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In this Issue!

Message From the President

By

Jonali Baruah, Ph.D.

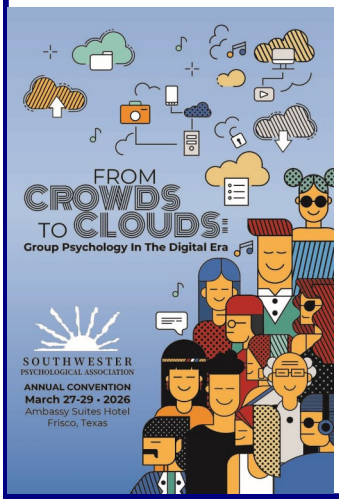
Professor

Tarleton State University

SWPA 2026 is just around the corner, and the energy is building. Many of us are already packing, finalizing schedules, and getting ready for what promises to be a truly memorable convention. Whether you come primarily to present, to learn, to reconnect with colleagues, or to find your next collaboration, I believe you will find a session that speaks to you.

This year's convention theme is *From Crowds to Clouds: Psychology of Groups in the Digital Era*. The title captures a transformation we are all living through. Human beings have always relied on groups, but the spaces where groups form, communicate, create, support, and influence each other are shifting. Our groups still matter deeply. What has changed is the environment in which the group interacts and the dynamics that shape its members' thoughts and actions. To make it concrete, let me begin with a scenario that I have often experienced post-COVID, and many of us will recognize it. In a hybrid class, half the students sit in the room and half join on video. The professor asks a question. The in-person students exchange glances and smile. The online students hesitate. A few turn the cameras off. Silence stretches. Then one online student types a thoughtful response in the chat. The professor reads it aloud. The in-room students nod. Another student builds on it also in chat. Soon, the chat becomes the real discussion space, while the physical room becomes a backdrop. After class, a student who attended in-person says, "I feel like the online students are in a different world." And an online student says, "I feel like I'm watching a class, not part of it." Same course. Same instructor. Different environments and different psychological experiences of belonging and participation.

From a classic perspective, Kurt Lewin's field theory reminds us that behavior is a function of the person and the environment, $B = f(P, E)$. In the digital era, we are watching the "E" change rapidly (Lewin, 1951). When the environment changes, patterns of behavior change, not because people suddenly become different, but because the conditions shaping attention, interaction, accountability, and belonging have been altered. A camera-off meeting is not the same environment as a face-to-face meeting.



The Embassy Suites by Hilton Dallas Frisco Hotel & Convention Center

A text-only brainstorming paradigm is not the same environment as a discussion around a whiteboard. A group where AI tools contribute to drafting, summarizing, or idea generation is not the same environment as one where all contributions are entirely human. This is why the psychology of groups in the digital era matters to corporate workers, students, educators, practitioners, clinicians, and researchers. It is also why the conversation has to include both benefits and tradeoffs, not just enthusiasm for new tools.

For corporate workers, the gains are real. Workplaces have learned that collaboration can be scaled, distributed, and made more flexible. Workers save money on gas and contribute less to their carbon footprint. Yet many leaders and team members feel that something is missing- spontaneous connection, informal mentoring, saying hello in the hallway and small interactions that quietly build psychological safety. When communication becomes more efficient, it can also become more transactional. When meetings become easier to schedule, they can also become more exhausting. Even our bodies experience the change. Video-based interaction can create cognitive and nonverbal load, contributing to *Zoom Fatigue* (Bailenson, 2021). The paradox is clear. We can be more connected than ever, yet feel more fragmented and tired.

For educators, the digital era has expanded access and flexibility, but it also reshapes motivation, participation, and accountability. Group projects look different when interaction happens through shared documents, chats, and intermittent video calls. Hybrid teaching adds a new complexity because instructors must track two "classrooms" at once. The pedagogical challenge is no longer only "How do I teach content?" It is also "How do I cultivate a community of learners when the group itself is distributed?" Although online asynchronous discussions offer flexibility, they suffer from a lack of spontaneity, high message volume, and difficulty establishing momentum. This creates another paradox that is worth naming. Activity can go up while belonging goes down. Instructors may see more posts, but students may still feel unheard.

