

Critical Issues – Psychology 311

SYLLABUS

Professor: Brent D. Slife
Teaching Assistant: Brent Melling
Office: 1072 SWKT
Office Phone: 422-3657
Home Phone: 796-6765
Office Hours: Tu/Th 3:00 – 4:00 and by appointment
E-mail addresses: slife@byu.edu
brentmelling@gmail.com

Slife website: www.brentdslife.com

*Objectives*¹

The focus of this course is critical thinking about psychology. Critical thinking does not mean *being negative* in the sense of looking for psychology's flaws and problems. Critical thinking also does not mean merely *rigorous thinking* in the sense of carefully applying logic, scientific methods, and research statistics. Rather, critical thinking is a *twofold knowledge* of: 1) one's current assumptions, both professional and personal, and 2) assumptions that are alternative to one's current assumptions, both professional and personal. Consequently, the objective of this course is to facilitate your ability to think critically about psychology through the knowledge and application of current and alternative assumptions.

*Required Texts and Chapters*²

Slife, B. D. (2004). Theoretical challenges to therapy practice and research: The constraint of naturalism. In M. Lambert (Ed.) *Handbook of psychotherapy and behavior change*. pp. 44 – 83. New York: Wiley. [S]

Slife, B.D., Mitchell, L. J., & Whoolery, M. (2004). A theistic approach to therapeutic community: Non-naturalism and the Alldredge Academy. In S. Richards &

¹ Each program at BYU has developed a set of expected student learning outcomes. These will help you understand the objectives of the curriculum in the program, including this class. To learn the expected student outcomes for the programs in this department and college go to <<http://learningoutcomes.byu.edu>> and click on the College of Family, Home and Social Sciences and then this department. We welcome feedback on the expected student learning outcomes. Any comments or suggestions you have can be sent to <FHSS@byu.edu>.

² All royalties from Slife texts and articles are donated to charity.

A. Bergin (Eds.) *Casebook for a spiritual strategy in counseling and psychotherapy*. Washington, D. C.: American Psychological Association Books. [SMW]

Slife, B.D., Reber, J., & Richardson, F. (2005). *Developing critical thinking about psychology: Hidden assumptions and plausible alternatives*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association Books. [SRR]

Course Papers

The good news is that there are no exams in this course. The bad news is that you are required to write seven, two-page, double-spaced essays through the semester (12 point Times font with one inch margins). Consider the following steps in formulating and writing each paper. These steps will also help you to know how we evaluate your papers. Comments on your papers will refer to specific passages in these steps (e.g., “3C”).

Step 1. Read carefully the chapters assigned for the relevant weeks (typically two weeks of readings are necessary for a particular paper). I italicize the word “carefully” because a thorough understanding of these readings is imperative to both the content and style of your papers. If you attempt to write these papers without a careful and thoughtful reading, expect your grade to be low.

Step 2. Select some article or chapter from the writings of mainstream psychologists. **A)** This selection should originate from the literature of the subdiscipline of psychology that the relevant course readings address (e.g., social psychology). **B)** This selection should also illustrate two or more of the assumptions noted in the relevant readings. Although many selections, literally thousands, are available, finding a suitable reading to write about constitutes a portion of your grade. **C)** Do not knowingly use the selection of someone else in the class, unless you have already begun analyzing the article or chapter. **D)** Even here, it is imperative that you do not trade notes or discuss the selection in common. (It is usually quite easy for us to see when the same selection has been discussed by two or more people.) **E)** However, discussion about the readings assigned or different selections is always appropriate and encouraged. **F)** Make a legible copy of the selection to be stapled to your write-up. Papers will not be accepted until they are properly stapled to the corresponding selection.

Step 3. Read carefully the article or chapter selected, and identify and explain two assumptions in the selection that were discussed in the assigned readings. **A)** You are not only to label this set of assumptions from your selection (typically one assumption at a time), **B)** but you are also to explain why this assumption is the assumption you identify. **C)** Take pains to make this explanation as thorough as possible. In other words, spell out carefully why you believe the authors of your selection are making this particular assumption. **D)** What is it about the selection (e.g., quote the author) that leads you to think that the assumption is being made, even though it is not perhaps identified as an assumption by the author(s)? **E)** When you have identified something the author has said that you believe is evidence of a particular assumption, be clear about how this passage is connected

to the assumption (e.g., unpack the meaning of the quote). Evidence of this sort, along with connections and explanations using this evidence, will be a major portion of the paper, and thus a major portion of the grade.

Step 4. Describe now alternative assumptions to each of the two assumptions you identified in Step 3. **A)** Your best resource for accomplishing this task will, again, be the assigned readings. Although one of the readings typically emphasizes alternative assumptions, the other often has important information about alternative assumptions (and vice versa). Describing alternative assumptions implies more than merely labeling them. **B)** A student must also explain how alternatives are alternatives – how they are different from the current assumptions of the selection or author(s). **C)** Also, a student must attempt to explore what alternative assumptions might mean for the article or chapter selected. This is perhaps the toughest part of the paper and often the main reason for not getting a high grade. How might the research or topic of the selection have been different if the author or authors had made the alternative assumptions specified? There are many right ways to accomplish this exploration. **D)** Just be sure to be consistent with the selection and the alternative assumptions. This description of alternative assumptions is the other (other than Step 3) major portion of your paper and grade.

