

## **SPECIAL TOPICS: RESEARCH IN EXPERIMENTAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY (PSY4980)**

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This is a multi-faceted experiential learning course designed to provide students with knowledge about research and the research process in experimental social psychology. The field of experimental social psychology seeks to answer varied research questions by utilizing the experimental method of manipulating variables and measuring their influence. One goal of the course is for students to learn about theoretical, empirical, and statistical issues relevant to experimental social psychology. A second goal is for students to gain a deeper understanding of the decisions involved in conducting experimental social psychology research. A final goal is to provide a hands-on learning experience about the research process in an experimental social psychology laboratory.

### **READING MATERIAL**

*1. Various empirical research articles on the topic of experimental social psychology.* Readings will be provided on-line on the course Black Board page.

*2. Research Methods in Social Psychology (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition).* Aronson, Ellsworth, Carlsmith, & Hope Gonzales. This text provides a guide for the process of experimentation, focusing on asking the right questions, translating questions into a workable ethical design, setting up data collection, designing reliable and valid dependent variables, avoiding bias, conducting the post-experimental interviews, and writing up research results. Readings from this book will be provided on-line on the course Black Board page.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- Be trained and certified in ethical psychological research practices
- Be able to conduct a literature search on social psychological topics
- Be able to develop social psychological research hypotheses
- Be able to develop experimental protocols that test research hypotheses
- Be able to evaluate social psychological research study designs
- Be able to conduct experimental research sessions
- Be able to use software for psychological research, such as SONA Systems, MediaLab, Qualtrics, and PsychData
- Be able to code and enter research data into SPSS
- Be able to interpret the results of studies and plan follow-up research

## **COURSE RESPONSIBILITIES**

Throughout the semester, students will take on a number of important duties. As such, student schedules should be open and flexible to accommodate your commitment to this course. Students with tight schedules or who cannot attend our weekly meetings should NOT register for this course. These are the major components of the course:

- **1. Attend and participate in weekly class meetings.** We will hold weekly meetings throughout the semester. During these meetings, students will be introduced to new research ideas, methodologies, statistics, etc. Moreover, students will be expected to update the lab group on the progress of ongoing efforts for experiential learning tasks (see below). Issues relevant to the careers of undergraduate students (e.g., graduate school preparation), as well as topics covering the technological and methodological demands of the field will also be covered. It is expected that students attend EVERY meeting and contribute to discussion. If a student must miss a lab meeting due to illness or some other university-appropriate excuse, please let the instructor know in a timely manner.
- **2. Compose weekly reaction papers.** Students will write 1-page (double-spaced) reaction papers (due by the following Wednesday). The reaction papers should briefly summarize the topic of the meeting (1 paragraph), indicate what was learned from the meeting (1 paragraph), and provide thoughtful questions that you would want to ask about the topic (1 paragraph). Students will hand in 7 reaction papers during the semester and can choose which weeks they want to submit these.
- **3. Read assigned journal articles and textbook chapters.** Depending on the week, students may have chapters from our textbook or journal articles to read. These readings will be used to facilitate our discussion of research in our weekly class meetings. All readings will be indicated on the syllabus and posted on Blackboard.
- **4. Complete experiential learning tasks.** As part of the experiential learning component of the course, students will be assigned to various research-related tasks involving experiments in social psychology. To facilitate this, students will be assigned times during the semester where they will complete these tasks (approximately 6 hours during the week). These tasks will include some combination of the following:
  - **Data Collection.** Data collection is a vital responsibility of every student in the course and significant time will be spent on research ethics, experiment training, and correct experimental protocols. If data is not collected correctly, the research project dies there. It is important to remember that the success or failure of our social psychological research projects will have a significant impact on the professional lives for all people in the lab (faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students). As such, we rely heavily on students in the data collection stage of the research process and we always appreciate their efforts. Data collection can involve:
    - Being an experimenter (in charge of a research session)
    - Playing the role of a confederate (someone who pretends to be a participant)As an experimenter (or confederate), it is imperative that the study be ready to go when participants arrive. To ensure that everything is set up *before* the study start time, please arrive early so that you have time to set up and prepare the necessary materials. Also, when running studies, keep an eye out for problems and be pro-

active in finding solutions. Finally, experimenters are expected to dress professionally when running participants.

