



# PSYC 734: MEASUREMENT & STUDY OF PEAK PERFORMANCE

FALL 2022 GMU graduate course for Human Factors and Applied Cognition

## BASIC INFORMATION



**Professor:** [Patrick E. McKnight, Ph.D. \(GMU\)](#)

**Office Location (Hrs):** David King 2064/5 (Tues 9-10a)

**Course Dates:** Fall 2022 (latest)

**Class Times:** Tues/Thurs 10:30a - 11:50a ([Optional ZOOM link](#))

**Location:** [Innovation Hall 317](#)



## BROAD OVERVIEW

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Peak performance is something we desire to measure and study. Everyone - researchers, athletes, and all people striving to be better - seeks peak performance in some manner. Researchers focus on winners and survivors. Athletes focus on their own "bests." Anyone who strives to improve will monitor performance. We laud the peaks and largely ignore most else - especially in sports. In short, we talk about peaks in performance every day. What is missing from all these conversations is what constitutes a "peak," what outcomes of performance matter, can we manipulate people or groups to perform at their "peak," and is a "peak" based upon normative (peak for age groups or males), individualistic (relative to one's potential), or collective (best ever) comparisons? Interested so far? Consider the following questions to get you thinking more deeply about the topic:

- Can a person routinely enter into a peak performance?
- Do peak performances come in instances or can many instances accumulate into a more general peak performance?
- Is a peak performance relative to the person's ability or potential? Should we handicap individuals or groups?
- Are these peak performances more effortful than other lesser performances? (cf flow research)
- Do peak performances relate to failure performances?
- What moderates or mediates peak performance?

If you find any of these questions (or others you can think of) intriguing, please follow along. This course - offered at George Mason University - is a hybrid lecture (recorded lectures distributed via YouTube followed by an in-person discussion to tuition-paying students). All the materials on this site and the readings listed (and linked) are free (as in beer, not speech) and open to all to consume. If you have suggestions or comments, feel free to reach out to me ([Patrick E. McKnight](#) on the psychology website at George Mason University).



# COURSE DESCRIPTION



My aim is to teach and learn how to design studies, measure predictors/outcomes, analyze the data, and interpret results for the study of peak human performance in applied psychological settings. The course covers topics including research design, measurement, and data analysis with specific application to performance related outcomes. We meet each week to discuss readings on the topics and I provide comments and suggestions about each week's topic. Tuesdays will be theory and article discussion while Thursdays will be devoted to designing studies based upon what we discussed on the prior Tuesday. We have one exception and that is the week we have fall break. I will sort that out when the time comes. Final grades depend on participation (twice weekly Q&A sessions, classroom discussion, and online discussions) and one two page (single spaced) methods section describing how you might design, measure, and analyze performance outcomes.

## REQUIRED TEXTS AND READING

**No text required.** Please read the assigned and linked readings listed in the [tentative course schedule](#).



# COURSE TEACHING OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES



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Design, evaluate and analyze studies of peak performance. All students will be expected to:

- participate in weekly discussions during class time
- contribute to an online discussion of peak performance in general and in application
- read the assigned materials
- submit questions prior to each class meeting (2x/week)
- be kind to one another

Course demands about two hours of reading each week, 15 minutes of video watching/listening, an hour of online discussions (max), and three hours of classroom participation. In short, six hours each week or about an hour a day. At the end of the semester, you will complete a two page proposal for a hypothetical (or real) project that focuses (in part even) on peak performance.

## TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS



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Internet connection, functional computing device, and communications software (e.g., zoom, email, web browser)



# GRADING/GRADES



Five things for you to do to ensure you get an A. Think of a sandwich wrap but plural:

1. **Write** a coherent 2 page study proposal (methods and stats only)
2. **Read** assigned readings and watch my videos
3. **Attend** class
4. **Participate** in class and online discussions
5. **Submit** questions twice weekly (before each class)

It is that simple. Do these five things and I will gladly hand out "A" grades; don't do them and we have to negotiate something lower than an A. Please do them - doing so makes all our lives easier and more enjoyable.

# ACADEMIC INTEGRITY



At George Mason University, Academic Integrity is demonstrated in our work, community, the classroom and research. We maintain this commitment to high academic standards through Mason's Honor Code. It is an agreement made by all members of our community to not "cheat, steal, plagiarize, or lie in matters related to your academic work." Students sign an agreement to adhere to the Honor Code on their application for admission to Mason and are responsible for being aware of the most current version of the code. This link provides the full read of the 2021-2022 Honor code. Please see: [George Mason University Honor Code 2021-2022 final](https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/)

**All text above comes directly from GMU's website (<https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/>)**



# NET ETIQUETTE



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Simple rules I found useful.

1. **Don't be offensive**

2. **Don't take offense**

Read [this wonderful document \(and links\)](#) to learn what you can and ought to do to be a good internet citizen if you need more than my two rules.

# TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE



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Each week, we have two things

1. A few readings to introduce the topic
2. A video of me providing a broad overview of the topic

**Weeks 1-5:** Introduction & Conceptualization

**Week 6-10:** Design & Measurement

**Week 11-15:** Data Analysis & Interpretation

**Final:** 2-page proposal of design and analysis of a peak performance study

Please refer to the [Tentative Schedule](#) page for all details.