For clinicians and those training clinicians, digital group processes shape care as well. Telehealth, online support groups, remote supervision, and virtual psychoeducation have expanded access, especially for clients who face geographic or logistical barriers. Yet the same shift raises clinical questions: How do we build alliance and trust when cues are filtered? How do group norms develop when members participate unevenly? How do we manage confidentiality, boundaries, and the emotional reality of presence when the "room" is virtual?

And for students, the digital era is not just a set of tools. It is a developmental context. Students today are constantly learning new things, collaborating on projects, and building relationships. They are doing all of this in mixed environments: sometimes face-to-face, sometimes virtual, and sometimes supported by tools that can generate text, summarize meetings, and even simulate feedback. This generation is not simply using digital group spaces. They are growing up inside them.

At the same time, the digital era can feel like a storehouse of information overload. Oxford named *brain rot* its Word of the Year for 2024. The term refers to the supposed deterioration of a person's mental or intellectual state, especially when it is viewed as the result of overconsuming online content that is trivial or unchallenging (Yousef et al., 2025). This matters for group functioning because attention and meaning are not just individual outcomes. They shape what people bring into their groups: listening, persistence, and the ability to stay cognitively present.

I recently learned a term that deserves careful research: *smart loafing*. Traditionally, we have discussed social loafing as reducing effort in a group brainstorming task because others will carry the load. *Smart loafing* describes something more strategic: intentionally reducing one's effort in human–virtual agent collaboration to conserve cognitive resources and increase efficiency at work (Abedin et al., 2022). That concept is provocative because it forces us to ask: When does offloading work as an adaptive tool and when does it erode learning, skill development, or accountability? In other words, what looks like efficiency today may be dependence tomorrow. We need research that can tell when offloading work is helpful and when it reduces real engagement.

Think about the broader social world. Our relationships and communities are increasingly mediated. Sherry Turkle offers a vivid example of this shift in how youths perceive relationships. She recalls a high school senior who suggested an AI program might be a better resource than his father for talking about dating because the program would have more "information" and more "cases" to draw on (Turkle, Essig, & Russell, 2017). Regardless of how one reacts to the story, it raises an important psychological question: When relationships begin to feel like information problems, what happens to trust, mentorship, and the development of judgment? The journey from crowds to cloud is about how human psychology persists, changes, and sometimes struggles as environments evolve. We will continue to innovate. New platforms will emerge. AI tools will become more embedded in learning and work. The cloud will grow. My hope is that SWPA 2026 helps us think more deeply about how groups function across contexts and how we can design environments, whether in crowds or in the cloud, that bring out the best of human collaboration.

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Publishing at a Teaching-Focused University

By

Tyler N. Livingston, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor & SWPA Professional Representative

Angelo State University

A mentor from my doctoral program asked me to share tips with their current students about how to maintain research productivity at a teaching-focused university. R1 faculty often do not wish for their students to seek jobs at non-R1 institutions, but some of us do so intentionally and without regret. Accepting a position at a non-R1 university is the start of your research career, not the end. I put together some reflections that might also motivate SWPA students preparing to enter the academic job market.

You Have Time for Research

It is a myth that teaching will take up all your time. If you prioritize research, you will have time for it. Remind yourself of that or risk making a pessimistic perception your reality.

Basic Resources are Enough

If you have a Sona system, a Qualtrics account, and an IRB, you can make significant progress toward your research goals. Lab space is nice but not essential if you collect data online. If you lack lab space and want to collect data in-person, reserve a classroom. Think creatively about how you can design your studies given the resources you have rather than letting constraints become excuses. They have constraints at R1s too.

Research Is Your Identity

When people hear you're a professor, they will ask what you teach, as if teaching is all you do. Answer by describing a current research project instead: "Well, I'm currently studying..." This habit reinforces your professional identity and keeps research at the forefront of your mind. My mom visited me in Texas recently while I was working on a manuscript revision. When I told her what I was doing, she said, "but you're a schoolteacher, you grade papers, you don't write them." Most people will not understand that a professor is not a schoolteacher, and much of our effort is spent on research. Remind yourself of your research identity because no one else will. And be patient with your mom!

