PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT PARTICIPANT POOL

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Overview

The psychology department participant pool allows for data collection from undergraduate participants in return for partial fulfillment of course requirements. All 100-level psychology courses require students to participate in a set number of research credits either by participating in research studies or a reading-and-writing alternative. This number of research credits changes each semester. If students do not complete this requirement, their grade in the 100-level course will be lowered by two levels (e.g., from a B to a C+). Thus, researchers play a role in participants’ grades.

In addition, researchers play an educational role for the students in 100-level courses. For many of these students, this is their first exposure to the research process; through their participation they are learning how psychologists conduct research. The presentation of informed consent, the research itself, and a thorough debriefing is an essential part of participants’ education.

To familiarize researchers with how to use the participant pool, we have prepared this document explaining the rules and regulations of using the participant pool, including procedures for gaining approval for a study, the steps required in order to solicit participation in your research projects, and steps to give participants proper credit for their participation. Please read this thoroughly, and if you have any questions about these procedures, contact the Academic Technician, Zared Shawver (Kaufman 100, 717- 245-1446, shawverz@dickinson.edu).

This document will specify tasks generally completed by faculty and those possibly completed by student researchers and is subject to change. All changes will be e-mailed to faculty supervisors and posted on our website.

All forms and documents will be available on our Department Website:

<http://www.dickinson.edu/departments/psych/participantpool.html>

# Researcher Guidelines

## What is a Credit?

One credit of research is equal to 30 minutes of research participation. If your study takes 30 minutes for each participant to complete, those who participate will earn one (1) credit; if your study takes 60 minutes, those who participate will earn two (2) credits, ad infinitum. All study times are rounded up to the next 30 minute interval. That is, if your study lasts any length of time less than 30 minutes it is treated as a one credit study; if your study lasts any length of time greater than 30 minutes, it is treated as a two credit study, ad infinitum. To the best of your ability, please keep your study’s length well within the 30-minute ranges to avoid situations where a 35 minute study is awarded 2 credits.

## Requesting Credits

One week prior to the semester starting, the faculty member in charge of the research project must submit a request to the Participant Pool Committee. This request is for all prospective participants for the faculty member’s own research, independent studies/honors projects, and 300-level courses. The credit request form is embedded at the bottom of this document as an appendix. In a given semester the number of available hours is divided among all entities requesting hours. 300-level courses receive their own allocation; if a faculty member teaching a 300-level course would like students to use the pool, s/he should submit a separate request for the course. If a request is not received before the due date, the pool cannot be used until the last 2 weeks of the semester (see section: Open Participant Pool).

The faculty member will receive notification of the number of hours allocated to her/him by the beginning of the semester. The faculty member may distribute the given hours among her or his research projects in any way with the understanding that s/he must use all of the allotted credits.

## Credit Use

Sona will prevent researchers from using more hours than were allocated by limiting the number of time slots that can be advertised.

Faculty members should make every effort to use allocated hours by posting sufficient sign-up hours for students. The Academic Technician will email faculty during the week of Roll Call to assess the progress of her/his research. If a faculty member will not be able to use the allocated number of hours for any reason, s/he should notify the Academic Technician. The PPC can either redistribute unused credits equally to the remaining users of the pool, or, if absolutely necessary, will notify psych 100 students that their requirement has been reduced. These changes will be made on a case-by-case basis.

## IRB Approval

Generally, the faculty supervisor will complete the IRB application, although students may do so, as well, with the faculty supervisor’s approval. In the IRB application, researchers must specify that the participant pool will be used for recruitment as well as stating the amount of credit the study is worth. The IRB is familiarized with the mechanisms of the participant pool, so researchers need only indicate that this is their chosen method of recruitment. If you plan to use the pool you must send the Academic Technician all IRB approval notices before you begin data collection.

## Study Approval

Log in to Sona, click on “Add a study.” Select the type of study you are conducting (i.e., standard, two-part standard, online survey, and online external survey). **Be sure to select the correct study type, as it cannot be changed once a study has been created.** You are required to fill in the following general information about your study: Study Name, Brief Abstract (initial description that participants will see), Detailed Description (more specific information that participants will see before signing up), Duration (rounded to 30 minute increments), Credits (30 minutes = 1 credit), Researcher (select RA[s]), Principal Investigator (supporting faculty member), and Active Study (check yes). An IRB code is not required, but before a study can be approved a final IRB approval must be sent to the Academic Technician. Additionally, if the study is an online external survey, you are required to put the link to the survey in Survey URL. You may also adjust the participant sign-up and cancellation deadlines to whatever best fits your schedule. Pre-requisites, disqualifiers, and course restrictions are solely at the discretion of the researcher on a study-by-study basis. Please consider carefully which options will be appropriate for your study.

Be sure to select “Yes” for “Email Approval Notice” when you are creating your study. This will generate an automatic email that is sent to the Academic Technician to review your study. The Academic Technician will review the information you have posted and inform you (within two business days) that you have been approved to start offering time slots for student participation. The Academic Technician will also add a Study Code (i.e., state name) at the beginning of your study’s name.

