

Psychology 311 – Critical Issues in Psychology – Winter 2009

Instructor:	Edwin E. Gantt, Ph.D.	Office:	1086 SWKT
Room:	374 MARB	Phone:	422-9785
Email:	ed_gantt@byu.edu	Office Hours:	TBD

Please Turn Off All Cell Phones!!!

Texts:

Bishop, R. C. (2007). *The philosophy of the social sciences*. New York: Continuum.

Readings: TBA

Content: The course is designed to be an intensive and academically demanding examination of certain critical conceptual issues in contemporary psychological theory and practice. As such it is organized around three major undertakings: (1) A careful consideration of the nature and role of theory and philosophy in psychology. Much of the course is, thus, aimed at enabling you to understand and appreciate many of the underlying philosophical assumptions at work in the various schools of mainstream psychological thought; (2) an increased understanding of and appreciation for some of the more sophisticated and influential approaches to conceptualizing the nature and meaning of human existence that have been advanced by the discipline both historically and in more recent decades; and (3) the development of the ability to think and write critically, analytically, and clearly – skills that are far too often missing in the writing and thinking of those in the discipline of psychology.

The goal of this course, then, is to both deepen your acquaintance with the discipline of psychology and to help integrate what you have learned in other courses by providing a meaningful historical, philosophical, and conceptual context. This will be done not only by articulating the many important philosophical and theoretical issues with which the discipline continues to struggle, but also by providing numerous conceptual tools for making sense of the discipline and its theoretical commitments and judging between competing philosophical or conceptual claims. Be forewarned! This course is likely to be very different from most others that you may have taken in the department. The subject matter of this course is critical thinking about psychology as an intellectual enterprise, its claims, findings, and its metaphysical and moral commitments. Thus, there will be a significant demand that you not only strive for a high level of intellectual sophistication and critical concern, but also that you be willing to suspend (for the sake of careful and probing examination) some concepts and ideas you may have thus far taken for granted.

You will be expected to read and write extensively. You are expected to be current in your reading of the required text, in addition to any other readings that may be assigned periodically during the course of the semester. To assist you in this endeavor, unannounced quizzes will occasionally be given over the reading material. Be forewarned that it is possible that you may be reading ahead of the material we are discussing in the class. As part and parcel of the reading assignment, you will be expected to come to every class prepared to ask questions and discuss issues. It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that in a class such as this **PARTICIPATION MATTERS!!!**

REQUIREMENTS:

1. You will be required to complete six (6) writing assignments in this course. Five (5) of these assignments will be formal essays and will be limited to a **MAXIMUM** of 2 pages in length. The remaining written assignment will be a one paragraph long introductory exercise in formulating a proper thesis and introduction.

You will be graded on the quality of your writing as well as the substance because style and content cannot be meaningfully separated. Excerpts may be lifted from student papers and used (anonymously and with permission) in class as examples as we discuss ways to improve conceptual analysis and writing skills. You would be well-warned not to take these assignments lightly. Despite the short length of these writing assignments, they will likely prove to be among the most difficult you will experience in your undergraduate career.

2. The final examination will simply consist of your final paper topic and will be due at the time of the

conclusion of the university scheduled final exam time (10:00am on Friday, April 17th). **Late work will not be accepted – absolutely no exceptions.**

3. It is absolutely essential that you keep current with the reading. You will need to attend class regularly in order to keep current as to what if any additional assigned readings there may be each week. Further, there will be unannounced quizzes on assigned readings throughout the semester. Each quiz will be worth a total of 20 points. At the end of the semester your percentage of quiz points earned will be translated into a letter grade and will be considered equal in weight to an essay assignment.

PERCENTAGE / LETTER GRADE SCALE FOR QUIZZES

93% - 100%	A	83% - 86%	B	73% - 76%	C	63% - 66%	D
90% - 92%	A-	80% - 82%	B-	70% - 72%	C-	60% - 62%	D-
87% - 89%	B+	77% - 79%	C+	67% - 69%	D+	00% - 59%	E

4. **Late work is unacceptable.** You are expected to hand in all work when it is due. If you feel that you need to have an exception to this policy you should a) arrange for it well in advance and b) make sure that it is very, very good! (Note, however, that your definition of a good excuse is likely to be much more flexible than my own.)

