it might go in the future. I developed a plan for an independent study on how different domains of culture (i.e., language, storytelling, technology, etc.) are affected by the same cultural pressures; in particular, I’m interested in studying what factors might influence ever-present perceptions of moral decline in such cultural domains. Over the coming semesters I will continue to meet with Dr. Roberts, as well as other researchers, to develop this project. Next summer, I plan to carry out the project as an independent study.