Course Overview

This graduate seminar surveys social influences on behavior.

My goal is that each of you will develop: (1) an understanding of the major theories driving social psychological research, (2) appreciation for the methodological strategies common to social psychology, (3) the ability to apply social psychological theories to answer questions within your own subfields and in the real world, and (4) enhanced research skills, critical thinking skills, writing skills, and oral communication skills.

Objectives

By the end of this course, students should:

- Be familiar with classic and contemporary issues in social psychology
- Understand the major theories driving social psychological research
- Understand the methodological strategies commonly used to address social psychological research questions
- Be familiar with major findings in social psychological research
- Be able to utilize social psychological methods and theories to generate novel research questions and methods for assessing those questions
- Be able to utilize social psychological methods and theories to generate solutions to real-world problems
- Develop stronger research skills, critical thinking skills, and written and oral communication skills

Textbook


Course Website

Readings and other miscellaneous information will be posted on Blackboard. Please check Blackboard frequently.
Attendance

Attendance in class is mandatory. Absences and/or lateness will negatively affect your participation grade, though I do allow two no-penalty absences for any reason during the semester. A second or third absence will result in a deduction to the participation portion of your grade. A fourth absence will result in a failing grade for the participation portion of the overall course grade. Frequent instances of late arrivals, early departures, and/or excessively long departures from class may also result in grade penalties to the participation portion of the course grade.

Weekly Readings

Readings for each topic will be posted to Blackboard no later than one week prior to class.

Evaluation Criteria

1. Participation (20%)

Participating in class is essential for developing communication and critical thinking skills and for learning from each other. I expect all students to participate in every class. I will moderate the class discussion in a way that ensures that everyone has a chance to contribute, and I ask that you come to class prepared to contribute. This will require not only reading the articles but also putting some serious thought into questions such as:

- What are the central ideas presented?
- Are these ideas coherent, compelling, and complete?
- What alternative explanations could be given for the phenomenon of interest?
- How widely do the explanations likely generalize?
- Does the research design provide a good test of the hypotheses?
- Are the conclusions justified by the data?
- What additional research is needed to extend knowledge about the phenomenon?
- What practical value do the ideas have?

2. Weekly Discussion Board Posts (20%)

Please contribute to the online discussion board at least once per week starting on the second week of class. Please contribute each week by posting a 250-500 word reaction that discusses the articles assigned for the upcoming class no later than 12 hours prior to class (10:30 PM on Sunday or Tuesday) AND by commenting on at least one of your classmates’ posts no later than an hour and a half prior to class (9:00 AM Monday or Wednesday). Sufficiently substantive posts are those that address one or more of the following:

- Do you think the ideas presented in the articles are coherent, compelling, and complete explanations of the phenomena of interest? Why or why not?
• What alternative explanations could be given for the phenomena of interest?
• How widely do the explanations likely generalize? That is, what factors (in addition to what was discussed or found) likely moderate the proposed or observed effects?
• Does the research design provide a good test of the hypotheses?
• Are the conclusions justified by the data?
• What additional research is needed to meaningfully extend knowledge about the phenomenon?

Your comment on a classmates’ post can be just a few sentences and should briefly build upon or provide a counterpoint to their argument (rather than simply expressing agreement or disagreement).

3. Take-home mid-term (30%) – Distributed by 3/5; Due on 3/19
This test will involve writing several essays that synthesize and critically evaluate the literature on a specific topic discussed in class.

4. Take-home final (30%) – Distributed two weeks prior to final exam date; Due at the end of our exam slot.
This will be a paper applying a topic covered in class to a topic of your choice.

Official Communications via GMU E-mail
Mason uses electronic mail to provide official information to students. Examples include communications from course instructors, notices from the library, notices about academic standing, financial aid information, class materials, assignments, questions, and instructor feedback. Students are responsible for the content of university communication sent to their Mason e-mail account and are required to activate that account and check it regularly.

Class Cancellation Policy
If I need to cancel class due to an illness or personal emergency, I will send an email to the class as soon as possible. If the university shuts down for any reason, I will send an email to the class confirming whether or not the class will be held. If class is cancelled, any revisions to the syllabus or changes to class assignments will be announced in class and over email.

Students with Disabilities
If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Services (DRS) at 703-993-2474.

Academic Integrity
Please familiarize yourself with the University Honor Code found at the following link:
http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/. Violations of the Honor Code will not be tolerated, and the instructor of this course reserves the right to
Intentional Inclusivity

As the instructor for this class, I will strive to promote and maintain an equitable and just work and learning environment. I welcome and value individuals and their differences including race, economic status, gender expression and identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age, and disability. I believe that by fostering willingness to hear and learn from a variety of sources and viewpoints, we will gain competence in communication, critical thinking and global understanding, and awareness of our biases and how they affect our interactions with others and the world.

Class Schedule

The course schedule provided below is to be considered a guideline, and is highly subject to change.

Adding and Dropping Classes

The last day to add classes to your schedule is January 28. The last day to drop classes with no tuition penalty is February 5. The final day to drop classes is February 11.

Disclaimer

The instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus and its content. Any changes will be announced orally and in writing.
Schedule of Topics and Readings

Week 1

Intro to Social Psychology: Its History & Societal Value (1/22)


Week 2

Skepticism about Social Psychology, Part 2 (1/27)

Ferguson, C. J. (2015). “Everybody knows psychology is not a real science”: Public perceptions of psychology and how we can improve our relationship with policymakers, the scientific community, and the general public. American Psychologist, 70(6), 527-542.


Ordinary Personology, Part 1 (1/29)


Week 3

*Ordinary Personology, Part 2 (2/3)*

Fiske, Chapter 3


*Social Cognition (2/5)*

Fiske, Chapter 4


Week 4

*The Self—Self-understanding (2/10)*


The Self—Self-esteem (2/12)


Week 5

The Self—Self-Control (2/17)


Attitude Structure & Change, Part 1 (2/19)

Fiske, Ch. 6


Week 6

*Attitude Structure & Change, Part 2 (2/24)*


*Attraction (2/26)*

Fiske, Ch. 7


Week 7

*Close Relationships, Part 1 (3/2)*

Fiske, Ch.8


Week 8

NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Week 9

*Situationism & the Person-Situation Debate (3/16)*

Fiske textbook, Ch. 1, Section on “Situationism”


*Prosocial Behavior, Part 1 (3/18)*
Fiske, Ch. 9


**Week 10**

*Prosocial Behavior, Part 2 (3/23)*


**Aggression, Part 1 (3/25)**

Fiske, Ch. 10


**Week 11**

*Aggression, Part 2 (3/30)*


(And reactions)
Social Biases, Part 1- Implicit Biases (4/1)

Fiske, Ch. 11


Week 12

Addressing Causes and Consequences of Racial Biases (4/6)


Addressing Causes and Consequences of Racial Biases (4/8)


Week 13

Addressing Causes & Consequences of Gender Biases (4/13)


Group Processes, Part 1 (4/15)

Fiske, Ch. 12


Week 14

Group Processes, Part 2 (4/20)


4/22 – NO CLASS

**Week 15**

*Social Influence, Part 1 (4/27)*

Fiske, Ch. 13


*Social Influence, Part 2 (4/29)*


**Week 15**

*Social Influence, Part 3 & Wrap-Up (5/4)*

