

Baby Researcher Bootcamp: Navigating Integration and Identity Development as an Emerging Scholar

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Abstract: Undergraduate and early graduate students often enter academic research spaces with enthusiasm, but a limited understanding of the expectations, norms, and developmental trajectory involved in becoming a researcher. This 1.5-hour workshop, hosted by Tarleton State University's Psi Chi Chapter, aims to support "baby researchers" by demystifying the research experience and providing a structured, supportive framework for developing academic skills and professional identity.

To create an approachable and engaging atmosphere, participants will receive a "Baby Researcher Bingo" card upon arrival. Designed as a lighthearted icebreaker activity, the bingo card highlights universal struggles of early researchers, such as mixing up terminology, repeatedly searching basic concepts, feeling intimidated by more advanced students, or spending more time troubleshooting software than conducting studies. Once the session begins, presenters will reveal their completed cards, along with examples from graduate students or faculty, to show that these challenges are not signs of inadequacy but part of a shared developmental journey. This opening activity frames the workshop's central message: research challenges are not barriers to belonging but serve as reminders that participants are already part of the research community.

The workshop then explores how psychology labs operate, introducing a general hierarchy from faculty to postdoctoral researchers, doctoral students, master's students, graduate assistants, and undergraduate research assistants. Common lab roles such as lead coordinator, tech coordinator, risk manager, data manager, and recruitment coordinator are discussed, with an emphasis on how students can meaningfully contribute, regardless of differences in lab structure and experience level. The session also addresses how to identify potential mentors, communicate interest effectively, and begin integrating into a research environment.

Next, participants will receive a comprehensive overview of the research cycle, covering the development of research questions, ongoing literature reviews, study design, IRB processes, data collection, analysis, and manuscript or conference presentation preparation. The discussion focuses on the practical habits, tools, and strategies that make each stage achievable, while emphasizing the time, patience, and persistence required for research.

A core component of the workshop is the development of a researcher's identity. Participants learn about the progression from contributor (primarily observing and assisting), to project driver (taking ownership of subprojects), to mentor-in-training (supporting newer students). This framework helps students understand how responsibilities evolve and how their identity as a researcher grows through participation, collaboration, and reflection.

The session culminates in an interactive activity where participants create a personalized Researcher Identity Card. They will identify their strengths, areas for growth, research interests, core values, and one goal for the next SWPA cycle. The workshop concludes with a discussion in which participants can share insights from their cards, reinforcing the idea that becoming a researcher is an ongoing, community-supported process.