Step 5. Redraft and refine your paper to make it as well organized and as clear as possible. Reviewing and revising your paper is the key to a well written paper (and a high grade). **A)** Nothing replaces correct content, to be sure, but correct content cannot be discerned without a logical organization and a clear writing style. **B)** The key to revising and redrafting your paper is to get a rough draft done early (even in the first of the two weeks), so that you can **C)** review and revise it several times before turning it in for evaluation. **D)** Having others, including students of our class, review and suggest revisions to your paper is encouraged, as long as all the work on the paper, including the revisions themselves, is yours and yours alone.

Grades

All the essays are graded on a 100 point basis, with > 90 = A, 80 – 89 = B, 70 - 79 = C and so on. Your final grade is figured on a parallel percentage basis, with > 90% (or 630 points) = A, 80 – 89% (or 560 – 629 points) = B, 70 – 79% (or 490 – 559 points) = C and so on.

Other Issues

Flu policy. As are all large communities, BYU is preparing for the potential of the H1N1 influenza virus to spread rapidly throughout the campus during the coming winter. Details of BYU's preparation, and advice on what you can do to prepare, can be found at flu.byu.edu. Please read it! In order to contain any possible infection, the administration has advised course instructors to ask any student who is feeling sick with flu-like symptoms (fever with either sore throat or cough) to remain home, away from class and away from all large gatherings. Sick

students should remain at home until at least 24 hours after the fever has gone away. Students should also call their doctor or the student health center for advice as soon as possible.

The administration has asked course instructors to provide adequate make-up opportunities for all work missed during a flu-like illness. Accordingly, I will allow all time as needed to miss class during an illness and to make up work at a reasonable time afterward, provided the student provides a doctor's note to document the illness. ALL students who feel sick with fever and sore throat or cough should call the doctor and visit if so advised. If advised to visit the doctor, please obtain a note whether or not you are diagnosed with the flu! When you are ill please call or email your TA or the instructor as soon as possible, and *continue to communicate* with us until you are well. You should also be in contact as much as possible with one or two class members, in order to keep up on what you miss. We will try to facilitate class communication from the beginning of the semester.

For your protection, your instructors will follow the same rules! If your instructor is sick he or she will try to find a replacement to carry the class forward, else will notify students as soon as possible about a class cancellation.

Late papers. A paper is penalized five percentage point (e.g., 89 to 84) for every day it is late (after 5:00 pm on the day listed). Incomplete papers (e.g., missing pages, no stapled article) are considered late papers, with the daily penalty incurred. This penalty will be routinely assessed, *regardless of the reason for its lateness* (e.g., flat tire, personal problem). The only possible exception is illness, mental or physical, where a licensed health practitioner writes a note indicating the reason for the lateness.

Grade appeal. If you feel you have a legitimate complaint about a grade on a paper, you are encouraged to appeal the grade. This requires submitting to me a well-reasoned and highly specific explanation of what you feel is the problem. I will re-read your entire paper. If this results in an alteration of your grade (higher or lower), the second grade will replace the original grade. Grade appeals can only be made within the one week period following the return of the paper.

Extra credit. You are allowed one extra credit opportunity. In a special issue of the *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* (Fall, 2009, Volume 29, Number 2), Dr. Jeff Reber and I argue that mainstream psychology is prejudiced against theism. Eight commentators then reply to this argument, and we reply to them (in the same issue). Your extra credit opportunity is to write an essay that compares our position (both the initial article and the reply) to the positions of two (of the eight) commentators of your choice. This comparison would include both similarities and differences among the positions. Your essay will be evaluated for the clarity, organization, and accuracy of both the original author positions and their relations to one another. A maximum of 21 total points (or 3% of your overall grade) is possible.

Plagiarism. It is an act of plagiarism to "borrow" ideas or quotes from former students' old papers and from the papers of students presently taking the course with you. Plagiarism also includes quoting or paraphrasing passages from any of your references without giving proper credit to the real authors (i.e., an APA-style citation), because doing so implies that this information came from you. Presenting the ideas of others as

one's own is called plagiarism. Plagiarism, as defined by the BYU Honor Code, is a form of intellectual theft. It is an act of fraud; it is dishonest, deceitful, unethical, and can lead to serious and lasting negative consequences for your academic and professional career. For this reason, please follow the course guidelines for when and when not to read other 378 students' papers (including those from other sections) or have them read yours. In addition, please use only those sources that meet the course criteria for acceptable reference materials.

