

Psychology Capstone (PSY492)

Winter 2024

Section 01: T/Th, 1-2:15pm, 2132 ASH

Section 07: T/Th, 4-5:15pm, A1182 MAK

Instructor

Ellen Shupe, Ph.D.

shupee@gvsu.edu

2218 ASH

Office Hours

In-person office hours: T/Th 2:30-3:45pm (2218 ASH)

Other meetings (virtual and in-person) by appointment

Course Overview

Welcome to Advanced General Psychology (Capstone), a culminating course for senior psychology and BNS majors. Capstone offers a survey of important research findings and theoretical perspectives in psychological science and fosters critical discussion of methodological and conceptual issues. It provides an opportunity to collectively consider the implications of psychological theory and research for public discourse, policy, and programs benefitting ourselves and the broader society. Finally, the course is designed to help students recognize the unique understanding and skills acquired through the psychology and liberal arts curriculum and to collectively consider the ways this unique perspective can help you navigate through your continued studies and professional lives. You have learned much as psychology students (perhaps more than you realize!), and you have much to offer.

The course will be taught using a [seminar, discussion-based format](#), which is more collaborative and participatory than the traditional lecture approach. You will do a significant amount of reading and thoughtful reflection about the readings, and most class periods will include a facilitated student-centered discussion about the readings. Participation of everyone is important for meaningful discussion, so please plan on attending every class session and be prepared to discuss the course materials.

Course Content

Although we will pull material from a number of disciplines, the course is primarily grounded in social psychology. Over overarching theme is the **application of psychology**, with most of our discussion focusing on **belonging and well-being**. We will examine the literature through different lenses and at different levels of analysis and revisit several topics throughout the semester, including identity, biased thought processes, the usefulness of multiple perspectives, and the interplay between individual and system-level factors. Throughout the course you will also be pushed to think critically about your own assumptions and beliefs, and about claims made by others in the academic and popular literature. Although you will not have tests, you will be asked to do a great deal of reflective reading and writing, so plan to spend a significant amount of time (6-7 hours) on course-related work each week.

We will discuss many theories, and our discussion of research and theory will be infused with a discussion of the “So what?” -- applications and implications beyond the classroom. This emphasis on theory and application has a long tradition in social psychology. Indeed, founder Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) is famously quoted as saying “there’s nothing so practical as a good theory” and “no research without action, no action without research.” Our focus on application is also consistent with the [APA’s mission](#) of promoting “the advancement, communication, and application of psychological science and knowledge to benefit society and improve lives.”

We will spend several weeks discussing belonging and well-being, with particular emphases on poverty, racism, and identity and issue-based polarization. These specific topics are well-suited for the capstone course in that they are 1) informed by a substantial theoretical and empirical literature; 2) complex and interdisciplinary; and 3) highly relevant in our current social landscape. While topics such as racism and poverty are suitable for inquiry and discussion and clearly important to our society, they can also be very difficult to read and talk about, particularly for those who have first-hand experience with them. Please know that my intent in covering the content is not to make you feel targeted or to invite conflict, but to seriously grapple with the issues so we can make informed judgements and effectively and ethically apply psychological research, theory, and tools. If you have never experienced racism or poverty, I encourage you to push yourself beyond your comfort zone and embrace the discomfort and awkwardness that often come from a rigorous examination of the topics.

I will do my best to make the classroom a space for everyone to engage with the material in a safe and intellectually challenging way. That being said, I know we all have different limits and triggers. If you know of particular course material that may be traumatizing to you, I'd be happy to discuss any concerns you have before the topic comes up in class. If at any time you find yourself nearing your limit with a topic or assignment please let me know, so we can discuss strategies for minimizing your discomfort while still meeting the course requirements. Likewise, if you find a discussion to be traumatizing or otherwise too difficult, you may choose to not participate in the discussion or to leave the classroom. If you choose to stay, you will not be called on to share your own experiences or expected to speak on behalf of an entire social or identity group.

Learning Objectives

Before graduating, students majoring in psychology should be able to engage in deep reading and reflection; think critically about claims and assumptions; make evidence-based decisions; write well-developed, clear papers; plan and facilitate group discussion; and prepare and deliver presentations based on the psychological literature. The course objectives listed below reflect this mission and our goals for psychology majors.

