PSY 311(02) - Controversial Issues in Psychology
TH 11:30 – 12:45 ASH 2119
Winter 2015

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30–3:30 and by appointment.

Course Description:
This course aims to introduce you to a number of contemporary issues and controversies in psychology. As you will see, there are no easy answers to many of the topics we will discuss this semester. Therefore, when confronted with differing opinions and points of view, it is necessary to develop the ability to comprehend, evaluate, and make decisions in the face of uncertainty. 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.”

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), 11 quizzes (the lowest 2 scores will be dropped), and one major paper.

Exams: Each exam consists of essay and/or multiple-choice questions drawn from lectures, readings, class discussions, and in-class videos.

Quizzes: quizzes will be scheduled during regular class time and are usually done in the first 5 to 10 minutes of class. They will cover recently assigned readings (in general, one quiz for every new topic) to help you keep up with the pace of this course. No quizzes are given to late-comers!

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). You will be graded on the quality of your writing as well as the content of your arguments and the selected texts. You have the opportunity to submit a first draft on which you will receive a “warning grade” that will help you improve the quality of the final draft. A paper is penalized five percentage point for every day it is late (papers submitted after 10PM 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!

Extra credit: 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 5/230 points.

Grading Scale

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<th>Points</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>21.74%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>26.09%</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 quizzes/in-class activities or debates* (9 x 5p. each)</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>Final paper</td>
<td>75</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<th>Final Grade</th>
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*Drop lowest 2
** 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!!

Make-up exams/quizzes:
Make-up exams/quizzes 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/quizzes will be different than those given during regular class time.

Office Hours:
You are strongly encouraged to drop by my office during my office hours if you have any questions, confusions, concerns, or suggestions about this course. If your schedule conflicts with my regular office hours, please let me know and I will schedule an alternative time to meet you.

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.
| Week 1 | Jan 6 and 8 | Tu: Syllabus discussion  
Th: Critical thinking, metathinking, and the difference between Science and Pseudoscience |  
Week 2 | Jan 13 and 15 | Are repressed memories valid?  
(+Video “Divided Memories”) | Kluft & Loftus 104-122, Tavris (on Bb) Sagan 153 – 168 (to be distributed in class) Ruscio 1-3; 115-120 184-192, 197- 200  
**Instructions for paper**  
**Week 3** | Jan 20 and 22 | Does the divorce of parents harm their children long term? | Wallerstein & Hetherington, 146-164; Amato & Cheadle (on Bb)  
**Week 4** | Jan 27 and 29 | Praising children: beneficial AND harmful? | Henderlong & Lepper 774–795, Kohn 24-30 (both on Bb)  
**Week 5** | Feb 3 and 5 | Innate talents – reality or myth? | Howe, Davidson, & Sloboda (1998) 339-442 (on Bb)  
**Week 6** | Feb 10 and 12 | Spanking and its consequences | ADD  
**Week 7** | Feb 17 and 19 | Midterm exam Thursday, Feb 19  
Th: Further Paper Instructions |  
**Week 8** | Feb 24 and 26 | Emotion expression and recognition: universal or culture-specific? | Ekman, 1999; Shiraev & Levy  
**Week 9** | March 3 and 5 | Spring Break 😊😊 |  
**Week 10** | March 10 & 12 | Should adolescents who commit serious offenses be tried and convicted as adults? | Mears vs Steinberg & Scott  
**Week 11** | March 17 & 19 | Gay Parenting: Healthy for Children? | ADD  
**Week 12** | March 24 & 26 | Can playing violent video games lead to increased aggression in some individuals? | Anderson, Olsson (from Taking Sides), Engelhardt et al., 2011  
**Week 13** | March 31 & April 2 | Religion and prosocial behavior: a positive link? | Galen  
**Week 14** | April 7 and 9 | Topic of students’ choice | XX  
Final draft due April 9 |
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<th>Week 15</th>
<th>Suggestions for critical thinking</th>
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<td>April 14 and 16</td>
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**Final Exam**

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