Be Willing to Work Independently and Collaborate Selectively

You may need to work on research in bursts that fit your schedule. This means you need to be willing to work independently. Waiting on an inflexible collaborator will cause you to miss those sporadic windows of maximum productivity.

When you do collaborate, be selective. Work with the best people you know; colleagues whose work style and thinking align with yours. If you find those people, publish as much as you can together. Stop working with people whose collaborations feel awkward and require too many meetings to align goals and perspectives. Collaborations are like relationships: The good ones feel effortless and you don't have time for the bad ones.

Only take on projects that genuinely interest you. Nothing drains energy faster than research you don't care about. Nothing energizes you more than a topic you actually care about. It's tempting to accept invitations to join a colleague's study as "the statistics person," "the XYZ theory person," or "the good writer" thinking it will be an easy publication. In reality, working on studies outside your direct interests siphons time from research that energizes you. You'll feel obligated to prioritize your colleague's work to make a good impression and to be considerate. Those good intentions will translate to you not pursuing at least two papers in your own area using an equal amount of energy (yes, I checked the math on that conversion). Practice saying no, thank you, politely and professionally.

Let Commitments to Students Motivate You

Be motivated, not overwhelmed, by students asking for research experience. Students will show up at your office requesting research experience, many the semester before they graduate. Welcome them, say yes to more students than you think you can handle, and approach your work together enthusiastically. Always have something students can work on, even if you need to generate an idea quickly using existing data. You won't have time to start new data collections with most students, so maintain a backlog of analyzable datasets. Students help you stay active; without their requests, you'd do less research. Every student collaboration should result in at least a conference poster. Both of your CVs should reflect your work together.

Think Strategically about Time and Money

Schedule your classes to maximize productivity. If mornings are your best writing time, teach in the afternoons. If anticipating an upcoming class prevents concentration, teach in the mornings instead. Before I go to class, I occupy myself reviewing slides and rehearsing activity instructions even if I know them like the back of my hand. It is better for me to teach in the morning so that I do not waste time before an afternoon class looking over my materials repeatedly. For some people, leading a class drains their energy for the rest of the day so they benefit from teaching in the afternoons and writing before class. Try different schedules until you learn what's best for you. Also, try scheduling back-to-back courses on certain days to create full writing days, or spread classes across the week for smaller daily writing blocks.

Grant writing may not be a requirement at a teaching-focused university. That is an advantage. If you want to do research with limited time and attention, actually conduct studies rather than spending energy thinking about, proposing, and justifying them. You might protest that you need funding, but I'd question that assumption. Is there a free or nearly free way to answer your question? When a colleague wanted to test hypotheses about automatic responses to stimuli using fMRI, which required a grant, we instead implemented a free implicit association test (IAT) hosted on Qualtrics to test the same psychological mechanisms. A respected journal published the study just the same. Think creatively about feasible approaches.

Remain Current and Finish Projects

You are not too busy to read papers or attend conferences. Many of our best ideas emerge from learning about others' research. Assign papers you want to read to your classes if you need extra motivation. Devote time to reading and discussing research that might inspire your next project. Without this exposure, you might notice yourself lacking in creativity.

Finish your papers. A manuscript circulating among journals for multiple years accumulating reviews and rejections depletes cognitive energy. It idles in the back of your mind and distracts from new projects. Target appropriate journals, submit to lower-tier outlets if needed, and lean toward placating reviewers rather than provoking another round of revisions. Unfinished papers block your research pipeline. No paper is perfect, so don't chase perfection. Just finish them and move to the next one.

The belief among some R1 faculty members that accepting a position at a teaching-focused university means the end of one's research career is only as accurate as we allow it to be. Embrace the many opportunities associated with non-R1 institutions when you enter the job market.

Join us for

SWPA 2026!

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