

PSYC 401W  
Capstone in Psychology  
Spring 2024

- 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.



## **Psychology of Close Relationships**

**Instructor: Dr. Dave Hibbard**

**PSYC 401W-01**

**Day/Time: Tues/Th 9:30-10:45am**

See [class schedule](#) for full details

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.



## Positive Psychology

**Instructor: Dr. Terry Miller-Herringer**

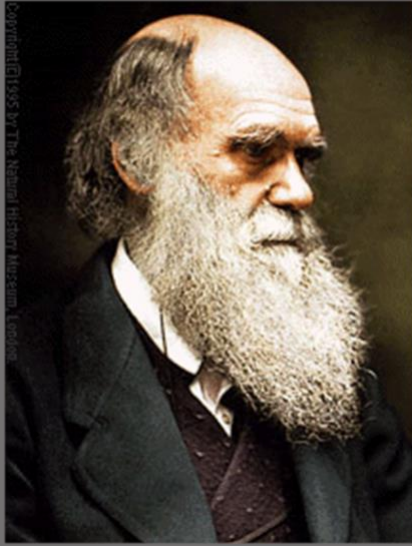
**PSYC 401W-02**

Day/Time: Tues/Thurs 3:30-4:45pm

See [Class Schedule](#) for full details

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.).



## Evolutionary Psychology

**Instructor: Dr. Eddie Vela**

**PSYC 401W-03**

Day/Time: Tues/Thurs 12:30-1:45pm

See [Class Schedule](#) for full details

"In the distant future I see open fields for far more important researches. Psychology will be based on a new foundation, that of the necessary acquirement of each mental power and capacity by gradation. Light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history."

A small, rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in cursive that reads "C. Darwin". The ink is dark and the background is a light, aged paper color.

*On the Origin of Species* (1859) p.488

This senior seminar will introduce the discipline of “evolutionary” psychology. Evolutionary psychologists maintain that not only are physical attributes evolved, but so are *mental* attributes. Human cognition is thus viewed as a set of evolved and therefore adaptive mental attributes in which “mind” is not a blank slate but rather a collection of specific ‘ways of knowing’ selected for in the context of ancestral environmental and especially social conditions.

*This senior seminar is sure to make you rethink the causes of human behavior, providing insights that will surprise, enlighten, and entertain.*



## Understanding the Influence of Visual Media on Thinking

**Instructor: Dr. Neil Schwartz**

PSYC 401W-04

Days/Time: Tues/Thurs 2:00-3:15pm

OR

PSYC 401W-05

Days/Time: Tues/Thurs 3:30-4:45pm

See [Class Schedule](#) for full details

This course is designed to teach students about the power of visualization as tools with which to think—to reason, problem solve, and persuade.

Consider this: Students study graphs, charts, timelines, and formulae to learn concepts in school; executives make graphics presentations to corporate boards to win high stakes contracts; engineers examine schematics to build bridges and design cars; medical students use metaphorical interactive visualization tools to learn delicate surgical procedures; advertisers rely on pictures and photos to persuade consumers to buy products; litigators convince jurors with visual displays to win cases. In our own experience, we all know that visualizations are ubiquitous across social and news media—on Facebook, Snapchat, CNN, Breitbart, the New York Times, and Fox News. The question is how do these visualizations operate to teach, persuade, and influence people to think in particular ways? That is, how do viewers process visualization, and what do psychologists know that can be used to leverage users' media decisions. This course is aimed at providing students with an understanding of the way the human mind processes visualizations and the principles for designing them to meet commercial and educational goals.



Image from <https://www.art-therapist.org/blog/coping-with-loss>

## **Psychology of Loss, Dying, and Death**

**Instructor: Dr. Mary Dolan**

PSYC 401W-06


**Synchronous Online Course  
Entirely Internet Based**

Tues/Thurs 2:30-3:45pm

See [class schedule](#) for full details

The human experience with loss is inevitable. Loss occurs in a myriad of forms including the dissolution of a relationship, being displaced from home, and experiencing physical impairment. Significant loss in these areas can be as impactful as witnessing the dying process of a loved one or being faced with their sudden death. How a person responds to such losses varies tremendously and is dependent on a number of factors, including cultural, religious, and spiritual beliefs and practices. Topics that many find sensitive and difficult (including suicide) will be examined in this seminar.

This course is intended to offer a culminating experience that will challenge you to apply what you have learned as a student of psychology. Utilizing a well established and growing body of both empirical evidence and theoretical literature, we will explore how human thought, emotion, behavior, and physiology is impacted by loss, knowledge of impending loss, and the death of a loved one. You will be encouraged to think critically in this course, and express your ideas during seminar discussions and in writing assignments.



The Psychology of  
Meaning and  
Purpose

## The Psychology of Meaning

**Instructor: Dr. Keith Harris**

PSYC 401W-07

**Synchronous Online Course**

**Entirely Internet Based**

**Mon/Wed 4:00-5:15pm**

See [class schedule](#) for full details

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.



## Ecopsychology

**Instructor: Dr. Mary Dolan**

PSYC 401W-08

**Synchronous Online Course  
Entirely Internet Based**

Days/Time: Mon/Wed 4:00-5:15pm

See [Class Schedule](#) for full details

Ecopsychology, the intersection of psychology, ecology, and spirituality, has emerged to address specific issues connected to the relationships humans have with nonhuman worlds. According to the International Community for Ecopsychology, the focus here is to examine “the synergistic relation between personal health and well-being and the health and well-being of our home, the Earth.”

This course is intended to offer a culminating experience that will challenge you to apply what you have learned as a student of psychology. Utilizing a well established and growing body of empirical evidence, we will explore how human thought, emotion and behavior is interconnected to such issues as sustainability, global climate change, and the ensuing moral and ethical obligations that arise. You will be encouraged to think critically in this course and express your ideas via seminar discussions and writing assignments.