Project Description

I am seeking funds to present some research at the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) convention.

The research I will present (abstract below) is part of an ongoing line of research in which I have been involved with Tim Hackenberg (faculty) sponsor and another student (Cyrus Kirkman).

The project tries to examine claims in the literature that rats are altruistically motivated to share food with other rats. I am the first author of the project and we started this project in 2017 fall semester; experiments were daily based and were also run during the break and the summer. We have already done Reed poster session, and Tim Hackenberg has been invited to give a talk in a session on social behavior at the ABAI meeting next May in Chicago.

I am the first author of the project, with the co-authors Cyrus Kirkman, & Timothy Hackenberg. This poster is one of the three presentations on which I will be a co-author. Cyrus Kirkman did the follow-up study on a cross-price demand study about the economic relationship between social reinforcement and food reinforcement, and he is also the first author for a poster going to be presented. Tim Hackenberg also talked in a symposium on social behavior. The abstracts have recently been submitted and the decisions are expected by January 2019.

Funding to attend the conference would allow me to explore a career as a behavioral scientist, gain experience presenting original work, advance my expertise of behavior science, develop new skills, learn new theories and methods, obtain academic resources, and extend my future academic network, as I plan to apply Ph.D. after graduation. The ABAI convention is the biggest professional meeting in the field. This would be my first academic conference and my first time presenting research in a non-Reed setting.

Speaking of the funding, I am going to sharing a room with Cyrus Kirkman so $75 per night ($375 in total) rather than $150. The cheapest amount of airfare getting to Chicago and back is $450. I have also applied for SABA Senior Student Presenter Grant, which would pay back the registration cost that would be $160. The ABAI student membership costs $84 and the poster printing costs $50. The conference lasts for five days (May 23-27) so $55 per diem for the full 5 days would be $275. Therefore, the total amount of money would be 1394 and possible $160 registration payback if I get the student presenter grants ($1234 in total).

Abstract. Prior research has found that one rat will release a second rat from restraint in the presence of food, thereby allowing that second rat access to food. Such behavior, clearly beneficial to the second rat and costly to the first, has been interpreted as altruistic. Because clear demonstrations of altruism in rats are rare, such findings deserve a careful look. The present study aimed to replicate this finding, but with more detailed methods to examine more systematically if, and under what conditions, a rat might share food with its cagemate partner. Rats were given repeated choices between 5 pellets of food and 10-s social access to familiar rat in an open economy, with free access to food and the social partner outside the 60-min sessions. Social access was arranged by lifting a door to a restraint, within which the partner rat was held. Rats responded consistently for both food and social interaction, but sharing occurred at very low levels across sessions and conditions (mean < 1%, across subjects and conditions), even under conditions in which the rats were satiated. The results are therefore inconsistent with claims in the literature that rats are altruistically motivated to share food with other rats.