


Psy D58

Instructor Information

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General Course Overview

This course addresses the possibility that there are two distinctly different ways in which our mental processes affect performance; via conscious or unconscious influences. We will discuss this issue in several contexts including examinations of perception with and without awareness (e.g., subliminal perception), memory with and without awareness (e.g., amnesia), hypnosis, awareness in animals, and the notion of will.

Throughout, the focus on the course will be to demonstrate how such a difficult issue can be rigorously examined using the scientific method. We will spend a fair amount of time discussing the costs and benefits of certain logics that have been used, and you will be pushed to learn techniques of critical analysis when reading and thinking about papers. I will try my best to highlight the “dynamic” nature of science. That is, the notion that science is not really about uncovering truths, it is about building theories that explain and predict data. These theories are constantly being debated, and one should not believe what is being said just because the author believes it.

In accordance with the above, you will be primarily evaluated on the basis of the thoughts and ideas you have throughout the course, rather than being evaluated on how well you learn the details of any given study. Thus, there will be no exams.

My hope then, is that this course will contribute to your learning of psychology in several ways. You will learn about a number of phenomena related to the issue of conscious versus unconscious influences. You will learn to think critically about the techniques used to examine them, and the implications drawn from them. You will also learn how to express those thoughts in both written and verbal form. Finally, you will learn that psychology is a new and hotly debated field of study, full of interesting possibilities that we are only starting to uncover.

Class Style

This is meant to be a seminar style course. In my view, a seminar course is one where a bunch of people read the same papers each week. One lucky member of the audience then presents one of the readings, while the others listen and ask questions (or raise issues). The purpose of the presentation is to facilitate discussion. Thus, a good presentation will be one that encourages the others to share their views and ideas. In an ideal world then, class would involve a vibrant discussion of topics guided by the presenter.

The current class has 25 students, which is really too many for everyone to do a spoken presentation. So, partly to show you how research is presented at conferences, we will have spoken presentations on some days, and one day in which a number of students present poster presentations of papers they have read ... papers not on the reading list. We can have several posters presented at once, and all of the other students in the class will visit each poster with the presenter "walking them through" the research as scientists do at conferences. We will do this for the first hour of that class, then we'll chat about things as a group for the second half.

With respect to the spoken presentations, I've been a professor long enough to know that such discussions do not tend to just occur. The students must be made to read the papers, and must be encouraged to enter into discussion. How can I help realize that goal? I rely on the following.

First, every student will have to lead one discussion during the course. The presenter will be encouraged to look for critical issues in the papers, and raise them in the class. Part of each student's grade (10%) will be based on this experience.

Second, every student will be required to write a "thought paper" on the readings for the day on the 9 weeks when there are verbal presentations (even those presenting). Nobody has to do one on poster day. This paper should not be a summary, it should be a description of things you liked, disliked, or thought could be done differently in the experiments. You might also describe how you might like to follow-up on the research, or things you think the author missed. The papers should only be approximately one page long. Each student will hand in 9 such thought papers, worth 5% each for a total of 45% of the final mark.

Third, an additional 15% of the final mark on the course is assigned by me based on in-class participation.

My hope is that these components will indeed make for thought provoking presentations in a context where the other students have read the papers and do have a good reason for presenting their thoughts

Readings

This year, there is no book of readings. Instead, they are available from the readings link of the course homepage.

Evaluation

There are no exams in this course. Instead, your mark in the course will come from the following sources with the following weightings.

Thought papers:	$9 \times 5\% = 45\%$
Presentation:	10%
Participation:	15%
Final Paper:	30%

Final Paper:

I see the final paper as a long essay in which you will take one context from the course and examine it in detail. This will involve discussing relevant papers from the course in addition to at least three to five papers not discussed in the course. The optimal essay will be one that uses these papers to emphasize some issue that could benefit from further research. The student will spell out the research that has currently been done, highlight the issue of primary interest, then propose an experiment (or set of experiments) that could be performed to advance our understanding of the issue in question. Finally, the student will spell out what conclusions would be drawn if certain results were found (especially the expected results, but also results other than those expected).

This final paper should be longer than the thought papers, perhaps 8-15 pages in length. The essays will be marked primarily in terms of the clarity of your arguments, and the novelty of your ideas. You should use APA format throughout, including the appropriate use of abstracts, title pages, tables, figures, references, etc. The final essay will comprise 25% of your final mark.
