PSYC 406-001: Psychology of Communication

Fall 2019 – George Mason University

***Instructor:*** Brianna Artz, M.A. ***Email:*** bartz@gmu.edu

***Office:*** David King 2025D ***Office Hours:*** Monday 3:00-4:00 PM

***Location:*** David King 2053 ***Time:*** M 4:30-7:10 PM

**Course description:** This course will provide a broad, comparative overview of animal and human communication, with an emphasis on understanding how and why different forms of communication behaviors might have evolved. The course will explore ethological, biological, and psychological principles of communication.

**University synthesis:** This course has been approved to meet the University’s General Education requirement for Synthesis. A Mason Core synthesis course must address outcomes 1 and 2, and at least one outcome under 3. Upon completing a synthesis course, students will be able to:

1. Communicate effectively in both oral and written forms, applying appropriate rhetorical standards (e.g., audience adaptation, language, argument, organization, evidence, etc.)
2. Using perspectives from two or more disciplines, connect issues in a given field to wider intellectual, community or societal concerns
3. Apply critical thinking skills to:
   1. Evaluate the quality, credibility and limitations of an argument or a solution using appropriate evidence or resources, OR,
   2. Judge the quality or value of an idea, work, or principle based on appropriate analytics and standards

**Criteria for evaluation:**

Grades in this course will be based on the following components:

1. **PARTICIPATION (35%)**

Many course points will be earned through regular participation in seminar-style group discussions in class. Participation will be recorded by the “Discussion Moderator”, who will record the number of times each student contributes to the discussion. Lists of questions will be provided to jump start conversations about the readings and the discussion environment should be warm and inviting. Tips on how to succeed in seminar style discussions will be given on the first day of class. In order to earn full participation credit each class, you must make **three meaningful contributions** per paper discussed. Examples of meaningful contributions will be given on the first day of class. You must bring detailed notes and/or hard copies of the assigned readings with notes in order to be eligible for participation points. I will informally take note of students who do not seem to have notes and ask to see notes at the end of class. Please come prepared ☺. I will keep track of participation points throughout the semester, but participation grades will only be posted halfway through the semester and at the semester’s end. Please see me during office hours if you would like to know your participation grade at any other point in the semester. \*If you feel there is any reason you may not be able to meet the required three contributions (e.g. social anxiety, language barriers, etc.) please see me immediately to discuss alternative participation options.

* 1. **Discussion Moderator:** The discussion moderator will ask discussion questions provided by the instructor to the group and will record each student’s participation. The discussion moderator will receive points for moderating alone and will not be required to participate in the discussion (but you certainly can if you have a good point!). Moderators will volunteer for the position via google calendars and can volunteer to moderate for up to two class periods. There will be one moderator per discussion group for a total of two per class. If no one volunteers to moderate for a specific class date, the moderator will be chosen at random the day of class.

1. **HUMAN OBSERVATION DAY (5%)**

After learning about different forms of non-verbal human communication, you will take to campus grounds to observe humans in their natural habitat. Groups of 6 students will split up across campus (The Johnson Center [2], The Corner Pocket, SUB 1, Fenwick Library [2]) and observe communication behavior using a simple ethogram for one hour. Different locations can be approved if the above locations do not suit your research question. Research questions will be determined during the first 20-minutes of class. After data collection, your group will have 20-minutes to discuss results and write a brief discussion of your conclusions. You will then share your findings with the class in a 5-minutes or less “mini” presentation. Grade will be based off participation throughout the entire process.

1. **DISCUSSION BOARD POSTS (20%)**

Each week there is an assigned reading, you will be responsible for posting a discussion board, and replying to one classmate, by 11:59 PM the Sunday before class. If there are multiple papers assigned that week, you are only responsible for posting about one of the articles. The discussion board contributions must be meaningful; original posts must exceed 350 words, and replies must exceed 100 words. If you are stuck thinking of meaningful contributions, consider the following questions for help:

* + - 1. Is there anything about the experiment’s methods that you would have done differently?
      2. How do the results of this study compare to other animal or human communication?
      3. If only one sensory modality was studied, how do you think other senses may have impacted the communication?
      4. How could future studies expand on this study’s ideas?

1. **RESEARCH PROJECT (40%)**

Using an ethogram to quantify observational data, all students will complete a study on the communication of animals or humans. This study should be based on 3-4 peer-reviewed journal articles, created to fill in current gaps in the literature. This project can be based on either animal or human communication. All research topics must be emailed to me (bartz@gmu.edu) with the subject “PSYC 406 Topic” before 9/23 at 11:59 PM for approval.

