

Local I-O Groups: Are We Ready to Pass the Torch? How Local I-O Groups Are Engaging With Students

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“The best way to prepare students for the future is by empowering them in the present.” – John Spencer (2019)

As with most growing fields, the future of I-O rests in the hands of our students. Growing the next generation of leaders requires more than just time in the classroom. If students are to forge the path for the future of I-O, they must be empowered to lead rather than follow the path already traveled. Local I-O groups provide extraordinary opportunities for students to grow and lead today.

SIOP's Local I-O Group Relations Committee wants to recognize the unique contribution that local groups serve in not only facilitating the growth of our future leaders but also in providing a platform for students to shape the direction of the field. In this article, we highlight the activities of some of the local I-O groups that have stepped up to provide meaningful development experiences for students. We hope these ideas may inspire other local groups to embrace the contributions that students bring while they prepare to take the torch that we will soon ask them to carry.

Who Are the Local Groups?

We reached out to local I-O groups to learn more about what they are doing to involve students. We heard back from several organizations who reported they have actively worked to involve and serve students using multipronged strategies. We will summarize best practices and recommendations provided by the following local groups. The professional organizations profiled in this article include Blacks in I/O, GAIOP, METRO, MPPAW, and SCIOPN. All of these organizations reported offering students a variety of ways to stay connected to I-O by promoting learning from others, networking, expanded learning opportunities, and leadership experience. Examples of each of these local group activities will be addressed below.

Blacks in I/O is a professional networking organization meant for practitioners, students, and allies. They attempt to create a more inclusive industry and to get information about I-O into minority institutions and HBUs. Their Spotlight Member series serves to highlight professionals and bring awareness to Black I-O students. (<https://www.blacksiniopsych.com/>)



Top: CHAIOP helped organize event and rented team vans to drive to SIOP pre-COVID; Bottom: SCIOPN pre-COVID happy hour gathering in Burbank

The **Georgia Association for Industrial-Organizational Psychology** (GAIOP) is a professional organization created to promote sharing of ideas and information about psychology as applied to work and human resource management. (<https://www.gaiop.org/>)

The **New York Metropolitan Association of Applied Psychology** (METRO) is a group dedicated to serving the needs of applied psychologists and related professions in the greater New York area. METRO hosts events in NYC and attracts professionals and students from the metropolitan NY area. (<https://www.metroappspsych.com/>)

Minnesota Psychology Professionals Applied to Work (MPPAW) is an inclusive, professional organization that meets seven times per year in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Founded in 1998, the group promotes education, sharing ideas, and information exchange among scientists and practitioners; and supports the advancement of the field as a science and as a profession. (www.mppaw.org)

The **Southern California I-O Psychology Network** (SCIOPN) is a local group of I-O psychology practitioners and researchers building meaningful connections and community in the Los Angeles and Orange County area.

The **Chattanooga Area I-O Psychology Group** (CHAIOP) is a 100% student-driven and student-led organization started by **Chris Cunningham** and the graduate students at University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. The organization's focus is on professional development for students, and it serves the 2-year MA program. What sets CHAIOP apart from many student organizations is its mission to reach beyond student participation and welcome professional practitioner and academic members with similar educational and professional interests. Its stated purpose is “to strengthen the connection of local I-O Psychologists in the Chattanooga area.” In addition to providing opportunities for meeting, learning, and networking, the group emphasizes community involvement by partnering with other professionals and organizing activities that support the greater Chattanooga area.

The **Clemson Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology** (CSIOP) is managed by doctoral students at Clemson University, located in northwest South Carolina. Although it is also managed by graduate students, this group extends their influence by actively recruiting undergraduate students as well.

“Developing leadership skills is likely to enhance psychology students' training and professional competence and serve to strengthen the profession as a whole.” (Kois et al., 2016)

Building Tomorrow's Leaders

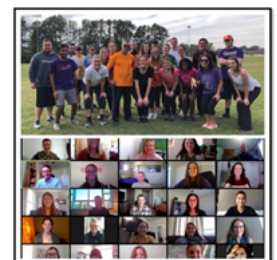
Like the familiar 70-20-10 rule often cited for executive development programs (Center for Creative Leadership, 2019), many of the most valuable learning activities for graduate students happen outside the classroom. Although we are not able to include all the ways that local I-O groups contribute to the professional development of students, we think these practices provide a great sample of the possibilities.

Learning from others. The career impact of mentoring and other relationship-based learning has received attention from researchers and practitioners alike. Having a mentor has been found to impact key career outcomes such as compensation, promotions, and company loyalty, as well as increasing both career and job satisfaction (Allen et al., 2004). For many I-O graduate students, local groups offer an opportunity to build sustainable professional relationships with professionals beyond the faculty whom they already know. A few local groups have formalized the process of making those connections with great success.

