Dav Clark – Graduate Division Summer Grant

In working towards completion of my dissertation, I have completed initial experiments that have demonstrated the utility of science education approaches to the problem of climate change (or “global warming”) denial in the United States. In particular, I have shown that either (1) a brief mechanistic description of the greenhouse effect or (2) presentation of surprising numerical information can elicit notable shifts in climate change attitudes. It should be noted that this is a surprising result to many, as science education—particularly with politically charged issues—is widely recognized as a difficult or even ineffective approach to behavior or policy change. While my questions serve an education and policy purpose, I employ a cognitive level of analysis. This summer I will expand my experimental participant pool to include individuals from across the U.S. and continue writing my dissertation. I have generated the materials and have approval from CPHS for this summer’s activities. However, as compared to most psychological studies, it is imperative that I obtain a broad sample that is truly representative of the views of all U.S. citizens. Thus, despite the fact that my final experiments are “ready to go,” it will require considerable effort to recruit subjects. As such, it would be detrimental to my progress if I take time off to work, etc. It is my firm belief that an educated populace is a necessary component of a healthy democracy. This research will help all Americans—liberal or conservative—to arrive at an informed judgement on the issue of climate change that is consistent with their own values. Moreover, what we learn here may be used to improve other forms of education surrounding contentious issues. Support from the Graduate Division for the summer will, I hope, benefit not just me, but also have near-term real-world benefits.