

PSY 311(01) - Controversial Issues in Psychology

TH 2:30 – 3:45 ASH 2320

Winter 2017

Instructor: Mihaela Friedlmeier, Ph.D.

Office: ASH 2309

E-mail: friedlmm@gvsu.edu

Phone: 616-331-8706 (office)

616-331-2195 (Psych Dep)

Office hours: Online office hours (using Blackboard Collaborate), Monday 11 to 12 and Wednesday 12 to 1.

E-mail: Please be aware that I may not respond to email inquiries that involve information that has already been covered in the syllabus or in class.

*This syllabus is subject to change. Changes (if any) will be announced in class or posted on Blackboard. Students are responsible for keeping informed of any such notices.

Course Description:

This course aims to introduce you to a number of issues and controversies in psychology; it is also designed to teach critical thinking on a broader level. When confronted with contradictory information, differing opinions and points of view, it is necessary to have and work on improving your ability to comprehend and evaluate available sources and material. The use of such “critical thinking skills” can have a profound impact upon one’s life in terms of academic, professional, and personal success.

SWS Course: The GVSU handbook states: “*Courses that have received the SWS designation are not merely courses that require written assignments; they adhere to certain guidelines. Students turn in a total of at least 3,000 words of writing during the term. Part of that total may be essay exams, but a substantial amount of it is made up of finished essays or reports or research papers. The instructor works with the students on revising drafts of their papers, rather than simply grading the finished piece of writing. At least four hours of class time are devoted to writing instruction. For a three-credit course at least 1/3 of the final grade is based upon the writing assignments.*” It is GVSU policy that you must receive a grade of C or better in this course in order to get SWS credit. A C- will not do.

Main Course Objectives:

- 1) To provide you with thinking skills that will enable you to analyze and evaluate complex issues in psychology.
- 2) To help you to improve your ability to express arguments in oral and written format.
- 3) To encourage you to learn how to acknowledge different viewpoints and become more tolerant of diversity.

Class Format:

Classes will be a mixture of discussion, group debates, and some lecture. You will be expected to read and write **extensively**. Only important points from the reading may be emphasized in lecture format. The readings for this class are often difficult and will require you to read the material twice or three times. Make sure you will allocate the necessary time for this! At many times, discussion will center on sensitive and complicated issues, which may involve deeply held beliefs and opinions. Feel free to disagree with and challenge each other’s opinions and statements, but do so in a respectful way that focuses on the issues, not the individuals.

Materials for class:

No textbooks are required. Most of the reading material will be available in pdf or word files that can be downloaded from Blackboard. For some topics, copies of the readings will be provided in class by the instructor.

Course Outcome Measures:

Your final grade will be based on the total number of points that you receive on two exams (one midterm and one final), debates, one major paper, and participation points.

Exams: Each exam consists of essay questions drawn **from lectures, readings, class discussions, and in-class videos**. Make-up exams will not be given unless there is a family emergency or a severe personal health problem. In such cases, please notify me by phone or email BEFORE the scheduled exam time. Make-up exams will be different than those given during regular class time.

Paper (more detailed instructions will be discussed in class): this will be on a topic of the student's own choosing of a controversial issue in psychology (these topics will be cleared with the instructor first; see schedule for specific date). You will be graded on the quality of your writing as well as the content of your arguments and the selected texts. We will spend a significant amount of class time covering content and format of the paper.

A paper is penalized five percentage point for every day it is late (papers submitted after 11:59PM of the due date are already considered late papers). This penalty will be routinely assessed, *regardless of the reason for its lateness*. The only exception is illness, mental or physical, where a licensed health practitioner writes a note indicating the reason for the lateness. **No late work will be accepted one week after its due date!**

Debates: we will have a total of 3 to 4 in-class debates this semester (each will be worth 5 points). More details in class. In order to get any points, you have to be present in class and participate actively.

Participation points: In order to facilitate our discussions, you are expected to write and bring to class three questions about the readings every time a set of readings has been assigned for that day. The questions you compose should both (a) demonstrate that you have thought about the readings, and (b) be designed to stimulate potentially interesting discussion of the topics at hand. Your questions will be collected in the beginning of the class and will contribute to your participation points. Depending on the quality of your questions, you may receive 0, 1 or 2 points (11 topics X 2 = 22 points max.). I will not accept questions sent via e-mail.

In addition, students can earn one point per topic by showing extra critical thinking initiative: finding information, correcting an argument in class or generally going above and beyond in terms of class participation or discussion of *relevant* material.

