

## **CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN PSYCHOLOGY: PSY 311-02**

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 10:00 – 10:50 a.m.  
2320 Au Sable Hall

### **Instructor: Brian Bowdle**

Office: 2311 Au Sable Hall

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesday, 1:00 – 2:00 p.m., and by appointment

Phone: 616-331-2420

E-mail: bowdleb@gvsu.edu

### **Course Description**

This course offers a series of critical thinking and communication exercises as ways of exploring current debates in the field of psychology. After successfully completing the course, students will be able to (a) identify areas of controversy in psychological science and evaluate arguments based on empirical findings; (b) demonstrate the ability to think critically about opposing arguments and form their own reasoned judgments; and (c) research and express ideas clearly in both written and oral formats. This course is worth three credits.

### **Required Books**

Keith E. Stanovich (2018) – *How to Think Straight about Psychology* (11<sup>th</sup> edition)

Carol Tavis and Elliot Aronson (2015) – *Mistakes Were Made (but Not by Me)* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning (2018) – *The Rise of Victimhood Culture*

Christina Hoff Sommers (2013) – *The War Against Boys* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

Jesse Bering (2013) – *Perv*

Frans de Waal (2013) – *The Bonobo and the Atheist*

These six books constitute the core of this course, and everyone is expected to keep up with the readings – and to come to class prepared to discuss any chapters that are assigned for that day (see the course schedule at the end of this syllabus for a list of our reading dates).

In addition to the books listed above, a small number of articles will be assigned throughout the semester to tie in with specific discussions and homework assignments. Required articles will be announced during class, and will be made available to you on our Blackboard site via the Additional Readings page.

### **Course Evaluation**

The maximum number of points you can receive in this course is 180, and point totals will be translated into grades at the end of the term using this scale:

169 – 180 points = A	131 – 138 points = C
162 – 168 points = A-	126 – 130 points = C-
157 – 161 points = B+	121 – 125 points = D+
149 – 156 points = B	113 – 120 points = D
144 – 148 points = B-	108 – 112 points = D-
139 – 143 points = C+	107 points or less = F

Grades will be cumulatively determined by the following:

**Attendance and participation.** Your attendance of this course will be recorded, and – along with your in-class participation – is worth 30 points. You are allowed to miss three class meetings without penalty; after that, however, each missed class will count against your final grade.

**Homeworks.** Expect to receive one or two homework assignments almost every week we meet. Upcoming homeworks will be announced during class, and will be made available to you on our Blackboard site via the Assignments page. Each homework response must be typed, not handwritten, and must be turned in during class on the date it is due. Late homeworks will not be accepted. Taken together, the homework assignments will be worth 30 points.

Quizzes. Six multiple-choice quizzes will be given this term, each of which covers one of the required books in its entirety (see the course schedule for the dates of these quizzes). Taken together, these quizzes will be worth 30 points. Missed quizzes cannot be rescheduled, but your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

In-class presentation. Working in a group, you will give a presentation to the rest of the class in which you take on a “hot topic” in psychology. Your presentation will be worth 30 points. (Detailed instructions for the in-class presentations will be given on September 5<sup>th</sup>.)

Position paper. During the second half of this course, you will compose a substantial essay arguing for one side or the other of a current controversy in psychology. The composition process will be divided into three phases:

- 1) Write a draft of your position paper. (The draft will be due on November 12<sup>th</sup>.)
- 2) Write short reviews of three other position papers submitted by your classmates. (Your reviews will be due on November 28<sup>th</sup>.)
- 3) Write a revision of your position paper given the reviews you get back from your classmates. (The revision will be due on December 11<sup>th</sup>.)

Overall, the position paper assignment will be worth 30 points. (Detailed instructions for the position papers will be given on October 24<sup>th</sup>.)

