PSY U664: Seminar in Social Psychology

Current Topics in Experimental Social Psychology

Course Description

This is a seminar that meets in Sequence E (Tuesday and Friday, 11:45-1:25). As the title indicates, the topic will be current topics in experimental social psychology. There is one required paperback book, and there is a packet of required readings to purchase at Gnomon Copy on Huntington Avenue.


Prof. Hall’s office is 225 NI (373-3790, j.hall@neu.edu). Drop-in office hours are Fridays 10:00 – 11:00 and students may also make an appointment.

A seminar is a discussion-based course and therefore the format will consist mostly of class discussion of the readings, as well as presentations by students followed by discussion. Dr. Hall will provide background and commentary in every class but most of the class will consist of student participation. It is essential, therefore, that students are prepared for class by reading the assignment, thinking about it, and being ready to talk about it.

The course requirements are as follows:

- Quality and quantity of class participation (45% of grade).
- Quality of assigned presentation (20% of grade).
- Take-home midterm summary paper (15% of grade).
- Take-home final summary paper (20% of grade).

Extra Credit Options

Students may complete one, two, or three (as they choose) extra credit assignments. Each counts for a maximum of 3% toward the final grade. The extra credit is added after grades are calculated, meaning that students who do not do extra credit assignments are not penalized for not doing them. See separate description of Extra Credit Options.

Presentations

In addition to the required reading for each class that everyone is responsible for, in every class one student will make a presentation of an article that has NOT been assigned to the rest of the class. The presenter will know the assignment well ahead of time, and therefore will have opportunity to ask questions of the instructor ahead of time (doing so is recommended). Students are responsible for obtaining their assigned article from Snell Library (either in the stacks or in E-journals), though Prof. Hall may be able to send a pdf to you electronically if you ask in advance. See separate section on Presentations.
Take-Home Summary Papers

There will be two summary papers, based on the readings, that are open-book, take-home essays of 5 pages in length. You will get the specific assignments at the appropriate time.

Academic Integrity

For preparing presentations, students may seek advice as needed. However, on the take-home essays, students are not allowed to collaborate or consult with any other person, other than Prof. Hall if there are questions. Evidence of collaboration or copying will be taken seriously by the instructor, with risk of receiving a failing grade on the assignment and/or being reported to University authorities.

Schedule of Classes, Readings, and Presentations

(Note: Readings for presentation are not in the class packet because these are not for the whole class to read. Only the presenter reads that article.)

Tuesday, Jan. 6  Introduction

Friday, Jan. 9  Cognitive Consistency


PRESENTER:

Tuesday, Jan. 13  Attribution


PRESENTER:
Friday, Jan. 16  **Implicit Self Esteem**


PRESENTER:

Tuesday, Jan. 20  **Self-Handicapping**


PRESENTERS (NOTE, 2 students will share the presentation of this article):

Friday, Jan. 23  **Reflections and Self**


PRESENTER:

Tuesday, Jan. 27  **Stereotype Threat**


PRESENTER:
**Friday, Jan. 30  ** **Self and Death**


**PRESENTER:**

**Tuesday, Feb. 3  ** **Social Influence**

Cialdini, Ch. 1-3


**PRESENTER:**

**Friday, Feb. 6  ** **NO CLASS**

**Tuesday, Feb. 10  ** **Social Influence**

Cialdini, Ch. 4-5


**PRESENTER:**

**Friday, Feb. 13  ** **Social Influence**

Cialdini, Ch. 6-7, Epilogue


PRESENTER:

Tuesday, Feb. 17  **Mimicry and Social Influence**


PRESENTER:

Tuesday, Feb. 17:  **FIRST SUMMARY PAPER ASSIGNMENT GIVEN OUT TODAY**

Friday, Feb. 20  **Nonverbal Communication and Cognition**


PRESENTER:

Tuesday, Feb. 24:  **FIRST SUMMARY PAPER ASSIGNMENT DUE TODAY BY 4:30**

Tuesday, Feb. 24  **Nonverbal Communication and Emotions**


Friday, Feb. 27  **Unconscious Processes**


Tuesday, March 3 and Friday, March 6:  **NO CLASS**

Tuesday, March 10  **Self-Fulfilling Prophecy**


Friday, March 13  **Self-Fulfilling Prophecy**


Tuesday, March 17  **Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Intergroup Relations**