- MPPAW established its formal mentoring program beginning with a pilot in 2011 (Scott & Hezlett, 2013). Nearly 10 years later this program is still going strong with around 5–10 mentor–protégé pairs assigned each year. Participating students (or early career professionals) and potential mentors are solicited for participation each fall and are matched based on responses provided on the application survey. Mentors are selected based on fit for protégé career goals, interests, and expectations for the mentoring process. Although MPPAW offers some structure and support for the mentoring relationship, it is up to each mentor–protégé pair to jointly establish goals and cadence for the program year. Mentors often provide career advice and guidance in areas such as networking, interacting professionally, internship or job searches, interview preparation, and career path exploration. As an alternative to 1:1 mentoring, students may choose to participate in a group-mentoring engagement. This arrangement provides options for the “matchmakers” because there are often more people seeking mentors than there are people volunteering to be mentors. Students choosing the group-mentoring option benefit from the mentoring activities as well as from new relationships built between students in the group. Some protégés may choose to participate for more than 1 year, first in group mentoring and later in 1:1 mentoring.
- METRO’s most student-focused event is its annual Career Day. During this full-day event, students learn about various career options for I-O psychologists by hearing from successful professionals from academia as well as internal and external consulting. This year’s Career Day was hosted virtually in early March 2021 and included panel discussions with early career psychologists, internal practitioners, external consultants, and academics representing many of the top employers for I-O psychologists. The remote virtual meeting format also allowed for more intimate discussions between participating students and panelists through the use of virtual breakout rooms. FYI: You do not need to be a METRO member to participate in METRO’s Career Day, although members pay a discounted registration fee.
- Opportunities to shadow I-O psychologists at work is one of the benefits that CHAIOP offers its members. By matching students with I-O practitioners in various roles throughout the greater Chattanooga area, this process provides students with a good taste of the day-to-day work performed in different roles and careers within the field of I-O. It also supplements academic training by allowing students to see practical applications of what they learn in the classroom. One huge bonus: These shadowing experiences often lead to networking opportunities that help students land internships or jobs after graduation.
- CHAIOP’s biggest annual event is the River Cities I-O (RCIO) Conference, which they’ve hosted each fall since 2008 (<https://new.utc.edu/arts-and-sciences/psychology/rcio>). This conference draws students and professionals from throughout the Chattanooga area. The conference has a specific theme each year and is scheduled from Friday evening through the end of the day on Saturday. Submissions are peer reviewed and students gain invaluable feedback on their research. Friday-night presentations focus on how to get into graduate school and obtain jobs with a psychology degree. The conference is funded through donations from local organizations, as well as funding from the school. Local hotels also provide support by offering discounted rates for the student attendees.

Networking. Networking is clearly a benefit of joining a local I-O group. In fact, networking is often a major reason why local groups exist at all. In surveys conducted with local group members both within the US and around the world, “networking” was cited as the main reason for joining a local group by most respondents (Farmer et al., 2015; Erickson, et al., 2017). Many local groups offer discounted rates for student attendees, making it easier for them to mingle with professional group members. Groups such as MPPAW and METRO hold time for mingling and networking during a “social hour” prior to meetings (that is, when groups can meet in person). In addition, some groups have taken extra steps to facilitate networking between student and professional members. For example,

- METRO partners with local schools (Montclair, Baruch, Hofstra) where, for a minimal flat fee, faculty bring their entire class to a METRO event. This gives students a chance to sample the organization before needing to make a commitment. Additionally, each month, two METRO members (including students) attend dinner with the featured speaker of the evening. This is an amazing chance for students to meet with the speaker and for the board to ask questions and discuss the meeting topic post event.
- CSIOP promotes networking by hosting a reception at the annual SIOP conference where current students can connect with alumni. They also host various social events to promote networking, such as the “What Do You Meme” game nights with cash prizes and other events such as “Clemson graduate student bingo.”
- Blacks in I/O provide a safe space for building networking skills by facilitating dialogue between students and professional members during every meeting. Within many local groups, volunteering activities provide students with opportunities to get involved. Volunteering offers many networking opportunities, not only with I-O professionals in the field but with students across different programs in the area.



TOP: CSIOP pre-COVID kickball game;
Bottom: CSIOP First Friday event during COVID

Expanded learning opportunities. Some local groups offer workshops that provide members opportunities to acquire new skills and potentially earn certification and/or continuing education (CE) credits needed for licensure. Workshops can be prime learning opportunities for students who are able to attend. To encourage student attendance, these local groups offer deep discounts or waive fees for student members.

- GAIOP partners with SIOP to offer CE credits required for licensure renewal for members attending their quarterly workshops. They waive these fees for student members, which allows students to attend these half-day workshops for free.
- METRO offers educational opportunities for its members, such as certification to interpret a personality assessment. The board is working on expanding credential/skill workshops (e.g., visualization in R, coaching, antibiotics training), which students may not typically be exposed to in their academic programs.
- CSIOP hosts monthly First Friday events that include both academic and applied presentations. They have also used faculty expertise and contacts to schedule programming. For example, they recently hosted a military panel consisting of three speakers.

Taking the lead. Last, but most certainly not least, we think you’ll agree there’s nothing that develops leadership skills quite so well as *actually leading*. Local I-O groups provide excellent opportunities to build leadership skills within their day-to-day operations. We want to acknowledge that many local groups actively recruit and include students in leadership roles and volunteer opportunities. In addition, we want to highlight several student-led organizations in which the students have been very proactive in building professional development opportunities for themselves. These organizations have been particularly active in regions where the local community or metro area does not have a targeted local I-O group.

