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In this Issue!

- Message From the President
  [by Shawn R. Charlton]
- Confidentiality First: What High-Achieving Clients Ask of Therapists
  [by Martha Fernandez]
- Professional Writing Tips for Conference Abstracts and More
  [by Tyler N. Livingston]
- The Modern Language of Love: Responsiveness in Digital Communication
  [by Dylan Jenkins]
- Join Us for SWPA 2027!
- Meet Our Sponsors!
- Job Posting!
  University of Central Arkansas – Tenure Track Assistant Professor of Psychology

Message From the President

By

Shawn R. Charlton, Ph.D.

Professor and Director of Undergraduate Programs in Psychology

University of Central Arkansas



Between the Sessions: Building Community That Advances Psychology

As you walk through the hallways of a psychology convention, you will encounter an extraordinary variety of conversations and interactions. An undergraduate student explaining the findings from their first research project. An established scholar discussing unexpected results that challenge years of assumptions. Two faculty members from different institutions discovering overlapping research interests. A graduate student receiving advice about professional opportunities. A practitioner encountering research that answers a challenge from their work. An exhibitor introducing a resource that will transform how a faculty member teaches or conducts research.

Together, these interactions show why conventions matter for individual and disciplinary growth. Psychological science advances as ideas are tested and communicated. Conventions are where those ideas meet in real time, mix together, and, hopefully, spark new ideas and collaborations.
Scientific conventions provide a venue for sharing psychological science. They also create critical opportunities to develop the psychological scientists, professional relationships, and intellectual communities that help our science thrive.

Planning for the 2027 Southwestern Psychological Association convention in Houston led me to reflect on the importance of scientific gatherings and their connection to our theme, *Psychology in Service of Self and Society*.

Building Identity and Belonging

SWPA and psychological conventions, in general, tie directly to a question my students and I are exploring, one critical to understanding undergraduate growth and success: What does it mean to develop an identity connected to psychology?

When we train future psychologists, we rightly emphasize scientific knowledge, research methods, critical thinking, and the responsible application of psychological principles. However, what individuals know and can do does not fully capture what it means to belong to a discipline and to develop a disciplinary identity. Becoming psychologists is also about how we understand ourselves, how we view the world, where we envision our futures, and how we recognize our capacity to contribute to others.

My team and I are constructing a framework to explore these connections. Our emerging model considers five relationships that may shape psychological identity: (1) our relationship with ourselves, (2) our understanding of psychology as a scientific discipline, (3) our connections with the professional community, (4) our ability to envision possible futures, and (5) our understanding of the contributions we can make through psychological science and application.

Although we are still investigating these dimensions, how they develop, and how they interact, what we know so far provides insight into one of the major values of psychological conventions: helping people form and strengthen their relationships with psychology. A convention can engage all five dimensions of psychological identity.

The Power of Scientific Exchange

Like all scientific conventions, SWPA gathers to advance the discipline. Presenters share their findings, explain methods, discuss limitations, challenge interpretations, and consider new questions. Attendees question the data, challenge the assumptions, and provide new perspectives and ideas. The quality of our scientific programming is essential to the growth and development available at the convention.

High-quality science at a convention is strengthened by interactions between attendees. For example, when a researcher fields a challenging question from someone working in a different area of psychology, the unfamiliar perspective reveals an overlooked explanation and offers a new way to see their work. A discussion after a presentation suggests a new method or collaboration. An emerging scholar recognizes that scientific knowledge is not fixed but continually tested and refined. These moments strengthen disciplinary understanding by showing how psychology produces knowledge and our place in that process.

Interaction among scholars from diverse perspectives is essential to the health of our discipline. Scientific quality increases as scientists connect with a broader range of ideas. Scientific progress accelerates through the thoughtful exchange of differing perspectives. Experiencing the breadth of questions psychological scientists and practitioners in the Southwestern region are exploring strengthens our understanding of ourselves, our work, and the impact we can have in our communities.