Grading Scale

			<u>Final Grade</u>	
	<u>Points</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	A	94 - 100%
Midterm Exam	50	21.55%	A-	90 - 93%
Final Exam	60	25.86%	B+	87- 89%
Debates (4 X 5)	20	10.78%	B	84- 86%
Final paper	75	32.33%	B-	80 - 83%
Questions Submissions (11 X 2)	22	09.48%	C+	77 - 79%
Total	227	100.0%	C	74- 76%
			C-	70 - 73%
			D+	67- 69%
			D	60 - 66%
			F	59% and lower

** This is a tentative syllabus, including the grading scale

Class Attendance:

Attendance will not be taken. BUT, you will be expected to come to every class, prepared to ask questions and discuss issues. Participating in group discussions, and reading assigned materials before and after class are crucial to getting a good grade and learning something from this class. If you are unable to attend class, make sure to find out what has been covered in class (from your classmates, NOT FROM THE INSTRUCTOR). Students are responsible for checking Blackboard each time before class for announcements.

Please turn off your cell phone in class and use your laptops only for class purposes!!

Plagiarism:

Any attempt to pass another author's words as one's own will receive a failing grade with NO exceptions. The claim of "I didn't know that was plagiarism" will not be acceptable. This is particularly relevant for the increasing use (copying, pasting) of internet documents and articles.

Writing center:

This is one resource for those students who feel that they need more assistance with their writing skills. They offer free peer consulting services in writing and a walk-in center for students with papers, *particularly in SWS courses*.

Additional Thoughts:

As you cover the readings for class, share your thoughts with others during class, complete your assignments, I urge you to pay attention to how you've come to hold the beliefs that you have. What sources of knowledge do you use to support your beliefs? How do you respond to evidence or arguments that question a belief that you hold? What do you do when you recognize contradictions among some of your beliefs? When do you find that it makes sense to change a belief? These are all important questions to consider...

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE & READING ASSIGNMENTS

	Topic	Readings
Week 1 Jan 10 and 12	Syllabus discussion Critical thinking, biases, testimonials and pseudoscience Q & A: paper topics for the paper	No readings
Week 2 Jan 17 and 19	Do adults repress childhood sexual abuse? Is the concept of repressed and recovered memories valid? (+Video “Divided Memories”)	Kluft & Loftus 104-122; Tavris, APA link
Week 3 Jan 24 and 26	Debate: Religion and human development: a positive link? Jan 28 Deadline to choose paper topic	McBrayer, 2014; Galen, 2015 Saraglou, 2006
Week 4 Jan 31 and Feb 2	How to raise children with a “growth mindset”: does praising help? Paper Instructions	Henderlong & Lepper 774–795, Kohn 24-30, Dweck, 2015
Week 5 Feb 7 and 9	Debate: Effective & beneficial parental discipline methods (spanking, time-out, etc.)	Gershoff et al., 2010; Gershoff, 2013; + websites
Week 6 Feb 14 and 16	Is divorce bad for children?	Hetherington et al., 1998; Amato & Cheadle, 191-206; Wallerstein and Lewis, 2004
Week 7 Feb 21 and 23	Midterm exam: Tuesday, Feb 21 Feb 23: Further Paper Instructions	
Week 8 Feb 28 and March 2	Is There a “Narcissism Epidemic” Among Contemporary Young Adults?	Twenge, Arnett, Twenge, + interview with Twenge
Week 9 March 6 and 12	Spring Break ☺ ☺	
Week 10 March 14&16	Nature/Nurture: Human Violence	add Documentary “Mind of a rampage killer”
Week 11 March 21&23	Debate: Should adolescents who commit serious offenses be tried and convicted as adults?	Steinberg, 2009; Fischer et al.; Steinberg’s response, + Documentary, When kids get life
Week 12 March 28&30	Nature/Nurture: Gender Differences in Academic Achievement	Lindberg et al. & Olszewski-Kubilius and Lee
Week 13 April 4 and 6	Nature/Nurture: Gender Differences Evolutionary explanations of gender differences in jealousy	Buunk et al., Harris, DeSteno & Salovey, reply by Buunk et al.
Week 14 April 11 and 13	Topic of Students’ Choice Final Draft due April 12	
Week 15 April 18 and 20	Suggestions for critical thinking	Material distributed in class
Final Exam Monday, April 24, 12:00 pm - 1:50 pm		