



COMMUNICATING HER RESEARCH

Anna Sagan did not have an “aha!” moment that led her to choose her major, but doing research is what caused her to realize that it was something she wanted to stick with. Anna is a UNI senior majoring in Communication Science and Disorders. She has been doing undergraduate research for a few years now. Once she graduates from UNI this May, she will be going to graduate school in order to study Speech Language Pathology, which involves the evaluation and treatment of speech and communication disorders.

Anna became involved in undergraduate research by approaching one of her professors one day after class during her sophomore year. Dr. Lisa Kopf had spoken about her work with voice research in class that day, and Anna knew she had to get involved.

“I walked up to her and said, ‘Hi! I would love to be involved in your research. Two years later, I’ve done two different studies with her and we are starting our third,’” Anna said. It was during the first study that Anna decided Communication Science and Disorders was definitely the field for her.

The current project is about a voice monitor that Anna and Dr. Kopf like to call a “FitBit for the voice.” It was developed in order to help occupational voice users. Occupational voice users are people whose voices are essential for doing their jobs. This includes teachers, clergy, courtroom attorneys, people who work in customer service, and many others.

“The study that we’re doing right now is testing a feedback display for an app that users of the voice monitor would use,” Anna said. She explained that they are just starting to recruit participants. The participants will come into the lab and use the voice monitor on their vocal folds. Data about their voice and vocal folds will be put into a display, and the participants will then tell Dr. Kopf and Anna whether or not the display was helpful.

Anna said that this project is important for occupational voice users, even if they do not know it yet.

“A lot of people don’t realize that they may be using their voice too much. Vocal health is really important because people can easily develop vocal disorders,” Anna explained. The device Dr. Kopf and Anna are working on will not only help people prevent the development of vocal disorders, such as laryngitis. It will also help in the rehabilitation process if a vocal disorder has already developed.

The undergraduate research experience is one Anna highly recommends. In part because it is interesting to learn about the research professors are doing when they are not teaching, but also because being involved in research is a great way to learn more about the topics discussed in classes. She recommends trying it at least once, just to find out what the research side of your field is like.



Anna Sagan, UNI Senior, Communication Science and Disorders