

COURSE OUTLINE - Fall 2025

**PY3810(A2): Learning and Behaviour - 3 (3-0-0) 45 Hours for 15 Weeks**

Northwestern Polytechnic acknowledges that our campuses are located on Treaty 8 territory, the ancestral and present-day home to many diverse First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people. We are grateful to work, live and learn on the traditional territory of Duncan's First Nation, Horse Lake First Nation and Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, who are the original caretakers of this land.

We acknowledge the history of this land and we are thankful for the opportunity to walk together in friendship, where we will encourage and promote positive change for present and future generations.

<b>INSTRUCTOR:</b>	Dr. Bruce Galenza (he/him)	<b>PHONE:</b>	780-539-2994
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<b>OFFICE HOURS:</b>	Tues & Thurs: 10 – 11:30		

**CALENDAR DESCRIPTION:** This course is an introduction to the psychological theories of learning. Topics discussed will include the evolutionary context in which learning occurs, reflexes and fixed action patterns, sociobiology, the behaviourist theories of classical and operant conditioning, criticisms of the behavioural perspective, and criticism of the transitional memory theories. This course is the first of a pair of courses in the field and is generally followed by the advanced course in cognition, PY3580.

**PREREQUISITE(S):**

Complete all of the following

Complete the following:

PY1040 - Basic Psychological Processes (3)

PY1050 - Social and Individual Behaviour (3)

Or permission of the instructor

**COREQUISITE(S):**

None

**REQUIRED TEXT/RESOURCE MATERIALS:** Powell, R.A., Symbaluk, D.G., & Honey, P.L. (2013). Introduction to learning and behaviour (4<sup>th</sup> Ed), Thomson Wadsworth.

**DELIVERY MODE(S):** On-Campus Lecture/Discussion

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**COURSE OBJECTIVES:** This course may be different from any other course you have ever taken. There will be no memorizing lists of facts or definitions; students must learn the material, organize it for themselves so that they understand it, and apply it to their own lives such that they can reflect upon how these principles have been at work creating the people that they are now. Further, students are required to develop the skills of discussing, both through written and verbal communication, their knowledge of course material.

Please be aware that your normal strategies for passing classes may not work here and new strategies may have to be developed; do so quickly. There are no standard multiple choice examinations; seven minor summary papers (3 pages minimum, typed and double spaced, APA format) are assigned, plus a comprehensive 30% final examination that will include a eighth paper. Three-page papers that are on-topic will get you a passing grade; more is expected if you wish a higher grade. Papers may not be longer than 8 pages, not counting title and reference pages. Extra readings will be recognized, going beyond lecture material will be rewarded.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:** As a result of taking this course, students will be able to:

1. Discuss J.B. Watson's (Behaviourist - Logical Positivist) and Gilbert Ryle's (The Concept of Mind) position on the existence of "mind" and its place as a causal agent in human behaviour.
2. Define, explain, and give examples of the Sociobiological (E.O. Wilson, George Boeree) perspective of human behaviour, including genetic determinism, reflexes, habituation, FAP's, and complex social behaviour.

3. Define, give examples, and apply the principles of Pavlovian or Classical Conditioning, including conditioned and unconditioned stimuli and responses, as well as its principles such as acquisition, extinction, discrimination, generalization, and stacking. Discuss and give novel examples of the complex modifiers of conditioning such as latent inhibition, sensory pre-conditioning, overshadowing, potentiation, blocking, and inhibitory conditioning.
4. Define, explain, and give examples of the principles of Thorndikian Instrumental Conditioning and Skinnerian Operant Conditioning including stimulus control, discrimination, generalization, habits, copying, and Guthrie's views on stimulus control.
5. Define, explain, and give examples of the principles of Skinnerian Operant Conditioning including reinforcement, extinction, and punishment, modifiers of consequences, schedules of reinforcers, and side effects of punishment and aversive control.
6. Discuss and evaluate the Behavioural perspective in terms of its ability to explain all human and animal behaviour and/or its effectiveness in application through behaviour modification (This paper should emphasise what it CAN do; you may introduce criticisms but save extensive treatment of them for a later paper.) Option: Design, institute, and report a Behaviour Modification PSI program for yourself or someone else.
7. Define, explain, and give examples of the evolutionary basis of human learning, especially the Biobehaviourist concepts of biological effects on enabling and constraining learning and discuss how this is a challenge to the classical Behavioural perspective.
8. Define, give examples, apply, and evaluate the paradigm shift from Behaviourism to Cognitivism, as exemplified by the transitional theories and principles of Bandura's Social Learning, Tolman's purposive Behaviorism, and others, WITHOUT REGRESSING TO DUALISM. What are the major criticisms of the Behavioural perspective and how does Bandura's Social Learning theory account for them?