Finding Our Place

If you are an established professional, take a moment to think back to a professional gathering that changed how you viewed yourself or your work. Perhaps someone asked a critical question during a presentation that forced you to think in an unexpected direction. Maybe a conversation during a poster session or in the hallway between sessions introduced you to a field you had never considered. Or perhaps a colleague encouraged you during a difficult transition.

Convention experiences like these shape belonging in the discipline. We come to feel like we belong when we see our interests, abilities, and perspectives reflected in the larger community. We encounter this type of belonging at a convention as we intentionally engage with new ideas and people.

If you are a student preparing to attend SWPA for the first time, you can expect that belonging may come from discovering that you can contribute meaningfully to scientific conversations. For an early-career faculty member, belonging may be enhanced by creating networks that extend beyond your home institution. For an experienced scholar, belonging may grow through reconnecting with colleagues, finding new collaborators, or mentoring those just entering the discipline.

Fortunately, we do not have to arrive at a convention already feeling that we belong. Participation enhances that sense of belonging and identity.

Understanding how conventions build identity and belonging comes with responsibility. Effective community must be built; it doesn't just occur when people gather in the same place. Community develops through engagement and interaction, including thoughtful questions, genuine interest, invitations into conversation, and introductions to new colleagues. These intentional moments communicate belonging and create community.

These benefits occur for everyone in the community. New members gain from the generosity and experience of established colleagues. Established members benefit from the fresh perspectives, questions, and energy new members bring. Community grows stronger as more people attend, and even stronger as more people fully engage and participate.

The Future We Build Together

A scientific convention also expands our sense of what is possible. Students are often familiar with only a narrow range of careers in our remarkably broad discipline. A convention makes that breadth visible by introducing students to researchers, educators, practitioners, graduate programs, and organizations whose work shows the many ways psychological science can shape a career, a life, and a community.

This future orientation matters well beyond the student years. Participating in a convention may lead an established faculty member to discover a new research direction. A practitioner may encounter an emerging application. A lifetime of professional development is about continuously discovering new ways to learn, grow, and contribute.

Connections formed at a convention extend far beyond the meeting as conversations become collaborations. Questions asked during presentations become future studies. Faculty and colleagues turn into future mentors and collaborators. Traditional measures of convention success rarely capture these outcomes, but they are central to the convention's lasting value.

Psychology in Service of Self and Society

The 2027 SWPA theme brings personal development and contribution into focus. Psychology serves the self by deepening self-understanding, clarifying lived experience, strengthening abilities, and building meaningful professional identities. Psychology serves society through the contributions we make as we use psychological knowledge to improve lives, advance education, strengthen communities and organizations, and address the challenges facing individuals and groups.

These purposes reinforce each other. For example, engagement during a presentation might help a scholar see their work more clearly, strengthening them as a researcher and generating ideas that further psychological science. An educator who discovers a new approach to teaching strengthens their own practice while improving learning for hundreds of students. A practitioner who learns a new skill feels empowered in their practice while providing better service to their clients and communities.

Because professional interactions are mutually reinforcing, much of our growth happens outside scripted meetings. It happens in hallways, poster sessions, the exhibitor hall, and the breaks between scheduled activities. Scientific progress depends on rigorous scholarship. It also depends on the relationships between scientists, practitioners, and students through which knowledge is communicated, challenged, extended, and put to use.

Join Us in Houston

What I've described above is the kind of community and connection I've experienced at SWPA's annual meeting each year. Since first attending SWPA in 2007, I've continually found greater understanding of psychology, connection to the field, and opportunity to impact my communities through my engagement with SWPA.

I invite you to join us April 2–4 at the Royal Sonesta Houston Galleria, where together we can advance psychological science and strengthen the people who make that advancement possible. Full details about the convention can be found at www.swpsych.org.

I encourage you to bring your work, whether it is your first investigation or the culmination of years of scholarship. Bring your curiosity, your willingness to engage with ideas outside your immediate interests, and your excitement for psychological science. And bring your classmates, students, and colleagues to join us in Houston this April.