Upon completion of this Capstone course you should be able to:

- Identify and apply concepts associated with major theoretical perspectives and empirical findings in psychology.
- Describe and synthesize alternative theoretical perspectives within the discipline
- Recognize sources of bias in psychological research, and understand how they can affect the interpretation or usefulness of research findings
- Analyze and explain interdisciplinary approaches to psychological questions
- Identify and integrate multiple perspectives
- Recognize professional writing, and complete professional-level papers

In addition, you should have further developed the following skills and abilities:

- The ability to think critically in interpreting and applying psychological theory and research
- The ability to critically reflect on the values implicit in approaches to understanding social issues
- The ability to work in groups to synthesize key readings and design an empirically based program designed to foster well-being or belonging
- Skills related to the development and delivery of an engaging, evidence-based presentation
- Skills related to the application of psychological theory and research to the good of society
- Cultural awareness and intercultural communication skills

Class Policies & Expectations

Professionalism & respect. Students learn at their full potential only when they feel as if they are heard and respected in and outside of the classroom. Thus, **maintaining a climate that is inclusive and respectful** is not only socially responsible and ethical, it is key to a successful learning

experience. We live in a time of incredible divisiveness, stress, and loss, when personal attacks and the public expression of strong emotions have become more and more commonplace. It is particularly important, therefore, that we use considerate language and behavior toward one another, and that we make a conscious effort to affirm the contributions of all.

Academic integrity and the use of AI-generated material. You are expected to do your own work in Capstone and to not engage in any form of academic dishonesty. It is very important that the papers you submit are written in your own voice and reflect your own insight and analysis. While it is okay for you to use ChatGPT or other AI tools to brainstorm ideas, or for the minor editing of sentences you already wrote, your submitted written work should not include any AI-generated material. If you use ChatGPT or another AI tool for any purpose, remember to provide proper citations. The use of AI-generated material without proper citation will be considered academic dishonesty. If you need additional information about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please ask me and/or consult GVSU's academic integrity policy and guidelines ([GVSU's guidelines](#)).

Accommodations and support. If you need formal accommodations, please contact me early in the term so we can work together to make appropriate arrangements. Please let me know if you encounter any challenges or barriers in the course or classroom that interfere with your learning, and if you think you may benefit from formal accommodations, contact GVSU's Office of Disability Support Resources (gvsu.edu/dsr/) at (616) 331-2490 or dsrgvsu@gvsu.edu. Likewise, if you would like to request accommodations so you may practice a religious holiday, please let me know.

Other university policies. In addition to the policies described above, you'll be expected to comply with other course-related policies at GVSU (<http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/>).

Coursework and Activities

As noted above, the course will be taught using a seminar format. Among other things, this means there will be a shift in class structure and coverage of content, with a greater **emphasis on a critical examination of the theoretical and empirical literature, an integration of diverse perspectives, and a collaborative exploration of evidence-based applications**. Classes will be discussion based, and you will be required to do considerable reading and reflective writing outside of class.

Reading & Notetaking

Readings and other course materials include books, scholarly articles and chapters, readings from the popular press, podcasts, and TED Talks (see below for a complete list). Unless otherwise noted, all readings and course materials will be posted on our class Blackboard site. I highly recommend using hard copies of the readings to facilitate notetaking and to make it easier to find pages and excerpts referenced during our class discussion.

Please plan on spending considerable time each week reading and thoughtfully reflecting upon the readings and integrating the various perspectives they offer. This type of deep reading goes beyond an understanding of the authors' words; it's an active process of identifying inconsistencies and exploring links between the readings, and it requires frequent questioning about the claims, evidence, potential bias, interpretations, and applications. It requires more time and effort than scanning or surface reading, so you should budget your time accordingly and plan to read when you are not fatigued or distracted. I recommend taking notes or annotating the works while you read by circling key terms and phrases highlighting or underlining important theories, studies, and concepts; and/or writing brief comments and questions in the margins. This note taking will facilitate your understanding and memory of the readings and make it easier for you to complete the integrative assignments.

Similarly, I recommend that you engage in a dialogue of sorts with yourself and/or the authors. Delve into the content, critically consider claims, and push yourself to examine links to other class material, content covered in previous courses, your own life, and our current social backdrop. Some questions that will be helpful as you engage in this process are:

Questions to help you deeply and critically consider the authors' perspectives and claims:

- What claims do the authors make, and what evidence do they present to support the claims?
- What are the authors' underlying assumptions, and to what extent are they valid?
- What theoretical framework or approach do the authors use? Are there other frameworks that should be considered?
- Does the author seem to represent the ideas of others accurately? Do they seem to oversimplify complex ideas?

