

Current Topics in Social Psychology

Course Syllabus for PSYD15 (Winter Semester 2009)

Meets Wednesdays 19:00 – 21:00 in Management Building (MW) 264

Instructor Contact Information

Instructor: Steve Livingston

Office Location: Science Wing 569-A

Instructor's E-mail Address:

Office Phone: (416) 208-2695 [voicemail equipped]

slivingston@utsc.utoronto.ca

Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:00 – 14:30 (or by appointment)

Course Overview

In this course we will examine some of the recent ideas, research 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. 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.

		<u>Course Total</u>
<i>Weekly Reaction Papers:</i>	_____ /30 points	
<i>Research Presentation:</i>	_____ /20 points	= _____ /100 points
<i>Term Paper:</i>	_____ /35 points	
<i>Class Participation:</i>	_____ /15 points	

1) Weekly reaction papers

Every student is required to write 6 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 already familiar with the assigned readings. Therefore, there is no need for an extensive summary of these readings in your reaction paper. 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 2 double-spaced pages (12-point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins on all sides of the page). 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) Research presentation

With a class partner, 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 (2004-2008, inclusive) 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 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. You will be graded upon the presentation style and content and quality of your responses to audience questions.

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 me – remember the negative connotation of the phrase “all sizzle and no steak”.

3) 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 (12-point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins on all sides of the page). 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 Wednesday, April 8th, 2009. If you have trouble deciding on a topic, please speak with the instructor well in advance of the due date for the term paper.

4) 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.

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.

Class Schedule*

Date (2009)	Discussion Topic	Assignments Due
January 7	Course overview and “getting to know you”	NONE
January 14	Cultural differences in cognition and perception	Reaction paper #1
January 21	Social psychology and the unconscious	Reaction paper #2
January 28	Does the accuracy of a stereotype justify its use?	Reaction paper #3
February 4	Materialistic values and life satisfaction	Reaction paper #4
February 11	The emergence of social neuroscience	Reaction paper #5
February 18	NO CLASS – UTSC READING WEEK	NONE
February 25	TBA	Reaction paper #6
March 4	TBA	NONE
March 11	Is social psychology telling us anything useful?	NONE
March 18	Class presentations	NONE
March 25	Class presentations	NONE
April 1	Class presentations (last scheduled day of class)	NONE
April 8	NO CLASS – UTSC STUDY BREAK	Term paper due

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

Instructional Staff Responsibilities for this Course

- 1) Arriving on time and ready to work
- 2) Doing our best to make the course material interesting and relevant to our students
- 3) Doing our best to make the classroom environment a safe and respectful place to learn
- 4) Doing our best to respond to all student concerns within 48 hours of initial contact
- 5) Encouraging and carefully considering feedback from our students
- 6) Regularly updating course materials and readings
- 7) Making announcements of any changes to the course schedule as far in advance as possible
- 8) Fairly and promptly grading work, and allowing students to review their graded work
- 9) Adhering to the written policies of the University of Toronto Scarborough

Student Responsibilities for this Course

- 1) Arriving on time and ready to work, which means:
 - Keeping up with the weekly assigned readings
 - Regularly attending class
 - Participating in class discussions, activities, demonstrations, etc.
 - Asking questions when you need something answered
 - Having your assignments printed, stapled, and ready to turn in at the start of class
- 2) Professional conduct inside and outside of class, which means:
 - Avoiding unnecessary disruptions of class meetings (e.g., arriving late or leaving early, talking with classmates outside of class discussions, leaving your cell phone on, taking a nap, noisily eating)
 - Cleaning up your personal space (food packaging, scrap paper, etc.) before you leave
 - Being tolerant of other opinions and being constructive when giving any critical response
 - E-mails to instructional staff should be clear and concise, and sent via University of Toronto accounts whenever possible (university regulations suggest this for personal security reasons)
- 3) Maintaining standards of ethical scholarship, which means:
 - Neither committing, encouraging, nor ignoring academic misconduct
 - Reporting incidents of academic misconduct when observed
- 4) Contacting the instructional staff (TAs and/or professor) when you:
 - Will be unable to attend an exam due to medical illness or other reasons
 - Notice a broken link or other problem with online class content
 - Suspect a colleague of academic or non-academic behavioral misconduct
 - Do not understand the course material even after reviewing the lectures and readings

DISABILITY STATEMENT

All students are welcome in this course, including those with disabilities. It is vitally important that students discuss their needs as early as possible with AccessAbility Services (contact information is provided below) in order to put accommodations in place. Students must present relevant and up-to-date documentation, as outlined on the website, from an appropriate health care professional.

Services are provided to students who have a mental health disability, learning disability, attention deficit disorder, acquired brain injury, physical, sensory (hearing/vision), or chronic health condition (e.g., epilepsy, cancer, bowel disease) as well as students who have temporary disabilities such as a broken dominant arm. Students who register with AccessAbility and utilize their services will not be identified on their transcript as receiving accommodations. Information disclosed to the service is confidential and is disclosed with the student's permission. AccessAbility staff can be reached at:

Voice/TTY: 416-287-7560

Office Location: Science Wing 302

E-mail: ability@utsc.utoronto.ca

Website: <http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/ability/>

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT STATEMENT (written in bigger font for emphasis! ☺)

<http://www.utoronto.ca/govcncl/pap/policies/behaveac.html>

I strongly suggest that you carefully read sections A and B of the above-linked Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters, as they form the basis of academic misconduct policy for this course. Academic integrity and honest scholarship are keystones for the success of any great university, the reputation of its graduates, and the worth of its awarded degrees. I take these matters extremely seriously, and I hope that you do as well. Please contact me if you have suspicions of academic misconduct on the part of a classmate, or if you are unsure whether something you personally plan to do is outside the boundaries of ethical scholarship.

Most importantly, you should always avoid postponing your work to the last minute, as this will minimize both the likelihood of mistakes and the lure of resorting to dishonest conduct.

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

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