THE ESSAYS: The essays that you will be required to write are to be analytical essays. You will be expected to come to grips with the topic of the essay on a fairly sophisticated level, and show by reason, argument, and careful analysis what might sensibly be said about the issue. These essays are not to be simple "information dumps," wherein you report back to me what I reported to you in class, or what the author may have reported in your text. However, neither are these essays to be literary exercises in "stream of consciousness" or fictional creativity. I am not particularly interested in subjective impressions, opinions and/or personal feelings. What I am interested in is careful, analytical considerations of issues, with an eye to important ramifications for what it means to be a human being and for the discipline of psychology.

As stated above, there is no defensible distinction between what you say and how you say it. Consequently, essays full of mixed metaphors, grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, "purple prose,"* pseudo-intellectual jargon, incoherent sentences, formless paragraphs, dangling and unsupported assertions, other psychologist's opinions, and information reports will most definitely yield low grades.

Classroom Courtesy: Please turn off your cell phones and beepers before class begins. Discourteous classroom behavior also includes: frequently arriving late for class, talking or sleeping or studying other materials (including the newspaper or homework) in class, and leaving class early. The Prophet Joseph Smith said: "It is an insult to a meeting for persons to leave just before its close" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 287). Please be courteous in your class behavior. I reserve the right to lower your final grade for consistently discourteous class behavior.

Extra Credit: There is no extra credit (please don't ask). Use the time that you would spend on doing extra credit to complete assigned readings and adequately prepare for the essays. The course requirements are clearly stated in this syllabus. If you remain in the class, it means that you accept these requirements. This syllabus is a type of contract between the instructor and the student. It protects you from unfair treatment (i.e., I can't assign you additional material without due reason) and it protects me from unfair treatment (i.e., student wheedling and whining!).

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 the psychology department and college go to <http://learningoutcomes.byu.edu> and click on the College of Family, Home and Social Sciences and then the psychology department. We welcome feedback on the expected student learning outcomes. Any comments or suggestions you have can be sent to <FHSS@byu.edu>.

Special Needs: Any student with special needs or any student requiring special assistance should talk with me as soon as possible. Every effort will be made to accommodate your needs. In addition, any student with concerns or problems with the course materials is encouraged to discuss them with either me or the TA. We are committed to helping you succeed in the class, hopefully you will be as well.

Academic and Moral Integrity: “We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul – We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things” (Article of Faith 13; see also Brigham Young University Honor Code in the BYU 1999-2000 Undergraduate Catalog, pp. 6-9).

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 instance of cheating on exams or plagiarizing on papers. See <http://www.byu.edu/stlife/campuslife/honorcode/honcode.html> 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 either speak to me about it, contact the Equal Employment Office (378-5895 or 367-5689), or contact the Honor Code Office (378-2847).

* “There are few of us who have not sometimes wakened before dawn, either after one of those dreamless nights that make us almost enamoured of death, or one of those nights of horror or misshapen joy, when through the chambers of the brain sweep phantoms more terrible than reality itself, and instinct with that vivid life that lurks in all grotesques, and that lends to Gothic art its enduring vitality, this art being, one might fancy, especially the art of those whose minds have been troubled with the malady of reverie.” (Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray)

A FEW SIMPLE GRAMMATICAL RULES

1. Subject and verb always has to agree.
2. Being bad grammar, the writer should not use dangling participles.
3. Parallel construction with coordinate conjunctions is not only an aid to clarity but the mark of a good writer.
4. It behooves the writer to avoid archaic expressions.
5. Do not use hyperbole; not one writer in a million can use it effectively.
6. Avoid cliches like the plague.
7. Mixed metaphors are a pain in the neck and should be thrown out the window.
8. In scholarly writing, don't use contractions.
9. A truly good writer is always especially careful to practically eliminate the too frequent use of excessively employed adverbs.
10. Use a comma before nonrestrictive clauses which are a common cause of difficulty.
11. Placing a comma between the subject and the predicate, is not correct.
12. Parenthetical words however should be enclosed in commas.
13. Consult the dictionary frequently to avoid misspelling.
14. Each pronoun agrees with their antecedent.
15. Watch out for irregular verbs which have crept into our language.
16. Don't use no double negatives.
17. Join clauses good, like a conjunction should.
18. About sentence fragments.
19. Don't abbrev.
20. Check see if any words left out.
21. Don't write a run-on sentence you've got to punctuate it.
22. Its important to use apostrophe's right.
23. A writer mustn't shift my point of view.
24. Do not use a foreign term when there is a perfectly adequate English quid pro quo available.
25. At all times, a writer, who chooses to use commas, should be careful not to overuse them.