Seminar in Cognition (PSY/LIN U660)  
Fall 2008  
Mondays 11:45-2:40 PM

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Office: 443 Nightingale Hall (dial 3060 from the 4th floor phone)  
Office hours: M 10-11 AM and by appointment

Welcome to the Seminar in Cognition! A seminar is a course based on open discussion of primary-source readings. Thus, discussion will form the major part of each class meeting, but short lectures, formal debates, demos, presentations, and activities will also add to the mix.

Overview:

The field of cognition is filled with exciting current debates over how the mind really works. In this seminar, we will consider ongoing debates in cognition, as well as new, surprising, and sometimes radical ideas that are certain to give rise to new debates in the field. We will traverse the major subtopics of cognition, sampling classic and hot-off-the-press debates from across the breadth of the field. Using relevant literature from cognitive psychology, cognitive neuroscience, cognitive development, and social cognition as our guide, we will immerse ourselves in these debates and add our own opinions to fuel the fire. We will consider multiple sides of each debate on all levels, from the theoretical to the experimental, and think critically about the relation of these debates to the human mind as it operates in the real world.

Readings:

• Required coursepack available at the NU bookstore (617-373-2286)  
• An intro-level Cognition text is on reserve at Snell Library (to refresh memories if needed)  
• For a helpful site on APA style, go to http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/p04_c09_o.html  
  The 5th Edition of the APA Publication Manual is recommended for psychology majors.

Required mindset:

Take personal responsibility for guiding our discussions and for preparing your own thoughts and questions. This seminar can only be as exciting as you make it, and the sky is the limit!

Course objectives and expected outcomes:

• To become highly familiar with debates, ideas, and research findings on human cognition ranging from more classic debates to current hot topics.  
• To take an active role in these ongoing debates by adding your own thoughts to fuel the fire, and by carefully considering and responding to the comments of your classmates and to the contributions of researchers in the field.  
• To critically consider and question both sides of each debate, from theories, hypotheses, and data interpretation to the nuts and bolts of the research procedure and results.  
• To gain extensive practice in expressing your critical thinking about psychological research in both written and oral form.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sep. 15</td>
<td>Organizational</td>
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<td>Sep. 22</td>
<td>Explorations in Change Blindness</td>
<td>Levin et al. (2000)</td>
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<td>Gallace et al. (2006)</td>
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<td><em>Simons &amp; Rensink (2005)</em></td>
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<td>Sep. 29</td>
<td>Is Face Recognition “Special?”</td>
<td>McKone et al. (2006)</td>
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<td>Bukach et al. (2006)</td>
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<td>Elgar &amp; Campbell (2001)*</td>
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<td>Tanaka et al. (2004)</td>
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<td><em>Gries &amp; Peng (2002)</em></td>
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<td>Oct. 13</td>
<td><em>University Holiday - Columbus Day</em></td>
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<td>Oct. 20</td>
<td>Explaining Extraordinary Memories</td>
<td>Smilek et al. (2002)</td>
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<td>Parker et al. (2006)</td>
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<td>Thioux et al. (2006)*</td>
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<td>Oct. 27</td>
<td>Creating False Memories</td>
<td>Pezdek et al. (2006)</td>
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<td>Clancy et al. (2002)</td>
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<td>McNally et al. (2006)*</td>
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<td>Nov. 3</td>
<td>Flashbulb Memories of 9/11</td>
<td>Talarico &amp; Rubin (2007)</td>
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<td>Sharot et al. (2007)</td>
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<td>Greenberg (2004)*</td>
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<td>Nov. 10</td>
<td>Believe It! Or… Not: How People Deal with New Information</td>
<td>Gilbert et al. (1993)</td>
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<td>Weisberg et al. (2008)</td>
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<td><em>Bloom &amp; Weisberg (2007)</em></td>
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<td>Nov. 17</td>
<td><em>No class meeting</em></td>
<td>Take-home assignment due in class, 11/24</td>
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<td>Nov. 24</td>
<td>Case study in Concepts and Categorization: Do People Think Mental Disorders Are Real?</td>
<td>Haslam &amp; Ernst (2002)</td>
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<td>Ahn et al. (2006)</td>
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<td>Zachar &amp; Kendler (2007)*</td>
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<td>Dec. 1</td>
<td>Children’s Explanations of the Natural World</td>
<td>Kelemen (1999)</td>
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<td>Greif et al. (2006)</td>
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<td>Keil (2003)*</td>
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<td>Hood &amp; Bloom (2008)</td>
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<td><em>Bloom (2004, Ch. 3)</em></td>
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<td>TBA</td>
<td>Take-home final essays</td>
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BIBLIOGRAPHY

* This week’s presenters only

I. Perception & Attention

Explorations in Change Blindness

Is Face Recognition “Special?”