SWPA 2027 will provide us with another rich opportunity to advance psychology through the science we present, the people we meet, the relationships we cultivate, and the contributions we make together.

I look forward to seeing you in Houston.

Confidentiality First: What High-Achieving Clients Ask of Therapists

By

Martha Fernandez, LCSW

Co-Founder

CEREVITY Health, Inc.



Physicians, attorneys and senior executives rarely doubt that therapy works. What they doubt is what it might cost them. A claim, a record or a licensing question can feel like a threat to a career built over decades, and that fear shapes the very first call.

The scale of it is measurable. In a 2026 CEREVITY review of 297 physicians who sought therapy through the network, 61% said they had postponed therapy because of licensing or credentialing fears, and the median delay before a first session was 22 months. These are the people who eventually came in. The review is internal and self-reported, and it has not been peer reviewed, so I offer it as a pattern worth attention, not as an established finding.

What they ask for in the first call

In my work, the opening questions are rarely about technique. They are practical, and they are about control.

Where the record goes. Who can see it, what it contains, and whether it travels with an insurance claim. Some people choose to pay privately for exactly this reason, because a claim places a diagnosis in a third party's system.

How sessions fit a calendar they do not control. Surgeons work around operating room schedules and trial attorneys around court dates. They ask for sessions that can move on short notice and that never require explaining an absence to staff.

Discretion about where and how. Telehealth, how a charge appears on a statement, and whether a name sits on a sign-in sheet in a waiting room are all real questions. None of them is vanity. Each is a way of asking whether the clinician understands what is at stake.

Meeting those needs ethically

Discretion is not secrecy, and the quickest way to lose a guarded client is to promise more than you can deliver. Standard 4.02 of the American Psychological Association Ethics Code requires psychologists to discuss the relevant limits of confidentiality and the foreseeable uses of information at the outset of the relationship, and thereafter as new circumstances may warrant. It also requires that clients who receive services by electronic transmission be told of the risks to privacy. The standard binds psychologists, and it is a sound benchmark for any clinician.

Records deserve the same plain talk. Standard 6.01 of the same code says records are kept to facilitate later services, to meet institutional requirements, to ensure accurate billing and to ensure compliance with law. Documentation is never only for us. Under the federal HIPAA rule, psychotherapy notes are a narrow category: notes by a mental health professional that document or analyze a counseling conversation and are kept separate from the rest of the medical record.

A covered entity must obtain an authorization for any use or disclosure of them, with limited exceptions. The definition excludes items such as session start and stop times, treatment modalities, test results, and summaries of diagnosis, treatment plan, symptoms, prognosis and progress. Those stay in the main record. A clinician should be able to say exactly which is which.

What training programs could teach

Most programs teach confidentiality as a rule to recite. High achievers need it taught as a conversation to have. Three additions would help.

First, record literacy. Students should be able to explain, in two sentences, what a client's record contains, who can request it and how long it is kept.

Second, the questions licensing boards actually ask. They differ by profession and jurisdiction, and the wording matters. In 2018 the Federation of State Medical Boards adopted recommendations that licensing and renewal questions focus on current impairment, not on illness, diagnosis or previous treatment. Wording on any given form may still differ, so a clinician's job is to help a client read the exact question in front of them and answer it accurately, and to suggest a licensing attorney when the answer is unclear.

Third, role-play of the first call. Practice answering “Who will see this?” without hedging or jargon.

Takeaways for early-career clinicians

1. State the limits of confidentiality in ordinary words in the first session, before the client has to ask. Example wording: “What you say here stays here, with a few exceptions. Depending on our state, I may have to share information if someone is at serious risk of harm, if a court orders it, or if you ask me to send records to someone. You can ask me about any of these at any time.”

2. Tell clients what is in their record, who may request it and how long it is kept.

3. Ask what worries them most about being in therapy. Do not assume it is the obvious thing.

4. Promise accuracy, not secrecy. Say what you will protect and how, and what you cannot.

5. Learn the specific questions that the licensing boards and employers in the professions you serve actually ask.

High-achieving clients are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for a clinician who knows precisely where the walls are, and who will tell them the truth about them. Saying so early is how trust gets built.

