

Spring 2015 PSYCH 490 Senior Seminar topics

Section 1 T R 9:45-11 208 Ford Building **Dr. Reg Adams (social)**

The Laughing Animal

After World War II the field of psychology was primarily focused on pathology, on how to repair psychological damage. As a result, most research on emotion focused on negative emotional states, their expressions, and their negative social consequences. In 1998 the president of the *American Psychological Association*, Dr. Martin E.P. Seligman, launched a new era of inquiry that he coined "Positive Psychology", which focuses instead on a preventative model of psychological wellbeing. As a result, there has been a burgeoning interest in the psychological mechanisms that underlie healthy functioning. Critically, this new focus has brought forth a revival of research examining humor and laughter. This course offers a survey of this field utilizing a three-prong approach including: a) exploring the origins of these presumably uniquely human qualities of humor and laughter from phylogenetic and ontogenetic perspectives, b) examining their contribution to positive psychology, and c) explicating their potential dangers and pitfalls in social functioning. Humor and laughter can be healing, but they are also often wielded as weapons of exclusion and disparagement helping to establish and maintain stereotypes and prejudices. Clarifying when humor and laughter are healing and when hurtful will be of special emphasis in this course as we explore in depth the marriage of comedy and tragedy. Finally, insights gained from examining the nature of humor and laughter, when applicable, will be applied more broadly to social psychological theories of cognitive appraisal, creativity, attribution, and emotion regulation.

Section 2 T R 9:45-11 120 Moore Building **Dr. Sandy Azar (clinical)**

Marriage and Family

In recent years, psychology has gone beyond studying individuals and begun to look at couples and families. This course will extend students' understanding of human behavior beyond that of the individual and the parent-child dyad and help them to consider the individual in the context of other intimate relationships (e.g., dating, living together, marriage, and the family). It will begin by familiarizing students with the major psychological theories of how couples and families operate and develop their ability to apply these theories to real life family transactions, using material from films and literature. The methods used to study families and their strengths and limitations will then be presented. Using the family life cycle as a rough developmental framework, changes in couples and families over the lifespan will be reviewed and discussed (young adulthood and leaving family of origin, dating and becoming a couple, having children, raising young and adolescent children, and launching children and old age). Along the way, discussions will focus on non-traditional couples and families (e.g., families who have adopted children, divorced families, gay and lesbian couples), as well as issues of race, ethnicity, social class, and gender. Finally, students will begin to consider the effects of major stressors on couples and family (e.g., migration, chronic physical and mental illness, poverty) and within the couple and family disturbances (e.g., dating violence, domestic violence, child abuse, substance abuse).

Section 3 T 3:35-6:35 010 Life Sciences Building **Dr. Stephanie Shields (Social)**

Psychology of Women

We will consider a variety of topics in the psychology of women, including: girls' lives; sexuality and sexual identity; body image; emotion; psychological perspectives on women's health; violence against women; friendships and close relationships; mothering; women and work; feminist psychotherapy; and other topics/issues in the psychology of girls and women that are of special interest to class members. Intersectional and international perspectives will be emphasized. We will also investigate how research on the psychology of women can be used to understand pressing social issues and to promote positive social change. The class is designed for psychology majors who have some background in women's studies and/or psychology of gender and who want to build on and extend their knowledge of the psychology of women and gender. Course requirements include preparation and participation (15%), reaction papers and other brief assignments (25%), two seminars which you and a partner facilitate (15% each), and the choice of an exam or project option, with choice to be made by Week 3 (30%). Assigned readings will be drawn from research literature, secondary sources, and mass media compiled in a course reader. If you have questions about the course, would like more information, or are trying to figure out whether this is the right 490 for you, please don't hesitate to contact me (sashields@psu.edu).

Section 4 T R 4:15-5:30 220 Willard Building **Dr. Alysia Blandon (Developmental)**

Family Relationships

This course is designed to provide an overview of theory, research methods, and empirical research on family relationships largely from a family systems perspective. The course will primarily focus on families as systems and key subsystems that will be examined include: marital/romantic, coparenting, parent-child, and sibling relationships. We will consider how these relationships change over time and across development and the impact of these relationships on the functioning of all family members. The influences of relationships on other relationships within the family will also be examined. Finally, understanding how relationships develop and change via both social and biological influences will be an important focus of the course. This course is designed for psychology majors who have some background in developmental psychology and who want to explore more in depth development within the family. Assigned readings will be drawn from the current research literature and the course format will be primarily class discussion with short lectures to introduce new themes and concepts.

Section 5 MWF 9:05-9:55 201 Ford Building **Dr. Nancy Dennis (cognitive)**

False Memories & Eyewitness Testimony

This course will examine the cognitive processes that lead us to have false or inaccurate memories. Topics of discussion will include: theories of false memories, children & older adults as eyewitnesses, cross-race effect in memory, emotional influences on memory and memory distortions, and flashbulb memories. Class reading will be taken from both the behavioral and neuroscience fields.

