

Grand Valley State University  
Psychology 492-01: Capstone Winter 2017  
MW 1:30-2:45 PM ASH 2121

**SYLLABUS**

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**Course Description**

Psychological researches are expanding in a breath-taking pace and can be a rich source of information for anyone seeking answers to personally relevant questions. However, it takes life-long learning to be a savvy consumer of this rich source of information, let alone to become a contributor to it. A crucial part of the learning is to understand where scientific questions come from and how they are related to and distinct from just any questions anyone can ask. The main goal of this course is to help students to learn how to raise meaningful questions and frame them in scientifically approachable ways. We start by reviewing certain guiding principles in conducting scientific research, followed by surveys and discussions on a sample of research topics that promise to offer insights into the human nature and have implications on the urgent issues facing the humankind. Throughout the course, students are encouraged to explore the relationship between science, scientific psychology and the humanist ideal for transcending our species' and individuals' histories and reaching for the greater good.

**Reading material**

No textbooks are required. Most of the reading material will be accessible in pdf files that can be downloaded either from the Blackboard or directly from the web. In exchange for the cost of the textbook, you have to defray the cost of printing the reading material yourself. **Please bring your printed copies of the articles to class.** You may also have to purchase two books from amazon.com (most of them cost under \$20) at your own expenses, if they are not available from your libraries.

**Class organization and reading/writing requirements**

This course will be conducted like a seminar. There will be very little formal lecturing. Instead, the course will be structured around reading and discussion of original journal articles, book chapters and books. **Much of the time will be spent on discussing why the authors raise their questions as they do, how well they answer questions, how to raise your own questions and makes them more meaningful and testable.**

There will be six topics, around which the class discussion, debates and exploratory writing assignments will be organized. Each of these focal topics will consume about two weeks, or four class sessions. While there is room for change, each of the two weeks or four days for a focal

topic will be structured in the following way:

**Day 1:** Introduction to the focal topic; Quiz on the highlights of each article; raising questions of personal relevance; Exploratory writings aimed at finding paths to answering the questions; further discussions or recap on the last topic, except for the first and the last week of the semester.

**Day 2 & Day 3:** Group discussion on the assigned articles led student discussion leaders; trying really hard to help each other understand the main points of each article, and most importantly, see the connections between these articles and the questions raised in Day 1.

**Day 4:** Further group discussions; activities including in-class writings, debate and peer-reviews. A summary/reflection paper of no less than 1000 words is due, **in which** you 1) Raise and clarify your questions, 2) Describe how the articles discussed in class are relevant to your questions, 3) Consider different approaches for scientifically answering the questions. For each piece I will post a list of questions/issues for exploration. After the Spring break, this day will be reserved for the presentation of the second assigned book, one that is different from each student.

**The two classes before the spring break** are scheduled for the discussion on the first assigned book, one that must be read by every student. It will be structured liked book club meeting. Each student will be responsible for presenting one chapter and engage in conversations/debates with other students on all topics of the book.

To meet the requirements of the class, it is important that you 1) read and understand quite well the four or five articles for each of the six topics; 2) complete the six summary/reflection papers on time; 3) attend all class sessions and be engaged in class discussion and activities, and 4) read two assigned books and get ready for presentation and class discussion.

**In addition**, you are highly encouraged to use the discussion board of the Blackboard for discussing course-related issues and helping one another. You will earn extra credit of up to 10 points by using the discussion board, depending on the frequency and the quality of your posts.

There will be a take-home final exam that consists of short concept questions and short-essay questions covering all the topics discussed in class.

