

PSYCH 490/FA 21 Topics

Joyce Furfaro/490 section 001

A Healthy Brain is a Happy Brain

This capstone seminar will explore current research on maintaining a healthy brain, including avoiding neurotoxins and toxic relationships, as well as strengthening your neuronal connections through meditation and continued learning. Students will be encouraged to practice healthy brain activities and report their experience to their classmates. Your critical thinking skills will be tested as we also find and discuss related news items from popular press sources - what do they get right, and what do they get wrong? Some core topics will include cognitive reserve, mindfulness, dementia, and the effects of stress on the brain. This course is best suited for psychology majors who have taken courses relating to the neurobiological aspects of psychology.

Nancy Dennis/490 section 003

False Memory and Eyewitness Testimony

If you were the victim of a crime, do you think you would be able to accurately describe the events of that crime and accurately identify a suspect from a line up? You are probably not as good at this as you think you might be. If you ask any memory expert to describe how memory works, they will say: "Memory is not a tape recorder. Memory is a reconstruction." Meaning that we cannot simply 'replay' a past experience in our mind, but we have to recreate that experience from many stored pieces of that experience. This distinction has profound implications for the accuracy of our memories. Memory reconstruction is prone to the generation of false memories or remembering the past differently than how it was actually experienced. This course will examine the cognitive factors that lead to false and otherwise inaccurate memories, with a special emphasis on how such memory errors affect eyewitness testimony.

Roger Beaty/490 section 004

The Creative Brain

This course is designed for students who are interested in the psychology and neuroscience of creativity. It surveys scientific research on a broad range of topics, including the nature and measurement of creative thinking, the right vs. left brain controversy, the roles of memory and attention in creative problem solving, the relationship between creativity and intelligence, and the neural basis of musical improvisation, among others. The course will include diverse examples from the fine arts and humanities (visual art, literature, music), the sciences, and other relevant domains, largely from the perspectives of cognitive psychology and neuroscience.

Dawn Witherspoon/490 section 005

Youth Development in Context: How Place & Race Jointly affect Youth

This course is designed to provide an introduction to the theoretical and empirical literature about how characteristics of place (i.e., community, neighborhood, activity space) are associated with development during childhood and adolescence. Further, this course interrogates the intersection of place and race

and their joint effects on youth development. Topics to be discussed in this class include attention to cultural variables (i.e., race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, acculturation), exposure to violence, parenting strategies in neighborhoods, and a variety of youth academic, behavioral, and psycho-social outcomes (e.g., academic self-concept, deviance, friendships, substance use, and identity). An important aspect of this course is the attention to multiple forms of data, various methodologies (i.e., quantitative and qualitative), and dissemination of empirical findings (e.g., scholarly reports, newsletters, briefs, etc.) to elucidate a greater understanding of how place and its social characteristics are related to family functioning and youth outcomes. This course is designed for students who have had exposure to developmental psychology and want to learn more about how contexts outside of the family may shape development. The course will be discussion based with some lectures to introduce concepts and themes.

Suzy Scherf/490 section 006

Myths of the Brain

The brain is a mysterious organ to the general public. Overwhelmingly people embrace beliefs about the brain and how it works that are complete myths! In this class, we will examine these myths, debunk them, and think about the socio-cultural factors that lead people to endorse the myths. To do so we will read popular press materials and watch movies that feature or defend these myths. We will use empirical evidence to debunk the myths.

Rich Carlson/490 section 007

The Psychology of Human Error

Normally, we successfully carry out our intentions. But sometimes cognitive failures result in errors. We leave out steps or repeat steps, for example, forgetting to put water in the coffee maker, or putting coffee in twice. We walk into the kitchen intending to do something but do something else instead and forget the original intention or find ourselves wondering why we came into the room. Sometimes cognitive errors have major consequences – a pharmacist fills a prescription with the wrong dosage, or a pilot fails to put down the landing gear before landing a plane. We will look at the research on the causes of error and how errors can be reduced. We will focus primarily on individual cognitive failures but will also consider how design and institutional failures can result in errors. It is recommended but not required that students have a prior course in cognitive psychology.