

Current Topics in Social Psychology

Course Syllabus for PSYD15 (Spring Semester 2008)

Meets Tuesdays 18:00 – 20:00 in Management Building (MW) 264

Instructor Contact Information

Instructor: Steve Livingston

Office Location: Science Wing 569-A

Instructor's E-mail Address:

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slivingston@utsc.utoronto.ca

Office Hours: W & R 13:00-14:30 (or by appointment)

Course Overview

In this course we will examine some current ideas, trends, and controversies in the field of social psychology. In this course there will be both lecture and group discussion, with an emphasis on examine social psychological theory and research from a critical standpoint. Your theory comprehension and analytical skills will be evaluated through a series of short reaction papers and two term tests. You will also have the opportunity to explore and discuss topics of your own choosing, which will culminate in a class presentation and a term paper. This course will be fairly work-intensive, but it is hoped that you will emerge with a better understanding and critical appreciation of the current state of social psychology as a scientific discipline.

Basis of Course Grades

Your final grade will be based on multiple components, described below. You may use the spaces below to keep a running tally of your scores in the course; they will also be posted on the course's UTSC Intranet site.

<i>Weekly Reaction Papers:</i>	_____ /20 points		<u><i>Course Total</i></u>
<i>Midterm Exam:</i>	_____ /15 points		
<i>Research Presentation:</i>	_____ /20 points	=	_____ /100 points
<i>Term Paper:</i>	_____ /30 points		
<i>Class Participation:</i>	_____ /15 points		

1) Weekly reaction papers

Every student is required to write weekly reaction papers, starting in the second week of the semester. These reaction papers will provide you with an opportunity to thoughtfully elaborate on any ideas, questions, concerns, doubts, or inspirations concerning the readings and the lectures. The ideal format of the reaction paper is a brief essay in which you try to expand on aspects that find similarities among the various readings, or in which you identify apparent contradictions between theoretical approaches or research findings. You might also compare various theoretical approaches to the same phenomenon with respect to their explanatory strengths and weaknesses. A discussion of your personal experiences or preferences is certainly a legitimate basis for the paper, but you must clearly link these to the broader ideas covered in that week. Keep in mind that your instructor is very familiar with the assigned readings. Therefore, there is no need for an extensive summary of the papers. What is critical is that you write clearly, demonstrate that you have thought about the assigned readings, and support your statements with logic and evidence.

Each reaction paper should be 1 to 1.5 double-spaced pages. Because the task of integrating and criticizing is relatively open-ended, evaluation will focus on their thoughtfulness of the papers and the degree to which you succeed in making a clear, supported point.

2) Midterm exam

In the first meeting after the UTSC reading week break (February 26, 2008), you will complete a midterm examination. This examination will contain a variety of questions that will test your understanding of the course material discussed up to that point. More details about this examination and how to best prepare for it will be provided by the instructor as the exam date approaches.

3) Research presentation

You will make an audiovisual presentation to the class concerning one recent research (not review) article. You will select the article from those published in issues from the last 5 years (2003-2007) of *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, or *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*. Please select three possible articles and show them to me at least one week before your presentation. I will help you choose from within these three.

The 15 minute presentation should explain the theoretical context for the study, the authors' specific hypotheses, how the hypotheses were tested, and the results and conclusions. This is an exercise in reducing the material in the articles to the essential important points in the study. You will want to avoid getting bogged down in details of the studies and results. During the last few minutes of your presentation, you should also propose a study that you would do to follow up the study. The instructor and students in the class will use a form to grade and give feedback to the presenter based upon the presentation style and content and the quality of the discussion of the material. This form, which will be provided later in the semester, can help guide the development of your talk.

Given the number of talks that we will hear, creativity and humor in your presentation are certainly welcome. However, style without substance will not impress your audience – remember the negative connotation of the phrase “all sizzle and no steak”.

4) Term Paper

You will write a term paper about a topic of your choosing. In it, you will review the recent social psychological literature on that topic (i.e., published within the last 8-10 years), and make some suggestions about potential avenues for further scientific investigation. You will likely find published review papers on the topic area and it is strongly recommended that you use these papers to guide you in your review. Once you find such a review paper, however, do not assume that you have found a sufficient summary of the field. There are often several published reviews on a specific topic, including reviews that occurred at different times, that used different methods of analysis (e.g., statistical meta-analysis vs. qualitative approaches), and/or reviews by scholars who have come to different conclusions.

Given the topical variance in the amount of published research, there will be no formally set minimum or maximum length for the term paper. However, a well-organized and sufficiently detailed paper will almost certainly be 10-15 double-spaced pages. Papers much shorter than this often sacrifice detail and clarity; papers much longer than this often sacrifice focus and comprehensibility. The term paper **SHOULD NOT** be as long as one that you would find in a journal such as *Psychological Bulletin* or *Personality and Social Psychology Review*. Rather, it should summarize what you perceive to be the important types of research, conclusions, and debates that have recently occurred in a particular topic area.