### **Grade Distribution**

Your final grade will be based on following components:

- 1) 6 summary/reflection papers: 20 points each = 120 points
  - 2) 1<sup>st</sup> Book presentation = 20 points
  - 3) 2<sup>nd</sup> Book presentation = 20 points
  - 4) Final exam = 55 points
  - 5) Discussion leading = 20 points
  - 6) Attendance and class participation: = 60 points
  - 7) Discussion Board postings = up to 10 points of extra credits
- Total= 295 points + 10 extra credit points**

Your total points will be converted to scores in percentage, and your final letter grade will then be determined according to the following percentage scale:

A= 93-100; A- = 89-92; B+ = 86- 88; B = 82-85; B- =79-81; C+ = 76-78;

C=72-75; C- = 68-71; D+ = 64-67; D = 60-63; F= 0-59

### **Schedule**

(Subject to change, please check BB frequently)

#### **1/9: Course overview**

#### **1/11, 1/18, 1/23 &1/25: Topic One (Scientific methods and psychology)**

#### **(1/16: Martin Luther Jr. Memorial Day, no class)**

Meinrad, P. (1991). The difference between everyday knowledge, ideology, and scientific knowledge, *New Ideas in Psychology*, 9(2), 227-231.

Lillienfeld, S. O. (2010). Can psychology become a science? *Personality and Individual Differences* 49 (2010), 281–288.

Gilbert, D. (1991). How mental systems believe, *American Psychologists*, 46(2), 107-119.

Shermer, M. (2008). Folk numeracy and middle land, *Scientific American* September, 40

Boudry, M., Blancke, S., and Pigliucci, M. (2015). What makes weird belief thrive? The epidemiology of pseudoscience, *Philosophical Psychology*, 28(8), 1177–1198.

#### **1/30, 2/1, 2/6 & 2/8: Topic Two (Nature, Nurture and Culture)**

Champagne, F. A. & Mashoodh, R. (2009). Gene in Context: Gene-Environment interplay and the origins of individual differences in behavior. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 18(3), 127-131.

Fuss, J., Auer, M. K., & Briken, P. (2015). Gender dysphoria in children and adolescents: a review of recent research, *Current Opinions in Psychiatry*, 28, 430-434.

Zilioli, S. et al. (2016). Interest in babies negatively predicts testosterone responses to sexual visual stimuli among heterosexual young men, *Psychological Science*, 27(1) 114–118.

Sorokowski, P., Sorokowska, A. & Witzel, C. (2014). Sex differences in color preferences transcend extreme differences in culture and ecology. *Psychonomic Bulletin Review*, 21, 1195–1201.

Tomasello, M., Hermann, E. (2010). Ape and Human Cognition: What's the difference? *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 19(1), 3-8.

### **2/13, 2/15, 2/20 & 2/22: Topic Three (Mind and Body)**

- Van Oudenhove, L. & Cuypers, S. E. (2010). The philosophical "mind- body problem" and its relevance for the relationship between psychiatry and the neurosciences. *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 53(4), 545-57.
- Piedimonte, A. Benedetti, F. (2016). Words and Drugs: Same Mechanisms of Action? *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 46, 159-166.
- Wright, R. J.& Rakow, T. (2017). Don't sweat it: Re-examining the somatic marker hypothesis using variants of the Balloon Analogue Risk Task. *Decision*, 4(1), 52-56.
- Mobbs, D., Lau, H., Jones, O.D., & Frith, C.D. (2007). Law, Responsibility, and the brain, *PLoS Biology*, 5(4), 693-700.
- Weir, K. (2011). The exercise effect. *APA Monitor*, 42(11), 48-52.

### **2/27 & 3/1: "Book-club" meeting: Discussion on Michael Shermer's book "The Moral Arc"**

### **3/5-3/12: Spring Break Recess**

### **3/13, 3/15, 3/20 & 3/22: Topic Four (Perceptual and cognitive unconscious)**

- Rensink, R., O'Regan, K., & Clark, J. J. (1997). To see or not to see: The need for attention to Perceive changes in scenes, *Psychological Science*, 8(5), 368-373.
- Johansson, P. et al. (2014). Choice blindness and preference change: You will like this paper better if you (believe you) chose to read It! choice blindness and preference change. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 27(3), 281-289.
- Dijksterhuis, A. et al. (2005). The Unconscious Consumer: Effects of Environment on Consumer Behavior, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 15(3),193–202.
- Solms, M. (2000). Freud returns. *Scientific American*, 290(5), 82-88.

