

PSY 311(01) - Controversial Issues in Psychology

Spring 2021

Online Meeting: Tu & Th 9:30 to 11:30am

Instructor: Mihaela Friedlmeier, Ph.D.
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Virtual Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:00-12:00. You can always reach me by email!

*This syllabus is subject to change now that we transitioned from a traditional seminar-style course to a remotely taught online course. Most changes will be announced on Blackboard after the first and second week – please stay tuned! I will do my very best to avoid confusion in the (amount of) information sent your way!

Class Attendance:

While attendance of online meetings is not mandatory, it is essential and VERY strongly encouraged. 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. Students are responsible for checking Blackboard regularly for announcements.

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.

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. Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to:

Objective 1: Identify areas of psychological controversy and evaluate supporting arguments based on empirical findings.

Objective 2: Demonstrate critical thinking skills (analyzing the arguments of other people and forming one’s own reasoned judgment).

Objective 3: Research and express ideas clearly in a written and oral format

Class Format:

Classes will be a mixture of discussion, group debates/discussions, 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. 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), one major paper, bi-weekly questions, and participation points.

Exams: Each exam consists of essay questions drawn **from lectures, readings, discussions, and videos**.

Paper (more detailed instructions will be provided on Bb): 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 unless students choose a topic from the list provided by the instructor). 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. You will be asked to submit a rough draft worth 10 points (out of 65).

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). **No late work will be accepted one week after its due date!**

Questions Submission: In order to facilitate our discussions, you are expected to write and submit on Bb 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 submitted the day before the online meeting and will contribute to your participation points. Depending on the quality of your questions, you may receive 0, 1 or 2 points (8 topics X 2 = 16 points max.).

Participation points: Simply attending the online class meetings is worth one point per meeting (starting with the first Thursday). Our first online class meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, May 13th at 9:30.**

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

Grading Scale

	Points	Percentage	Final Grade
			A 94 - 100%
Midterm Exam	50		A- 90 - 93%
Final Exam	50		B+ 87- 89%
Final paper	65		B 84- 86%
Questions Submissions (8 X 2)	16		B- 80 - 83%
			C+ 77 - 79%
Total	181		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

Integrity of Scholarship and Grades: All academic work will be done by the student to whom it was assigned. Anyone caught cheating (e.g., procuring, providing or accepting any materials which contain questions or

answers to any exam or assignment, submitting work that has been previously graded) or plagiarizing (taking ideas or material from another source for either written or oral presentation without acknowledging the original source) will be dropped from the course, given an F, and referred to the University for further action. Cheating is a serious violation of academic integrity. For more information on academic honesty please see the GVSU student code <http://www.gvsu.edu/studentcode/section-4-academic-integrity-of-grades-and-scholarship-73.htm>

This course is subject to the GVSU policies listed at <http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/>.

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 Class Schedule

	Topic	Readings
Week 1	<p style="text-align: center;">Tu: No meeting</p> <p>Th: Do adults repress childhood sexual abuse? Is the concept of repressed and recovered memories valid?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Video “Divided Memories”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">No readings</p> <p>Kluft & Loftus 104-122, Tavris, APA link</p>
Week 2	<p>Tu: Effective & beneficial parental discipline methods (spanking, time-out, etc.)</p> <p>Th: How to raise children with a “growth mindset”: does praising help?</p>	<p>Gershoff et al., 2010; Gershoff, 2013; + websites (add more)</p> <p>Henderlong & Lepper 774–795, Kohn 24-30, Dweck, 2015</p>
Week 3	<p style="text-align: center;">Tu: Gay Parenting: Healthy for Children?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Th: XX</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Paper Rough draft, Part 1 due</p>	
Week 4	<p style="text-align: center;">Tu: Midterm Exam</p> <p>Th: Religion and prosocial behavior: a positive link?</p>	<p>Galen (2012); Myers (2012) and Saroglou (2012)</p>
Week 5	<p style="text-align: center;">Tu: Nature/Nurture: Human Violence</p> <p>Documentary “Mind of a rampage killer</p> <p>Th: Nature/Nurture: Should adolescents who commit serious offenses be tried and convicted as adults?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Documentary, <i>When kids get life</i></p>	<p>Caspi et al., 2002; Fergusson et al., 2011; Raine et al., 2010;</p> <p>Steinberg, 2009; Fischer et al.; Steinberg’s response, +</p>
Week 6	<p>Tu: Innate talents – reality or myth?</p> <p>Th: Critical thinking: Suggestions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Final Paper due</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Final Exam</p>	<p>Howe, Davidson, & Sloboda (1998) 339-442</p>