

2027 Summer Research Project

Project title	Building the Social Continuum Study: Video Stimuli and a Behavioural Measure of Trust in Artificial Agents
Positions available	Two positions. The two scholars work as a team on one shared goal, with one taking the lead on stimulus production and the other on the behavioural task, and both contributing to piloting and documentation.
Hours & delivery	20 hours per week for 6 weeks (11 January to 19 February 2027). Mostly on campus at St Lucia (School of Psychology), with some editing and programming work possible from home. Working days are flexible, typically three to four weekdays; a small number of filming days will be fixed in advance.
About the project (150-250 words)	When do people treat a machine as a social being, and do they trust its advice appropriately? Our lab studies how humans respond to robots and artificial agents, from friendly humanoid robots like NAO to disembodied voice assistants. In 2027 we are launching one of the School's largest team studies: a systematic map of the "social continuum", comparing how people react to a human, a hand puppet, a humanoid robot, a mechanical robot, a screen avatar, and a voice-only agent, each introduced with a different explanation of where its intelligence comes from. A study like this depends on two things being built well before any participant is tested. The first is the stimulus library: standardised video introductions and interactions for every agent type, professionally produced and carefully matched. The second is the central behavioural measure: a Judge-Advisor task in which participants make tricky judgments, receive advice from the agent, and can revise their answers. Because the advisor's accuracy is fixed at around 70 percent, we can measure whether people's reliance is well calibrated to the advice's real quality. This project builds both. Two summer scholars will work together, one leading video production and one leading task development, sharing the online pilots that test whether the agents are believable and whether the measure behaves well. Your work becomes the foundation for around twenty honours theses and a major registered-report publication.
What you'll do (100-150 words)	On the stimulus side, you will help film and record interactions with the NAO robot, a puppeteer, and human actors, produce voice-only and avatar versions of the same interactions, and edit clips to standard durations with matched audio and visual properties, assembling the branching structure used online. On the task side, you will develop and difficulty-test a pool of judgment items, program the task for online delivery, and implement the fixed-accuracy advice schedule. Together you will run pilots on Prolific, analyse the resulting data (believability ratings; the distribution of the key reliance measure), and refine accordingly. In the final fortnight you will lock down the frozen versions of both products and write the documentation, shot list, and codebook that the 2027 honours team will inherit.
What you'll learn (100-150 words)	You will learn how experimental stimuli and behavioural measures are actually built: designed, controlled, piloted, diagnosed, and refined until they do what they are supposed to do. You will gain hands-on experience with video and audio

	production for research, with programming online experiments, with recruiting and monitoring participants through Prolific, and with analysing pilot data in R. You will work directly with a NAO humanoid robot and see how human-robot interaction research is staged. You will also see how a large preregistered, registered-report project is prepared before a single participant is tested, and why standardisation, calibration, and documentation matter so much. Throughout, you will be embedded in an active lab, attending weekly meetings with PhD students and research assistants.
Project outcomes (75-125 words)	By the end of the placement, the lab will have a complete, edited stimulus library covering all six agent types and both framing conditions, and a finalised, frozen Judge-Advisor task with a difficulty-calibrated item bank and fixed-accuracy advice schedule, each supported by pilot data from online participants and full documentation. Both products will be used by around twenty honours students throughout 2027 and will underpin a planned registered-report publication. Stimulus development and instrument development of this kind are genuine methods contributions and will be credited as such in resulting publications. You will each present a short summary of your work at a lab meeting at the end of the placement.
Who should apply? (75-125 words)	This project suits second- or third-year students in psychology, cognitive science, or a related discipline who are curious about human-robot interaction and social psychology. No prior research experience is required. Because the two roles differ, we welcome applicants with either profile: comfort with technology and any video or audio editing experience (even informal, such as editing for social media) is an asset for the production lead, while statistics coursework and any experience with R, Qualtrics, or JavaScript is an asset for the task lead. Reliability, attention to detail, and the patience to get things exactly right matter most. An interest in continuing to honours is welcome but not required.
Team & supervision	You will be supervised by Professor Eric Vanman in the School of Psychology. The lab studies the social neuroscience of emotion and human-robot interaction using behavioural, psychophysiological, and neuroimaging methods. Day to day, you will work most closely with two experienced research assistants who know the project inside out, alongside your fellow scholar and a third summer scholar working on a related coding project, and you will join weekly lab meetings with PhD students working on robots, AI, trust, and social behaviour.
Additional opportunities (optional)	Your contribution will be credited in the methods of resulting publications, and the calibration pilot may support a methods-focused write-up. The placement is a natural pathway into the lab's 2027 honours team project, which will use the materials you build, and into future research volunteering or RA work.
Additional requirements (if applicable)	None beyond standard onboarding. All equipment is provided; any required inductions will be arranged in the first week.
Contact	Yes, students may contact the supervisor before applying. Direct enquiries to: Professor Eric Vanman, School of Psychology [email]