Section 6 T R 11:15-12:30 201 Ford Building **Dr. Kisha Jones (industrial-organizational)**

Justice and Diversity in Organizations

This course will introduce students to two topics relevant to worker experiences: how fairly they feel treated at work and how their diverse personal characteristics, identities, and backgrounds influence behavior at work. The first part of this course will cover organizational justice, including how justice perceptions are formed, how justice perceptions are measured, how justice perceptions differ across cultures, and outcomes of organizational injustice. The second part of the course will cover diversity in organizations, including topics such as group identity, diversity recruitment and organizational socialization, diverse team interactions, and discrimination. Students will be required to engage with the material and participate in class, as what is learned will be connected to their own past experiences. Course sessions will be led by the instructor but will incorporate student presentations and discussions of the research literature. There will also be an emphasis on how theory and research on organizational justice and diversity can be applied to the workplace.

Section 7 T 4:30-7:30 302 Willard Building **Dr. Keith Nelson (developmental)**

Art, Language, and Creativity in Children and Adults

Steve Jobs of Apple Computer, among other commentators, has observed that visual arts skills will be critical to many of the (rapidly changing) sorts of career challenges that adults will face in this, the 21st Century. Other commentators have emphasized that creative, flexible thinking skills are critical to both job success and personal satisfaction. Finally, rich language and communication skills also are strong benefits in every area of life. Despite widespread agreement on the importance of all these skills, it is far from clear what the best paths are to developing these skills during childhood. This course will approach these issues first through reviewing what is already known about facilitating art, language, and creativity in children and adults. The role of contact//awareness of patterns in nature also will receive attention. Then we will concentrate on generating ideas about new ways of facilitating these skills. Finally, we will critically sort through our new ideas to propose specific teaching and intervention plans that would appear to have high probabilities of high impact on art, language, and creativity.

Section 8 T R 4:15-5:30 269 Willard Building **Dr. Ginger Moore (clinical)**

Emotions and Psychopathology

This section will provide an in-depth look at emotion as it relates to psychological disorders and other problematic behaviors (e.g., violence) and the treatment of psychological disorders.

Section 9 T R 2:30-3:45 120 Thomas Building **Dr. Songqi Liu (industrial-organizational)**

Occupational Health Psychology

This course will introduce students to the field of occupational health psychology (OHP). As a field of scientific research and practical application, OHP emphasizes the promotion of wellness and prevention of negative health-related consequences within organizational settings. Students will be required to engage in participatory learning environment focused on understanding this broad and rapidly

developing interdisciplinary field. Course sessions will be led by the instructor, but enhanced by regular student presentations, and discussions of recent and relevant literature. At all times, the emphasis will be on drawing connections between OHP theory and OHP practice and at the relationship between individual and organizational health and well-being.

Section 10 MWF 2:30-3:20 105 Chambers Building **Dr. Aaron Pincus (clinical)**

Personality Disorders

This capstone seminar focuses on an increasingly important topic in clinical psychology—Personality Disorders. We will review conceptualization, classification, assessment, research, and treatment of personality disorders from multiple perspectives (e.g., Psychodynamic, Attachment, Interpersonal, Trait, Cognitive, Evolutionary, and Neurobiological). While “abnormal personalities” are well documented throughout the history of clinical psychology and psychiatry, their unique clinical status in contemporary psychology only began with the publication of DSM-III Axis II in 1980. Because focal attention to personality disorders is relatively new, current theory, research, and treatment of personality disorders reflects a significant diversity of assumptions, perspectives, and models. While we can’t cover everything in depth each week, the seminar is designed to help you think broadly about the best ways to define and describe personality pathology. While this certainly includes the DSM system, the seminar attempts to go well beyond the DSM when possible. This seminar is particularly suited for students intending to pursue graduate training or careers in clinical psychology, psychiatry, social work, and other professions where personality disorders are commonly encountered.

Section 11 W 3:35-6:35 112 Keller Building **Dr. Jenae Neiderhiser (developmental)**

Developmental Behavioral Genetics.

This course will focus on understanding how genetic methods can be applied to the study of human development. Genetic designs and methods that can be used to address questions about individual differences in human behavior throughout development will be emphasized, including twin, sibling and adoption designs and molecular genetics.

Section 12 T R 11:15-12:30 120 Moore Building **Dr. Dan Weiss (cognitive)**

Intuition and decision making

In our everyday life, we make countless judgments ranging from very routine choices (e.g., What should I wear? Should I take an umbrella with me?) to influential decisions that will have lasting impact (e.g., Should I take this job or look for another one? Should I marry this person?). This course takes a look at the cognitive processes involved in these types of decisions and many others. Themes of the course will include how to evaluate the effectiveness of a decision (how do we define an optimal solution?), the heuristics we may use for making choices under conditions of uncertainty, and how our intuitions can lead us astray. In an ideal world, by the end of the course students will be better prepared to make good decisions. At a minimum, though, my goal is that students leave the course with a deeper understanding of the factors that are involved in evaluating and understanding suboptimal choices .