About the author

Martha Fernandez, LCSW, a licensed clinical social worker with eight years of clinical experience, is a co-founder of CEREVITY (Cerevity.com), a private-pay concierge network of independent licensed clinicians built for high achievers: executives, founders, physicians, attorneys and finance leaders. She is the author of Wired to Burn: A Therapist’s Guide for High Achievers Running on Fumes (2026).

Professional Writing Tips for Conference Abstracts and More

By

Tyler N. Livingston, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor & SWPA Professional Representative

Angelo State University



I offer an undergraduate research course in which students design and conduct a study, then report on it verbally and in writing. The written report is many students' most in-depth experience with scientific writing, so I share some tips with them. The SWPA abstract submission portal is now open, and I thought these tips could help SWPA students as well. They apply to abstracts and to professional writing of any kind.

Professional writing clarifies our thinking and prepares us to explain our work to others. We may have learned valuable skills in a research lab, but employers and graduate admissions committees will know about those skills only if we can describe them clearly and concisely. This is true for any career path in academia, industry, government, or a nonprofit organization. In each of these settings, it is necessary to document how we solved a problem, show that we understand the findings our work produced, and describe their practical implications.

Students often think foremost about formatting when we discuss APA style, such as 1-inch margins, double spacing, appropriate fonts, and citation format. APA style includes those rules, but its broader purpose is to make our writing easier to read. At the global level, it organizes writing into sections with clear headings and separates distinct ideas into paragraphs. At the sentence level, it asks for concise sentences that say only what needs to be said. At the word level, it discourages figurative language and colloquial phrases.

These guidelines differ from the conventions of literary writing that many students are used to. Literary writing uses devices such as metaphor and complex sentence constructions, which are valuable in writing that people read for pleasure. Scientific readers read for information. Many of them skim, and most will read a given section only once. Our writing does not need to entertain them. It needs to inform them efficiently so that no one needs to re-read a sentence to understand it. We should use direct, literal language that any reader can understand, whether that reader lives in our hometown or on the other side of the world.

Literary writing also varies word choice to avoid repetition. Scientific readers interpret a new word as a new concept. If we call a variable "power" in one paragraph, "status" in the next, and "dominance" in a third, a reader may conclude that we measured three different variables. We should choose one term for each construct and use it every time.

We should also write for readers outside of our lab. It's best to define each term before we use it and give the plain-language meaning first. Avoiding abbreviations and labels that only our research team uses can improve clarity. Reviewers, employers, and admissions committees did not attend our lab meetings, so terms familiar to us may be new to them.

Professional writing uses the active voice rather than the passive voice. In the active voice, the subject of the sentence performs the action ("We examined the effects of age"). In the passive voice, the subject receives the action, and the person who performed it appears later in the sentence or not at all ("The effects of age were examined [by the researchers]").

The passive version uses more words, takes more effort for a reader to process, and conveys less precise meaning.

The active voice entails using first-person pronouns. Many of our English teachers told us to avoid referring to ourselves in our writing and to use sentences such as "One might expect people to help less often when other bystanders are present." In professional writing, "I" and "we" tell readers who did the work: "We hypothesized that participants would help less often when other bystanders were present." Referring to ourselves in an abstract may feel strange at first. It is appropriate when we formulated the hypothesis, recruited the participants, or analyzed the data. We should state plainly what we did and take credit for it.

