

Recruiting and Retaining a Quality Research Team

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A quality research team is essential to conducting psychological research. While it is certainly possible to hand out surveys yourself, often research is far too complex for independent data collection. Perhaps you need confederates for your experiment. Perhaps you need to collect data when you are not physically available to do the work yourself. Sometimes you may need to collect so much data that it is infeasible to do it alone, or have so many components to your design that it is impossible to execute them alone. These are all common areas where a research team can be of assistance. However, quality research teams can provide valuable contributions beyond data work. A quality research team can provide feedback that can catch potential problems during the early stages of data collection, alert you to the unforeseen, and even make theoretical contributions that shape your research in a positive way. With all of the potential benefits of a quality research team, virtually every graduate student can benefit from recruiting and retaining one. However, not everyone is aware of how to recruit and retain a research team.

Recruiting a team requires you to be proactive. First, find out from a professor what options you have regarding student recruitment. Many schools have some form of independent study that allows students to receive credit for work done in a lab. In rare cases, students might even be able to be paid out of a grant.

Once you know what options you have available to present to the students, it is time to start recruiting. I have found success in building research teams by visiting mid-level psychology classes. Students in these classes range from the occasional sophomore to seniors. Talk to the instructor of the class and ask for a minute of time to recruit research assistants. Explain to the students why research experience is important for them to have. Briefly discuss the various projects that are in progress for which you need a research assistant. You should also talk about what kinds of help are needed on those particular projects (confederates, experimenters, data enterers, or coders). Finally, provide contact information and allow participants to contact you. Once you have been contacted, you should individually interview each of the potential research assistants.

Getting first-time research assistants is only half of what can be done to have a quality research team. Retaining research assistants semester to semester is extremely important. This is especially essential when you are conducting complex research that requires significant amounts of training to implement. Retention is an ongoing process that starts as soon as the research assistant starts working with you. You must treat your research team with the utmost respect. Most research assistants do not particularly like doing data entry and if you have them do data entry all semester, chances are they will not come back. However, most research assistants also understand that data entry is part of the job and will accept doing the data entry as long as they get rotated to other responsibilities.

Soliciting feedback from your research assistants is important. They are on the frontlines of your research, and might notice something you haven't. Occasionally, they might have an idea that will

greatly improve your research design. It is important to listen to these suggestions, because they bring a different and valuable perspective to the research project.

Being a part of a research team can be a rewarding experience for all involved. The research assistants get valuable experience in the research process, and this experience gives them an edge in preparing for graduate school. You, as a researcher, get invaluable assistance in collecting data. Recruiting and taking the time to retain your research team will lead to great things for everyone.