Questions to help you consider the readings in relation to one another, your own experiences, and other ideas you've encountered:

- What are the connections among the various readings? Do any common ideas or viewpoints run through them?
- In what ways are the authors' claims related to other sources you have read or theories and research you have studied?
- How does this perspective relate to previous texts and discussions we have had, as well as concepts you've encountered outside of this course?
- How does the reading "land on" you? What thoughts and emotional reactions do you have when you read it?
- Does the reading challenge your own values, beliefs, and/or assumptions?

Questions to help you examine possible implications, extensions, and applications of concepts discussed:

- What questions does the reading raise for you, and how could they be addressed?
- Does the reading cause you to think about additional research questions or hypotheses? If so, what type of study could be designed to test these hypotheses?
- What are the implications of concepts and findings discussed?
- How might the ideas or findings discussed in the reading be applicable to other contexts or subjects?

Engagement & Participation

Because Capstone uses a seminar format, many class sessions will be centered around a discussion of the weekly readings and other assigned materials, and on connections between the current week's materials and previously discussed readings. This class discussion is key to our ability to make connections, communicate an understanding, and learn from one another. Thus, **active engagement and participation in the class discussions and activities** is very important. In addition to completing the assigned readings before class, you should prepare for the discussion by critically and thoughtfully considering answers to questions that can be brought into the discussion (such as the questions listed above). If you find it difficult to speak in front of a group, you might consider preparing a written list of points related to each reading and bring them to the relevant class period.

At the end of each class you will be asked to complete a participation/engagement form in which you describe your class reflections, engagement, and participation. Each class you'll receive a score of up to **2 points** based largely on your responses. While class attendance and engagement are important, I also recognize that life is full of unexpected challenges and that there are days when we all need a break. So that you'll have an extra breather when you need it, I'll allow you two "freebie" (no participation grade) mental health days that can be taken at any time. If you do not take the mental health days, your two lowest engagement/participation grades will be dropped. Absences that are due to illnesses, family crises, accidents, and other emergencies will be excused and will not be counted as mental health days.

Writing

Because the ability to articulate an understanding and analysis of evidence and ideas is essential to a liberal arts education, the course requires students to do a considerable amount of writing. You will write a number of thought papers and other assignments requiring you to summarize, reflect upon, synthesize, and/or analyze one or more of the course readings.

Thought questions. About once a week you will be required to write a paper in which you thoughtfully respond to questions related to the assigned readings. The papers will be graded based on relevance and accuracy, depth and thoughtfulness of your responses, and coherence and clarity of your writing. They will be worth **5-8 points** each.

Identity self-narrative assignment. Early in the semester you will be asked to complete an assignment in which you reflect on your identity, based on a set of prompts. This self-narrative assignment will be worth **12 points** and will be graded based on content, depth, evidence of thoughtful reflection, and quality of writing.

Integrative & reflective papers on well-being and belonging. You will also be required to complete two papers asking you to reflect on and integrate course materials related to well-being and belonging. These papers will be worth **15 points** each and will be graded on accuracy of content, depth, evidence of thoughtful reflection, and quality of writing.

Integrative final paper. Finally, you will be required to write a paper in which you summarize, analyze, and/or synthesize course readings, and critically discuss the readings in the context of your own experiences and belief systems. While this paper will be similar in some ways to the thought questions, it will be longer and require more breadth and depth of discussion. The paper will be worth **20 points** and will be evaluated based on the quality of writing, and the depth, thoughtfulness, relevance, and accuracy of the content.

Group project: Program design, with virtual exchange collaboration

During the second half of the semester, you will work in a small group to complete a project in which you develop an idea for and **design a specific program or initiative related to belonging or well-being**. Although you will be given some leeway in the choice of topic, the program or initiative must clearly represent the application of psychological science and be grounded in theoretical and empirical literature. Together with your group, you will select a topic, become familiar with the relevant theoretical and empirical literature, and develop a concrete idea for applying the literature to meet a specific need, in a specific context and/or with a specific population. There will be both group-based and individual requirements for the project, as described below.

A unique feature of the project is the inclusion of an **international virtual exchange collaboration**. In international virtual exchange (IVE) students work together with their peers from an international university, using virtual tools such as Zoom and Google docs. It's designed to foster global learning and perspective taking ability, and to provide an opportunity to get to know students with different cultures and experiences. It can be challenging but also very valuable (and fun!)

For our virtual exchange, you will be working with psychology students from UniSon, a university in Mexico. The exchange will take place over four weeks in March and April and will be directly related to the program design project. Your group will be paired with several UniSon students. Over the course of the four weeks, you will exchange information with your UniSon partners – they will provide information relevant to your project, and you will provide information relevant to a different project required for their class. While your group's project will integrate information you've learned from UniSon students, they will not work directly on the project.