Online discussion forums. The development of critical thinking is in many ways a social enterprise, requiring thoughtful interactions with other individuals whose perceptions, experiences, and beliefs may differ from your own. Therefore, you are expected to participate in a series of online discussion forums, which can be accessed on our Blackboard site via the Discussion Forums page. To be more specific, there will be six different discussion forums, each of which will revolve around one of our six required books. For each of these forums, you should plan on making a minimum of five thoughtful and substantial (100 words or more) contributions. One of these contributions must be an original item – a question, position, idea, or experience that you would like to share – which should be posted as a new thread. Four more of these contributions must be responses to other people’s messages. Any additional posts you make to any of the forums can be either type of contribution – it’s your choice. Your participation across all six of the discussion forums will be worth 30 points.

Here are some additional guidelines for using the online forums:

- 1) While I will not be giving you any specific questions to answer, make sure that your contributions to each forum stay “on topic” by relating them to the contents of the book at hand. This will still allow for plenty of flexibility in terms of what you can write about, of course – not only do all six of our books cover lots of conceptual territory, but the various twists and turns of our in-class discussions for each of these books are also fair game for your posts. Moreover, if you can find interesting ways of relating the issues covered in one of our books to current events, to personal experiences, and/or to material you have discussed in other courses here at GVSU, I encourage you to write about these things as well.
- 2) Each one of our six discussion forums will have a limited window of availability – it will appear three days prior to our first scheduled discussion of the relevant book, will remain active across all four class meetings devoted to that book, and will disappear three days after our last scheduled discussion of the book. Once a forum has disappeared, you can no longer post to it, so make sure that you stay on top of the discussion forums (and the relevant readings).
- 3) Avoid the temptation to post all of your contributions to a given forum at once – these forums will work best if everyone in the class remains actively engaged in the discussions as they evolve from one day to the next.
- 4) Avoid starting new threads on the very last day a discussion forum is available. Otherwise, many of your classmates may not have enough time to consider your contribution and post thoughtful responses before the forum disappears.
- 5) Avoid redundancy. It is fine to create a new thread about a topic that others have discussed, but make sure that the content of your post brings something new to the table, as opposed to simply rephrasing a question that has already been asked or an observation that has already been made.
- 6) Although I expect most of your contributions to be substantial (100 words or more), relatively short (one- or two-sentence) posts are by no means forbidden, and may often be useful if you are moved to continue a

discussion in a thoughtful manner. For instance, if you'd like someone to clarify a point they just made, do not feel like you have to compose a 100-word message asking for clarification when a 10-word question would serve the purpose.

- 7) Because these forums are "threaded," please make sure that your responses are posted appropriately. That is, if you are responding to a specific message, post your response as a reply to that message, and not as a reply to a different message or as a new thread.
- 8) And finally, I expect the tone of our discussion forums to be respectful and courteous throughout. It is perfectly fine to express different (and perhaps even "unpopular") viewpoints, and to openly disagree with others, but insulting or antagonistic posts have no place in these forums and will not be tolerated.

Please be aware that if you wish to receive better than a C (22 out of 30 points) for this online activity, you will not only need to contribute to all six discussion forums, but will also need to go beyond the minimum of five substantial contributions to each forum on a regular basis.

### **Additional Thoughts**

Many of the discussions that we will have during this course will no doubt provoke strong feelings and challenge your customary ways of thinking about the issues at hand. As you share your thoughts and reactions with others during class, complete our various assignments, and post messages on our discussion forums, I urge you to repeatedly ask yourself the following questions: How did you come to hold the beliefs that you currently have? What sources of knowledge do you use to support your beliefs? How do you typically respond to evidence or arguments that run contrary to your most cherished beliefs – and how do you typically view people who confront you with such evidence or arguments? What do you do when you recognize contradictions among two or more of your beliefs? And what would it take to make you change a belief that has always struck you as being obviously true? These are all questions that are worth returning to again and again throughout this course ... and throughout life, when you get down to it.

### **Taking this Course as a Supplemental Writing Skills (SWS) Course**

You must receive a grade of C or better both on the position paper assignment and in the course overall in order to receive SWS credit. A C- will not do.

### **Class Correspondence and Announcements**

Important class announcements will regularly be posted on Blackboard. You should make it a habit of logging onto our Blackboard site two to three times each week. Also, I will be using Blackboard to send out e-mails to members of this class, which means that you should regularly check the messages on your GVSU student e-mail account.

