

Academic Partnerships: Old Friends and New Beginnings

Virginia Andreoli Mathie
James Madison University

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On August 3, 2000, 67 psychology teachers from high schools, community colleges, 4-year colleges and universities and graduate programs met in Washington, D.C. to renew friendships and celebrate the successful partnerships and work that had begun the year before at the National Forum on Psychology Partnerships. The forum was the centerpiece of the American Psychological Association Education Directorate’s Psychology Partnerships Project: Academic Partnerships to Meet the Teaching and Learning Needs of the 21st Century (P3). This reunion of more than half of the forum’s participants highlighted P3’s success as a model for establishing local, regional, national, and international partnerships among teachers at all academic levels. The impact of P3 extends beyond these new partnerships, though. P3 also underscored the importance of these partnerships in meeting the challenges that confront educators in the new century.

What has set P3 apart from previous national conferences on the teaching of psychology is the emphasis on partnerships as a way to enhance psychology education. In this new century, the needs and demands of students, faculty, legislators, and the public and the recent pedagogic, demographic, societal, economic, and technological changes pose profound challenges to teachers. In fact, Dolence and Norris (1995) and Katz and Associates (1999), among others, argued that educators must prepare for a paradigm shift if they are to deal effectively with the transformations of the “information age.” The issues before us transcend the boundaries of academic levels. Consequently, I believe that to develop effective solutions to these challenges we must establish partnerships with our colleagues within and across academic levels. Here are just a few of the challenges before us that illustrate the need for increased collaboration among teachers at all academic levels.

1. The number of students enrolled in psychology courses at the high school, community college, 4-year college/university, and graduate levels and the number of students graduating with psychology degrees are growing rapidly (Ernst & Petrossian, 1996; McGovern & Reich, 1996; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). Projections

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over the next 20 years reveal that psychology will be second only to business as the most popular undergraduate major (Murray, 1996). How will we teach, advise, mentor, and supervise large numbers of students in a cost-effective manner without sacrificing academic integrity? Through partnerships we can share scarce resources and help each other to develop creative strategies and pedagogical techniques to teach larger classes in ways that still foster the development of important skills such as critical thinking, active learning, and analytical writing. Coordinating advising resources across academic levels could provide another opportunity to control the growing number of psychology majors. While we want to welcome students into our discipline, we must also be sure that they understand the diverse nature of the field and have realistic expectations about the education and career options that lie ahead.

2. The increasing mobility of students poses new challenges. Approximately 50% of all freshmen and sophomores begin their college education at community colleges (Hansen, 1998; McClenney, 1998; McGovern & Reich, 1996) and a large percentage of these students transfer to other institutions. Additionally, students are demanding greater freedom to access the growing number of online courses offered by an increasing number of academic and non-academic institutions (Dolence & Norris, 1995; Duderstadt, 1999). How do we prepare students for these transitions and multiple enrollments? It will require a concerted collaborative effort to develop a more seamless and coordinated curriculum that will facilitate these transitions and maximize the continuity and quality of their education and advising across institutions and academic levels.

3. Data from 1993 and 1997 show that ethnic minorities are underrepresented in psychology and this underrepresentation increases as one moves through the continuum from baccalaureate degree, master's degree, doctoral degree, and finally, faculty positions in psychology (American Psychological Association, 1999; Holliday et al., 1997). At the same time, U.S. Census Bureau (1999) projections indicate the U.S. population will be much more culturally diverse by 2050. What can we do to increase the recruitment and retention of culturally diverse students in psychology and what can we do in our courses to prepare our students to live and work in a more culturally diverse country with a more global orientation? One solution would involve colleges forming partnerships with high school psychology classes and developing a pipeline to recruit these culturally diverse students into psychology at the college level. These partnerships would also allow all of us to benefit from the experiences and knowledge of high school and community college teachers who typically work with a more culturally diverse student body and help us to incorporate cross-cultural perspectives into our psychology courses.

4. Employers are increasingly demanding that in addition to good critical thinking, problem solving, communication, interpersonal, and leadership skills, graduates have real-world experience in applying their knowledge (Dolen & Norris, 1995; Oblinger & Verville, 1998). How can we increase the practicum, internship, and service learning opportunities available to students even as the number of students in psychology continues to grow? Local partnerships among teachers in high schools, community colleges, and universities and among these teachers and professionals in the community

could be one effective way to increase the number of potential sites for applied learning. Another benefit of these local partnerships is that they provide opportunities for shared supervision of students in the field to accommodate a greater number of students.

5. New technologies, including the Internet, have revolutionized opportunities for innovative and collaborative teaching and research at local, regional, national, and international levels. How can we make the most of these opportunities? Deliberate and sustained efforts are required to harness the power of these new technologies to form partnerships across academic levels and thereby increase communication and collaboration among teachers and the sharing of resources and professional development opportunities.

There are many other ways that academic partnerships could benefit psychology teachers and students. For example, partnerships also have the potential to

- give teachers opportunities to learn about the academic culture of other schools,
- provide a more inclusive network of colleagues to serve as resource people,
- provide opportunities for schools to expand course offerings with limited new resources,
- facilitate the development of assessment strategies that transcend or can be adapted for different academic levels,
- increase opportunities for joint grant proposals for external funds,
- increase recruitment opportunities for undergraduate and graduate programs, and
- provide models of teamwork and collaboration for students.

Of course, the process of building and maintaining partnerships across academic levels is not necessarily easy. Real partnerships across academic levels are collaborative efforts among colleagues who share a common vision and common goals, respect and value one another's expertise and contributions, view each other as equals with shared responsibilities and authority, and recognize the mutual benefits that can accrue from the partnership. Here are a few suggestions to facilitate the development of successful partnerships across academic levels.

Do not be afraid to contact teachers in other academic settings. It may seem like a daunting task but most teachers welcome the opportunity to talk with other people who are as passionate about teaching as they are.

Take the time to nurture the partnership, establish trust, and identify a shared vision and shared goals.

Make an effort to learn about the academic culture at your partner's workplace. Good communication is key to maintaining a successful partnership. To facilitate

communication it is critical that partners know the vocabulary, methodologies, governance structure, and practical concerns of others in the partnership (Bullough & Kauchak, 1997; Corl, Harlow, Macián & Saunders (1996).

Remember that the pace of work in a partnership may be slower than anticipated. Be prepared for this and be patient with the process and with your partners.

Partnerships are more likely to continue over the long term if they are integrated into the structure of the institution or a professional organization. This decreases the likelihood that the partnership is dependent on the energy and initiative of just one or two people and also helps to increase the continuity of commitment to the partnership.

We are entering a new era in psychology education in which partnerships among high school, community college, 4-year college and university, and graduate teachers play a crucial role in the success of the discipline and the quality of our teaching and our students' learning. Participants in P3 have been leaders in establishing many of these partnerships. I encourage readers to share their own partnership experiences through the PsychTeacher electronic discussion list so they can serve as additional models for the discipline.

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