During the past semester I’ve worked as a telephone interviewer at the Center for Social and Behavior Research (CSBR) at UNI. The CSBR conducts applied research for institutions across the state of Iowa and the country. While there is a wide range of studies being conducted a few done by telephone interviewers include:

- Quiltline Iowa Evaluation (Smoking Cessation)
- Iowa Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) with the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) & CDC
- Statewide STEM Attitudes & Opinions Survey for the Governor’s Stem Advisory Council
- Iowa Violence Perception Survey for the IDPH

The study I work on is the BRFSS. This study is designed to collect data on the health practices of people in the U.S. It was established in 1984 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The study began in 15 states and has since expanded to cover all 50 states and territories. The study has also served as a model for other countries.

The study asks general questions regarding the health practices of U.S. residents such as:

- Eating habits and diet
- Exercise habits
- Basic measurements of health (height, weight, etc.)
- Demographic and occupational info as it relates to health hazards
- Use of preventative services
- Past and chronic health issues and conditions

Some responsibilities and duties:

- Being attentive to the concerns of respondents
- Addressing any questions callers have to encourage participation
- Maintaining the confidentiality of participants
- Being trained to recognize signs of distress

The goal of the CSBR is to provide quality research on social and behavioral practices for scholarly and public bodies. It does this through partnering with the university, policy makers, researchers, and non-profits. Be it locally or nationally, we pride ourselves with research that adheres to the best practices and ethics in our commitment to excellence.

It’s important to recognize that this study continues to find ways to gather the most reliable data from the widest range of individuals. It examines every aspect of the study from the design to the methodology. We ask how the wording could be clarified. We seek new ways to increase participation through how we rebut or persuade. We even test on a small scale and increase participation through how we rebut or persuade.

None of this would be possible without psychological principles to guide our decisions. Understanding priming and how respondents may perceive a certain phrase or word informs how we structure our questions. Knowledge of compliance and persuasion helps us to develop methods, such as the simple act of introducing yourself, to increase overall participation.

My work as an interviewer has helped me grasp the importance data collection plays in the advancement of our understanding. As my knowledge of psychology progressed, I began to see the many topics and issues in my classes come up at the CSBR. Not only did these connections solidify what felt like abstract concepts, but it allowed me to see the reasoning behind our work on a much deeper level.

Working at the CSBR helped me value psychology and academic research even more. Listening to the experiences of respondents and the struggles they have, which may or may not influence and be influenced by their health, I’ve developed a greater desire and admiration for the social and behavioral conceptual understandings which form the basis of psychological inquiry. The scientific desire to comprehend and alleviate such struggles is now all the more pertinent.