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UM students conduct research in primate laboratory

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IMMEDIATELY

UM STUDENTS CONDUCT RESEARCH
IN PRIMATE LABORATORY

MISSOULA --

David Strobel, associate professor of psychology at the University of Montana and director of the UM Primate Laboratory at Fort Missoula, is investigating the behavioral effects of trace mineral deficiencies in rhesus monkeys. Results of the research, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, have direct implications for both animal and human diets.

Scientists know that people need zinc in their diet for normal growth and physical development, and adequate zinc in the body is necessary for the manufacture of proteins and a number of important enzymes and hormones. However, researchers are not so sure of the effects of insufficient zinc on behavior, including intellectual development and social adjustment. UM faculty and students are searching for that answer.

Judy Pfaff Camp, a senior in psychology from Cascade, is involved in behavioral testing at the Fort Missoula laboratory. She is one of a number of UM undergraduates who have received first-hand experience in testing these animals.

Under the supervision of graduate research assistants, Camp conducts experiments that test the learning abilities of zinc-deficient and zinc fed-monkeys. These tests are similar in many respects to the intelligence tests given to human children. They evaluate a full range of intellectual development, from simple discrimination learning to higher conceptual attainment.

Camp and others are finding that monkeys, unlike simpler animals such as rodents, are highly resistant to the retarding effect of zinc deficiencies. This suggests that monkeys, like the highly adaptable humans, have evolved adjustive responses to certain forms of malnutrition.

(more)

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She has found her research experience to have been both academically and personally valuable. "I have been able to apply much of what I have learned in this experience to my other course work," she said. "I have very much enjoyed working with the faculty, staff, and other students in their research, as well as the numerous interactions I've had with the monkeys. U of M students are very fortunate to have the unique opportunity to work in a primate lab at the Undergraduate level."

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