Bonus: If you are unhappy with a grade on one of your papers, you may write a bonus paper to replace the grade: "Describe and explain the causes of human and animal behaviour including genetic, environmental, and cognitive determinism, as defined in the psychological field of Learning." This is essentially a summary of the course.

## TRANSFERABILITY:

Please consult the Alberta Transfer Guide for more information. You may check to ensure the transferability of this course at the Alberta Transfer Guide main page <http://www.transferalberta.alberta.ca>

\*\* For courses with alpha (letter) grading, a grade of D or D+ may not be acceptable for transfer to other post-secondary institutions. **Students are cautioned that it is their responsibility to contact the receiving institutions to ensure transferability**

## EVALUATIONS:

Assessment	Value
Summary Papers (the final paper is submitted along with the final exam)	80% (8 worth 10% each)
Final Exam	20%
Total	100%

Research psychology recognizes the authority of, and bases its judgements on, carefully collected data, as opposed to belief, opinion, tradition, or authority. In keeping with this philosophy, rather than me imposing my authority on you and telling you what you must know and then arbitrarily assigning cut-off points for grades through non-standardized tests, you as a class will inform me what you are capable of, through my careful measurement of your performance. Students will be assessed according to their relative position within the class. The field of psychology always measures human behaviour in this way. This method will be explained fully in the first class period; a handout is available if requested. Assessment will be based on the eight papers, each weighted at 10 points for a total of 80. Following the final grade assignments, students will be subjectively assessed for bonus points on the basis of their involvement in, and contributions to, the class, and attendance.

## GRADING CRITERIA:

Please note that most institutions will not accept your course for transfer credit **IF** your grade is **less than C-**.

Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalent	Expected Percentage of Class Receiving		Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalent	Expected Percentage of Class Receiving
A+	4.0	2%		C+	2.3	16%
A	4.0	3%		C	2.0	13%
A-	3.7	7%		C-	1.7	9%
B+	3.3	9%		D+	1.3	7%
B	3.0	13%		D	1.0	3%
B-	2.7	16%		F	0.0	2%

The Percentage Guidelines listed above will obtain only if a perfectly normal distribution results. Deviations from the assumptions of normality will result in modified percentages. In short, this grading technique is NOT grading on the curve.

## GRADING RUBRIC:

Papers will be graded according to the extent that students have achieved the following criteria:

1. Written organized and structured papers reflecting the students' organized and structured schemas of knowledge concerning the concepts in the field of Learning.
2. The thesis shall be clearly stated and shall form the organizing structure for the entire paper such that all discussed points shall relate to that thesis (1 point).
3. All concepts shall be placed correctly in their proper context within the field of Learning. Students shall present the Big Picture of the concepts before rushing to the details (1 point).
4. The essential elements of theories and principles shall be identified, abstracted out, defined, explained, and examples generated thereof (5 points).
5. Proper sequencing of ideas and concepts, written from the general to the specific, and from the simple to the complex. Organization shall follow the logical or chronological sequences inherent in these theories and principles. Papers shall show cohesion, a unified whole. Concepts shall be linked to the thesis, used to support that thesis, concepts shall stay on topic, and there shall be no padding. (2 points).