PRESENTER: 

Friday, March 20  **Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Intergroup Relations**


PRESENTER: 

Tuesday, March 24  **Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Intergroup Relations**


PRESENTER: 

Friday, March 27  **Aggression**


PRESENTER: 
Tuesday, March 31  **Prosocial Behavior**


PRESENTER:

Friday, April 3  **Culture and Cognition**


PRESENTER:

Tuesday, April 7  **Culture and Emotion**


PRESENTER:

Friday, April 10  **Culture and Honor**


PRESENTER:
Friday, April 10:  FINAL SUMMARY PAPER ASSIGNMENT GIVEN OUT TODAY

Tuesday, April 14  The Moral-Empirical Interface


PRESENTER:

Friday, April 17:  FINAL SUMMARY PAPER DUE TODAY BY 4:30
Class Participation

Good class participation starts with regular attendance and coming to class on time. Obviously, one must also speak up in class in order to contribute effectively. However, the sheer amount of participation is not all that matters. Good participation involves the following: (1) Listening well, so that your comments truly follow from what others have said. (2) Adding comments that push the discussion along rather than just affirming or paraphrasing what someone else said. (3) Using your comments to demonstrate that you are thinking about the material and have read the assignments. (4) Posing good questions to the instructor or other class members. A good question can ask for clarification of something that is not clear, or it can be intended to probe or challenge another speaker or something that you read.

Ground rules for participation involve showing interest, showing mutual respect, and every student’s adoption of a leadership attitude. Your goal is to share in a rewarding learning experience, not to compete or show off. A leadership attitude doesn’t mean that you wrest control from the instructor, or that you dominate the class discussion; it does mean that you are not just passively listening or letting the discussion go in any direction it happens to go. A leadership attitude means that YOU make efforts to shape the discussion, to get it back on track, to take it in a direction you want it to go, and to question or challenge fellow students or the instructor (respectfully). Students who are naturally quiet will need to work especially hard to develop their participation skills.

Presentations

Presentations should be planned to take about 30 minutes, counting both the formal presentation and class questions/discussion. A paper handout is required to give out to the class; you may also use the blackboard but not Powerpoint. You can work from notes and you can also refer to the article if you need to. You must always keep in mind that the rest of the class has not read the article, which means explaining background and other basics and going slowly enough for the audience to digest what is being said. It is very important to sift out what is important to say from what is not important to say. You should HIGHLIGHT and PRIORITIZE. Highlighting includes repeating yourself to get important points across. Prioritizing means that when describing a research article, tell your listeners what’s important rather than a lot of detail that might not matter or be a distraction to the main points. Always keep in mind that you want to talk about what is important, not talk about everything.

Check in with the audience from time to time to be sure they are following. Do not present in a monotone because the audience will stop listening. Also, in planning the content of your presentation try not to be boring. Make the research interesting. You must demonstrate that you can go beyond just reporting/quoting what’s said in the article. This includes saying things in your own words, paraphrasing, summarizing, tying the findings to other things learned in the
course, criticizing, and speculating. You should prepare one or two interesting questions to ask the class, to get discussion going after the presentation. You are responsible for understanding what was done in the research being described so that you can answer questions from the class. Of course, no one is expected to memorize every detail, so it is allowable to look at the article if you need to for answering questions. However, you should come prepared with a very good understanding of the research. Be sure you read it far enough ahead so that you have time to ask Prof. Hall for clarification of anything in the article that you don’t understand. Be sure to ask for help; you are not expected to be able to understand complicated research articles without help. And remember, faking it won’t work when you are standing up in front of the class!

Prof. Hall will arrange the schedule of presentations and will identify the readings well in advance so you have plenty of notice.

**On Reading Primary Sources**

Much of your reading consists of primary sources (original research articles). These can be daunting to read if you are not used to them, and especially if you are not very knowledgeable about statistics. Those of you who might be phobic about numbers will be additionally challenged. Here are tips on how to read these articles:

Authors always describe and paraphrase in regular English what they are doing and what they found. Therefore, it is possible to get the basic message even if you never read the numbers at all. So, remind yourself as you go along through an article that the author says it, and says it again and sometimes yet again, in different places within the article. However, you should do your best to make sense of the numerical presentations. Especially, look closely at the tables and/or figures, as they usually present results in a clear fashion in terms of graphing means or showing means within different cells of a research design. And when you look, THINK. Applying your normal common sense will achieve a high level of understanding.

