

## Psychology 311 – Critical Issues in Psychology – Winter 2018

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### Please Turn Off All Cell Phones!!!

**Required Texts:** Martin, J., Sugarman, J., & Thompson, J. (2003). *Psychology and the Question of Agency*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

**Additional Readings:** TBA

**Course Description:** 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 being 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 social sciences.

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 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.

**Learning Outcomes:** Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and describe basic assumptions (and the implications of those assumptions) that underlie the major theories, methods, practices, and schools of contemporary psychology. *Measurement:* Reading Summaries/Reviews and Short Analytical Essay assignments.
- Identify and critically evaluate these basic assumptions in the published writings of psychologists. *Measurement:* Reading Summaries/Reviews and Short Analytical Essay assignments.
- Compare and contrast alternative assumptions (and the implications of those assumptions) to those associated with the major theories, methods, practices, and schools of contemporary psychology, especially as they may be relevant to a Christian perspective. *Measurement:* Reading Summaries/Reviews and Short Analytical Essay assignments.

**Course Expectations:** 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, you will be required to write a short (1 page) review of the argument at the core of each class's assigned reading. In addition, you will be expected to come to every class prepared to ask questions and discuss issues relevant to the particular reading assigned for that day's discussion. Further, you will be expected to write several short analytic essays on various topics, in which you grapple with some important issue in contemporary psychology at a fairly sophisticated level (see below). Finally, due to the nature of the course, it cannot be emphasized strongly enough that active and insightful **PARTICIPATION MATTERS!!!**

#### **REQUIREMENTS:**

1. You will be required to complete five to six (5-6) short essay assignments in this course. These assignments will be limited to a **MAXIMUM** of 2 pages in length. Other writing assignments **MAY** be required depending on the needs of the course and the students and will be assigned on an "as needed" basis.

**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 and should not be taken lightly.

2. You will be required to provide a short (1) page analytic summary of each assigned reading, in which you outline the essential features and structure of the argument/analysis being made by the author of the assigned reading. Unlike the short essay assignments, these will be more outline or summative in nature. These short reviews will be worth 10 points each. The scores of all of these reviews combined will be considered as the equivalent of two essay papers.

3. 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 for this class (**10:00AM on Saturday, April 21st**). **Late work will not be accepted – absolutely no exceptions!**

4. **Reading:** 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.

5. **Late Work:** You are expected to hand in all work when it is due. For each day late, writing assignments will be penalized by a one grade-step reduction (e.g., "B" to "B-") in the case of analytical essays, or 2 points in the case of reading reviews. If you feel that you cannot complete an assignment on time you must a) make arrangements with me well in advance of the due date for the assignment, and b) your excuse had better be very, very good – that is, (1) university excused absence or (2) verified medical necessity.

6. **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 a well-reasoned and highly specific explanation of what you feel is the problem and why you feel that your paper deserves a different grade. After reviewing your appeal, I will then re-read your entire paper. If this results in an alteration of your grade (higher or lower), then I will change the original grade. Grade appeals can only be made within the one week period following the return of the paper.

7. **Classroom Courtesy: Please turn off your cell phones 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. **Laptop computers are welcome so long as they are being used to take notes and do not distract others. If you wish to surf the internet for funny videos, information that is not relevant to the class discussion, or just to play some games, please don't bother coming to class to do so. Furthermore, texting during class is inappropriate so please turn off you phones and put them away when class begins.** I reserve the right to lower your final grade for consistently discourteous class behavior.

**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.

**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!).

**BYU Honor Code:** 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 and Harassment:** 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 Employment Office at 422-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office at 422-2847.

\* "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*)

**Students with Disabilities:** Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere that reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office (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 by contacting the Equal Employment Office at 422-5895, D-285 ASB.

