PSYC 401W
Capstone in Psychology
Fall 2020

- This is a writing proficiency (W) course. A grade of C- or better certifies writing proficiency for majors.

- PSYC 401W Prerequisites: Completion of GE Written Communication (A2) requirement, PSYC 101, PSYC 261, PSYC 364, and four additional courses in the major.

- Students may take any section of PSYC 401W as long as prerequisites have been met.
This capstone course focuses on how social and developmental psychologists study close personal relationships. In particular, students will learn the nature of several major types of close relationships as they occur at different points in the life cycle (i.e., parent/child, friendships, romantic). In addition, the course reviews the process of ending relationships, as well as the psychological implications for individuals when relationships end. Classic and contemporary readings are assigned that cover a broad range of theoretical and empirical issues related to the study of close relationships. The purpose of this capstone is two-fold. First, the course is designed to help students develop scientific thinking skills within the context of the research area known as “relationship science.” Second, the course is also intended to give students the opportunity to apply psychological principles of close relationships to one’s own life and to the larger world around us.
Why do we choose to spend our money now instead of saving it for retirement? Why do we distract ourselves with cell phones while driving, despite the dangers of doing so? Why do we, as a society, continue to depend on fossil fuels that satisfy our immediate energy needs yet pollute the environment in the long run?

This senior seminar course will attempt to answer these important questions by examining self-control and impulsivity from a behavioral perspective. Students enrolled in this course will contact theoretical, conceptual, and empirical foundations of the science of decision-making through seminal and contemporary readings in the area. In particular, the course will highlight nonhuman and human research investigating the neurobiological, pharmacological, environmental, economic, and social determinants of choice. Students taking this course will gain an appreciation for basic behavioral science and its capacity to inform treatments to improve self-control in at-risk populations.
A new branch of psychology called Positive Psychology began around 2000, with a call for psychological science to become as concerned with human strengths as it had traditionally been with human weaknesses. One of its founders, Martin Seligman, defined Positive Psychology as “the scientific study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive. The field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play.” We now know, from almost two decades of research that positive emotions, character strengths, and good social relationships can serve as protective buffers against the adversities of life.

In this senior seminar, we will examine Positive Psychology research on topics such as resilience, courage, subjective wellbeing, life satisfaction, gratitude, empathy, forgiveness, mindfulness, humor, creativity, and wisdom. The main emphasis of our seminar discussions, presentations, and written assignments will be on the scholarly findings and their real-world applications to health, relationships, and societal institutions (schools, workplaces, communities, etc.).
“It is probable that the progenitors of man, either the males or females or both sexes before acquiring the power of expressing mutual love in articulate speech, endeavored to charm each other with musical notes and rhythm (Darwin, 1871/1874).”

Music is fundamental to human existence. Scientists argue that we probably “sang” before we spoke. The human brain has evolved to both appreciate, and generate music. Music is represented in the brain across a wide and varied range of functions, and regions. Indeed, cognitive/social functions can be understood through music.

Psychological connections to music are endless including brain functioning, social development, and music related dysfunction. Music is an important part of our physical environment and facilitates our interface with the environment. Of course, music appreciation, and development are all psychological processes as well, and this course will focus on these processes. This course will not cover all aspects of Music Psychology, but will introduce the student to the field, and offer an opportunity to develop a more advance understanding of some aspect of the field.
All of us want our lives to have purpose and meaning. We want to be successful, happy, and fulfilled, and to experience our lives as worth living. But for most people, life is not easy to sort out, and what makes life meaningful differs from person to person. Seminar participants will examine contemporary research on meaning and purpose. We'll draw on the core domains of psychology, such as personality, social psychology, developmental psychology, behavioral and cognitive psychology. Together, we'll consider how the need for meaning affects relationships, careers, and our daily lives, and how people can best make their way in the modern world.
"That we do not discover reality but rather invent it is quite shocking for many people. And the shocking part about it - according to the concept of radical constructivism - is that the only thing we can ever know about the real reality (if it even exists) is what it is not. It is only with the collapse of our constructions of reality that we first discover that the world is not the way we imagine."

- Paul Watzlawick

This course is designed to introduce and address the issues and practical applications of understanding "group and individual" psychology from a "post-modern and post-structural" perspective. Inherently, and by design, it will provide an alternative view to "modern" or "conventional" psychological principles as they relate to groups and individuals. As such, the course will offer a counter-view of understanding and working with the "self" and with "groups." This course will assist students in:

1. Locating their respective practices within a set of principles that situate the individual and group within a post-modern/post-structural understanding of the human experience.

2. Acquiring knowledge of the difference between post-modern, post-structural and modernist perspectives;

3. Fostering the acquisition of post-structural and post-modern methodologies as they pertain to group and individual work via journal work;

4. Acquiring an understanding of one's development and how stories come to employ the individual toward particular identities;

5. Observing the insidious nature of "western" psychology's influence here and throughout the world;

6. Unmasking the DSM and providing an alternative perspective in understanding