### **3/27, 3/29, 4/3 & 4/5: Topic Five (Stereotypes and social perception)**

- Todd, A. R., Thiem, K. C., Neel, R. (2016). Does seeing faces of young black boys facilitate the identification of threatening stimuli? *Psychological Science*, 27(3), 384–393.
- Jussim, L, Crawford, J. T., Rubinstein, R. S. (2015). Stereotype accuracy in perceptions of groups and individuals. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 24(6), 490.
- West, T. V., Pearson, A. R., Dovidio, J. F., Johnson, B. T., & Phills, C. E. (2014). Racial attitudes and visual cues in political judgments: Support for Obama during the 2008 presidential election. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 20(4), 583-590.
- Cohen, G. L., Sherman, D. K. (2005). Stereotype threat and the social and scientific contexts of the race achievement gap. *American Psychologist*, 60(3), 270-271.

#### **4/10, 4/12, 4/17 & 4/19: Topic Six (Self, values, and society)**

- Dweck, C. S. & Molden, D. (2008). Self-theories: The construction of free will. In J. Baer, Kaufman, J. N., & L. Lawrence (Eds.) *Are We Free? Psychology and Free Will* (pp.44-64) Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dutcher, J. et al. (2016). Self-Affirmation Activates the Ventral Striatum: A Possible Reward-Related Mechanism for Self-Affirmation, *Psychological Science*, 27(4), 455–466.
- Schwartz, S. H. (2012). An overview of the Schwartz theory of basic values. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1116>
- Barbera, P. et al. (2015). Tweeting from left to right: Is online political communication more than an echo chamber? *Psychological Science*, 26(10), 1531–1542.

#### **“Must-read” book:**

Shermer, M. (2016). *The moral arc: How science makes us better people*.

#### **Recommended Books (You will be assigned a unique one from the list):**

- Bering J. (2011). *The belief Instinct: The psychology of souls, destiny, and the meaning of life*
- Sagan, Carl (1997). *The demon-haunted world: Science as a candle in the dark*
- Shermer, M. (2012). *The Believing brain: From ghosts and Gods to politics and conspiracies---How we construct beliefs and reinforce them as truths*.
- Haidt, J (2013). *The righteous mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion*
- Greene, J. (2014). *Moral tribes: Emotion, reason, and the gap between us and them*
- Ridley, M. (2004). *The agile gene: How nature turns on nurture*.
- Macknik, S. & Martinez-Conde, S. (2010). *Sleights of Mind: What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals about Our Everyday Deceptions*.
- Gilbert, D. (2006). *Stumbling on happiness*.
- Sternberg, R. (2006). *The new psychology of love*.
- Pinker, S. (2003). *The blank slate: The modern denial of human nature*.
- Churchland, P. (2013). *Touching a nerve*
- Stanovich, K. (2010). *What intelligence tests miss: The psychology of rationality*.
- Banaji, M. R. & Greenwald, A. G. (2013). *Blindspot*.
- Schacter, D. (2001). *Seven sins of memory*
- Goleman, D. (2006). *Social Intelligence: The revolutionary new science of human relationships*.
- Iacoboni, M (2009). *Mirroring People: the science of empathy and how we connect with others*.
- Kaplan, M. & Kaplan, E. (2009). *Bozo Sapiens: Why to err is human*
- Hood, B. (2013). *The Self Illusion: How the social brain creates identity*
- Kagan, J. (2010). *The temperamental thread: How genes, culture, time and luck make us who we are*.
- Cain, S. (2013). *Quiet: The power of Introverts in a world that can't stop talking*
- Bloom, P. (2010). *How pleasure works: the new science of why we like what we like*.
- Bloom, P. (2016). *Against empathy: the case for rational compassion*
- Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset*.
- Gopnik, A. (2009). *The philosophical baby: What children's minds tell us about truth, love and the meaning of life*