### **Students with Disabilities**

If there is any student in this class who has special needs because of a cognitive, physical, or other disability, please let me know, and contact Disability Support Resources (DSR) at (616) 331-2490. Although students with disabilities are held to the same academic standards as all other students, accommodations will be provided as appropriate.

### **GVSU Policies**

This course is subject to all of the GVSU policies regarding enrollment, grading, academic integrity, and fairness listed at <http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/>.

### **Disclaimer**

The schedule of topics and assignments in this syllabus is subject to change. Any such changes will be announced during class.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

<u>Topic/Activity</u>	<u>Date(s)</u>	<u>Book Readings</u>
<b>Introduction</b>		
Overview of Course	8/27	---
From Debate to Dialogue	8/29	---
The Obstacle of Identity	8/31	---
<b>Group Presentation Instructions</b>	9/5	---
<b>The Science of Psychology</b>		
The Nature of Science	9/7	<i>Think Straight</i> , pp. 1-35
Research Methods in Psychology	9/10	<i>Think Straight</i> , pp. 36-73
Methodological Issues in Psychology	9/12	<i>Think Straight</i> , pp. 74-104
Intuition versus Reason	9/14 *	<i>Think Straight</i> , pp. 105-145
<b>Group Meetings</b>	9/17	---
<b>The Psychology of Belief</b>		
The Power of Self-Justification	9/19	<i>Mistakes Were Made</i> , pp. 1-87
Distortions of Memory	9/21	<i>Mistakes Were Made</i> , pp. 88-163
All Is Fair in Love and War	9/24	<i>Mistakes Were Made</i> , pp. 164-275
Honesty and Forgiveness	9/26 *	<i>Mistakes Were Made</i> , pp. 276-312
<b>Group Meetings</b>	9/28	---
<b>Group Presentations</b>	10/1, 10/3, 10/5 10/8, 10/11, 10/12	--- ---
<b>The New Culture Wars</b>		
Honor, Dignity, and Victimhood	10/15	<i>Victimhood Culture</i> , pp. 1-70
Hate Crimes and Safe Spaces	10/17	<i>Victimhood Culture</i> , pp. 71-142
Social Justice Warriors	10/19	<i>Victimhood Culture</i> , pp. 143-212
The Value of Free Speech	10/22 *	<i>Victimhood Culture</i> , pp. 213-265
<b>Position Paper Instructions, Part I</b>	10/24	---
<b>Gender and Education</b>		
Shifting Inequalities	10/26	<i>War Against Boys</i> , pp. 1-90
In a Different Voice	10/29	<i>War Against Boys</i> , pp. 91-126
Hamlet, Ophelia, and Title IX	10/31	<i>War Against Boys</i> , pp. 127-171
Character Education	11/2 *	<i>War Against Boys</i> , pp. 172-205
<b>Film Screening and Discussion</b>	11/5, 11/7, 11/9	---
<b>Position Paper Instructions, Part II</b>	11/12	---

### **Rethinking Sexual Deviance**

Deviant versus Normal	11/14	<i>Perv</i> , pp. 1-66
Nature versus Nurture	11/16	<i>Perv</i> , pp. 67-136
The Concept of Harm	11/19	<i>Perv</i> , pp. 137-208
The Road Less Travelled	11/26 *	<i>Perv</i> , pp. 209-233

### **Position Paper Instructions, Part III**

11/28 ---

### **Morality and Evolution**

The Garden of Earthly Delights	12/30	<i>Bonobo/Atheist</i> , pp. 1-54
Nonoverlapping Magisteria	12/3	<i>Bonobo/Atheist</i> , pp. 55-112
Human Exceptionalism	12/5	<i>Bonobo/Atheist</i> , pp. 113-188
The Origins of Religion	12/7 *	<i>Bonobo/Atheist</i> , pp. 189-240

### **Final Meeting**

12/11 ---  
(12:00 – 1:50 p.m.)

\* QUIZ DATE!