SONA PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH SYSTEM USER GUIDE for INSTRUCTORS

The UAB Department of Psychology uses a web-based system to schedule research appointments and assign students credit for research participation. The following information is provided to help Introductory Psychology instructors understand how to use the system.

I. General Information

A. Access

To directly access the Sona system, please use the following URL: https://uab.sona-systems.com. You also can access the system by going to the home page for the UAB psychology department and following relevant links.

B. Account and Course Set-Up

All instructors will need an instructor account. To obtain an account and register your course, send an e-mail to Ed Cook, the PY101 Research Participation Coordinator (ecook@uab.edu).

C. Last Day of Participation

The Sona system will stop assigning research credits at the end of the last day of regular classes. Students will not be allowed to participate in research during or after the finals period in a given semester.

II. Using the System

A. Log In

Go to the front page of the Sona web site (https://uab.sona-systems.com). Enter your BlazerID and password.

B. Generate a Course Report

1. After you login, select the “Course Reports” tab and then Click on the “All Participants” link.

2. You will see a course report on your screen. The report will present your students’ names, the credits that they have earned and the credits that they are required to earn.

3. Note that you will need only the first and last column of the report (student names and hours earned for your course).

4. At the bottom of the web page, you will have the option of downloading and saving this report to your PC. After you have saved the report, you can open it with Excel.
C. Change Your Email Address

You might prefer to have Sona communications sent to an e-mail address other than your UAB address. To provide an alternate email address, simply update your information via "My Profile" on the top toolbar.

III. Missed Appointment Policy

The Psychology Department had a long-standing policy regarding missed study appointments, whereby students who simply failed to show up for appointments received a negative credit. However, in January 2010 the federal Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP) determined that such penalties violate the section of the federal regulations that requires that research participation be voluntary, and that refusal to participate in research involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. Interestingly, this determination was specifically in response to the penalty function implemented in the SONA system, though it would apply to us regardless of whether we used SONA or not. The OHRP letter to SONA may be viewed at http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/Correspondence/sonasystems20100108letter.html

It would theoretically be possible to retain the negative credit policy for students participating in projects for PY315, because that participation does not fall within the federal regulations. However, this distinction among projects is not technically or administratively feasible. We have therefore reconfigured our SONA implementation so that researchers cannot award negative credits for no-shows.

While we have discontinued the policy of “awarding” negative credits, the Research Requirement for Introductory Psychology, which all PY101 students should receive, makes clear that students bear a responsibility to either attend their research appointments once they have scheduled them, or to cancel them at least 24 hours in advance. It notes that:

Such “no-shows” inconvenience other students. In most cases, the time that you scheduled was removed from the list of available times during which other students could participate, and thus by signing up and not showing up you have needlessly limited their opportunities. Also, it’s very likely that another student is conducting the research and will have scheduled time away from other activities to come to the lab where the study is being done, set up for your participation, and wait for your arrival. Please be considerate of others by keeping track of your scheduled appointments for research participation and cancel your appointment in advance if you are no longer willing or able to participate in a study.

Please emphasize these points when you introduce the research requirement in your class. However, it is not appropriate to suggest to students that they can receive negative credits, as such threats clearly violate the federal regulations as interpreted by the OHRP.

To discourage no-shows, the SONA system does send reminder e-mails to participants, and allows researchers to record no-shows even though there are no penalties. Researchers are asked to report “no-shows” and we will continue to monitor the situation to determine whether any alternative policies for dealing with this problem need to be implemented.