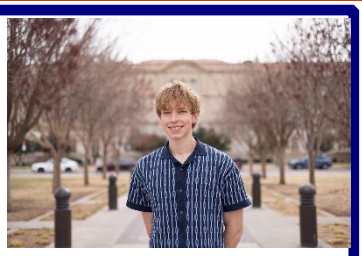
Quotations are another area where professional writing differs from literary writing. When we write about a literary work, we quote it directly to preserve the author's exact words, because the author chose those words and sentence structures with artistic purpose. Scientific writing is direct and literal, so there is no literary device to preserve. When we refer to another researcher's idea, we should paraphrase it and cite the source in parentheses. Paraphrasing means restating the essential part of an idea in our own words. It may feel like plagiarism, as if we were presenting someone else's idea as our own. It is not, because the citation credits the original author with the idea. Professional writers in the sciences paraphrase much more often than they quote.

Few writers produce concise sentences in a first draft. Revision helps us to remove unnecessary words, replace figurative phrases with literal ones, and confirm that each sentence says one thing clearly (I revised five versions of this newsletter article…). Starting an abstract early provides time to revise it. It also helps to ask a faculty mentor to read a draft, along with a reader outside the project. If that reader cannot explain the study after one reading, another revision may be beneficial.

Once we learn APA style and these conventions of professional writing, they become freeing rather than constraining. They give us guidance and direction for articulating our ideas so that we spend less time staring at a blank document on our screen. Professional writing is formulaic, and that is its greatest advantage. Once we learn the formula, we can apply it easily to each new piece of writing.

A Guide to Finding Funded Summer Undergraduate Research Programs

By
Dylan Jenkins
SWPA Undergraduate Representative
Texas Tech University



After a *long* freshman summer spent working in the meat department at my local grocery store, I made myself a promise: under no circumstances was I going back the following year. There was just one problem. I had no idea what else to do.

I wanted to pursue a career in psychology but hadn't the slightest idea what opportunities were available. So, naturally, I turned to Google, eventually finding myself deep in a Reddit thread (I know, I know, but Reddit *can* be helpful). That's where I discovered the National Science Foundation's Research Experiences for Undergraduates, or REUs.

As a first-generation student in my final year of college, I've repeatedly encountered academia's hidden curriculum: opportunities, expectations, and unwritten rules nobody explicitly tells you about. Discovering summer research programs was my first major encounter with it. Two summers of research later, I want to share what I've learned so you don't have to find these opportunities by accident.

What Opportunities Are Available?

Let's start with the basics. NSF REUs are federally funded programs that let undergraduates spend a summer conducting research, often at another university. Students typically work with faculty mentors, join a small cohort, and gain hands-on experience. Perhaps most importantly, you get paid to do it! Programs provide stipends and often help cover housing or travel. Depending on the site, you might also present your work and get a glimpse of what life is like as a graduate student.

But NSF REUs are only the beginning. There's also the Big Ten Academic Alliance SROP, the Leadership Alliance, university-specific programs such as Carnegie Mellon's SPUR, and internships offered by individual laboratories.

Unfortunately, no single directory lists every opportunity. Thankfully, Pathways to Science, Científico Latino, and PsychResearchList provide excellent starting points. And don't limit yourself to psychology! Programs in neuroscience, cognitive science, education, and even human-computer interaction might end up being very interesting. Just pay attention to eligibility requirements and funding. Some programs have citizenship restrictions, and a generous-sounding stipend might be less attractive when you discover you'll have to pay for housing yourself.

Finding the Right Program

With so many programs available, where should you apply? My advice depends on where you are in your research journey.

During my sophomore year, my strategy was simple: apply widely and see what happens.

I wasn’t sure what I wanted to research, and I figured I’d benefit from practically any experience. That summer, I ended up at an REU in Digital Accessibility at the University of Michigan–Flint. Human-computer interaction certainly wasn’t where I expected to find myself, but I developed new research skills, explored unfamiliar questions, and gained experience that I continue to draw on.

So, if you’re still exploring your interests, don’t be afraid to branch out. You might discover something you love. At the very least, learning what you *don’t* want to study can be equally valuable!

The following year, however, I approached things differently. I’d developed more specific interests and wanted to spend my summer working with someone whose research aligned with my graduate school goals. Instead of starting with programs, I started with professors.