- Help design/implement studies. Every study starts with an idea, but it must eventually be polished into a workable study. Students will contribute to this process by doing pilot testing, developing stimuli, creating IRB protocols, designing surveys, creating Medialab programs, and so on (note that the specific task will depend upon the nature of the project and a student's role in the project)
- Enter/code data. An important step in the research process is correctly entering and coding data. Basically, research participants will provide us with their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Afterwards, we need to translate this information into numbers for data analysis. Thus, data entry/coding helps us make the transition from a heap of raw data collected in our research rooms to the condensed findings that we report to other researchers at conferences and in research articles. This step requires great care, vigilance, and training. This is the “not-so-glamorous” step in the research process—but—it is also one of the most critical. At some point in the semester, all students will be involved in the data entry and coding process.

## **COURSE GRADING**

You will earn points in the class as follows:

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Possible Points</b>
Attendance and Participation in Meetings	130 points
Weekly Reaction Papers (10 points each)	70 points
Experiential Learning Tasks	200 points
<b>Total</b>	<b>400 points</b>

93 – 100% A	80 – 82% B-	67 – 69% D+
90 – 92% A-	77 – 79% C+	63 – 66% D
87 – 89% B+	73 – 76% C	60 – 62% D-
83 – 86% B	70 – 72% C-	less than 60% F

As indicated above, there are a number of components to this course. **First**, students should attend and participate in meetings. We will take attendance during these meetings and monitor participation. Students can earn up to 10 points for each meeting based on their attendance and degree of participation/engagement as determined by the instructor (130 points total). **Second**, students should submit a 1-page reaction paper on 7 occasions during the semester. These should be submitted to the instructor by the Wednesday following the class meeting. Students can choose which of the 7 weeks they want to submit reaction papers. Students can earn up to 10 points for each reaction paper (70 points total). **Third**, students should complete their experiential learning tasks each week. In total, each student will complete approximately 6 hours of experiential learning tasks each week. Earning all the points assumes that the student has been reliable, responsible, and productive in his/her lab tasks and with his/her contributions to the research. More specifically, this means demonstrating good attendance for experiential sessions (e.g., showing up on time), following experimental procedures, completing tasks in a timely manner (e.g., allocating research credit daily), and showing care with tasks (e.g., not making data entry errors). Points will be deducted from this score as issues arise. Moreover, if students do not follow the procedures laid out

in the syllabus they may be asked to drop the course. When students are not following the syllabus, the instructor may also remove the student from the course (resulting in an IW) or assign the student the grade of “F”. Students will be given written and oral warnings before being given a forced withdrawal from the course.

### **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS**

As noted above, our class meetings will be at noon on Fridays. Below is a schedule of topics for the class meetings throughout the semester. For the “Readings/Preparation” column, this indicates the outside work that you should be doing *before* coming to class that day.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading/Preparation</b>
9/1	Orientation to Research in Experimental Social Psychology	
9/8	Variables in Social Psychology; Empirical Article Discussion	Read Aronson Ch. 1; article TBA
9/15	Research Ideas; Empirical Research Presentation	Read Aronson Ch. 4
9/22	Developing Research Hypotheses and Designs (aka “Research in a hat day”)	Come up with 3 research questions related to psychology that you would like to answer
9/29	Introduction to Data Collection Programs	Read Aronson Ch. 6
10/6	SPSS Day 1	Read Aronson Ch. 7
10/13	SPSS Day 2 (wrap-up); Empirical Research Presentation	Read Aronson Ch. 8
10/20	Ethical issues in Psychology; Ethics Discussion	Read Aronson Ch. 3
10/27	Graduate Education Day 1	
11/3	Graduate Education Day 2	Bring 3 questions you had from Graduate Education Day 1
11/10	No meeting – Veteran’s Day	
11/17	Presenting Psychological Research; Empirical Research Presentation	
11/24	No meeting- Thanksgiving Break	
12/1	Writing in Psychology; Empirical Research Presentation	Read Aronson Ch. 11
12/8	The Big Picture & Course wrap-up	

\*Please note that the schedule and procedures in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances and when the instructor needs to do so.

### **COLLEGIATE POLICIES**

We will adhere to the following Collegiate Policies set out by the University of Toledo:

Academic integrity: <http://www.utoledo.edu/dl/students/dishonesty.html>

Student accommodations: <http://www.utoledo.edu/offices/student-disability-services/>