



Infant Communication Lab

Undergraduate Research Assistant Application

Meet Dr. Jana Iverson



My research program focuses on relations between early motor development and later-emerging 'higher-order' skills (i.e., communication and language). Specifically, I am interested in understanding: a) the way in which development in motor skills provides infants with an increasingly diverse set of opportunities for acquiring and refining abilities that contribute to development in domains such as communication and language and in which delays or deficits in motor skills can exert cascading developmental effects extending well beyond the motor domain; b) the developmental relationship between gesture and speech in children acquiring language typically; c) the extent to which early gesture-speech links are sensitive to variation in input; and d) the nature of early motor and communicative development in children at risk for Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). My research uses a variety of techniques, including studying behavior (i.e., grasping, reaching, sitting, eye gaze, vocalizations, gestures) and movement kinematics (i.e., wrist acceleration, postural sway) to understand how movement and communication develop in infants and young children.

I have been at Pitt since 2003 and have been our department's Director of Undergraduate Studies since 2013. I regularly have a large number of graduate and undergraduate students who work in my lab. I received the Chancellor's Distinguished Research Award in 2007. I am a member of the Editorial Boards of *Infancy*, the *Journal of Child Language*, and *Language Learning and Development*, and am regularly on the conference review panels for the Meetings of the Society for Research in Child Development and the International Conference on Infant Studies.

About the Infant Communication Lab

The Infant Communication Lab studies the nature and development of the relationship between motor activity, postural stability, communication, and language in infants at risk for autism and infants with no such risk. Current projects focus on four major topics: a) how changes in motor activity and postural stability relate to advances in other developmental domains; b) how motor planning develops over time; c) how communication, gesture, and language develop over time in infants; and d) how caregivers' communication with infants changes over time. Our use of wrist sensors and a pressure sensitive mat to record a child's arm movement and weight distribution while sitting and reaching for objects is unique to our lab.

Responsibilities and opportunities as an undergraduate research assistant

All of our undergraduate research assistants (URA) have the opportunity to take part in our data collection. For our current study, our data collection requires us to travel to families' homes to collect kinematic data (i.e. wrist sensors and mat data) and administer developmental assessments. As a URA, you would be responsible to film the data collection or watch the older siblings of our participants. Back in the lab, all URAs are assigned a behavioral coding team for which they complete assignments on a weekly basis. We currently have coding projects that focus on motor, vocal, and language development and we try to assign you to a coding team that matches your interest. As a coder, you will be watching for behaviors of interest to your team and categorize them based on the coding manual. In addition to these tasks, URAs also take part in processing, and entering data. We encourage our URAs to build on their research interests through directed research, senior thesis, or a BPhil.

Requirements

- GPA of 3.5 or higher
- Must be able to dedicate 10 hours/week for two semesters
- At least one 4-hour block of time available per week for home visits
- Comfortable with and interested in working with families and young infants
- Dependability, excellent organizational skills, attention to detail
- Ability to work with a team
- Good computer skills (familiarity with Microsoft Word, Excel, Access)
- Willingness to learn new tasks
- Able to attend mandatory lab meetings on Wednesdays from 11:00am -12:00pm
- Has or is able to obtain Act 33 (PA Child Abuse), Act 34 (PA Criminal Record) and Act 73 (FBI Background) clearances



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Lab Expectations

1. Honor your commitments

In applying, you are indicating that you are able to dedicate 10 hours a week to the lab. Just like any other job or internship, we expect that you honor your commitment by working your dedicated hours and completing your assignments in a timely manner.

2. Communicate with all lab members

Keeping your commitment to the lab is important but we understand that things come up. If you are unable to make a meeting or complete an assignment, you should let your supervisor and Jana know. Let people know in advance so we can figure out another way to work with your schedule. If you are unable to make your 10-hour commitment, let your supervisor know ahead of time so you can discuss the best way for you to make the lost time up. If there is an emergency and you are unable to let us know beforehand, please make sure you follow-up with us as soon as possible. We are happy to work with you!

3. Check your emails daily and respond within 24 hours

Because we have a large number of people working the lab, email is the most efficient way for us to reach everyone. It's extremely important that you check your emails on a daily basis as some things may require your immediate attention. If you are ever unclear about anything in an email, do not hesitate to ask for a clarification. It's also important that you respond to emails within 24 hours. Communication is important!

4. Respect others and the lab space

We have many great people working in the lab so it's important you respect them and their time. When you have a meeting scheduled, you should attend that meeting on time or you should let that person know ahead of time when you can't make it. It's also important to keep the lab space clean. Please clean up after yourself before you leave.

5. Update your hour-log and calendar

Everyone in the lab is required to log their hours. It's important that your hour-log is up-to-date as supervisors check the logs on a weekly basis. Get into the habit of updating the log before leaving the lab so you don't forget. These logs are great to reference when we write letters of recommendation. You should also keep your calendar up-to-date as they are used to schedule meetings and visits.

6. Ask for help

If you are ever having issues with an assignment or don't know how to do something, ask someone as soon as possible! We have many great resources available whenever you are having trouble. You can contact your supervisor, another undergraduate student, a graduate student, a staff member, or Jana. Make sure you have the contact information of everyone you work with so you can let them know if you are having an issue. Don't ever hesitate to ask a question about an email or an assignment.



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Applicant's Information

Name [Click here to enter text.](#)

Year [Click here to enter text.](#)

Email [Click here to enter text.](#)

Phone Number [Click here to enter text.](#)

GPA [Click here to enter text.](#)

Major [Click here to enter text.](#)

1. **Do you intend to do an honors or BPhil thesis?** YES NO

2. **Do you know what you would like to do after graduation? Please detail.**

[Click here to enter text.](#)

3. **Have you ever worked with children?** YES NO

a. If yes, where and with what age?

[Click here to enter text.](#)

4. **Have you ever worked in a lab?** YES NO

a. If yes, when and with whom?

[Click here to enter text.](#)

5. **Why are you interested in getting involved in the Infant Communication Lab?**

[Click here to enter text.](#)

6. **This lab requires at least a 2 semester commitment. Are you able to commit at least 2 semesters to working in the lab?** YES NO

7. **This lab requires a 10-hour per week commitment. Realistically, are you able to dedicate 10 hours a week to the lab?** YES NO

8. **Do you have at least one 4-hour block of time open in your schedule?** YES NO

9. **Will you be able to attend lab meetings on Wednesdays from 11:00am-12:00pm in Sennott Square?** YES NO

10. **Do you have any of the following clearances?**

a. Pennsylvania State Police Request for Criminal Record Check YES NO

b. Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance YES NO

c. FBI Criminal Background Check? YES NO

11. **How did you hear about us?**

[Click here to enter text.](#)



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Agreement and Signature

By signing the line below, I agree that I have:

- Read all of the information about the lab, being an undergraduate research assistant and lab expectations
- Filled out the application with correct information and to the best of my ability

Date [Click here to enter text.](#)

Signature: _____

Submission Instructions

Please email your application and your resume to the project coordinator, Kaitlyn Cortez, at kbc30@pitt.edu.