



Psychology 405

Contemporary Theories in Psychology

<b>Instructor:</b>	Dr. Hank Stam	<b>Lecture Location:</b>	A 253
<b>Phone:</b>	403-220-5683	<b>Lecture Days/Time:</b>	TR 12:30-13:45 (75 m)
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<b>Office Hours:</b>	TR 2:00-3:00 (or by appointment)		

**Course Description and Goals**

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' or 'analyze' 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 practical problems in psychology. In practice this means frequent testing and solving weekly conceptual questions for immediate feedback. 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 a number of 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. 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.

### **Prerequisites**

Psychology 205 – Principles of Psychology, or equivalent and one senior half course in psychology.

### **Required Text & Readings**

For this course you will need a required set 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; fortunately it too is available electronically from the library (search for this book in the library's catalogue and click on the "electronic resource" version that comes up).  
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 on the web in addition to any announcements on Blackboard (see [blackboard.ucalgary.ca](http://blackboard.ucalgary.ca) to log in).

## Evaluation

**Course Requirements:** 10 weekly quizzes (40%); 10 weekly assignments (40%); one final presentation (16%) and participation (4%).

### I. Ten Weekly Quizzes:

After the first two weeks, which will consist of lectures, the following 10 weeks will consist of this schedule: Tuesday will be a lecture day and Thursday will be a test and project day. Hence, beginning January 26, Thursdays in the first 15 minutes of class you will receive a mini-test covering the material for that week. The remaining 60 minutes will be devoted to group projects.

The tests will cover the material on that week's problem. You will need to read the readings for that particular week and you will have to know the material from the Tuesday lecture. The best 8 out of 10 tests will count toward your final grade. Each test is worth 5% of your grade ( $8 \times 5\% = 40\%$ ). There are no make-up quizzes in this class, if you miss one, you simply write nine, and so on. If you write less than 8 and have a legitimate (and documented) medical excuse (no other excuses are valid), you may discuss writing an extra paper with me to make up the difference.

### II. Ten Weekly Projects:

Each Thursday, after the quiz, you will answer a question that is set for that week. These projects are group projects. Each group will answer the question by the end of class. (I will be there to facilitate the process.) Please note, no group may be the same in any one week – you must circulate group membership continually. At the end of each class project you will email me a group outline of your answer. Then, before the end of the weekend (i.e., before the end of Sunday night following that class) you will submit electronically your individual answer that must be based on the group answer. The group answer should be a summary of 500 words that answers the question. Your project paper should be no longer than 1000 words. If you did not hand in a group answer with your group on Thursday, then I will not accept an individual answer; both must be submitted in order for the project to count. The best 8 out of 10 projects will count toward your final grade. Each project is worth 5% of your grade ( $8 \times 5\% = 40\%$ ); late papers will result in a 1% loss (of 5%) per day. Send all material to this email address: [psychology.405.2012@gmail.com](mailto:psychology.405.2012@gmail.com).

III. Final Project and Paper: In the last week of class you will give a presentation on a theory developed by you and your group members and you will each hand in a paper on this project. Your paper is described in further detail, below and the project will be discussed more extensively in class. The paper and project is worth 16% of your total grade. Late papers will lose 1% (of 16) per day.

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. All papers must be submitted electronically. Please note: After Sunday night I will not accept any more papers on a particular topic except with a documented medical excuse. Therefore, you have three days to complete each project.

### **Final Paper**

Group project: for this particular project you will choose a group project with up to 3 other people (maximum 4 people to a group-no exceptions) but you will still have to hand in an individual paper. The group will take a contemporary problem in psychology and design a new theory. The theory must either have obvious methodological or practical implications. By the beginning of March (that is by March 1) you need to hand in exactly what project your group will work on and the names of your group members. You will present your project in the last week of class. I will use your group projects to design a question for the final exam. (8% for group presentation, 8% for paper)

Paper Due: Thursday, April 12.

IV. Participation: 4%. This will be determined by your participation in groups, your willingness to help out in ensuring groups are formed and complete projects on time, and your overall participation in the class.

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### **Grading Scale**

A+	96-100%	B+	80-84%	C+	67-71%	D+	54-58%
A	90-95%	B	76-79%	C	63-66%	D	50-53%
A-	85-89%	B-	72-75%	C-	59-62%	F	0-49%

As stated in the University Calendar, it is at the instructor's discretion to round off either upward or downward to determine a final grade when the average of term work and final examinations is between two letter grades. To determine final letter grades, final percentage grades will be rounded up or down to the nearest whole percentage (e.g., 89.5% will be rounded up to 90% = A but 89.4% will be rounded down to 89% = A-).