No researcher should post study time slots until they are completely ready to begin data collection. Thus, the faculty researcher and RAs should consult carefully with one another to determine that (1) the IRB project has full approval, and (2) the procedures for the research study are fully complete prior to allowing sign-ups. In the case of a study using computers or other technical equipment, researchers should test this equipment prior to posting time slots to fully ensure that their procedure can progress as planned.

Coordinate with the Academic Technician to use specific rooms in the psychology research suite. However, it must be stated in the study description that students will go to the waiting area in K157. The researcher will then meet the student in the waiting area and escort him or her to the specific research room. To use other rooms in the department (such as a lecture room for the administration of questionnaires in a group) contact the Conferences and Events Services (CASE; 245-1900). Please be aware that before CASE will accept a reservation from a student, a faculty member must first provide CASE with the names of students who are eligible to schedule rooms on their own.

## Research Assistant Training

Student researchers are required undergo a Research Assistant training that will be held prior to the start of any data collection (faculty researchers will be asked about their start-date plans around the 3rd week of the semester, and then the Academic Technician will plan the session for all RAs to attend; multiple and/or individual sessions may be required). During this ½ hour-long training, RAs will learn procedures on how to use the participant pool, the ethical obligations associated with conducting research with human participants, the educational role researchers play in teaching 100-level psychology students about the research process, and common *what-if* scenarios that they may encounter when conducting research.

Faculty may not provide their own training in lieu of the required training.

Student researchers must complete this training for **every semester** that they collect data. Our policies are regularly updated, and student researchers must have the most recent information. Additionally, minute details about running studies are difficult to remember, and the training each semester will reinforce all aspects of a researcher’s responsibilities.

## Web-Based Studies

For online studies, RAs will receive the Sona ID numbers of the students who participated in the survey in the last 24 hours. It is expected that these students will receive credit (or penalty, if the student missed the completion deadline) within 48 hours of receiving the list of participant ID numbers. A researcher may also opt to automatically give credit to online participants. Should the researcher want to learn how to set up automatic crediting, please contact the Academic Technician.

## Typical Research Session

1. Proceed through informed consent. A faculty member’s name should be associated with all research projects; during informed consent, the faculty supervisor should be clearly identified so that participants can contact him or her with questions or comments.
2. Proceed through the research session itself, according to the researcher’s procedure.
3. Provide a clear debriefing (verbally or in writing). The debriefing is an integral educational tool, during which researchers are educating students about the research process, topic, question, and methodology. Again, the faculty supervisor should be clearly identified.

## Verifying Participation

Researchers should verify that each participant (1) has a Sona ID and (2) has come to the correct study. These policies are to ensure that the students are participating in the right study and will be correctly awarded credit. It also ensures confidentiality, as Sona IDs ensure that participants’ name and email are not made aware to researchers.

## Procedures for awarding credit:

Log in to dickinson.sona-systems.com:

* 1. Beneath each student participant’s identification number, check either “Credit” or “No-Show”.
  2. All students should be awarded a credit or no-show within 48 hours of the study being conducted. After two days without credit or penalty being given to participants who signed up, the system automatically notifies the Academic Technician. At this time, your ability to continue using the Participant Pool will be formally questioned. (See Section titled “Revoke Ability to Use the Pool”.)

## Late Participants

Faculty and student researchers should discuss in advance how to handle the situation if a student, who had already signed up for the study, shows up late for a session. It is a good idea to make clear in the study description the importance of being on time. Here are the options for handling late participants: (1) If there is enough time, the researcher may mark the participant as ‘present’ and allow him/her to complete the study; (2) If the participant would not have time to complete the study, or if admitting the participant into the room may be distracting to other participants, the participant may be marked as an ‘Unexcused no-show’. Again, it is imperative that all researchers working on a given study choose, in advance, which method will be followed so that all participants are treated the same. Additionally, if a participant displays a pattern of not showing up to a particular study, they may be barred from participating in that particular study, limiting their options for completing the requirement.

Additional note: If a student shows up to a study who has not signed up and the researcher wishes to allow the student to participate, the researcher may log in and sign the student up for the current timeslot if it is prior to the start time for the study. If the start time for the current timeslot is passed, the researcher may create a new timeslot for the student. Alternatively, the researcher could email the Academic Technician with the participant’s Sona ID so that s/he can manually grant credit.

## No-Show Participants

Not all participants will show up to their designated timeslot. This may be because of any number of reasons, but they are to be marked as Excused or Unexcused no-shows in Sona. An Excused no-show may be marked if the participant cancels her/his timeslot or contacts the researchers in advance of the cancellation deadline (i.e., typically 24 hours before a timeslot). An Unexcused no-show may be marked if a participant tries to cancel her/his timeslot within 24 hours or fails to show up for a study without notice. Excused no-shows do not carry the consequences that unexcused no-shows do. If a participant accrues two (2) unexcused no-shows for any particular study, then that participant will no longer be able to sign up for future timeslots for the study that she/he accrued the two unexcused no-shows. That is, unexcused no-shows penalize the students and limit their ability to earn credits, but only for the study that they failed to show up to.

