

**Controversial Issues in Psychology (PSY 311)**  
**Winter 2017**

**Section A:** TR 2:30- 3:45 ASH 2121

**Section B:** TR 4:00- 5:15 ASH 1320

**Instructor:** Luke Galen, Ph.D.

**Office:** 2220 ASH

**Office Hours:** Tues/ Thurs: 10:00 – 11:00, and by appointment

**Phone:** 331-2904

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**Course Description:** Develops the skills of critical thinking (analyzing the arguments of other people and forming one's own reasoned judgments) about controversial issues.

**Course Objectives:** This class does not merely address specific controversial issues, but is also designed to teach critical thinking on a broader level. The course is also an SWS course. Therefore the objectives are as follows:

- 1) Factual knowledge of specific controversial issues based upon research.
- 2) Ability to identify underlying issues that create or lead to controversy.
- 3) Ability to generate opposing points of view and synthesize them.
- 4) Development of critical thinking (analyzing the arguments of other people and forming one's own reasoned judgments) skills.
- 5) Develop the ability to research and express ideas clearly in a written format.

**Texts:**

Ruscio, J. (2006) *Critical Thinking in Psychology: Separating Sense from Nonsense (2<sup>nd</sup> ed)*. Thomson/ Wadsworth.

Wilson, T.D. (2002). *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious*. Belknap/ Harvard.

Readings from course e-reserve will also be used or digital files posted on course blackboard.

**Class Format:** Discussion with some lecture. Students will be expected to read the assigned chapter or handouts for the week and come to class prepared to talk about them. Additional information not found in the book will be provided in lecture format. Similarly, important points from the reading may be emphasized in lecture format.

**Prerequisites:** WRT 150 with "C" or better.

**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.*"

A large proportion of the grade will be determined by your writing skills. In addition to developing formal arguments on controversial psychological issues, the student will be expected to

express them verbally in class and in written format in the papers. The instructor will revise paper drafts so that the student can receive feedback on his/her writing. Writing on quizzes, tests, and papers will be graded for clarity of content as well as mechanics.

**Grading:**

	<u>Points</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Exam I (Midterm)	40	20%
Exam II (Final)	50	25%
Paper I (Midterm)	30	15%
Paper II (Final)	40	20%
<u>10 In-class quizzes/ assignments* (5 pts each x 8)</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>20%</u>
Total	200	100%

\*Drop lowest 2

**In class quizzes:** There will be 10 class assignments or quizzes throughout the semester. They will not be announced ahead of time, and as such, cannot be made up. The student may drop the lowest 2. They will cover the reading material and lecture and are specifically designed so that the student keeps up in the reading and attends lecture. Each assignment or quiz is worth 5 points. They are also important because some of the material on the quizzes will be used on the exams. Quizzes are usually done in the first 5 minutes of class. **To prevent students from walking in late and getting the answers to the quizzes, no quizzes will be given to late-comers, and the blank quizzes will be discarded after the class. Since the student can drop the lowest 2, no questions asked, missed quizzes cannot be made up. In the case of a take-home assignment and the student was absent during class, that will count as one of their drops.**

**Papers:** More detailed handouts will be given for the 2 papers. The first and shorter paper (“midterm”) will involve the student summarizing a controversial issue in psychology. These issues will be chosen from a list provided by the instructor, the students may be required to look up and cite some sources (e.g., books, journals) to state the opposing sides of the argument and then discuss the two views. The second and longer paper (“final”) will be on a topic of the student’s own choosing. (These topics will be cleared with the instructor first). The format will be essentially the same as the midterm paper, but more in-depth. Each of these papers will be submitted in draft form to be graded and returned for the final draft. For details of this process, wait for the handouts on each paper.

**Extra credit:** Extra credit is not planned but students can earn an occasional miscellaneous point 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. No more than 4/200 points.

**Attendance:** Daily attendance will not be monitored, however in-class quizzes will not be announced and **cannot be made-up**; therefore, poor attendance will result in loss of points. In addition, since the material covered in quizzes and in class will be used on the exams, it will be difficult for students to perform well on the exams without good attendance. Students should read

the assigned readings before they are scheduled to be covered in class. If a student is absent or late it is their responsibility to keep up with class material and announcements.

**Academic Dishonesty:** Any evidence of cheating (e.g., using notes during exam, looking at another student's answers, plagiarism, copying portions of the paper from other sources) will result in a failing grade in the course and any other actions as allowed by GVSU policy (e.g., dismissal).