You should not rely on the summary in the Abstract, nor the summary in the Discussion, as a substitute for reading the Method and Results. You will never fully understand what was done and what was found if you rely on summaries instead of grappling with the actual study and its results.

At the same time, readers (even professional ones) are faced with a significant “forest versus trees” problem—in other words, there is a huge amount of detail and many results are reported but you are probably interested in only a portion of the detail and a few of the results. When you read, be sure to think carefully about what is more important and what is less important. Don’t get bogged down in unimportant details or results that are not really about the main point. You could easily waste a huge amount of time on the wrong things. Of course, deciding what are the right things to focus on is not easy and it is a skill that grows with experience. And, two readers might focus validly on different aspects—for example, they might disagree on what results are important, or they might disagree on what the results mean, or one might see a flaw while the other does not or they might debate whether it is a flaw. You can bring your individuality to the reading of research articles.

When you read, you should cultivate a critical attitude—which means thinking hard about whether what you are reading makes sense and whether you agree with it. “Critical”
doesn’t mean “negative.” You can read something critically and reach the conclusion that the work is perfect in every way. So, being critical means being skeptical and willing to challenge the writer. It is the process of appraising, not the final conclusion you reach. Discussion of articles is much more interesting if the class goes beyond digesting what the author said to posing new and sometimes challenging questions about what the author said.

Be sure you take good notes on each article you read. When I take notes on an article, my page of notes is usually no more than one page of handwriting, bullet-style. If your notepage is much longer than this, you are probably writing down extraneous detail. Of course, articles vary in their complexity and how many studies they report, etc. The important things for you to make note of are the following (if it would help, you could make yourself a template that you fill in):

What the main question is
Who the participants were (usually college students)
How the research was designed
   What was the independent variable(s)
   What was the dependent variable(s)
   (Sometimes the IV-DV designation is not relevant, as in a correlational study)
What were the (important) results
Interpretations, comments, problems, questions, “bottom line”

A good question to ask yourself after reading any article is “So what?” This makes you think about the bottom line and make an overall appraisal of the research. Another good mechanism to ensuring your understanding is to imagine telling another person about it (or actually tell someone about it). What would you say? What questions would they ask?

**Summary Papers**

There are two assigned papers, that take the place of midterm and final exams. Each of them is based on the readings (also discussion) we have had. Each paper will be 5 pages long, double-spaced. Do not include a reference section but be sure you clearly indicate which readings you are referring to. You will be given an essay question, the goal of which is to make you consider all of the readings at once (though you do not have to mention all the readings in your answer)—for example, to find common themes or to compare results or theoretical frameworks. In your papers you are expected to demonstrate an understanding of the readings/discussion as well as put ideas together in a sensible way that responds to the specific question being asked. When mentioning readings, explain what exactly you are referring to/talking about; don’t just give the citation. The latter doesn’t demonstrate mastery. This is your opportunity to show that you understood the readings, as well as to show that you can think integratively and originally.

You can use any and all printed resources for answering the questions but you may consult only with me, if you have clarifying questions. You may not collaborate with other students or consult anyone else. You are responsible only for material that you were assigned to read, but you should also bring in issues talked about in class if that is relevant.
Papers should be turned in to Dr. Hall’s office (225 NI) or to the Psychology office (125 NI) on the day they are due. In an emergency, electronic submission is acceptable but hardcopy is preferred.

**Extra Credit Options**

Periodically during the semester, an extra credit assignment will be offered to the class. This consists of (a) reading an assigned article and writing a 3-page description and analysis of it, including responses to specific questions assigned by Dr. Hall, or (b) doing an extra presentation. Students may choose to do one, two, or three of these assignments. Each will count a maximum of 3 additional percentage points on the final grade (depending on how well you do the assignment). If you choose to do an extra credit paper, you must turn it in no later than one week after you take it. No extra credit papers will be assigned during the final three weeks of class. Students not doing any extra credit papers will *not* be penalized in their grade. Also, no one can lose points by doing the extra credit.