**Academic Honesty Policy:** The first injunction of the BYU Honor Code is the call to be honest. Students come to the university not only to improve their minds, gain knowledge, and develop skills that will assist them in their life's work, but also to build character. President David O. McKay taught that 'character is the highest aim of education' (The Aims of a BYU Education, p. 6). It is the purpose of the BYU Academic Honesty Policy to assist in fulfilling that aim. BYU students should seek to be totally honest in their dealings with others. They should complete their own work and be evaluated based upon that work. They should avoid academic dishonesty and misconduct in all its forms, including but not limited to plagiarism, fabrication or falsification, cheating, and other academic misconduct.

**Plagiarism Policy:** Writing submitted for credit at BYU must consist of the student's own ideas presented in sentences and paragraphs of his or her own construction. The work of other writers or speakers may be included when appropriate (as in a research paper or book review), but such material must support the student's own work (not substitute for it) and must be clearly identified by appropriate introduction and punctuation and by footnoting or other standard referencing.

**Respectful Environment Policy:** "Sadly, from time to time, we do hear reports of those who are at best insensitive and at worst insulting in their comments to and about others. . . . We hear derogatory and sometimes even defamatory comments about those with different political, athletic, or ethnic views or experiences. Such behavior is completely out of place at BYU, and I enlist the aid of all to monitor carefully and, if necessary, correct any such that might occur here, however inadvertent or unintentional. . . . I worry particularly about demeaning comments made about the career or major choices of women or men either directly or about members of the BYU community generally. We must remember that personal agency is a fundamental principle and that none of us has the right or option to criticize the lawful choices of another." *President Cecil O. Samuelson, Annual University Conference, August 24, 2010*

"Occasionally, we hear reports that our female faculty feel disrespected, especially by students, for choosing to work at BYU, even though each one has been approved by the BYU Board of Trustees. Brothers and sisters, these things ought not to be. Not here. Not at a university that shares a constitution with the School of the Prophets." *Vice President John S. Tanner, Annual University Conference, August 24, 2010*

## **Ten Reasons You Might Consider Dropping This Course:**

- 1)** The reading in this course is often difficult and will usually require that you to read it two or three times in order to adequately master the ideas and the arguments being made. If you typically do not take the time to do a careful reading of course material, you may want to consider dropping this 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 in order to get a decent grade. If you usually rely on memorizing points or cramming at the last minute, you may want to consider dropping the course.
- 3)** Your grade is based heavily on brief analytical essays. If you do not take the time to write the essays well – revising and redrafting several times – you will not do well on these essays. If you do not plan to make the time necessary, or do not wish to do the hard work necessary to improve your writing and thinking, you should probably consider dropping the course.
- 4)** The material is different from and more philosophical than most other psychology courses you may have taken. If you do not wish to learn new ideas in depth and be challenged by new ways of thinking, then you should probably consider dropping the course.
- 6)** Your grade on the papers will be lowered if you do not hand them in on time. Late work is severely penalized. If you tend to be tardy with your work, you may want to consider dropping the course.
- 7)** The material of the course is so difficult that most students find it absolutely necessary to attend class and discuss the material with the instructor, the TAs, and their fellow students. (You have only to ask those who have taken the course previously to be assured of this.) If you tend to miss classes, you may want to consider dropping the course.
- 8)** It is essential to developing good critical thinking skills that you articulate your ideas out loud, as well as in writing. Therefore, it is expected that all students will actively participate in the give-and-take, debate-oriented nature of class discussions. If you do not enjoy discussing (i.e., advancing, defending, and critiquing) ideas in front of others, or have a very “thin skin” when faced with critical analysis or feedback of your ideas, then you may want to consider dropping the course.
- 9)** This is not a class on learning how to write. It is a class on learning how to think, how to make an argument, and how to evaluate an argument. Thus, it is a class in which basic writing skills are expected. The course TAs and I will help you to radically refine your existing skills, but it is assumed that you will have a fair degree of writing competency from the outset. If you typically need assistance with your writing, then you may want to consider dropping this course.
- 10)** Because it takes time and energy to complete the reading and writing assignments in this course, it is best if you are not carrying a very heavy course load this semester, and are not spread too thin with work and/or family related obligations. If you tend to have too many demands on your time, or are poor at managing your time, then you may want to consider dropping this course.

## 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.