



Department of Psychology
Contemporary Theories in Psychology
Psychology 405 (L01) – Winter 2008

Course Outline

Class Location: SS 012

Lecture Day/Time: TR 17:00 (75 min)

Instructor: Dr. Hank Stam

Office: Admin 251C

Phone: 220-5683

Office Hours: TR 2:00-3:00 (or by appointment)

E-mail: stam@ucalgary.ca

Readings

For this course you will need a required package of readings and one textbook:

1. The readings for the course will be available on the web or will be available electronically through the library. There will be no need to purchase them.
2. There is one textbook:
Dupré, J. (2001). *Human nature and the limits of science*. Oxford.

I will be posting Powerpoint notes, readings and information on where to obtain readings that are on the web in addition to any announcements on Blackboard (see blackboard.ucalgary.ca to log in). If you have questions about Blackboard, please go to <http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/blackboard/help.htm> for further instructions.

Overview: This course will focus on two interrelated sets of issues: (a) a critical examination of selected major theories and systems in twentieth century psychology, and (b) the development of new theory and methods of inquiry that have evolved from the critiques of these theories. In the process of examining these issues we will discuss the nature of science and psychology's place in science, and such concepts as theory, explanation, reductionism, determinism, intentionality and agency.

To emphasize theory is not to disparage research but to examine the presumed goal of all scientific activity, namely the development of theoretical statements which have as their aim either explanation (that is, they are 'true' statements about the world) or a pragmatic function (they allow the user to do things in the world not possible without the theory). Further, we will examine the

questions that have been asked about the relationship between data and theory in science generally and in psychology in particular.

The course will then attempt to understand the relationship between explanations that work at different levels. Is a biological (physiological/neurological) explanation preferred over a psychological one? Is a cognitive or a behavioral explanation a 'true' explanation? Are 'explanations' preferred over 'reasons' in psychology? Is data more important than theory, or is theory required so that we can 'see' the data? All of these questions take place in a social and historical context that will be discussed as the course proceeds.

What then of particular theoretical claims in psychology? We will examine some foundational topics to evaluate the nature of knowledge claims about these topics and the different ways of evaluating these claims.

Note that in this course we will be following a problem based approach. This means that the lectures, readings, class discussions, as well as your own background and knowledge and your use of other sources such as libraries and the web are all resources for you to solve a set of classic problems in psychology. Of course, these are not problems that are amenable to easy solutions but instead are the problems that form the center of debates and discussions in contemporary theoretical work. The aim of this course is to provide you with the understanding of fundamental problems in psychological theory and to provide you with the tools to seek out possible solutions. I have divided the course into roughly seven major problem areas that we will cover in turn (see the Timetable). These are: 1. Foundations & Science, 2. Reductionism and Determinism, 3. Behaviorism, 4. Functionalism, 5. Cognitivism, 6. Evolution, 7. Human development and sociality, 8. Abnormality and Culture, 9. Meaning and Language, 10. Reflexivity and research practices.

University of Calgary Curriculum Objectives:

This course is directly relevant to the core competencies. We will be engaged in addressing theoretical frameworks that form the foundations of critical and creative thinking in the discipline and that are focused on the analysis of problems at a foundational level. Much of this will require exposure to and mastery of abstract reasoning. The evaluations you will complete are designed to require you to engage in effective communication strategies and to require that you gather and organize information from diverse sources. It is expected that this course will generate insight into the production and maintenance of knowledge in psychology and will enhance your interpretive and assessment skills with respect to the evaluation of knowledge claims.

Evaluation

Course Requirements: 3 Mini-Papers, 2 Term-Tests and a Final Exam.

I. Three Mini-papers: due as outlined below:

1. Tuesday, February 5 (10%)
2. Tuesday, March 11 (12%)
3. Tuesday, April 8 (12%)

Your paper will address the questions outlined in the attached course timetable. The first mini-paper is worth only 10% of your final grade, a chance to get warmed up to this kind of assignment. The second is worth 12% and third is worth 12% each. In total, this means that your papers add up to 34% of your total grade.

In grading your papers I will be looking for the following: (a) clarity of language use and presentation, writing style and overall format and (b) the content of the argument or case you make, its relationship to the literature you cite and the general strength of your case. 'Strength' can mean both logical structure and rhetorical force; this will depend in part on how you are answering a question. In general, (a) and (b) here are, metaphorically, like 'artistic impression' and 'technical merit' in figure skating competitions (I have borrowed this metaphor from Dr. Marini in Education). By having you write multiple papers and tests (instead of one large one) the assessment ought to approach validity and reliability.