* 1. **Research proposal (20%):** An APA style research proposal including a Title Page, Abstract, Introduction and Methods section will be required before beginning your project’s data collection. This proposal should include 3-4 references from peer-reviewed journals and outline the observational methods you plan to include in your study. The methods should be practical for completion by the presentation date and should include at least total **3-hours** of observation. If you are doing a comparative project, this can be split into observing one species for 1.5 hours and another for 1.5 hours. More information can be found in the “Research proposal instructions” document
  2. **Final presentation (20%):** For your final presentation, you will create a poster where your data is displayed similarly to the way it is presented at conferences. Final presentations will take place on the last two days of class and presentation dates will be chosen at random. You must attend both presentation days even when you are not presenting. If you do not attend the class period you are not presenting, 20% will be deducted from your final presentation grade. The poster should include Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion and Future Directions sections. Good posters have lots of figures, a small amount of text, and a presenter that knows their research standing in front of it! The presentation should be between 8-10 minutes long. More information about how to create a great final poster and presentation is provided in the “Final presentation instructions” document.

**Grading Scale**

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| **90%-100%** | **A** |
| **87%-89%** | **B+** |
| **80%-86%** | **B** |
| **77%-79%** | **C+** |
| **70%-76%** | **C** |
| **60%-69%** | **D** |
| **59%-Lower** | **F** |

**Readings:** Most weeks, there will be two assigned readings that will be available on our blackboard course page. The readings will be made available at least one week prior to the discussion date. You are responsible for not only reading the papers, but for synthesizing the readings in order to meaningfully contribute to classroom discussions. Tips for getting the most out of the readings will be given on the first day of class.

**Absences:** You are permitted to miss one class without penalty for any reason. This free-absence is in place to account for a day you might have an illness or emergency which prevents you from attending class. After once absence, missing class will negatively impact your grade. If you are not in class, you will not have the opportunity to participate in class discussions. Missing even two or three classes may not cause you to fail but be mindful that class participation is a large part of your grade.

**Class cancelation policy:** If for some reason I need to cancel class unexpectedly, students will be notified through their GMU email and blackboard announcements. If class is canceled, we will cover the readings for that day the following week. If class must be canceled on a presentation or observation day, alternate assignments may be given.

**Technology use and class preparation:** Important announcements will be communicated through email and Blackboard, so please check these regularly. The use of computers, phones, tablets, or other devices will not be permitted during class. If you have an urgent call or text, please step outside. Since reading from an electronic device will not be permitted, students should bring paper copies of the readings or notes to refer to during class discussion. Please do not come to class without a printed version of the papers, or detailed notes to refer to in discussion. If you come to class with no evidence of preparation, you may be ineligible for participation points for that class period.

**Disability Services:** Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: [ods@gmu.edu](mailto:ods@gmu.edu) | Phone: (703) 993-2474

**In-class discussion decorum:** All students are expected to discuss topics in a respectful manner. Any comments that are considered disrespectful by any member of the class should be reported to me immediately. We are all adults and advanced students here, so let’s behave that way. Other tips…

1. Raise your hand if you have a meaningful comment to contribute. The discussion moderator will then call on you in the order hands are raised. Avoid speaking out unless it is your turn.
2. Only contribute if what you have to say adds to the conversation. Avoid raising your hand just to say, “good point” or “I agree”. Comments of that nature will not be awarded credit for participation and hinder the discussion.
3. If you are the type of person who likes to contribute, that is great! But – be careful not to dominate the conversation. Allow room for others to participate. Encourage others to share their thoughts!

**\*\*This syllabus is subject to change at any time throughout the semester. If changes to the syllabus need to be made, I will send out a course announcement and provide you with an updated syllabus document.**

**PSYC 406 Schedule**

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| Week | Topic |
| **1**(8/26) | Introductions / How to succeed in PSYC 406 / How to quantify communication? / Research project info |
| **2**(9/2) | LABOR DAY – NO CLASS |
| **3**(9/9) | How do beings communicate? Multiple Modalities |
| **4**(9/16) | Visual Communication |
| **5**(9/23) | Auditory Communication / **Last day to email me project topics by 11:59 PM** |
| **6**(9/30) | Chemical Communication |
| **7**(10/7) | Tactile Communication |
| **8**(10/14) | **Class meets Tuesday!** Tactile Communication cont. |
| **9**(10/21) | Extrasensory Communication / **Research proposals due in class (hard copy)** |
| **10**(10/28) | Human Communication – Gestures |
| **11**(11/4) | Human Communication – Facial Expressions |
| **12**(11/11) | HUMAN OBSERVATION DAY |
| **13**(11/18) | Inter-species Communication |
| **14**(11/25) | **PRESENTATIONS** |
| **15**(12/4) | **PRESENTATIONS** |