## Tentative Lecture Schedule & Readings

Date	Topic/Activity/Readings/Due Date
T Jan 10	Theories, Facts & Data: What are they, how do they work?
R Jan 12	Theories, Facts & Data, part II.
T Jan 17	Reductionism
R Jan 19	Determinism
T Jan 24	Reductionism, Determinism and Neuroscience.
R Jan 26	Quiz 1; Project on reductionism and neuroscience
T Jan 31	Behaviorism
R Feb 2	Quiz 2; Project on behaviorism
T Feb 7	Functionalism
R Feb 9	Quiz 3; Project on Functionalism
T Feb 14	Cognitive Science
R Feb 16	Quiz 4; Project on Cognitive Science
T Feb 21	Reading days. No lecture.
R Feb 23	Reading days. No lecture.
T Feb 28	Evolutionary Psychology
R Mar 1	Quiz 5; Project on Evolutionary Psychology
T Mar 6	Behavior genetics and post genomics
R Mar 8	Quiz 6; Project on Behavior genetics and post genomics
T Mar 13	Human Development
R Mar 15	Quiz 7; Project on Human Development
T Mar 20	Culture and the social self
R Mar 22	Quiz 8; project on culture and the social self
T Mar 27	Narrative & Phenomenology
R Mar 29	Quiz 9; Narrative & Phenomenology
T Apr 3	Language, reflexivity
R Apr 5	Quiz 10; project on language and reflexivity
T Apr 10	Class presentations
R Apr 12	Class presentations, paper due
F Apr 13	Last day to participate in research and allocate research credits. Last day to withdraw.

### Reappraisal of Grades

A student who feels that a piece of graded term work (e.g., term paper, essay, test) has been unfairly graded, may have the work re-graded as follows. The student shall discuss the work with the instructor within 15 days of being notified about the mark or of the item's return to the class. If not satisfied, the student shall immediately take the matter to the Head of the department offering the course, who will arrange for a reassessment of the work within the next 15 days. The reappraisal of term work may cause

the grade to be raised, lowered, or to remain the same. If the student is not satisfied with the decision and wishes to appeal, the student shall address a letter of appeal to the Dean of the faculty offering the course within 15 days of the unfavourable decision. In the letter, the student must clearly and fully state the decision being appealed, the grounds for appeal, and the remedies being sought, along with any special circumstances that warrant an appeal of the reappraisal. The student should include as much written documentation as possible.

### **Plagiarism and Other 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. Plagiarism involves submitting or presenting work in a course as if it were the student's own work done expressly for that particular course when, in fact, it is not. Students should examine sections of the University Calendar that present a Statement of Intellectual honesty and definitions and penalties associated with Plagiarism/Cheating/Other Academic Misconduct.

### **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 403-220-8237. 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 14 days after the start of this course.

### **Absence From A Test/Exam**

Makeup tests/exams are NOT an option without an official University medical excuse (see the University Calendar). A completed Physician/Counselor Statement will be required to confirm absence from a test/exam for health reasons; the student will be required to pay any cost associated with this Statement. Students who miss a test/exam have 48 hours to contact the instructor and to schedule a makeup test/exam. Students who do not schedule a makeup test/exam with the instructor within this 48-hour period forfeit the right to a makeup test/exam. At the instructor's discretion, a makeup test/exam may differ significantly (in form and/or content) from a regularly scheduled test/exam. Except in extenuating circumstances (documented by an official University medical excuse), a makeup test/exam must be written within 2 weeks of the missed test/exam.

### **Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act**

The FOIP legislation disallows the practice of having student's retrieve tests and assignments from a public place. Therefore, tests and assignments may be returned to students during class/lab, or during office hours, or via the Department Office (Admin 275), or will be made available only for viewing during exam review sessions scheduled by the Department. Tests and assignments will be shredded after one year. Instructors should take care to not link students' names with their grades, UCIDs, or other FOIP-sensitive information.

### **Course Credits for Research Participation (Max 2% of final grade)**

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 the student's final grade. Students earn 0.5% (0.5 credits) for each full 30 minutes of participation.** The demand for timeslots may exceed the supply in a given term. Thus, students are not guaranteed that there will be enough studies available to them to meet their credit requirements. Students should seek studies early in the term and should frequently check for open timeslots. Students can create an account and participate in Departmentally approved research studies at <http://ucalgary.sona-systems.com>. The last day to participate in studies and to assign or reassign earned credits to courses is **Apr 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

### **Evacuation Assembly Point**

In case of an emergency evacuation during class, students must gather at the designated assembly point nearest to the classroom. The list of assembly points is found at

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints>

Please check this website and note the nearest assembly point for this course.

### **Student Organizations**

Psychology students may wish to join the Psychology Undergraduate Students' Association (PSYCHS). They are located in Administration 170 and may be contacted at 403-220-5567.

**Student Union VP Academic:** Phone: 403-220-3911 [suypaca@ucalgary.ca](mailto:suypaca@ucalgary.ca)

**Student Union Faculty Rep.:** Phone: 403-220-3913 [socialscirep@su.ucalgary.ca](mailto:socialscirep@su.ucalgary.ca)

### **Important Dates**

The last day to drop this course with no "W" notation and **still receive a tuition fee refund** is **January 20, 2012**. Last day for registration/change of registration is **January 23, 2012**. The last day to withdraw from this course is **Apr 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012**.