



Psychology Club Enhancing the Experience of Online Adult Learners

Brian Redmond

Debra Mynar

William Wells

Sonia Rodriguez

May 17, 2010

World Campus Psychology Club (WCPC)

- Student inquiry: Psi Chi
 - Nothing available
 - Pitched to department as essential resource
 - Students took action



Purpose WCPC

- Mission

- To create and maintain a central and comprehensive resource area intended to support World Campus undergraduate students by:

- building a sense of community and identity where members can share ideas and experiences.
- encouraging members to pursue and excel in their present and future education goals.
- fostering developing interests in professional fields of psychology.
- providing opportunities for members to enhance the leadership and communication skills necessary for success in academic and other pursuits.

Overview/History of WCPC

- First online psychology club in the world
 - Primarily adult learners
 - Open to all World Campus students who have taken at least one psychology course
- Held 8 events in addition to regular meetings
 - Meeting program administration
 - Career and grad school information sessions
 - Academic talks
- Works very similar to traditional psychology club
 - May actually have advantages over “traditional”
 - More formal/professional
 - Information is recorded to enhance sharing
 - Adult learners more focused on furthering education

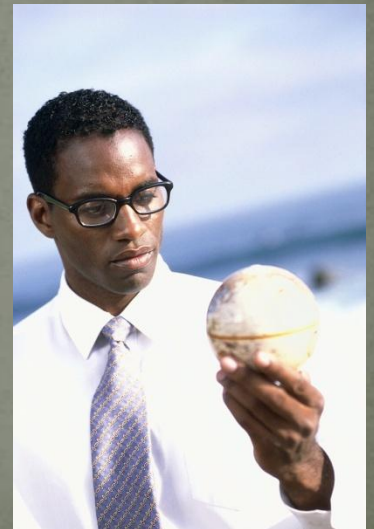
Literature Review

- Plethora of research on student engagement
- Zero previous research on online psychology clubs
- One study on online clubs
(unpublished dissertation; Ruggles, 2009)
- Very little research on psychology clubs
 - Usually in the scope of how can prepare for career and graduate school



Current Study

- Exploratory
 - Very little previous research to make hypotheses
 - Particularly as intent was different (enhancing current as opposed to future education)
 - Themes: usage, social, academic, improvements
- Ruggles (2009) survey adapted to WCPC
 - Survey sent to students by email invitation
 - Small sample: 11 (9% response rate)
- Qualitative comments/personal stories
- Preliminary step



Quantitative Results: Usage

- ANGEL
 - Login; median: 11-15 times during past year
 - Posting; median: 1-10 times
 - chat: 43%
- Second Life and facebook not as popular at this point
- Events; median attended: 1-2
- Primary purpose for being a member
 - 78% Academic



Quantitative Results: Social

- Purpose is clear and relevant to my needs – 100%
- Encourages discussion within the online community – 100% agree
- Discussion topics are relevant to the purpose of the WCPC – 86% agree
- Provides updated and accurate information – 86%
- Personally connected to other members – 72% agree
- Led to stronger ties with my fellow psychology students – 28%

Quantitative Results: Academic

- Having Penn State Psychology faculty participate in the WCPC is beneficial to me – 100% agree
- Recommend the WCPC to a new Penn State student interested in the study of psychology – 86%
- Led to stronger ties with the psychology faculty – 43% agree
- Helped me succeed in the psychology classes I have taken at Penn State – 29% agree

Qualitative Results: Comments – Social

- “I feel that the WCPC Club has been an asset to me during my time here at PSU. **I feel it has closed the gap that exists for many online student as we really do not get to know one another and become involved in anything other than our studies.** The club provides many useful activities and discussion and I feel the adviser is genuinely involved and here for the students which is also something that is missing in online education. It is not often one gets to interact with a faculty member that takes a true interest in our education and needs.”
- “I don't know where to begin! This club has, by far, been the best part of my educational experience! **Without this club, I would not have met and developed relationships with my fellow classmates or connected with professionals in the field. Most importantly, this club has made me feel like I am part of a "campus" and not just an "online" student.** Additionally, networking is the most important thing for any undergraduate--this club has certainly provided the means to learn and grow within the field. With this club, I feel that my career and educational goals have endless possibilities. Sure, there are barriers as an online student, but I have learned there are ways to overcome these barriers, and this club provides the support to do so. ”

Qualitative Results: Comments – Academic

- **"Because of this club, I feel like I received a complete education and not just a degree.** The social and peer sharing experience did nothing but enhance my learning and feelings of association."
- **"I've read the discussions and find it all very interesting and informative.** This is what I have been missing from the online studying."

Qualitative Results: Comments -- Improvements

- “The meeting times were usually inconvenient for me (being in the Midwest). While going through the numerous folders in the WCPC link in ANGEL, I noticed some discussion folders with no discussions in them and other folders with rather old discussions. I’m not sure if there is necessarily an issue with this, but if someone adds to the discussion 6-12 months later, then it is not much of a discussion if no one else is responding. With all the folders of discussions and topics (while they may be useful at some point) it seems almost like a part-time job trying to keep up with everything. I would like to feel more connected to people in the WCPC but right now I feel it is not very easy.”

“How to”: Administration

- Reach out to students – 67% responded to email invite
 - Sent every semester to “new” psychology students
- Infrastructure
 - Departmental support
 - Technology*
- Active participation
 - Student driven
 - Advisor guide
- Officers
- Constitution



“How to”: Technology

- Communication
 - Emails
 - Announcements in ANGEL
 - Conferencing software (Breeze/Elive)
- Information storage
 - Webpage(s)
 - Internal (CMS; ANGEL)
 - External
 - Facebook, Second Life
 - Department webpage (in works)



Challenges

- Pioneering new territory
 - Some administrative roadblocks
 - Stereotypes
 - Infrastructure not always there
- Coordination
 - Across time zones
 - Adult learner schedules



Successes

- Sharing
 - Information
 - Classes/studying
 - Future plans/opportunities
 - Resources
 - Materials (ex. Textbooks)
 - Professional associations
- Social → sense of community/reduced alienation
- Academic opportunities
 - Resume/C.V.
 - Learning opportunities
- Recognition
 - [PSU](#)
 - [USA Today](#)



Recognition

- Penn State Live – March 1, 2010
 - [Penn State Students Create an Online Psychology Club](#)
- Inside Higher Ed & USA Today – March 10, 2010
 - [Student Clubs, Virtually](#)
- About.com – College Life
 - [Unique college clubs and organizations](#)
- College Connections Radio Broadcast – March 27, 2010

Future

- Reorganization of infrastructure (Webpages)
- Continued talks
- Accommodations for more timezones
- Add service component
- Psi Chi



Discussion

- Club seems to be impacting adult learners in a positive way
 - Creating sense of community
 - Enhancing academic and social opportunities
- Questions?



Contact Information

- Brian Redmond
 - bfr3@psu.edu
 - 814-863-0409
- Debra Mynar
 - dam5283@psu.edu

References

- Dillinger & Landrum (2002)
- Landrum & Harrold (2003)
- Macera & Cohen (2006)
- Niemeyer, Lee, Saferstein & Pickett (2004)
- Ruggles (2009)
- Staudt (1951)