That's how I ended up working with Kurt Gray at Ohio State. I asked whether he'd consider mentoring me through the Big Ten SROP. He hadn't even heard of the program, but liked the idea: it would cover my funding, and I'd contribute to ongoing research in his lab. Just like that, I had a willing mentor lined up before I'd even applied. And, fortunately for me, he was also the one reviewing applications for his lab. So, instead of applying to dozens of programs like I had the previous year, I applied to just one, was accepted, and spent the summer conducting research with him.

The lesson? If there's a researcher whose work interests you, see whether their university offers a funded summer program, then ask if they'd consider hosting you through it. You might be surprised by what comes of a simple email! Just check each program's selection process; a willing mentor, alas, doesn't always guarantee admission.

Preparing a Strong Application

Now comes the fun part: applying. Most programs request some combination of a personal statement, CV, transcript, and recommendation letters. My biggest piece of advice is to prepare these materials early, then tailor your application to each opportunity.

Rather than simply saying you love psychology, take the time to read about a prospective mentor's research. Did a particular study raise questions you'd like to explore? Explain what caught your attention, how it connects to your interests, and what you hope to learn from working with them. And please, don't invent a lifelong passion for every topic—it's enough to express genuine curiosity and excitement. I certainly hadn't spent my childhood dreaming of human-computer interaction!

Also, don’t be discouraged if you have limited research experience. Many programs are designed for students still developing their skills. Discuss what you've learned through coursework, employment, or other experiences, and explain if you've had limited access to research opportunities.

Finally, ask for help! I know this can be daunting, but having professors or graduate students review your materials can make a real difference. And don't forget to give your recommenders plenty of advance notice!

What You Can Do Right Now

I leave you with a parting challenge: go down a few REU rabbit holes! Most NSF REU deadlines fall between January and March, but other programs may close earlier, making fall an excellent time to start searching.

Explore the directories above and make a spreadsheet of interesting programs. Track deadlines, eligibility, funding, potential mentors, and required materials. Trust me, you'll appreciate having everything organized when application season arrives.

These applications may be your first attempt to put your research interests into words. That can be difficult when nobody has explained the process. It's exactly why I wanted to write this guide: you shouldn't need a lucky Reddit discovery to learn what's out there. If you have questions or want advice, please reach out. I'm happy to share what I've learned.

And remember, you don't need to have everything figured out before you apply. Be curious, explore your options, and give yourself a chance. You never know where you might end up. I certainly didn't!