Use current material from the literature. This you can find in volumes of journals such as Psychological Review, Brain and Behavioral Sciences, American Psychologist, Canadian Psychology, Theory & Psychology, Philosophical Psychology, Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, Cognition, or other major publications which are available in our library or occasionally, on the web. Beware of the quality of web-based materials. If you are writing a paper with an historical emphasis, use original sources. Ask me if you are uncertain about an article or a journal. Your papers should be approximately 1,000 words in length, maximum, or about 4 typed, double-spaced pages - they can be shorter, depending on how well you present your case. I expect typed work in all instances.

You can be late with one of the three papers (3 days maximum) without asking me or requiring permission. More than one late will require an excuse or I will deduct 1 point-per-day for lateness.

Please note that, despite the use of Blackboard and other web resources, I will not accept papers that are sent to me electronically. It is difficult and tedious to grade material on a computer screen and therefore I will only accept hard copies of your papers.

II. Two term-tests: These tests will consist of very short answer questions based on the readings and lecture material (16% and 20% for a total of 36%).

1. Tuesday, February 12
2. Tuesday, March 18

III. In class Final Exam: On Thursday, April 17 you will receive a list of about 10 questions. Some of these questions will appear on the in-class, Registrar Scheduled, final exam. (value is 30%).

Grading System:

The final percentage obtained in the course will be assigned according to the following scale. In case of percentages I will round up:

| <u>Letter grade</u> | <u>Percentage Obtained</u> |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| A+ | 96-100 |
| A | 90-95 |
| A- | 85-89 |
| B+ | 80-84 |
| B | 76-79 |
| B- | 72-75 |
| C+ | 67-71 |
| C | 63-66 |
| C- | 59-62 |
| D+ | 54-58 |
| D | 50-53 |
| F | <50 |

Style: In writing your papers you must use the style of the American Psychological Association (see the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Fifth Edition, 2001). Pay particular attention to the referencing system and the "Guidelines to Reduce Bias in Language," pages 61-76 of the manual. Document every idea that is not commonplace by reference to the source from which you obtained it. If in doubt, consult the Publication Manual.

IMPORTANT: A student seeking reappraisal of graded term papers, essays, etc. must discuss her or his work with the instructor within two weeks of the work having been returned to the class. No reappraisal is permitted after the two-week period. The lecturer must approve any tape recordings of lectures.

Academic Accommodation

It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodations. If you are a student with a documented disability who may require academic accommodation and have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, please contact their office at

220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. You are also required to discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of this course.

Absence From A Test

Make-up exams are not an option without an official University medical excuse (see the University Calendar). You must contact the instructor before the scheduled examination or you will have forfeited any right to make up the exam. At the instructor's discretion, a make-up exam may differ significantly (in form and/or content) from a regularly scheduled exam. Except in extenuating circumstances (documented by an official University medical excuse), a makeup exam is written within two (2) weeks of the missed exam.

A completed Physician/Counselor Statement will be required to confirm absence from a test for health reasons. The student will be required to pay any cost associated with the Physician/Counselor Statement.

Academic Misconduct

Intellectual honesty is the cornerstone of the development and acquisition of knowledge and requires that the contribution of others be acknowledged. Consequently, plagiarism or cheating on any assignment is regarded as an extremely serious academic offense. Students should examine sections of the University Calendar, which present the Statement of Intellectual Honesty and definitions and penalties associated with Plagiarism/Cheating and Other Academic Misconduct. Please note that I take any form of intellectual dishonesty as a very serious offence against everything for which a university stands and will deal with it accordingly.

Important Dates

The last day to drop this course and **still receive a fee refund** is January 25, 2008.
The last day to withdraw from this course is April 18, 2008.

Student Organizations

Psychology students may wish to join the Psychology Undergraduate Students' Association (PSYCHS). They are located in the Admin Building, room 170 and may be contacted at 220-5567.

Course Credits for Research Participation

Students in most psychology courses are eligible to participate in Departmentally approved research and earn credits toward their final grades. A maximum of two credits (2%) per course, including this course, may be applied to an individual's final grade. Students can create an account and access the Research Participation System website at <http://ucalgary.sona-systems.com>. **The last day to participate in research is April 17, 2008.**

MINI-PAPERS

1. Find one experimental or empirical study in any of the journals of the American Psychological Association (do not use any other journals) from 2006-2008 only (a regular article in one of the journals listed below, not a short-report, a review article or any other non-empirical paper). Failure to follow these instructions will mean I will not read your paper. Your article should be an analysis of the way in which a reductive strategy has been used. That is, some very ordinary phenomenon (e.g., feeling sad) has been transformed into a scientific object (e.g., depression) using some set of tools. Evaluate this research study from the perspective of our class discussion and the readings. Note any distinctions between 'fact' and 'data' or between 'theory' and 'data'. How are the data produced, how are they made 'visible', how are they turned into a theoretical product? Finally, how is the entire article produced as a piece of 'science'? Attach a copy of the article to your paper.

