

GRANDE PRAIRIE REGIONAL COLLEGE
PY 2810: A2 / PSYC 387 AU
Principles of Behaviour
Mon 11:30 - 12:50, Fri: 10:00 - 11:20
Sept 4 - Dec 7, 2009
(3-0-0) UT to all Alberta Universities (3)

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Office Hours: Mondays through Thursdays, 10:00 - 11:30;
Fridays, 8:00 - 10:00; Tuesday & Thursday, 1:00
- 2:30; afternoons and weekends by appointment.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK:

Powell, R.A., Symbaluk, D.G, & Honey, P.L., (2009), Introduction to learning and behaviour (3rd Ed), Thomson Wadsworth.

THE COURSE:

This course will be an introduction to the psychological theories of learning. It will describe and evaluate the scientific method and the process of theory building in psychology, 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 the transitional memory theories, and introduce the modern emphasis on cognitive theories and models. This course is the first of a pair of courses in this field of psychology, and is generally followed by the advanced course in cognition. This course is designed primarily for serious students of theoretical psychology and the behavioural sciences, students interested in their own intellectual growth and development, and students who intend to work as teachers or instructors facilitating the learning others.

THE GOALS:

This course may be different from almost any other course you have ever taken. There will be no memorization of meaningless 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 persons 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 learning strategies may have to be developed; do so quickly. There are no standard multiple choice examinations; 10 minor summary papers (3 - 4 pages minimum, typed and double spaced) are assigned.

As a hint for doing well in this course, pay attention to the chapter summaries and key terms at the end of each chapter.

FURTHER GOALS:

As a result of participating in this course, students will demonstrate the following learning outcomes through written and oral communication:

1. Knowledge structures; organized, related and interrelated information, the ability to identify, abstract out, analyse, and structure the essential elements of theories and perspectives. The "what" of the psychology of learning.
2. Procedural knowledge; research methods and procedures, and communication of ideas. The "how" of psychology of learning.
3. Metacognitive judgement; independent, critical, and analytic thought concerning the proper use of the procedures and the generation of examples of personal learning illustrating these principles. The "where" and "when" of psychology of learning.
4. Affective considerations; understanding the value of this work and its application. The "why" of the psychology of learning.

OBJECTIVES: (Note: These are my planned topics; however, I reserve the right to change them as student interests and abilities dictate. Changes will be well advertised. Also, 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 per week and a half.)

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

1. Discuss Gilbert Ryle's and J.B. Watson's (Behaviourist - Logical Positivist) 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, and generalization.

4. Discuss and give novel examples of the complex modifiers of conditioning such as latent inhibition, sensory pre-conditioning, overshadowing, potentiation, blocking and inhibitory conditioning.
5. Define, explain, and give examples of the principles of Thorndikian instrumental conditioning and Skinnerian operant conditioning, including acquisition, extinction, and positive and negative reinforcement and punishment, stimulus control, discrimination, and generalization,
6. Define, explain, and give examples of reinforcement and its use in behaviour control, including schedules of reinforcement.
7. Define, explain, and give examples of the principles and uses (and side effects) of punishment in controlling behaviour.
8. Discuss and evaluate the behavioural perspective in terms of its ability to explain all human and animal behaviour and 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.)
9. Define, explain, and give examples of the evolutionary basis of human learning, especially the Biobehaviourist concepts of biological effects on enabling and constraining learning, including blocking, instinctive drift, and autoshaping, and discuss how this is a challenge to the classical Behavioural perspective.
10. Define, give examples, apply, and evaluate the paradigm shift from Behaviourism to Cognitivism, as exemplified by the theories and principles of Tolman's purposive behaviorism and others. What are the major criticisms of the Behavioural perspective and how does Bandura's Social Learning theory account for them.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

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

I am extremely available for student consultation, and I will be more than happy to proof students' rough drafts and to further discuss course material.

Late papers will be marked, but penalized 2 points per class day. As adequate time will be allotted between the end of the unit and the due date, no excuses other than medical and major emergencies will be accepted. Papers with spelling and grammatical errors will be penalized. Papers with multiple errors will be returned unmarked.

ASSESSMENT: Research psychology recognizes the authority of, and bases its judgements on, carefully collected data, as opposed to 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 necessary.

Assessment will be based on the ten papers, each weighted at 10%. 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, which will include attendance.

Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalence	Descriptor	Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalence	Descriptor
A+	4.0	Excellent	C+	2.3	Satisfactory
A	4.0		C	2.0	
A-	3.7	First Class	C-	1.7	
B+	3.3	standing	D+	1.3	Poor
B	3.0	Good	D	1.0	Minimal pass
B-	2.7		F	0.0	Fail

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.

Other students may try to buy papers from the Internet, or to copy from other students. This is also easy for me to spot, as a purchased paper is invariably different in scope from the highly specific assignments of my papers. Further, this cheating can be seen when the student shows no knowledge of what was in the paper he or she had just submitted, during class discussion.

If you cheat, you will be removed from this class, given an "F" for the term, and I will write a letter to the Dean recommending your college career be terminated.