Contact: Dyljenki@ttu.edu

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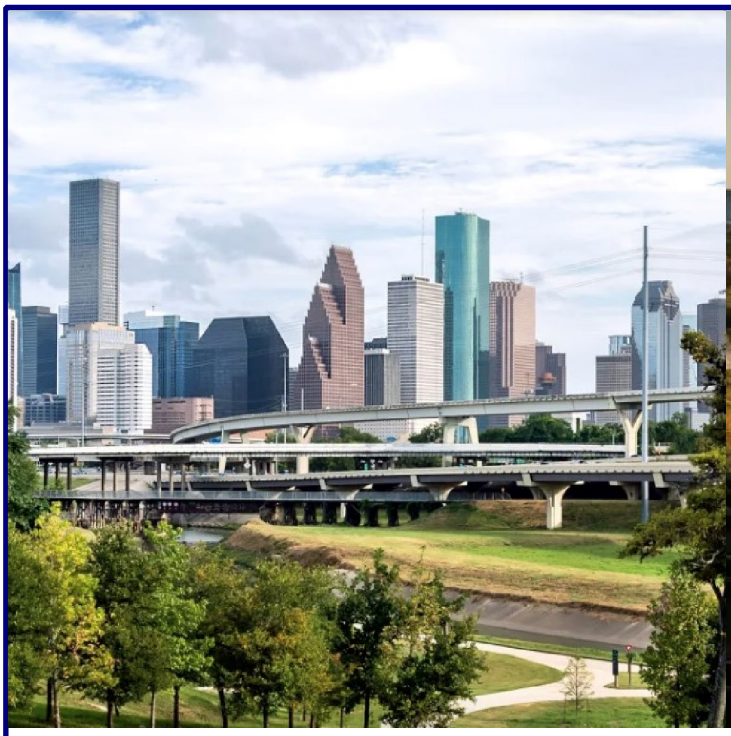
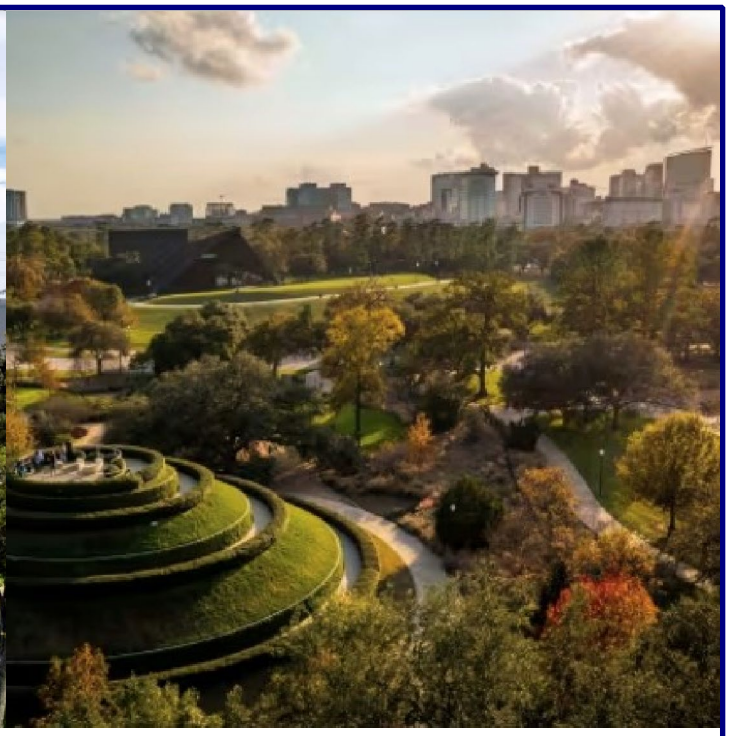
SWPA 2027!





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America's fourth-largest city is a cosmopolitan destination, filled with world-class dining, arts, hotels, shopping and nightlife. Take a stroll through the historic Heights, spend the day exploring the Museum District or head down to Space Center Houston. Later on, grab a bite in one of dozens of award-winning restaurants, or hang out with the cool kids on Washington Avenue. There's always something to do in this Southern hospitality meets urban chic city. Come explore YOUR Houston!

Want to know more about what awaits you in Houston, TX?

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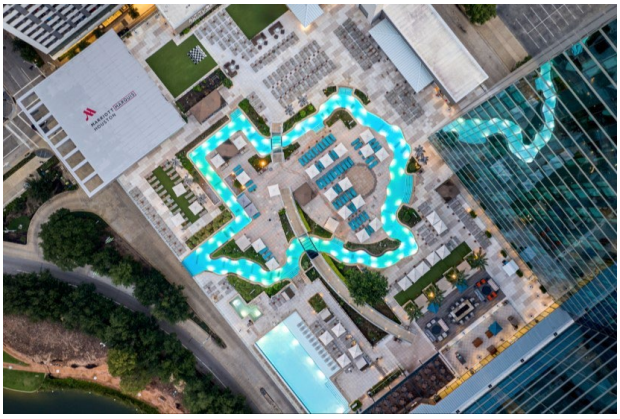

