



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## FORMING A PSYCHOLOGY CLUB

This article describes the groundwork, resourcing, implementation, and research topics of a new psychology club at El Centro College (ECC) and may serve as a template for others wishing to start a psychology club on their campuses.

### Determining the Best Approach

To determine what would best meet the needs of our students, we held meetings with a psychology club from another community college district, participated in discussion groups with a regional psychological association, administered a student survey of three psychology sections, and researched the archives of several academic journals (*Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, the *Journal of College Student Development* and the *National Innovation of Staff and Organizational Development*). Findings suggested three different approaches to forming the organization: regional, national affiliation, or club. Affiliation with a regional or national organization has membership fees. Based on the survey responses, students indicated that fees would have presented an economic hardship and would be a deterrent to joining. Eliminating fees, therefore, allowed more students to join the organization; therefore, the decision was made to forego regional or national affiliation.

### Mission and Purpose

The mission of the psychology club was to provide an *academic* and *social* environment where students could be “connected” with the study of psychology and the ECC psychology faculty. The purpose of the club was to 1) help students form mentoring relationships with ECC faculty, 2) promote the understanding of psychology as a human and behavioral science with an emphasis on “research and methods,” 3) provide information regarding transfer to a four-year institution and a major in psychology, and 4) provide guidance about further study in psychology, including career and research opportunities.

*Mentoring relationships.* Students who feel a sense of belonging are more likely to remain enrolled. The psychology club helps accomplish this by providing opportunities for interaction and can be instrumental

in getting each student involved in his/her own education. Students are more likely to be committed to the institution when they feel that the institution is committed to them. Giving students “serious and honest attention,” therefore, is vital to student retention.

*Promoting the understanding of psychology.* One of the research topics for the club was based on Paul Piff and his colleagues’ work at the University of California at Berkeley. In a recent article “Higher social class predicts increased unethical behavior,” published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (March, 2012), Piff and his colleagues used naturalistic methods of observation to study unethical behavior. In the study, an observer (a member of the research team) positioned out of sight, coded cars driving through a school crosswalk as either “high status” (i.e., Mercedes, BMW, Porsche) or “low status” (i.e., Corolla or Tercel). How did “high status” drivers compare to “low status” drivers when a “pedestrian” (a member of the team) attempted to cross the intersection at a school crosswalk? They found that “high status” drivers were more likely than “low status” drivers to drive through the school crosswalk without yielding to the waiting “pedestrian.” The authors concluded that “high status” persons were more likely to exhibit greed and a sense of entitlement.

The ECC psychology club decided to try to replicate this study in order to give students a better understanding of research methods, data collection, and analysis. Additionally, students were challenged to examine other variables that may be instrumental in altering driver behavior (i.e., dress-code and gender differences). How would drivers respond to a well-dressed female “pedestrian?” Each team was challenged to put together a research design exploring not only driver behavior at school crosswalks but other venues. Students not only obtained a better understanding of research and methods but also of the complexity of human behavior.

*Transferring to a four-year institution.* The psychology club helps members navigate the district’s transfer website, which includes links to all the major state universities where students can view needed class requirements for their major. Transfer worksheets can be downloaded and reviewed so that the student can determine which core courses can be taken at ECC that will be the basis for their bachelor’s degree.

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*Providing guidance regarding further study in psychology.*  
The psychology club provides students with information about a variety of career options in psychology. These options include teaching and conducting research at the university level; working in business, government and industry; private practice to help people with psychological problems; and high school counselors. Psychology majors can be good business analysts, corporate trainers, and human resource managers.

ECC provides supplemental instructors for each general psychology course, and club members are a great resource to serve in this capacity.

### **Resourcing**

The resource needs for the club include web-page development, advertising and recruiting via institutional e-mail (with the help of the ECC Office of Student Life), room access, and copying/duplicating expenses. Announcements of the club meetings and agenda are handled through the Blackboard™ learning management system's "Community Page" and through the Office of Student Life. A room with a workstation, Internet access, and projector was instrumental for holding workshops, allowing students the opportunity to access college and university transfer web sites, job boards, research articles and club member presentations. Officers of the club are the president, vice president, secretary/reporter and the faculty advisor. Since no fees are collected, there is no need for a treasurer.

### **Conclusion**

ECC's commitment to student success was the driving force behind the formation of the psychology club. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the enterprise, a look at the student population led to the conclusion that a club would be more effective. Understanding the student needs and the current academic climate with regard to success were critical to constructing the activities of the club. The emphasis on research and methods was instrumental in engaging students in critical thinking. Most importantly, the club has helped students feel like they belong, which is critical for student success.

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