Since this type of virtual exchange is likely new to you, we will discuss the guidelines, process, and expectations in detail before the exchange begins, and we will spend time reflecting on and sharing our experiences throughout the exchange. (So, please don't worry – you will be well prepared, and I will provide support and guidance along the way!)

As mentioned above, there will be [group-based and individual requirements](#) for the project. The group-based requirements are:

- Brief project proposal, including questions for UniSon partners & plan for integration (5pts)
- Meeting with Prof. Shupe (2pts for participation/engagement)
- A 30 to 35-min presentation on your program and relevant literature (15pts)

The requirements each student will need to complete are:

- Icebreaker assignment to exchange with UniSon partners (3pts)
- Project report, including a summary of the project and a discussion of UniSon feedback (8pts)
- Your reflections on the virtual exchange experience (5pts)
- Description of each group member's contribution to the project (2pts)

The entire project will be worth a total of [38 points](#) toward your final grade. I will meet with your group formally and informally throughout the project, to answer questions and provide feedback.

Course grades

As noted above, your final grade will be based on an identity self-narrative assignment; thought question assignments; papers on well-being and belonging; a final integrative paper; participation/engagement; and a group project. Approximate weightings and the grading scale used to determine final grades are given below.

	Approximate <u># of points</u>	Approximate <u>Weight</u>
Identity assignment	12 pts	7%
Well-being paper	15 pts	8%
Belonging paper	15 pts	8%
Final integrative paper	20 pts	10%
Group project	38 pts	19%
Participation/engagement	44 pts	22%
Thought questions	50 pts	26%

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percent</u>
A	92.5-100%	B+	87.5-89.5%	C+	77.5-79.5%	D+	67.5-69.5%
A-	90-92%	B	82.5-87%	C	72.5-77%	D	60-67%
		B-	80-82%	C-	70-72%	F	0-59.5%

Tentative Class Schedule

Week 1		
1/9 (T)	Topic	Introduction to Capstone; Overview of course themes
1/11 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Foundations: Well-being & social connection 1) Listen to On Being interview with Vivek Murthy 2) Assignment: Thought Questions (submit before class)
Week 2		
1/16 (T)	Topic Preparation	Foundations: Identity, values, & norms Assignment: Identity self-narrative assignment (submit before)
1/18 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Foundations: Program design and evaluation Reading TBD
Week 3		
1/23 (T)	Topic Preparation	Foundations: Community well-being; Community psych. theories Read Jason et al. (2019), Chapters 5 & 10
1/25 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Well-being: Subjective well-being; Importance of well-being 1) Read Diener, Lucas, & Oishi (2018), pp. 1-3, 8-13, 17-22 only 2) Read Diener & Tay (2013) 3) Assignment: Thought Questions (submit before class)
Week 4		
1/30 (T)	Topic Preparation	Well-being: Flourishing; PERMA theory; Stress & coping Read Seligman (2011), Ch. 1
2/1 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Well-being: Evidence-based interventions 1) Read Dahl, Wilson-Mendenhall, & Davidson (2020) 2) Assignment: Thought Questions (submit before class)
Week 5		
2/6 (T)	Topic Preparation	Well-being, growth, and self-determination Read DeHaan & Ryan (2014)
2/8 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Well-being, growth, and self-determination 1) Reading TBD 2) Assignment: Well-being Paper (submit by end of day)
Week 6		
2/13 (T)	Topic Preparation	Belonging: Our need to belong 1) Read <i>Belonging</i> (Cohen, 2022), Introduction & Chs. 1 & 2 2) Read Baumeister & Leary (1995), pp. 499-501 3) Assignment: Thought Questions (submit before class)
2/15 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Belonging: Opposing forces (misunderstanding/perception) Read <i>Belonging</i> (Cohen, 2022), Chs. 5 & 8
Week 7		
2/20 (T)	Topic Preparation	Belonging: Opposing forces (misunderstanding/perception) Read Weinstein, Itzchakov, & Legate (2022)
2/22 (Th)	Topics Preparation	Belonging: Opposing forces (misinformation & motivated reasoning) 1) Listen to J. Rauch “Constitution of Knowledge” interview (On Point) 2) Assignment: Thought Questions

Week 8

2/27 (T)	Topic Preparation	Belonging: Opposing forces (group-based polarization) Read <i>Belonging</i> (Cohen, 2022), Ch. 3
2/29 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Belonging: Opposing forces (group-based polarization) 1) Read Jost, Baldassarri, & Druckman (2022) 2) Assignment: Thought Questions (submit before class)

