Grand Valley State University
Psychology 492-01: Capstone Winter 2016
MWF 11:00-11:50 PM ASH 2119

SYLLABUS

Instructor: Leon Lou, Ph. D.
Office: 2313 Au Sable Hall
Office Phone: 331-2916

Office Hours: MWF 12:00-12:50 or by
appointment
E-mail: loul@gvsu.edu

Course Description

Psychological researches are expanding in a breath-taking pace and can be a rich source of
information for anyone seeking answers to personally relevant questions. However, it takes life-
long learning to be a savvy consumer of this rich source of information, let alone to become a
contributor to it. A crucial part of the learning is to understand where scientific questions come
from, how they are answered empirically, how they are interpreted, and how they are related to,
and distinct from just any questions anyone can ask. Accordingly, the goal of this course is to
help students to learn how to raise meaningful questions and frame them in scientifically
approachable ways. We will start by reviewing certain guiding principles in conducting scientific
research, followed by surveys and discussions of a sample of research topics that promise to
offer insights into the human nature. The majority of those select topics are concerned with
various aspects of consciousness, a issue that absorbs much contemporary research interests,
and arguably the nexus of all personal questions any conscious human being can raise.

Reading material

No textbooks are required. Most of the reading material will be accessible in pdf files that can be
downloaded either from the Blackboard or directly from the Web. In exchange for the cost of the
textbook, you have to defray the cost of printing the reading material yourself. You may also
have to purchase two books from amazon.com (most of them available as used books and cost
less than $20 each) at your own expense, if it is not available from the school library.

Class organization and reading/writing requirements

This course will be conducted like a seminar. There will be very little formal lecturing. Instead,
the course will be structured around reading and discussion of original journal articles, book
chapters and books. Much of the time will be spent on discussing how to raise good
meaningful questions and make them scientifically testable.

There will be six focal topics, around which the class discussion, debates and exploratory
writing assignments will be organized. Each of these focal topics will consume two weeks,
starting from the third week (the week after MLK Memorial day).
You should have read all the assigned articles before coming to the first of the two weekly class sessions. In the first class, we will raise questions centered on the focal topic and of personal relevance by brainstorming. We will then discuss 4-5 assigned articles on the topic, trying really hard to help each other understand the main points of each article, and most importantly, see the connections between those articles and the questions raised.

A two-page draft (about 1200 words) of mini research paper is due by the start of the second class. Please turn it in on the Blackboard before the class, and bring a printout to the class. In the article, you 1) raise and clarify your questions, 2) describe how the articles discussed in class are relevant to your questions, 3) consider different approaches for scientifically answering the questions, and 4) propose how you would proceed collecting evidence to test your ideas. Your draft paper will be discussed and evaluated in the class, and you will receive feedback from both your peers and/or me.

The second class will involve peer-reviews of the journals you have submitted, book presentations, debates, in-class writing and other activities designed to capture and highlight the main points discussed in class. The purpose is to broaden the scope of discussion on the focal topic.

To sum up, you are required to complete 6 journals over the semester. Each paper will be focused on a specific topic discussed in class and will go through one major revision by incorporating the feedback and content information of the class. In addition, I may give in-class writing assignments anytime, especially in the second class session for each focal topic. To satisfy the writing requirements, you must read and understand quite well the four or five journal articles assigned for each topic. You must attend the class regularly and be engaged in class discussion. You must also read TWO assigned books to be able to present the main points of each and answer questions from your peers.

In addition, you are also highly encouraged to use the discussion board of the Blackboard both before and after the class every week for raising your questions and replying your peers’ questions. You will earn extra credit of up to 15 points for using the discussion board, depending on the number and quality of your posts.

There will be a final take-home exam that consists mainly of short-essay questions covering all the material discussed in class. There will be no midterm exams.

Grade Distribution

Your final grade will be based on following components:

1) 6 Bi-weekly journals: 20 points each = 120 points
2) 2 Book presentations = 25 points each = 50 points
3) Final exam = 60 points
4) Attendance and class participation = 40 points
5) In-class assignments: = 40 points
6) Discussion Board postings = up to 15 points of extra credits

*Total*= 310 points + 15 extra credit points
Your total points will be converted to scores in percentage, and your final letter grade will then be determined according to the following percentage scale:

\[
\begin{align*}
A &= 93-100; \\
A- &= 89-92; \\
B+ &= 86-88; \\
B &= 82-85; \\
B- &= 79-81; \\
C+ &= 76-78; \\
C &= 72-75; \\
C- &= 68-71; \\
D+ &= 64-67; \\
D &= 60-63; \\
F &= 0-59
\end{align*}
\]

**Schedule**

(Subject to change, please check BB frequently)

1/11: *Course overview*

1/18: MLK Memorial Holiday, no class

1/25 & 2/1: *Topic One (Scientific methods)*

Journal articles:


2/8 & 2/15: *Topic Two (biological foundation of Mind and behavior)*

Journal articles:


Books:


Patricia Churchland (2013). Touching a nerve, W. W. Norton
Keith Stanovich (2010). What intelligence tests miss: The psychology of rationality. Yale University Press

2/22 & 2/29: Topic Three (Perceptual and cognitive unconscious)

Journal articles:

Rensink, R., O'Regan, K., & Clark, J. J. (1997). To see or not to see: The need for attention to Perceive changes in scenes, *Psychological Science*, 8:5, 368-373


Books:

Mahzarin R. Banaji & Anthony G. Greenwald (2013). *Blindspot*

3/6-3/13: Spring Break, no class

3/14 & 3/21: Topic Four (Self and motivation)

Journal articles:


Books:
Alison Gopnik (2009). *The philosophical baby: What children’s minds tell us about truth, love and the meaning of life*

3/28 & 4/4: Topic Five (Stereotypes and social perception)

Journal articles:


Books:
Marco Iacoboni (2009). *Mirroring People: the science of empathy and how we connect with others.*
Michael Kaplan & Ellen Kaplan (2009). *Bozo Sapiens: Why to err is human*

4/11 & 4/18: Topic Six (Consciousness and culture)

Journal articles:


Books:

Jerome Kagan (2010). The temperamental thread: How genes, culture, time and luck make us who we are. Dana Press
Susan Cain (2013). *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*