Culture and Visual Processing

II. Memory

Explaining Extraordinary Memories
Creating False Memories


Flashbulb Memories of 9/11


III. Thinking and Reasoning

Believe It! Or… Not: How People Deal with New Information


Case study in Concepts and Categorization: Do People Think Mental Disorders Are Real?


IV. Cognitive Development

Children’s Explanations of the Natural World

Object Representation in Cognitive Development
Course work

Readings. All readings should be completed prior to the corresponding class meeting. The reading selections were designed to be brief enough that only about half of your preparation time should be spent doing the first read-through, and the other half should be spent looking back over the readings and preparing what you would like to contribute to the discussion.

Participation. Come prepared to contribute regularly to class discussions. Each member of the class should take personal responsibility for keeping the discussion alive and on track. Participation grades will be based on both the quality and quantity of participation and the degree to which comments helped propel the class to a better understanding of the debate and research. Students may be called upon to help summarize sections of the readings for the class.

Weekly preparation notes. Please type approximately 1 double-spaced page outlining what you plan to talk about in the seminar meeting. Bullet points are preferable to paragraph form. These are due at the end of each class on the day of the corresponding discussion.

Presentation. Each person will take a turn presenting a paper from outside the coursepack that will supplement the week’s readings. Each paper will be presented by 1-2 people. A 15-20 minute recap of the paper should be given. We will also allot 5-10 minutes for questions from the class (note that your questions to other presenters will also factor into your participation grade!). Be creative and think about how you can present the information in a way that will be interesting and useful to the class, especially in the context of the coursebook readings for the week. Please keep these goals in mind when carefully choosing which details to present and which to omit.

Discussion leadership. Each week, 1-2 people will also be responsible for helping to lead the discussion (each person will take 1 turn during the semester). This will require thinking particularly carefully about what topics you’d like to bring up, guiding the class discussion, and taking responsibility for openly inviting other people’s topics, questions, and comments. You should also prepare a very brief summary of each paper (no more than a short paragraph!) to remind the class what the paper was about before discussion ensues.

Take-home final essays. In the final, you will be asked to recap the nature of some of the issues from class and explain your own conclusions and reasoning. There will be no surprises – everything will have been discussed in class.

Attendance. Attendance is required to pass the course. You are also expected to come on time to avoid disrupting the class for others. If you miss class, you are responsible for getting notes and announcements from a friend or your assigned notes partner. You are still expected to turn in any assignments on time via email (n.kim@neu.edu).

Classroom behavior. Please be considerate of others' opinions during classroom discussions. You are expected to help foster a professional working environment here. When others are speaking, you are expected to avoid talking, signing, whispering, doing other course work or reading, muttering, eye rolling, nudging, or behaving in any other way that might make others uncomfortable about participating in class. Such behaviors will demote your course grade (e.g., from an A to a B). Courteous, professional behavior at all times is a requirement for this course.
Late policy

All late papers and assignments will receive a deduction of 10 points (i.e., one full letter grade) per day. An excuse of illness must be accompanied by appropriate documentation (e.g., a note from your physician). Excuses relating to disabilities, including mental health, must be cleared through the DRC (http://www.drc.neu.edu/).

Academic honesty

All students will be held responsible for understanding and following Northeastern’s academic honesty policy (attached) and the accompanying plagiarism handout by The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (also attached).

Grading

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<tr>
<th>Participation/Leadership</th>
<th>30%</th>
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<tr>
<td>Written assignments</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Presentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take-home final essays</td>
<td>25%</td>
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Ranges for final grades:

- A 93.00 – 100.00
- A- 90.00 – 92.99
- B+ 87.00 – 89.99
- B 83.00 – 86.99
- B- 80.00 – 82.99
- C+ 77.00 – 79.99
- C 73.00 – 76.99
- C- 70.00 – 72.99
- D+ 67.00 – 69.99
- D 63.00 – 66.99
- D- 60.00 – 62.99
- F 59.99 and below