Winter break

3/4 – 3/8

Week 9

3/12 (T)	Topic Preparation	Belonging: Opposing forces (systemic classism and poverty) 1) Read Bullock (2019), pp. 635-636 only 2) Read Bullock & Reppond (2018)
3/14 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Belonging: Opposing forces (systemic racism) 1) Read Roberts & Rizzo (2021), pp. 475-482 only 2) Assignment: Thought Questions (submit before class)

Week 10

3/19 (T)	Topic Preparation	Belonging: Opposing forces (systemic racism) 1) Read Roberts & Rizzo (2021), pp. 483-484 only 2) Group work: Prepare questions for UniSon partners
3/21 (Th)	Topic	No Class (Release time to meet with groups & work with UniSon partners)

Week 11

3/26 (T)	Topic Preparation	Belonging: Group & systemic interventions: Contact & group borders 1) Read <i>Belonging</i> (Cohen, 2022), Ch. 5 2) Watch K. Payne “ Psychology of inequality & political division ” Tedtalk
3/28 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Belonging: Group & systemic interventions: Wisdom & empathy Read Grossmann and Dorfman (2019)
3/29 (F)		Assignment: Belonging Paper (submit by end of day)

Week 12

4/2 (T)	Topic	Group meetings with Prof. Shupe
4/4 (Th)	Topic	No Class - Work on group project

Week 13

4/9 (T)	Topic	Group-led class
4/11 (Th)	Topic	Group-led class

Week 14

4/16 (T)	Topic	Group-led class
4/18 (Th)	Topic Work	No Class (release time to work on project report and final paper) Project report (submit by end of day)

Finals Week

Topic: Recap and final discussion
Preparation: [Final Integrative Paper](#) (submit before class)
Sect. 01: 4/23 (T), 12-1:30pm
Sect. 07: 4/23 (T), 12-1:30pm

Readings

- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
- Bullock, H. E. (2019). Psychology's contributions to understanding and alleviating poverty and economic inequality: Introduction to the special section. *American Psychologist*, 74(6), 635–640. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000532>
- Bullock H. E., Reppond H. A. (2018). Of “takers” and “makers”: A social psychological analysis of class and classism. In Hammack P. L. (Ed.), *Oxford handbook of social psychology and social justice* (pp. 223–244). Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, G.L. (2022). *Belonging: The science of creating connections and bridging divides*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Dahl, C. J., Wilson-Mendenhall, C. D., & Davidson, R. J. (2020). The plasticity of well-being: A training-based framework for the cultivation of human flourishing. *PNAS Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 117(51), 32197–32206. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2014859117>
- DeHaan, C.R. & Ryan, R.M. (2014). Symptoms of wellness: Happiness and eudaimonia from a self-determination perspective. In K.M. Sheldon, & R.E. Lucas (Eds.), *Stability of happiness: Theories and evidence on whether happiness can change* (pp. 37-55). Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier. Doi 10.1016/b978-0-12-411-478-4.00003-5
- Diener, E., Lucas, R.E., & Oishi, S. (2018). Advances and open questions in the science of subjective well-being. *Collabra: Psychology*, 4(1). DOI: 10.1525/Collabra.115
- Diener, E., & Tay, L. (2013). The remarkable benefits of happiness for successful and healthy living. In *Happiness: Transforming the development landscape* (pp. 90-117). The Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH.
- Grossmann, I. & Dorfman, A. (2019). Wise reasoning in an uncertain world. In: R. Sternberg, H. Nusbaum, & J. Glück (Eds) *Applying Wisdom to Contemporary World Problems*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://rdcu.be/dkNgm>
- Jason, L.A., Glantsman, O., O'Brien, J.F., & Ramian, K.N. (2019). Introduction to community psychology: Becoming an agent of change. *College of Science and Health Full Text Publications*, 1. <https://press.rebus.community/introductiontocommunitypsychology>
- Jost, J.T., Baldassarri, D.S. & Druckman, J.N. (2022). Cognitive–motivational mechanisms of political polarization in social-communicative contexts. *National Review of Psychology*, 1, 560–576. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-022-00093-5>
- Roberts, S.O., & Rizzo, M.T. (2020). The psychology of American racism. *American Psychologist*, 76, 475–487.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Free Press.
- Weinstein, N., Itzhakov, G., & Legate, N. (2022). The motivational value of listening during intimate and difficult conversations. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12651>