Academic Honesty. While all students sign the honor code, there are still specific skills most students need to master over time in order to correctly cite sources, especially in this new age of the internet; as well as deal with the stress and strain of college life without resorting to cheating. Please know that as your professor I will notice instances of cheating on exams or plagiarizing on papers. See <http://www.byu.edu/honorcode> for specific examples of intentional, inadvertent plagiarism, and fabrication, falsification.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination against any participant in an educational program or activity that receives federal funds. The act is intended to eliminate sex discrimination in education. Title IX covers discrimination in programs, admissions, activities, and student-to-student sexual harassment. BYU's policy against sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the university but to students as well. If you encounter unlawful sexual harassment or gender based discrimination, please talk to your professor; contact the Equal Opportunity Office at 801-422-5895 or 801-422-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office at 801-422-2847.

Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere that reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability that may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the University Accessibility Center located in 2170 WSC (801-422-2767). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the SSD office. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures. You should contact the Equal Opportunity Office at 301-422-5895, D-282 ASB.

Student Learning Outcomes. Each program at BYU has developed a set of expected student learning outcomes. These will help you understand the objectives of the curriculum in the program, including this class. To learn the expected student outcomes for the programs in this department and college go to <http://learningoutcomes.byu.edu> and click on the College of Family, Home and Social Sciences and then this department. We welcome feedback on the expected student learning outcomes. Any comments or suggestions you have can be sent to FHSS@byu.edu.

Honor Code Standards. In keeping with the principles of the BYU Honor Code, students are expected to be honest in all of their academic work. Academic honesty

means, most fundamentally, that any work you present as your own must in fact **be** your own work and not that of another. Violations of this principle may result in a failing grade in the course and additional disciplinary action by the university. Students are also expected to adhere to the Dress and Grooming Standards. Adherence demonstrates respect for yourself and others and ensures an effective learning and working environment. It is the university's expectation, and my own expectation in class, that each student will abide by all Honor Code standards. Please call the Honor Code Office at 422-2847 if you have questions about those standards.

Preventing Sexual Discrimination or Harassment. Sexual discrimination or harassment (including student-to-student harassment) is prohibited both by the law and by Brigham Young University policy. If you feel you are being subjected to sexual discrimination or harassment, please bring your concerns to the professor. Alternatively, you may lodge a complaint with the Equal Employment Office (D-240C ASB) or with the Honor Code Office (4440).

Students with Disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect your performance in this course, you should get in touch with the University Accessibility Center (2170 WSC) 801-422-2767. This office can evaluate your disability and assist the professor in arranging for reasonable accommodations.

Class Schedule (week by week)

| WEEK OF (Dates are Tuesdays) | TOPIC | READING/DUE |
|---|--|--|
| Sept 1 | Critical Thinking Examples of Assumptions | Introduction - SRR |
| Sept 8 & 15 | Psychotherapy | S and SMW <u>Paper due:</u> Sept 18 |
| Sept 22 & Sept 29 | Social Psychology | Chs. 3 and 4 – SRR <u>Paper due:</u> Oct 2 |
| Oct 6 & 13 | Experimental Psychology | Chs. 5 and 6 - SRR <u>Paper due:</u> Oct 16 |
| Oct 20 & Oct 27 | Clinical Psychology | Chs. 1 and 2 - SRR <u>Paper due:</u> Oct 30 |
| Nov 3 & Nov 10 | Cognitive Psychology | Chs. 7 and 8 – SRR <u>Paper due:</u> Nov 13 |
| Nov 17 & Dec 1 (11/24 week is “Friday” class and Thanksgiving) | Developmental Psychology | Chs. 9 and 10 - SRR <u>Paper due:</u> Dec 4 |
| Dec 8 | Stats/Methods Psychology | Chs. 11 and 12 – SRR <u>Paper due:</u> Dec 17 |

Legend: S = Slife book chapter
 SRR = Slife, Reber, and Richardson Text
 SMW = Slife, Mitchell, and Whoolery chapter

Course Characteristics (or Why You Might Consider Dropping This Course)

- 1) The reading is difficult and will often require you to read the material twice or three times. If you typically do not take the time to do a careful reading of course material, drop the course.
- 2) You cannot memorize the material of this course, nor will merely “knowing” the material be sufficient. You will need to think about and articulate concisely the material well to get a decent grade. If you usually rely on memorizing points, consider dropping the course.
- 3) Your grade is based entirely on small essays. If you do not take the time to write the essays well – revising and redrafting several times – you should probably drop the course.
- 4) The material is different from and more philosophical than most other psychology courses. If you do not wish to learn something new and in depth, then you should probably drop the course.
- 5) You will be asked to find articles/chapters from the library (or your own library) that exemplify concepts from class. If you do not know how to use the library (or its computerized aids), you will have difficulty completing the requirements for this course.
- 6) Your grade on the papers will be lowered if you do not hand in your papers on time. If you tend to be tardy with your work, you will end up with a lower grade.
- 7) The material of the course is so difficult that most students find it imperative to attend class and discuss the material with the instructors. (Ask those who have taken the course previously.) If you tend to miss classes, do not take this course.
- 8) The class is large, so questions of clarification are the most useful to everyone.
- 9) The TA and I will not be able to make extensive comments on your papers. If you need extensive assistance with your writing, then consider another class. This is not a class on writing per se; it is a class in which writing skills are expected.