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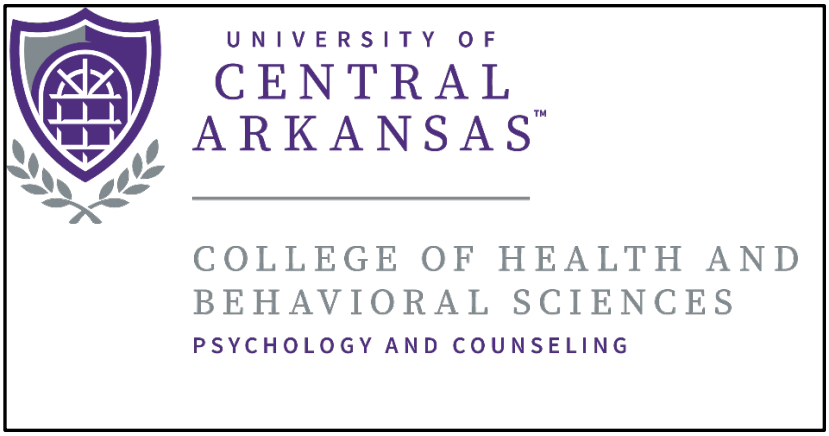

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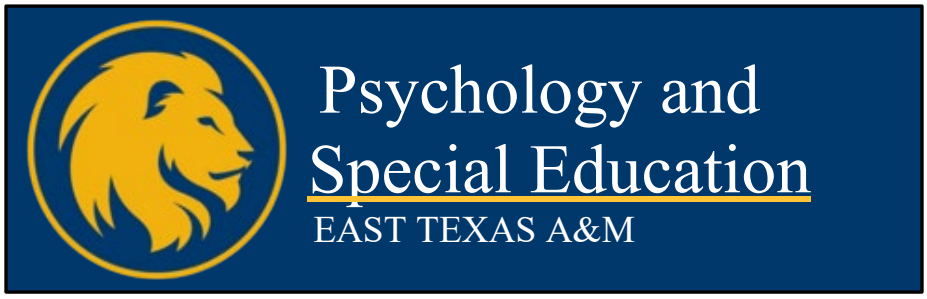

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELING

Tenure-Track Assistant Professor of Psychology

The Department of Psychology and Counseling at the University of Central Arkansas invites applications for an Assistant Professor, tenure-track position, to begin August 16, 2027. A Ph.D. in Psychology or closely related field is required. Areas of scholarship and expertise are open with some preference for candidates who can contribute to our programs/coursework in health psychology, sport psychology, or industrial/organizational psychology. We are eager to support applicants who bring diversity to the department and university.

▪ Position Responsibilities

- Serve as a core member of the undergraduate faculty with some teaching and mentoring in the graduate programs.
- Teach courses in line with program and department needs.
- Conduct an active program of research and scholarship with a clearly articulated agenda that supports the involvement of students as research assistants.
- Active engagement in curriculum and course design using best practice standards and informed by Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)
- Mentor students through professional and career advising and research.
- Serve the department, university, and community in ways that promote psychology.

▪ The Department of Psychology and Counseling

Our department includes approximately 100 graduate students and 550+ undergraduate majors. Department faculty includes licensed professionals and numerous experimental and applied psychologists who are all active researchers and committed teachers. Due to recent retirements, our department has many new collegial and productive professionals. The Department is located within the College of Health and Behavioral Sciences with opportunities for collaboration with other health professionals, e.g., nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, communication sciences and disorders.

UCA is in Conway, a growing, diverse, and economically vibrant city of approximately 65,000 people. About one-quarter of Conway's residents are Persons of Color. Conway is a 30-minute drive from Little Rock— Arkansas' capital and largest city. Conway, known as the "City of Colleges," has it all - UCA, two private colleges, a professional orchestra, live theatrical productions, and art museums and galleries. Conway residents enjoy easy access to myriad outdoor opportunities (e.g., scenic walking trails, bike paths, parks, lakes, fishing) within or close to city limits. The city also boasts of major industries and outstanding K-12 public schools. All the while, Conway's cost of living ranks well below the national average.

▪ Application Process

For full consideration, applications should be submitted by November 15, 2026, to https://jobs.uca.edu/

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www.uca.edu/psychology

Southwestern Psychologist Editor

Dr. Jeff Seger



We want to hear from you. Please contact us if you have any questions, concerns, or ideas related to the newsletter: jseger@cameron.edu.