Due: Thursday, February 5.

2. Find a research article in any standard psychology journal that is explicitly cognitivist or explicitly on consciousness. Evaluate cognitivism or the problem of consciousness by writing a brief review of that article. Develop a clear argument in your paper. Demonstrate the way that the functional nature of cognitive arguments or work on consciousness is elaborated in this paper. You may use historical examples or contemporary ones for this mini-paper but it must be a research article in an academic journal. Be sure to attach a copy of the article to your paper.

Due: Tuesday, March 11.

3. Coin a new term (a neologism) to describe a new or different phenomenon not typically described or discussed in psychology, or a new angle on an old problem. Write a mini-theory describing this phenomenon. You should develop a clear argument in your paper. I will be posting several examples of good papers from previous years on Blackboard.

OR:

Alternatively, for this particular project you may choose a group project with up to 3 people but you will still have to hand in an individual paper. The group can take a familiar problem in psychology and design a new theory. The theory must have obvious methodological or practical implications. To do this particular project you will need to have a meeting with me as a group before I approve it.

Due: Tuesday, April 8.

 List of APA journals for Assignment 1 (only) – your article must come from this list, any other source will be disallowed!

| | |
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| Behavioral Neuroscience; | JEP: Human Perception and Performance |
| Developmental Psychology; | JEP: Learning, Memory, and Cognition |
| Experimental and Clinical Pharmacology; | Journal of Family Psychology |
| Health Psychology; | Journal of Personality and Social Psychology |
| Journal of Abnormal Psychology; | Neuropsychology |
| Journal of Applied Psychology; | Professional Psychology: Research and Practice |
| Journal of Comparative Psychology; | Psychological Assessment |
| Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology; | Psychological Methods |
| Journal of Counseling Psychology; | Psychology and Aging; Journal of |
| Educational Psychology; | Psychology, Public Policy, and Law. |
| Journal of Experimental Psychology (JEP): | |
| Animal Behavior Processes; | |
| JEP: Applied; JEP: General | |

Timetable and Readings - Psychology 405, Winter 2008

Week 1 (January 15, 17): Rhetoric and Language - Theories and Facts.

Readings: 1. Stam, Notes I
 2. van Hezewijk. The Century of Theoretical Psychology?
 3. Harré, R. Varieties of Theorizing

Week 2 (January 22 & 24): Foundations of science, psychological and otherwise.

Readings: History and philosophy of science reading.

Week 3 (January 29 & 31): Reductionism: Brains and stuff.

Reading: Stam, Notes II

Week 4 (February 5 & 7): Reductionism and Determinism: Physics Envoy

Reading: Butterfield, Jeremy (1998). Determinism and indeterminism.

Week 5 (February 12 & 14): Behaviorism and its demise [Feb. 12, Term Test I]

Reading: 1. Skinner, B. F. (1950). *Are theories of learning necessary?*
 2. W. M. O'Neil *American Behaviorism*

Reading Week: February 17 - February 24

Week 6 (February 26 & 28): Functionalism, Cognitivism & Consciousness: If I can drive a car why can't I explain how it works?

Readings: 1. Stam, Notes – Cognition
2. Janet Levin - Functionalism
3. Carruthers

Week 7 (March 4 & 6): Evolutionary Theory

Reading: 1. Dupré, Chaps. 1 - 5

Week 8 (March 11 & 13): Human development and sociality

Readings: article on development
article on social nature of human life

Week 9 (March 18 & 20): Abnormality and Culture [March 18, Term test II]

Readings: Sass, 'Schizophrenic Person' or 'Person with Schizophrenia'?
Brockmeier, Remembering and Forgetting.

Week 10 (March 25 & 27): Meaning and Language

Readings: 1. Stam, Notes on hermeneutics and related issues.

Week 11 (April 1 & 3): Social mind and the problem of socio-rationalism

Readings: 1. G. H. Mead, *The social self*.
2. Vygotsky, Chap. 7 of *Thought and Language*
3. Jim Wertsch and Mike Cole, *The role of culture in Vygotskian-informed psychology*

Week 12 (April 8 & 10): Talk in Action; Action in Talk!

Reading: 1. Michel & Wortham, *Clearing away the self*.
2. Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré *Positioning: The discursive production of selves*.
3. Potter, *Discourse analysis and constructionist approaches: Theoretical background*

Week 13 (April 15 & 17): Returning to fundamental questions

Readings: 1. Dupré: Chap. 7.

April 17, Questions for Final Exam distributed.