

Food for Thought

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First, you take an introduction to psychology class and recognize that understanding the multitude of topics in psychology won't be easy. Then you make an even quicker realization that sorting through an infinite number of Web sites on every imaginable issue is unlikely to make your assignment any easier.

There is a place on the Web, however, capable of single-handedly condensing your online routine: The Psi Café at www.psy.pdx.edu/PsiCafe. Psi Café is an easy to navigate virtual space peppered with artistic references to Greek mythology. There you will find the impossible – neatly organized psychology themes linked to many interesting Web sites.

In the site's Resource Section, for example, you can access carefully assembled information on careers, research, and graduate training in psychology, along with resources on funding, psychological associations, and the history of psychology. Each area in the Resource Section has subsections, many of which are divided into even more specialized areas. Students might find the graduate training section helpful, particularly the information on choosing graduate programs, applying to schools, and taking the necessary entrance exams. For those students already in graduate school, a section on teaching resources offers insight on the basics of course planning. In addition to providing links to outside resources, Psi Café offers an introduction to each section and briefly discusses the nature of the posted material.

Yet despite its expansive nature, Psi Café is the brainchild of a single person: Nicole Sage. A graduate teaching assistant and doctoral student in the department of psychology at Portland State University, Sage devoted her summer of 1999 to tracking down and cataloging the valuable psychology sites dispersed throughout the Web. "I worked on one section at a time," Sage recalled of the site's building process. "I used tons of different search engines."

Psi Café was Sage's response to the positive feedback she received from students about the online teaching tools she had posted on her personal Web site. "I included the online resources in a list of references," Sage said. "I had students come back to me after a couple terms and say they found my site very helpful, and that they kept going back to my links in their future classes." Students' appreciation for additional learning tools inspired Sage to "make this one big site."

And she did, without having ever taken a formal class on Web design. "For me, Web site development is a hobby," Sage said. Now her leisure pursuit offers more than 2,000 pages and benefits both students and instructors. "Instructors e-mail me to ask if they could link to Psi Café in their class," she said. "It became a kind of addiction. I just kept building section after section. It grew bigger than I thought it was going to."

Psi Café's best covered areas are the Key Theorists section, which showcases information on prominent personalities across a dozen disciplines; the Research in Psychology category, further divided into Research Methods, Statistic, and Scientific Writing subsections; and the Developmental subsection,

located within the Areas (Subfields) in Psychology section, which comes as no surprise, since Sage's major area of emphasis is developmental psychology. Other resources include magazine articles, course materials, quizzes, dictionaries, and interactive learning tools all related to topics in psychology.

Aside from its undeniable strengths, however, Psi Café has problems. Some links lead to commercial sites such as the Online Marriage Agency. "That was what I did initially to get visible," Sage explained. "I talked to every person who was willing to exchange links with me, so I could advertise without having to pay."

Though she would like to eliminate these links, Sage has good reason to be a little distracted, between being a part-time teacher, part-time student, and full-time mother. "I would love to go back and delete the partner sites, now that I have the visibility," she said. "If I could find somebody to collaborate who knows how to do Web design, that would be ideal."

Even with all that on her plate, Sage and Psi Café still offer juicy bites of psychologically substantive cuisine.

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