This paper must be submitted in a hard-copy format, and it will be due no later than Tuesday, April 8th, 2008. If you have trouble deciding on a topic, please speak with the instructor well in advance of the due date for the term paper.

5) Class participation

The instructor will make a subjective assessment of your class involvement. This is not simply a matter of reading the material and attending the class meetings. It will also address your attention during class, your thoughtfulness during class discussions, and the nature of the comments you make about ideas presented by other students in class.

There is no need to monopolize class discussion in order to get a high participation score – indeed, doing so will likely detract from that score. In addition, you need not simply accept everything stated by your classmates. Critical analysis and debate is great – and expected – but these must be constructive contributions to the class discussion. You will not win favor from the instructor by tearing down your classmates' ideas to show “how smart you are”. Good scholarship is collaborative, not competitive.

Attendance, Participation, and Respect for Your Colleagues

Although you are not graded specifically on perfect attendance, I expect that you will both regularly attend and actively participate. If you will be unable to attend class, must arrive late, or must leave early, please let me know so that we can minimize any disruptions. You must also still submit any work due on the day that you miss (e.g., your weekly reaction paper).

In this course we are likely to touch upon issues related to ethnicity, gender, class, age, politics, religion, sexual orientation, and disability. You will likely have relevant personal experiences to share, and you may also have strong emotional reactions to these discussions. It can often be difficult to remain objective when somebody says something “ignorant” or “outrageous” about something that you care deeply about.

However, we must we strive to maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect and scholarship. It is very important to me that all of my students feel comfortable asking questions and contributing to class discussions. Please do your best to respect others, even if you have strongly differing opinions, and have patience, even if you feel that their questions or contributions are wasting class time. If you have any suggestions about how to create a better and more cooperative classroom environment, please let me know.

N.B. Using allotted class time to finish your nap, your lunch, your newspaper, your homework, or your text messages to friends makes it much harder for your classmates and your instructor to do their jobs. If you are disruptive, I will not hesitate to ask you to leave.

If you cannot arrive on time and prepared to work, please think twice about arriving at all!

Class Schedule**

Calendar Date	Discussion Topic	Assignments Due
Jan. 8, 2008	Course overview and “getting to know you”	NONE
Jan. 15, 2008	Cultural differences in cognition and perception	NONE
Jan. 22, 2008	Automaticity of behavior and the free-will debate	Reaction Paper #1
Jan. 29, 2008	Is there any such thing as a ‘real’ attitude?	Reaction Paper #2
Feb. 5, 2008	Materialistic culture and the empty self	Reaction Paper #3
Feb 12, 2008	The social psychology of genocide	Reaction Paper #4
Feb. 19, 2008	** NO CLASS – UTSC READING WEEK **	Reaction Paper #5
Feb. 26, 2008	Midterm exam ; the emergence of social neuroscience	NONE (Study for midterm!!)
Mar. 4, 2008	Is social psychology telling us anything useful?	Reaction Paper #6
Mar. 11, 2008	Class presentations	Reaction Paper #7
Mar. 18, 2008	Class presentations	
Mar. 25, 2008	Class presentations	
Apr. 1, 2008	Class presentations (last scheduled day of class)	
Apr. 8, 2008	** NO CLASS – UTSC STUDY BREAK **	Term Paper

***This schedule is subject to slight changes upon discussion and agreement of the entire class.*

Academic Misconduct →→→ This section is written in bigger letters for a reason! ☺ ←←←

All work must be your own. Cheating, plagiarism, collusion, or other violations of the code of student conduct will not be tolerated. Per university regulations, any suspicions of academic misconduct will be documented and dealt with through proper university channels. Please consult the University of Toronto’s code of conduct on academic misconduct distributed in class for more information. I will also post relevant materials (e.g., guides on proper citation and avoiding plagiarism) on the course Intranet site.

The foundation of good scholarship is ethical conduct. The course assignments are designed to demonstrate your comprehension and analysis of what we cover in this class. I assume you will do your own work, but I will also be vigilant to ensure that is the case. My best advice is to avoid completing your reading and assignments at the last minute, as this will minimize both the likelihood of honest mistakes (e.g., forgetting to cite sources, which is considered plagiarism) and the temptation to resort to prohibited behaviors. *If you are unsure whether specific conduct is prohibited, then ask me before doing it!*

Last, But Not Least...

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the AccessAbility Services Office as soon as possible. The UTSC AccessAbility Services staff (located in S302) are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations. Call (416) 287-7560 or send an e-mail to ability@utsc.utoronto.ca. The sooner you let us know your needs the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

You can use the spaces below to record contact information for some of your classmates.

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