

Creating links in psychology: The effectiveness of a 4th year psychology support program (PsychoLinks)

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PsychoLinks program

- 4th year research and support program in School of Psychology and Counselling, QUT
 - Bachelor of Behavioural Science (Honours) Psychology
 - Postgraduate Diploma in Psychology
- The program aims to enhance students' research and project management skills and provide them with greater efficacy for decision making around career and further study choices
- PsychoLinks is the only structured research and career 4th year support program that currently exists in Australia

Development of PsychoLinks

- The program began informally in response to students' request for additional support in certain areas of their 4th year research projects, such as ethics applications.
- Positive response to these workshops; students reported increased confidence in negotiating these key thesis related tasks.
- Evolved into a formal program timetabled with thesis units.
- Feedback from 4th year students also indicated that they felt unprepared for life after 4th year.
- In response career preparation workshops were also integrated into the Psycholinks Program

Development of PsychoLinks

- Program now contains formal and informal seminars.
- The program also accommodates student-requested workshops (these differ from year to year).
- The program aims to enhance students' confidence in the two key areas of
 - Thesis and research related tasks
 - Career preparedness

PsychoLinks program (cont.)

- A combination of professional guest speakers, academic staff, and past 4th year students present seminars, panels and interactive workshops
- 2 hour weekly seminars
 - Thesis components (e.g., ethics and health and safety application forms, EndNote, writing tips, statistics, research design, thesis structure)
 - Career skills (e.g., networking, preparing for interviews, careers options in psychology, panels of past students)
- Program overseen by course coordinator but run by an HDR student in order to facilitate student focus and engagement. Attendance is completely optional

Example: Semester 1, 2012 Seminar Topics

Semester 1, 2012 Mondays 11-1, Room B301 KG		
Wk	Date	Seminar/Workshop
1	Feb 27	Career Mentor Scheme Thesis Project management & planning
2	March 5	Developing your research question
3	March 12	Advanced literature searches Introduction to Endnote: Tips and tricks
4	March 19	How to design a study
5	March 26	Ethics Applications Health & Safety Risk Assessments
6	April 2	Writing TIPS I – Research plan & incorporating supervisor feedback
RECESS		
7	April 16	Introduction to Key Survey
8	April 23	SONA: New Psych Research Management System (MC); Formatting word documents
9	April 30	Report writing – real world applications
10	May 7	PUBLIC HOLIDAY
11	May 14	Identifying skills and options for careers in psychology
12	May 21	Your peers as weapons of mass construction/ destruction feedback session General feedback
13	May 28	General consultation (Research plan due May 31 st , 8:30 pm)

Example: Semester 2, 2012 Seminar Topics

Semester 2, 2012 Mondays 2-4pm, Room N-519		
Wk	Date	Seminar/Workshop
1	July 23	Planning for semester 2 Project management – thesis process
2	July 30	Woohoo – I’ve got data! What’s next?
3	August 6	Critical thinking & writing Writing tips II – workshop
4	August 13	Data cleaning & screening & testing assumptions
5	August 20	Networking & building pathways
6	August 27	Qualitative Data Analysis workshop
7	Sept 3	Preparing for interviews: masters & employment
8	Sept 10	Further Study: Life as a Masters/ PhD student Application Processes
9	Sept 17	Reporting analyses in text, tables and figures: Finishing touches & last minute stats advice
RECESS		
10	October 1	Public Holiday
11	October 8	Your thesis in a nut-shell
12	October 15	Almost there! Drop in session and last minute feedback (SK)
13	October 22	Final drop-in and support session (SK) Thesis due 8.30PM Thursday, October 25th

PsychoLinks program (cont.)

- The program is supported by an online community blackboard site
 - Course-relevant support material
 - PowerPoint slides from workshops
 - Student and Supervisor Thesis resources
 - Work, scholarship opportunities
 - Conferences



Present study

Aim

To establish how well PsychoLinks supports the development of research and project management skills and enhances student's career development skills

Hypotheses

1. Students' confidence ratings in 5 key skill areas will increase over the course of each semester
2. Self-rated ability to fulfil thesis tasks will increase across the course of each semester

Method

- Data collection across 2011 & 2012
 - 37% ($N = 41$) of students enrolled completed both the pre- and post-questionnaires
 - 87% female ($M\ age = 28.90$, $SD = 9.07$)
- Measures
 - Pre-post questionnaires
 - Skills Beliefs Scale
 - Thesis Knowledge Scale

Results (Skills Beliefs)

Scale	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI
Research Skills				
pre-score	3.16 (0.76)			
post-score	4.18 (0.79)	-6.36	.000	-1.36, -0.69
Data Analysis and Collection Skills				
pre-score	2.98 (0.91)			
post score	4.20 (0.91)	-6.84	.000	-1.59, -0.86
Project Management				
pre-score	3.26 (0.87)			
post-score	4.49 (0.73)	-6.61	.000	-1.61, -.0.85

Results (Skills Beliefs)

Scale	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI
Working with Others				
pre-score	4.15 (0.99)			
post-score	4.82 (0.85)	-3.57	.001	-1.06, -0.29
Career Knowledge				
pre-score	3.74 (1.12)			
post score	4.30 (0.88)	-2.60	.015	-1.00, -0.12

Results (Thesis Knowledge)

Scale	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI
Thesis Expectations				
pre-score	4.08 (0.65)			
post-score	4.51 (0.54)	-4.57	.000	-0.63, -0.24
Thesis Enactment				
pre-score	3.87 (0.78)			
post-score	4.36 (0.59)	-4.14	.000	-0.74, -0.25
Thesis Planning				
pre-score	3.53 (0.71)			
post-score	4.13 (0.59)	-4.43	.000	-0.89, -0.33

Results

- Students' confidence ratings in 5 key skill areas increased over the course of each semester
- Self-rated ability to fulfil thesis tasks increased across the course of each semester
- Results provide initial support for the effectiveness of the program to enhance students confidence and ability.

Extra student feedback

- Some informal student feedback...
 - *“I loved PsychoLinks throughout the year, a terrific initiative!! Its [sic] so informative and I only wish there was more time to absorb all the great tips and guidance. Thanks to you and your team for a fantastic contribution to our course”*
 - *“Thank you so much for your work and help, support, dedication to PsychoLinks and general availability to us this year...”*
 - *“Thanks for all of the work you put into the PsychoLinks program this year. I know I got a lot out of it... they were really informative and very much appreciated”*

Future research

- Collect follow-up data on student postgraduate/ career outcomes
- Conduct research utilising other broader measures to evaluate program
- Continue to develop and enhance the program based on student feedback

Implications

- Including a 4th year support program provides students with additional research and career advice that enhances and supports the 4th year experience.
- Enhancing student confidence in thesis task enhances their independence in conducting research.
- Enhancing student independence helps supervisors to be able to concentrate on content rather than forms and processes.
- Students gain knowledge in preparation for applying for postgraduate programs and/or career positions

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