

Syllabus for PSY510 - Cognitive Psychology.

Spring 2013

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Course description: Cognitive Psychology is the study of mental processes and the behaviors they engender. Central topics include pattern recognition, attention, memory, knowledge, thinking, and cognitive control (executive functions). Also relevant are questions concerning emotion, consciousness, and the relation between mind, brain, and behavior. This course is an advanced survey of these topics. In contrast to the more passive forms of learning that typically occur in undergraduate courses, the goal of this course is to give you the opportunity to not only learn about cognition, but also to *express* your knowledge in the form of scientific discussion, writing, and presentation.

Learning Outcomes: Upon completion of the course, you should be able to: (1) Understand the concepts, methods, and theories used in the study of cognition; (2) Identify and critique the primary research literature on cognition; and (3) Cogently communicate ideas, in speech and writing, related to the scientific understanding of cognition.

Course format: The format for the course is a mixture of lectures and seminar-like discussions, most of which should be led by students enrolled in the course. In general, I will lecture on Tuesdays and we will discuss papers from the primary literature on Thursday.

Textbook and readings: There is no formal textbook for course although students are encouraged to consult any available sources, including textbooks and reputable websites, for definitions and explanations of cognitive concepts, methods, and theories. The primary readings for the course will be papers from the primary cognitive literature. These papers will be made available on the course webpage (url above). All posted readings are required and should be read prior to the classes in which they are lectured on or discussed.

Grading: As detailed below, grades for the course will be based on a total of 200 points: 25 for submitting pre-class questions about the readings, 25 for leading one or more class discussions, 50 from 5 in-class quizzes worth 10 points each, 50 for one class presentation, and 50 from a final paper. Grades will be assigned using a 10-point scale with -'s appended to final scores ending in 0, 1, or 2, and +'s appended to final scores ending in 7, 8, or 9.

Pre-class questions: For each weekly topic, you will be expected to submit at least 2 questions or comments about the issues raised in the assigned readings. These questions should be posted to the Blackboard message board setup for this course, and should be submitted no later than 5pm on the day before the papers are to be discussed. There are no rules about the questions you ask or issues you raise; I am mainly looking for evidence that you have read and thought about the assigned readings; if I get that impression, you will receive maximum credit. Submitting relevant questions or comments on time each week will be worth 25 points (12.5% of total grade).

Leading Discussions: Discussion leaders have two main goals: To provide a brief overview of the readings and to facilitate discussion. Doing this in earnest will be worth 25 points (12.5% of total grade). Although handouts with key points may be useful, I generally dislike detailed outlines as they tend to stifle discussion. Instead, I encourage discussion

leaders to ask questions of the class (about definitions, methods, interpretations, theories, extensions to real life, etc.), or to elaborate important points with video clips, demos, etc., in order to facilitate discussion.

Quizzes: There will be 5-7 in-class quizzes worth 10 points each. The top 5 scores will be used to compute your quiz grade (25% of total grade). The quizzes will require you to define/explain key concepts in cognitive psychology, taken from a list of concepts that is provided at least 3 days prior to the relevant quiz. Quizzes will be unannounced and no make-up quizzes will be given.

Class Presentation: Students will be required to give a presentation on a topic of interest for up to 50 points (25% of your total grade). The topic is open as long as it is *directly related* to cognition, and it is fully acceptable for your presentation and paper to be on the same topic. The format for the presentation is open and could include videos, demos, etc., although my expectation is for a standard PowerPoint presentation lasting 15-20 minutes.

Paper: You will be required to write one paper for the course worth 50 points (25% of total grade). The paper can be on any topic as long as it is (a) new writing done explicitly for this course, and (b) directly related to the field of cognitive psychology. The kind of paper you submit is also open but I suggest either a review or a research proposal. Review papers should be in the spirit of *Psychological Bulletin*; that is, they should not only review prior research on a specific topic, but also try to provide a new perspective on that research. Research proposals should also involve a literature review but the focus should be on a detailed empirical plan for investigating a clearly defined cognitive phenomenon. There are no minimum or maximum page limits, but my expectation is for your paper to be in the 10-18 page range, double-spaced, in APA format. I like papers that are direct, clear, and concise.

Schedule of Topics: Please see the course webpage for a more complete (albeit tentative) schedule of topics and readings (see PSY510-Spring2013-Schedule.pdf).

Some Potential Paper & Presentation Topics:

- Cognitive training and/or rehabilitation.
- The cognitive psychology of marketing.
- Consciousness.
- Cognitive mechanisms underlying drug abuse & addiction.
- Cognitive development (or, better, the development of a specific cognitive ability).
- The cognitive psychology of sleep.
- The cognitive psychology of art, film, or music.
- Cognitive processes associated with the brain's default network.
- Embodied cognition.
- The role of fluency in memory & judgment.
- Philosophical and/or methodological issues in cognitive psychology.
- Cognitive psychology vs. behaviorism (wherein cog psych wins, but behaviorism puts up a pretty good fight).
- The cognitive neuroscience of everyday life (wherein you elucidate the cognitive mechanisms and neural implementation of a simple everyday act such as actively listening to a lecture; watching a movie; playing a sport; writing or grading an essay; learning, playing, or composing on a music instrument; deciding what to watch on television; developing expertise in something; etc.)