

PS870 Winter 2004
Specialized Research and Methods in Social Psychology

Topic: Recent Advances in Experimental Social Psychology

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Course Description:

The purpose of this seminar course is to provide graduate students with in depth coverage of some selected topics within the area of experimental social psychology. Each week we will read a chapter taken from a recent volume of Advances in Experimental Social Psychology. Chapters in this series typically summarize an extended and systematic program of research that has had an impact on the field, as well as review relevant past research through the lens of the author's theoretical perspective. Thus each week students will be exposed to an extensive, systematic, program of research on a particular topic.

Assigned Readings:

Each week there will be two assigned readings. First, as our primary reading, we will all read the Advances chapter (see schedule of readings below). In addition, one student (the article discussion leader) will be expected to locate a recent, empirical journal article related to the topic at hand. Journal articles should be selected from one of the following sources: Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, Journal of Experimental Social Psychology. The journal article should provide an extension of the program of research presented in the Advances chapter. Ideally it will be a more recent study conducted by the same authors, or by another researcher studying similar issues. If a more recent article cannot be found, then an article could be selected that was cited in the review chapter but not described in great detail. The article should be made available to everyone for copying by noon of the Monday before class. Although the article presenter will be responsible for leading discussion of the journal article, everyone is expected to read it.

Course Requirements:

20% Participation: This is a seminar style course that relies entirely on your active participation in class discussions. Each week you should come prepared to discuss the topics covered in the chapter and article. You should arrive at class prepared with comments and questions about issues in the readings that caught your interest. Your participation grade will be based not only on the quantity of your participation but also the quality – your contributions in class should demonstrate that you read the materials carefully and gave them some thought and reflection.

10% Discussion questions or comments: To help you think about the readings, you are expected to prepare a list of three discussion questions or comments each week. Your list of questions is to be turned in to the instructor at the beginning of each class. Questions will be graded as either satisfactory, good, or excellent. To be considered excellent, the questions need to demonstrate exceptionally careful critical thinking or creative insight. The questions should serve as a stimulus for discussion – you may want to keep a personal copy of your questions so that you will have them available during the discussion period.

20% Article discussion leader: Students will take turns as the article discussion leader. Each week, the leader is expected to locate a recent journal article related to the primary reading, and to make this article available to everyone by noon on the Monday before class. The leader is then responsible for briefly presenting the article in class and leading discussion about it. Keep in mind that everyone is expected to have read the article; thus, your presentation should do more than simply summarize the article. Try to highlight important aspects of the research, to think critically about the theoretical approach, to identify strengths and weaknesses of the research method, and to raise issues and questions that merit further discussion.

20% Lectures: On two occasions, you will be expected to prepare and deliver a brief “undergraduate lecture” on the reading materials. This exercise is intended to give you some experience in taking material intended for a professional audience and presenting it in a manner appropriate for students with little background in social psychology. Each “lecture” should be approximately 15-20 minutes long and should make use of appropriate visual aids (e.g., power-point slides). The lectures should be appropriate for students taking their first survey course in social psychology, such as PS270 at WLU. You may select the two topics for which you develop your lectures.

30% Thought papers: You are expected to write three “thought papers” throughout the term. Thought papers should be 4-6 pages, typed, double spaced. The topic of your thought paper is open, as long as it clearly relates to the seminar readings and discussions from previous weeks. You are expected to provide more than just a summary of readings, but exactly what you talk about is up to you. You may want to consider problems you’ve identified with a theory or a research approach, or to suggest some way to extend a line of research in a new direction. You could discuss the ways in which a program of research may have practical implications in the “real world” and illustrate with real or hypothetical examples. You could try to connect ideas arising in the course to ideas found in other disciplines or other domains of psychology. You could consider how the concepts in the course could relate to and extend your own primary research interests. See class schedule below for the due dates.

Schedule and Readings:

- Week 1 Organizational Meeting
- Week 2 D. A. Armor and S. E. Taylor. Situated Optimism. Specific Outcome Expectancies and Self-Regulation. Volume 30.
- Week 3 T.D. Wilson and D.T. Gilbert, Affective Forecasting. Volume 35.
- Week 4 R.S. Wyer, Jr., R. Adaval, and S.J. Colcombe, Narrative-Based Representations of Social Knowledge: Their Construction and Use in Comprehension, Memory, and Judgment. Volume 34.
- Week 5 D.T. Kenrick, Evolutionary Social Psychology: From Sexual Selection to Social Cognition. Volume 26.
- Week 6 C.M. Steele, S.J. Spencer, and J. Aronson, Contending with Group Image: The Psychology of Stereotype and Social Identity Threat. Volume 34.
- Week 7 J. Greenberg, S. Solomon, and T. Pyszczynski, Terror Management Theory of Self-Esteem and Cultural Worldviews: Empirical Assessments and Conceptual Refinements. Volume 29.
****Thought Paper 1 Due**
- Week 8 A. Dijksterhuis and J. Bargh. The Perception-Behavior Expressway: Automatic Effects of Social Perception on Social Behavior. Volume 33.
- Week 9 M.H. Kernis and S.B. Waschull, The Interactive Roles of Stability and Level of Self-Esteem: Research and Theory. Volume 28.
- Week 10 M.R. Leary and R.F. Baumeister, The Nature and Function of Self-Esteem: Sociometer Theory. Volume 32.
****Thought Paper 2 Due**
- Week 11 N. Ambady, F.J. Bernieri, and J.A. Richeson, Toward A Histology of Social Behavior: Judgmental Accuracy from Thin Slices of the Behavioral Stream. Volume 32.
- Week 12 S. Chen and S.M. Andersen, Relationships from the Past in the Present: Significant-Other Representations and Transference in Interpersonal Life. Volume 31.
- Week 13 R.S. Wyer, Jr., G.L. Clore, and L.M. Isbell. Affect and Information Processing. Volume 31.
****Thought Paper 3 Due**