

Grand Valley State University
Psychology 492-03: Capstone Fall 2016
MW 1:30-2:45 PM ASH 1117

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 will start by reviewing certain guiding principles in conducting scientific research, followed by surveys and discussions on selected sample of research topics that promise to offer insights into the human nature. Throughout the course, students will be encouraged to explore the distinction and relationship between scientific psychology and the humanist ideals for transcending our species' and individual histories and reaching for greater consciousness.

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 internet. In exchange for the cost of the textbook, you have to defray the cost of printing the reading material yourself. You may also have to purchase a book from amazon.com (most of them available as used books and cost less than \$20) at your own expense.

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 how to raise good meaningful questions and make them scientifically testable.**

There will be seven focal 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 class sessions for a focal topic will be structured in the following way:

Session 1: Introduction to the focal topic; 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.

Sessions 2 & 3: Discussing the 4-5 assigned articles on the focal topic; 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 **Session 1**.

Session 4: A short summary/reflection paper of about 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, and 4) Propose how you would proceed collecting evidence to test your ideas. For each piece I will post a list of questions/issues for exploration. Book presentations.

To meet the writing requirements, you must read and understand quite well the four or five journal articles assigned for each topic. You must attend the class regularly and be engaged in class discussion. You must also read an assigned book closely to be able to answer questions from your peers, and read at least the excerpts of the books presented by other students.

In addition, you are also highly encouraged to use the discussion board of the Blackboard both before and after the class every week for raising your questions and replying your peers' questions. You will earn extra credit of up to 15 points for using the discussion board, depending on the number and quality of your posts.

There will be a final take-home exam that consists mainly of short-essay questions covering all the material discussed in class. There will be no midterm exams.

Grade Distribution

Your final grade will be based on following components:

- 1) 7 Bi-weekly journals: 20 points each = 140 points
 - 2) Book presentation = 30 points
 - 3) Final exam = 60 points
 - 4) Attendance and class participation = 40 points
 - 5) In-class assignments: = 40 points
 - 6) Discussion Board postings = up to 15 points of extra credits
- Total= 310 points + 15 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)

8/29: Course overview

8/31, 9/7, 9/12, 9/14: Topic One (Scientific Psychology)

(9/5: Labor day recess, no class)

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

Bunge, Mario (1985). Speculation: Wild and Sound, *New Ideas in Psychology*, 1(1), 5-6.

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

Kelly, Harold H. (1992). Common-sense psychology and scientific psychology, *Annual Review of Psychology*, 43, 1-23

9/19 – 9/28: Topic Two (Beliefs and science)

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.

Cohen, A. B. (2015). Religion's Profound Influences on Psychology: Morality, Intergroup Relations, Self-Construal, and Enculturation, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 24(1), 77–82.

Norenzayan, A. & Gervais, W. M. (2013). The origins of religious disbelief, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 17(1), 20-25.

10/3—10/12: Topic Three (Nature, Nurture, evolutionary psychology)

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.

Baron-Cohen, S (2007). Sex differences in mind: Keeping science distinct from social policy, In S. J. Ceci & W. M. Williams (Eds.) *Why Aren't More Women in Science: Top Researchers Debate the Evidence*. (pp. 159-172). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

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

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

10/17 – 10/26: Topic Four (Mind and body)

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

Piedimonte, A. Benedetti, F. (2016). Words and Drugs: Same Mechanisms of Action? *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 46, 159-166.

Damasio, A. R. (1996). The somatic marker hypothesis and the possible functions of the prefrontal cortex. *Transactions of the Royal Society of London B Biological Science*, 351, 1413–1420

Mobbs, D., Lau, H., Jones, O.D., & Frith, C.D. (2007). Law, Responsibility, and the brain, *PLoS Biology*, 5(4), 693-700

10/31-11/9: Topic Five (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

Bear, A. & Bloom, P. (2016). A Simple Task Uncovers a Postdictive Illusion of Choice, *Psychological Science*, 27(6), 914–922.

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

11/14-11/23: Topic Six (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.

Samochowiec, J. Wänke, M. and Fiedler, K. (2010). Political Ideology at Face Value, *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 1: 206-213

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

11/28-12/7: Topic Seven (Self, Values, and Culture)

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.

Weir, K. (2011). The exercise effect. *APA Monitor*, 42(11), 48-52

Recommended Books:

Bunge, M. (2014). *Chasing Reality: Strife Over Realism*.

Bering J. (2011). *The Belief Instinct: The Psychology of Souls, Destiny, and the Meaning of Life*,

Michael Shermer (2003). *How we believe: the search for God in an age of science*. Freeman

Ara Norenzayan (2016). *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict*

Jonathan Haidt: *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*

Matt Ridley (2004). *The agile gene: How nature turns on nurture*, Harper Perennial

Stephen Macknik & Susana Martinez-Conde (2010). *Sleights of Mind: What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals about Our Everyday Deceptions*, Henry Holt and Co.

Michael Gazzaniga: *Who's in charge? Free will and the science of the brain*.

Daniel Gilbert (2006). *Stumbling on happiness*. New York: Knopf

Daniel Siegel (2010). *Mindsight: The new science of personal transformation*. Bantam

Robert Sternberg (2006). *The new psychology of love*. Yale University Press.

Steven Pinker (2003). *The blank slate: The modern denial of human nature*. Penguin

Patricia Churchland (2013). *Touching a nerve*, W. W. Norton

Keith Stanovich (2010). *What intelligence tests miss: The psychology of rationality*. Yale University Press

Matt Ridley (2004). *The agile gene: How nature turns on nurture*, Harper Perennial

Mahzarin R. Banaji & Anthony G. Greenwald (2013). *Blindspot*

Alexandra Horowitz (2014). *On Looking: A Walker's Guide to the Art of Observation*

Daniel Goleman (2006). *Social Intelligence: The revolutionary new science of human relationships*. Bantam Books

Marco Iacoboni (2009). *Mirroring People: the science of empathy and how we connect with others*.

Michael Kaplan & Ellen Kaplan (2009). *Bozo Sapiens: Why to err is human*

Bruce Hood (2013). *The Self Illusion: How the Social Brain Creates Identity*

Jerome Kagan (2010). The temperamental thread: How genes, culture, time and luck make us who we are. Dana Press
Susan Cain (2013). Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking
Paul Bloom (2010). *How pleasure works: the new science of why we like what we like*.
Paul Bloom (2016). Against empathy: the case for rational compassion
Carol Dweck (2006). *Mindset*. Ballantine Books
Alison Gopnik (2009). The philosophical baby: What children's minds tell us about truth, love and the meaning of life