

Fall 2020 – Psych 490 Descriptions:

Rina Eiden/section 001

Observational Methods in Behavioral Science

This course will cover the use of systematic observational methods in behavioral science. We will discuss the use of observational methods in research, discuss different types of observational methods and designs, provide opportunities for hands on training in using different types of observational methods in mini projects, and apply this knowledge to a final group or individual project using observational methodology to address a student generated research question.

Book: Yoder, P.J., Lloyd, B.P., & Symons, F.J. (2018). *Observational Measurement of Behavior*, 2nd Edition. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, Baltimore, Maryland.

Sandra Azar/Section 003

Psych. Psychology of Marriage and the Family

This course focuses attention on how families and marriages operate. It gives details of the major theories that have been developed to explain family and marital interaction and will use film and novel material to help you master how to apply them. It overviews the major methods that psychology has utilized to understand family and marital life. Attention is paid the major stages of family development from the formation of couples to taking on parenting (infants, young children and adolescents) to handling the issues involved with illness and aging. Discussion will also focus on atypical families and ones dealing with stressors such as mental illness in one of its members. Throughout the course racial, ethnic, and social class differences will be highlighted.

Suzy Scherf/section 004

Debunking 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. Your final project will be to create a public service announcement about the science of the brain.

Dan Weiss/Section 005

Cognitive: What Makes Us Human (cognitive)

A longstanding effort in science and philosophy has been determining the qualities and abilities that separate humankind from other animal species. Intuitively, we feel that humans must be special; an assertion supported by unrivaled achievements and innovations. Yet, pinpointing the source of our differences has been difficult and contentious. In this course, we will explore many issues that have been thought to separate our species from others, including language, mindreading, self-awareness, and mental time travel, among many others. The course will draw heavily from comparative psychology, exploring whether these characteristics are unique by contrasting our abilities with those found in animals. Further, we will touch on topics related to artificial intelligence and philosophy. The course will be highly interactive, with some lecture interwoven with student-led discussions

Nelson/Section 06

Art, Language, and Creativity in Children and Adults

Steve Jobs of Apple Computer, Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, among other commentators, have observed that creativity including 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 develop 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. Creativity in all contexts--business, personal lives, schools, social organizations, evolution, product invention, music and art--are all considered. 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.

Swim/Section 007

Psychology of Conspiracy theories

Conspiracy theories are relatively common, emerging from relatively mundane observations (arguments that the mattress stores are covers for money laundering) to worldwide events (beliefs that Covid 19 is a coverup for government control). Many conspiracy theories vary in their likely validity. While some conspiracies may be treated as entertainment, Information about conspiracies influences health care decisions, voting, political decision making, and vigilante efforts to fight conspiracies. Further, endorsement of the theories has the potential for psychological consequences of developing hatred, distrust, and feelings of helplessness. The purpose of the course is to look at conspiracy theories through the lens of psychological research. The course will examine reasons for endorsement including psychological characteristics of conspiracy believers, fundamental ways that people process information that leads them to believe these theories, and even the possibility that we are “hard-wired” to endorse

superstitions. The course will also examine connections between this topic and other areas of research including prejudice and persuasion. Students in class will select a conspiracy of their choice to explore in depth, comparing the conspiracy to facts, analyzing why people believe that particular conspiracy, and consider consequences of endorsing the conspiracies