- CHAIOP finds that sustaining a student-led organization can create unique challenges, especially when program participants are typically there only a couple of years before earning their master’s degree and moving on. As such, succession has been key to success. CHAIOP officers are voted in in their first year and serve during their second year. Officers have specific roles with clearly articulated tasks (president, event coordinator, branding ambassador, and community liaison). CHAIOP, like any well-run I-O organization, has a clear succession system in place, with a documented process for the current officers to train the incoming officers. A second student-led local group, CSIOP also has dedicated board positions (president, vice-president, secretary, social events coordinator, social media chair, treasurer, undergraduate chair, alumni and UG liaison) with elections every spring. To ease leadership transitions, CSIOP has

created cheat sheets to help incoming officers easily step into their new roles. Faculty involvement is limited and mostly relegated to helping reserve rooms, plan events, and, most importantly, to leverage communications to identify and invite potential speakers.



METRO pre-COVID Hogan talk event

- MPPAW has a long history of including students on their slate of officers. In fact, about half of the group's executive board are students in local I-O graduate programs. MPPAW is fortunate to have several universities offering I-O psychology degrees (doctoral and masters) within the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area. MPPAW has welcomed the contribution that students bring to the organization. METRO has specified roles on the extended board for which students can volunteer. These roles include technology director, career day director, sponsorship director, social media director, and education director. This system helps create informal succession plans with individuals who serve in these roles generating a strong pipeline of members who often become future board members upon graduation. These positions allow students to expand their skillsets, such as managing a professional organization and developing a reputation in the field.
- Finally, we want to acknowledge the work of **Naz Tadjbakhsh**, who established SCIOPN while she was a graduate student at Alliant International University-Los Angeles. Inspired by her experience at SIOP, she worked to continue the learning and exchange of ideas by establishing a local group in the Los Angeles and Orange County area (Tadjbakhsh et al., 2017). As Naz described, SCIOPN is composed of like-minded professionals (including students) who share an interest in promoting the science and practice of psychology to the world of work and organizations to enhance the ways people experience work. She states that the organization's primary purpose is to operate as a community of practice while also providing networking opportunities.

"Recognize and accept that students are earlier in their careers and are almost always very eager to learn. They have that spark and excitement that we all had when we just started out in our careers, which gives a reviving energy and renewing vibe to the group." - Naz Tadjbakhsh, founder Southern California I-O Psychology Network (SCIOPN)

Challenges and Recommendations

Involving students in key leadership roles is not without its risk and challenges. For example, students may face time constraints at different points of the year, and their time may become more limited than previously anticipated. Balancing the desire for high-quality monthly speaker events while ensuring affordability, engagement, and interest from student members can also be challenging. When we asked the local and student groups to outline challenges faced as well as recommendations for best practices, a common theme was the importance of succession planning to ensure a smooth running of the organization, as it may be difficult to accurately project time commitments for volunteer activities.

Here are some recommendations for local organizations to further their engagement with students:

- CSIOPN suggests creating transition cheat sheets with transparency regarding potential time commitments. Creating specific roles with clearly articulated responsibilities and promoting a collaborative environment may be useful.
- Consider the time that graduate student classes meet and strategically schedule events to minimize conflict. METRO, for example, looks at spring break schedules for all local schools before scheduling their Spring Career Day. Similarly, GAIOP and SCIOPN actively reach out to local schools with an I-O presence and factor in student schedules when planning events. Alternating days of the week when events are offered creates flexibility for students taking evening classes.
- Find connections and gain engagement from all I-O psychology programs in the area. METRO's board also plans to continue leveraging educators within the community to help bring in student perspectives.
- Focus on providing workshops that can advance students' business skills and statistics knowledge. Leaders from multiple organizations suggested asking members about topics they want highlighted and workshops (Qualtrics, R, Tableau) they identify as particularly relevant.
- Blacks in I/O also plans on releasing a scholarship with an engaging application process to give back and offer opportunities to students experiencing challenges.
- Maintain a running list of backup speakers, as this can be particularly helpful for last minute cancellations from speakers.

As Blacks in I/O wisely told us, "Take a pulse of your organization, and listen to your membership!"

Conclusion

As we must acknowledge, today's students will be carrying the torch going forward. Thus, student involvement in local I-O groups is essential and highly encouraged. The organizations we featured in this article have done remarkable work keeping students in the forefront. We hope we shed some light and offered valuable insights to local I-O organizations seeking meaningful ways to engage students. The future of I-O rests in good hands, those of our own students!

SIOP'S Local I-O Group Relations Committee is an ad-hoc committee tasked with promoting conversations and collaborations between leaders of local I-O groups. The committee offers a number of tools to support the establishment and growth of local groups across the US and around the world including tool kits, event calendars, and forums to connect local leaders. For more information about existing groups in your area or for support in establishing a new local group, visit this page on the SIOP website (<https://www.siop.org/Membership/Local-I-O-Groups>) or email the committee at Local_IO_Groups@siop.org.

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