## Researcher Cancellation

If a researcher is unable to run a scheduled study session due to exceptional and unavoidable circumstances (e.g., weather, health, crisis, technological problems, etc.), s/he must notify participants through Sona with at least 24 hours’ notice. If a researcher must cancel timeslots within a 24 hours period, s/he must give credit to those individuals who were scheduled to participate in the cancelled study session; the researcher will lose those credits.

## Contacting Participants and Advertising Studies

Students in the pool will be notified via email each time a new study is made available. This email notification can be tailored to any specific groups based on study criteria and pre-screen responses.

Researchers ***may not*** contact individual students in the PP. Each researcher may request that the Academic Technician send out one additional email reminder to the PP per study later in the semester.

Researchers *may* hang fliers advertising *paid* studies, but not studies for credit in the PP. Researchers must make a ‘good faith effort’ not to advertise studies to students in the PP. To that end, researchers *may* advertise paid studies to students in 300- and 400- level classes via PowerPoint slide announcements before class. However, researchers *should not* advertise to 200- level classes, as they may contain high numbers of students in the PP. Researchers are normally not permitted to advertise their paid studies in 100-level classes to avoid confusion with the PP requirement.

## Open Participant Pool

During the last 2 weeks of the semester (the final two weeks of pool operations), the participant pool will operate as a “free for all.” During these final 2 weeks, researchers are free to advertise for as many hours as they can use. Also, during this time, faculty (or student/faculty) projects that were not given any hours because they did not meet the deadline for inclusion in that semester’s pool may advertise for as many participants as is needed.

## Submit Abstract at End of Semester

It is required that researchers submit an abstract describing the study to the Academic Technician to send to all students in the pool at the end of the semester. The abstract should include: (1) minimal background information, (2) research questions/hypotheses, (3) method (including a description of the participants), (4) main findings, (5) implications, (6) potential future directions, and, (7) contact information for the professor supervising the project. If data collection is not yet complete, abstracts may include “preliminary” results. However, abstracts must still be submitted for distribution to the participants.

## Revoke Ability to Use the Pool

Use of the participant pool to collect data is a privilege, not a right. Researchers must treat participants with respect. An example of not using the pool responsibly would be an RA failing to grant credit or no-show within 48 hours of the study, or missing scheduled research sessions. To encourage students in 300-level classes to use this resource responsibly, faculty should consider offering or deducting points from a student’s research project for misuse of the pool. A researcher may have her/his right to use the PP revoked if several violations occur (whether committed by the faculty or his/her RAs).

If problems occur, the Academic Technician will inform the student researcher and associated faculty mentor and request that the faculty address these issues with the RA. Consequences will be determined based on the nature of the violation and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The decision to revoke the right of an RA or a faculty member to use the PP can be appealed to the Provost of the College.

Composition of the Participant Pool

Below is the typical composition of the PDPP. If the population you are interested in studying is not well-represented by the PDPP, please consider recruiting some of your participants from outside the pool (and factor that into your credit request).

* Size: the pool tends to have 170-180 participants
* Gender: the pool tends to be 75-80% female
* Sexuality: the pool tends to be 90% heterosexual straight
* Race/Ethnicity: the pool tends to be 75-80% White
* Class Year: the pool tends to be 90% first years and sophomores

## Considerations for Credit Requests

* **Other Faculty Using the Pool**: please keep in mind that other faculty will be collecting data through the PDPP (and may be planning to publish this work) when making your requests – the pool has finite resources.
* **Research Courses**: before requesting credits for classes, consider having students collect some data from the PDPP but also be responsible for recruiting some participants themselves.
* **Eligibility Requirements**: if only certain participants can sign up for your project, be prepared to have your project up and running early in the semester – if posted too late, there may not be enough eligible participants needing to complete the requirement late in the semester.
* **Start Date**: projects should be available to participants by midterms (at the latest) – beyond this point, the alternative assignment is available to participants and without the option for research, you may lose some prospective participants.

## Responsible Use of the Participant Pool

* **Participants’ Grades Impacted**: the research requirement, which is part of the participants’ grades, varies from semester-to-semester and is determined by credit requests – if all allotted credits are not used by researchers, participants are negatively impacted.
* **Returning Credits to the Pool**: if researchers do not think they will use all the credits they were allotted at the beginning of the semester, these credits can be returned to the pool for other researchers to use – this must be done at least two weeks before the start of the open pool (i.e., by Week 10 of the semester).

# Appendix A: Credit Request Form

The form on the following page is an embedded document. Double click on the form and it will open up a new document. Make all of your changes in that document and ‘Save As’ to send it to the Academic Technician.