**Plagiarism:** A full discussion of plagiarism will accompany the writing units throughout the course. But 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.

**Disabilities:** If you have a disability, it is up to you to determine if you wish to disclose that information and request classroom accommodations. If you wish to request educational accommodations due to a disability, you should register with the Disability Support Resources (4015 JHZ; 331-2490), if you haven't already done so. If you wish to request needed accommodations, please meet with me privately (e.g., during office hours) to discuss how to best meet your educational needs. This should occur early in the semester rather than later (e.g., after failing a test).

**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*. Students writing papers for any course can stop by for a walk-in session to get detailed feedback on their work at any stage in the writing process. Located in 120 Lake Ontario. 331-2922

**Make up exams and late assignments:** Any absence on the exam dates will result in total loss of points. Missed assignments due to emergency situations (illnesses, death in the family) will **require appropriate documentation**. It is the student's responsibility to notify the instructor. Assignments handed in late will be reduced **one letter grade for each class late**. I recommend printing out assignments ahead of the scheduled due date because of the unusually high rate of printer and flash drive failure that occurs on deadline days.

## Tentative Class Schedule:

<u>Week</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings</u>
Jan 10 12	Tues: Syllabus, Critical thinking in psych Thurs: biases, fallacies, features of science Q & A: paper topics for midterm paper	Ruscio 3-10; 14-24; 40-41
Jan 17 19	How to critique empirical articles Is treating homosexuality ethical and effective? Weighing testimonials. Writing the paper: searching for articles, plagiarism, etc	Course reserve, Ruscio xxiii-xxix Spitzer article
<b>Tues 24<sup>th</sup>: Hand in topic, sources, outline for midterm paper</b>		
Jan 24 26	Gay parenting and families  Testimonials, self-deception, dissonance, 3 <sup>rd</sup> variables	Regnerus vs. van Gelderen articles  Ruscio 67-75; 98-104
Jan 31 Feb 2	Do adults repress childhood sexual abuse? "Recovered memories" video. Intro to religion and morality section	Sagan & Tavris articles Ruscio 1-3; 184-192; 197- 200
<b>Midterm paper first draft: due tues Feb 2nd</b>		
Feb 7 9	Social psych: Religiosity and morality	Spilka article: 445-456; 457-479.
<b>Midterm paper first draft: back to you thurs Feb 9</b>		
Feb 14 16	Is morality learned or intuitional?	Miller: Roots of morality article
<b>Midterm paper final draft due thurs Feb 16th</b>		
Feb 21 23	Animal Cog.: Are animals conscious? Theory of mind.	Mitchell articles ch. 2-3;
<b>Midterm exam Tues Feb 28 and Midterm paper 2nd draft back</b>		
Mar 2 (thurs)	Why do we believe things? Confirmation bias, illusions	Ruscio 115-120
<b>Last day to withdraw (grade of 'W'): Mar 10, 5:00.</b>		
<b>Spring Break March 6-12 no class</b>		
<b>Hand out paper topics for final paper</b>		
Mar 14 16	Cognitive illusions, just world, inferred justification, blind spot bias Adaptive Unconscious	Ruscio 139-149; 42-52, Prasad and Pronin articles, Wilson (Strangers) Ch. 1-2
Mar 21 23	Nature/ nurture: Evolutionary psych & violence	BB Handout & Wrangham vs. Sussman
Mar 28 30	Nature/ nurture: gender	TBA.
<b>Final paper, first draft due: Mar 28th</b>		
Apr 4 6	Determinism/ automaticity vs free will Adaptive Unconscious	Bargh vs. Smith Wilson (Strangers) Ch. 3-6
Apr 11 13	Happiness and cognitive biases Adaptive Unconscious	Gilbert "stumbling on happiness" Wilson (Strangers) Ch. 7-8
<b>Final paper first draft: back to you tues Apr 11th</b>		
Apr 18 20	Happiness, money and society: what makes us happy? Adaptive Unconscious	Myers and Time Wilson (Strangers) Ch. 9
<b>Final paper 2<sup>nd</sup> draft due Tuesday Apr 18</b>		
<b>Finals: Section A: Tues Apr. 25th 4:00 – 5:50      Section B: Thurs Apr 27th, 4:00 – 5:50</b>		

Controversial Issues in Psychology: Winter 2017

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Year in School, Major: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for taking this course (i.e., to satisfy SWS requirement or elective):

Previous coursework in psychology or related coursework or experience (e.g., any psych internships or practica? Employment in human service profession? Interesting info? ):

Any particular aspects of topics you want to see covered?