6. There shall be a complete lack of extraneous information, unnecessary detail, or padding, demonstrating the students' ability to differentiate the essential information from the optional. Writing shall be precise and concise, terms shall be defined. (1 point).
7. Students shall express themselves in written and verbal form using higher academic standards of grammatically correct, properly punctuated, and correctly spelled Standard English (-2 points).
8. APA format is required (-1 point).
9. Particular requirements concerning the perspectives, theories, and principles to be covered are listed in Learning Outcomes listed above.

**COURSE SCHEDULE/TENTATIVE TIMELINE:** I intend to let student interests and abilities guide the speed of the course; consequently, there are no dates given for these papers but it will work out to about one every two weeks.

**STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:** This is adult education. You will be treated as such and are expected to behave accordingly. It is expected that all students will display a professional attitude and behaviour in the classroom. This includes reliability, respect for and cooperation with your fellow students and the instructor, attention to fellow students' questions and instructors' responses, determination to achieve first-class work while meeting deadlines, and constructive response to criticism. Engaging in cell phone behaviour will result in you being asked to leave the classroom.

### **STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:**

Academic Misconduct will not be tolerated. For a more precise definition of academic misconduct and its consequences, refer to the Student Rights and Responsibilities policy available at <https://www.nwpolytech.ca/about/administration/policies/index.html>.

\*\*Note: all Academic and Administrative policies are available on the same page.

If you cheat in any way, penalties will be pursued, potentially including a zero for the paper, an "F" for the course, and suspension from the institution.

There is so much more to learn than we can cover in our limited class time. Make the most of your college experience by reading the text and other sources beyond what is called for in the papers. It will also make your papers all the more insightful. Note that there are no assigned papers for many parts of the text; however, you are still responsible for this material for the final exam.

My preferred teaching style is interactive lecture, derived from the teaching philosophy that little is learned until responses are made (either verbally or written).

Papers are due at the beginning of the class period on the specified dates. Late papers will be graded but penalized 2 points per day. As adequate time is allotted between the end of the unit and the due date, no excuses other than medical situations, major emergencies, or single parenthood will be accepted. Ensure that you have an adequate supply of ink cartridges and paper and back up all papers externally. Again, students must express themselves in written and verbal form using higher academic standards of grammatically correct and properly spelled Standard English. If I cannot read your papers, I shall return them ungraded. You may have three free papers where I will indicate spelling and grammatical errors but not penalize them.

I am extremely available for student consultation, and I will be happy to proof students' rough drafts of papers and to further discuss course material. If you are unsure whether you have understood a topic, prewrite your paper and submit it to me at least 48 hours before the due date and I will give you feedback. Please append your prewrites in Word to my e-mail address. **DO NOT** use Brightspace, Google, Clouds, Sharepoint, pdf files, or anything else.

**A GENTLE WARNING:** Some students try to copy work from textbooks or other published writing and claim it as their own. This form of cheating is called plagiarism or theft of intellectual property. This is easy for me to spot; the difference in writing style between undergraduates and professionals is immediately obvious. I shall be using Turnitin, a program designed to detect plagiarism as well as English errors, and students are encouraged to use it as well.

Other students may try to buy papers from the Internet or copy from other students. CHAT GPT is very popular. However, as the ability for AI to write papers has progressed, along with this is software to discover if a paper is written by a student or AI, which we at the college have access to. This is also easy for me to spot as a purchased paper is invariably different in scope from the highly specific requirements of this course. Further, it can be seen when the student shows no knowledge during class discussion of what was in the paper that he or she has just submitted.

A third way of cheating is to buy or borrow papers from students who took this course from me last year. Please be forewarned that I have changed the course material, student requirements, and textbook substantially from last year, and papers from last year will be radically different and easily identified. If you cheat in any way, penalties will be pursued, potentially including a zero for the paper, an “F” for the term, and suspension from the institution.