PSYC 401W
Capstone in Psychology
Fall 2023

• 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.
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.).
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.
In this course you will be introduced to the current scientific understanding of the psychological processes involved in our interactions with food. In few other areas of human behavior is the interaction of biological, developmental, social, and cultural factors as prominent as in eating, and consequently this course will explore the centrality of eating in our lives from a multidisciplinary perspective. We will discuss the biological bases of taste, hunger and satiety and its interplay with environmental variables at the individual, social and cultural levels, to obtain a general view of the psychological study of why we eat what we eat, and how that relates to who we are, rather than focusing on disordered eating. Issues to be addressed include: the science of flavor, food choice, dieting behaviors, social and cultural influences on eating, and eating disorders.
Most people want to be successful, happy, and fulfilled – that is, to experience our lives as worth living. But for many in the modern world, life isn’t easy to sort out, and what makes life meaningful differs from person to person. Seminar participants will examine both historical and contemporary ideas about meaning and purpose. Drawing on core domains of psychology such as personality, social psychology, developmental, abnormal, cognition and others, we’ll consider how a sense of meaning emerges from relationships, purposes and projects, a sense of wonder, and even the mundane routines of our daily lives. Participants will investigate why these are such important issues for psychologists. We’ll explore how our experience of meaning (or the lack thereof) affects our behaviors, moods, and relationships, and appreciate how best to enhance our own lives and the lives of those around us.
“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.