

**Psychology 311-04**  
**Controversial Issues in Psychology**  
**Fall 2019**

**Instructor:** John Adamopoulos

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**Office Hours:** M,W 1:30-3:00 pm, and by appointment

**Readings: To be announced on Blackboard (look in “Course Documents”)**

**Course Description**

This course focuses on a variety of related topics that have been, and continue to be, very controversial in psychology—on theoretical, empirical, or even ideological grounds. This particular section of the course will focus on several important psychological and social phenomena whose explanation relies heavily on understanding the role of culture and the social environment in determining human behavior.

We will explore several distinct but interrelated topics, in an order that takes us from broad ideas to specific phenomena and back to general psychological constructs. We will start with an examination of the manner in which psychologists view culture’s influence in human affairs, then explore the question “where does our personality come from---our biological heritage or our cultural experiences?” We will then investigate the phenomena of honor cultures and honor crimes around the world. The next topic stems from the previous sets of issues and concerns the question of what is sometimes referred to as “cultural defense” in legal proceedings. We will conclude the semester with a broad overview of related controversies in the general area of the study of aggression in psychology over the past century.

All reading assignments will be from primary sources (journal articles and book chapters) and made available to you on Blackboard over the course of the semester.

**Course Objectives**

1. Identify areas of psychological controversy and evaluate supporting arguments based on empirical findings.
2. Demonstrate critical thinking skills (analyzing the arguments of other people and forming one’s own reasoned judgment).
3. Research and explain ideas clearly in a written format.
4. Present ideas clearly in oral format

This is an SWS course. This means that you will have to do some writing—in the form of brief homework assignments and a longer term paper—and you will receive feedback for some of your writing so that you have an opportunity to revise your work. The university recommends that at least some of the feedback be provided by your peers. For that reason, we will have one such opportunity.

This course is designated SWS. Completion of WRT 150 with a grade of C or better (not C-) is a prerequisite. SWS credit will not be given to a student who completes this course before completing the prerequisite. SWS courses adhere to certain guidelines. Students turn in a total of at least 3000 words of writing. Part of that total may be essay exams, but a substantial amount of it is made up of essays, reports, or research papers. The instructor works with the students on revising drafts of papers, rather than simply grading the finished piece of writing. At least four hours of class time will be devoted to writing instruction. At least one third of the final grade in the course is based on the writing assignments. Students must complete the course with a grade of "C" or better in order to receive SWS credit.

The Fred Meijer Center for Writing, with locations at the Allendale and Pew/Downtown Grand Rapids campuses, is a peer service available to assist you with writing for any of your classes. Writing consultants, who are fellow GVSU students, are trained to help you with all stages of your writing process, from brainstorming to organizing to editing your papers. Simply bring an idea, prompt, or draft of your paper along with the assignment sheet to any of the Center's locations. Also, through your Gmail account, you have access to online consultations through Google Docs. The Center's services are free and you can drop in and work with a consultant or make an appointment, either through our website or by calling the Center (331-2922). Peer support is available for research and speech/presentation through the Knowledge Market, where the Writing Center partners with the Speech Lab and the Peer Research Center. Additional information about the [Knowledge Market](#) and Writing Center services and locations can be found on our [website](#).

### Assignments

The SWS designation of course means that there are certain university-wide requirements that have to be met. Your final grade will be based on your performance on these requirements:

1. Multiple-choice midterm and final (each will count for 15% of your final grade).
2. A term paper (final version submitted after feedback) of at least 6 double-spaced pages (30% of final grade).
3. Two homework assignments (about 2 pages each) (each will count for 15% of your final grade)
4. A peer response paper (1-2 pages) (5% of final grade)
5. A brief (5-10 min) oral presentation (5% of final grade).

### Grading scale

<b>A: 93-100</b>	<b>C+:78-79</b>
<b>A-: 90-92</b>	<b>C: 73-77</b>
<b>B+:88-89</b>	<b>C-: 70-72</b>
<b>B: 83-87</b>	<b>D+:68-69</b>
<b>B-: 80-82</b>	<b>D: 60-67</b>

Each of the requirements presented above will be discussed extensively in class. Some details:

1. The midterm and final will be based on material from your reading assignments and class lectures.
2. The term paper will involve selecting a topic relevant to the theme of the course and exploring it by finding and reviewing appropriate scientific literature. It should follow APA style (to be discussed in class).
3. Each of the homework assignments will ask you to prepare a concise summary of some important positions associated with one of the topics examined in class.
4. Finally, students will make brief (5-10min) presentations based on their term papers.

In this course we will work at learning how to write scientific papers using the format of the American Psychological Association (APA). We will discuss how to identify scientific literature relevant to a particular topic, how to understand and organize major theoretical arguments, and how to structure papers so that they convey particular perspectives or ideas as effectively as possible.

You will have to submit a draft of your term paper in the end of October. I will provide feedback, which you will then use to submit a final version of your paper on December 6.

**Please keep in mind that class participation is important and may help your grade—especially in borderline cases.**

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

### **Tentative Schedule, Topic Outline, and Assignments**

<b>8/26</b>	Introduction to course/explanation of various assignments
<b>8/28</b>	General discussion of major topics
<b>8/30</b>	Mechanics of writing scientific papers using the APA format
<b>9/2</b>	<b>LABOR DAY RECESS</b>
<b>9/4</b>	Discussion of peer response process
<b>9/6-9/13</b>	How psychologists think about cultural explanations (1 <sup>st</sup> set of readings)
<b>9/16-9/23</b>	Culture and personality (2 <sup>nd</sup> set of readings)
<b>9/18</b>	First homework assignment posted on Blackboard
<b>9/25</b>	First homework assignment due in class Continue discussion on scientific writing
<b>9/27-10/4</b>	Honor cultures (3 <sup>rd</sup> set of readings)
<b>10/2</b>	Study questions for midterm on Blackboard Continue discussion on scientific writing
<b>10/7</b>	Discussion of term papers
<b>10/9</b>	<b>Midterm examination</b>
<b>10/11</b>	Selection of term paper topics
<b>10/14</b>	Second homework assignment posted on Blackboard
<b>10/21</b>	<b>FALL BREAK</b>
<b>10/23</b>	Continue discussion on scientific writing
<b>10/25</b>	Second homework assignment due in class
<b>10/30</b>	<b>Draft of term paper due in class</b>
<b>10/25-11/6</b>	Cultural defense (4 <sup>th</sup> set of readings)
<b>11/15</b>	Comments on drafts of term papers available in class

- 11/8-11/20** Aggression (5<sup>th</sup> set of readings)
- 11/22-12/6** Student class presentations
- 11/27-11/29** **THANKSGIVING BREAK**
- 12/6** Final term papers due in class
- 12/11** Final examination (8:00-9:50 am)