PSY 834: Graduate Seminar in Social Psychology
Fall 2016

Day/Time: Thursday, 5:00p-7:50
Place: 120 Psychology

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Office Hour: Thurs 2:15p-3:15p

Description

As the graduate core course in social psychology, 834 provides a broad overview of the science of social psychology. In addition to being exposed to broad range of literature, a primary goal of this course is to compare the contributions and limitations of major theoretical perspectives on our social psychology, and to learn about the nature of theory construction and theory-testing in psychology generally. Both general theories and middle-level models of social behavior are reviewed in light of empirical research. The advantages and disadvantages of different models for different levels and different kinds of social-personality phenomena are highlighted. Exercises comparing the predictions of different theories for the same study are designed to help the student acquire an appreciation of how to operationalize theories and an understanding of the various features of a "good" theory.

An important theme in this course is the analysis of human thought, feeling, and behavior in social context as directed toward strategic goals. The analysis of the strategic logic of social behavior is called game theory. This analytical tool is becoming ever more prevalent in the social sciences in recent years, and has the potential to become a key unifying principle bridging biology, economics and social psychology.

In this course you will learn about theories in social psychology, as distinct from personality or evolutionary psychology, which are separate graduate-level courses. However, in practice, this distinction is fluid. You will learn about approaches to human social behavior, regardless of whether these behaviors and the causes of these behaviors tend to be classified. Most of the content covered could be construed as mainstream social psychology, but a major goal of this course is the importance of uncovering broad principles of social behavior that operate in consistent ways, and that can be integrated into various disciplines across the behavioral sciences.

Evaluation

Class Participation
Preparation for and participation during class will receive 20% of the total grade. Each week there will be a feedback assignment due, based on the readings (upload to a dropbox on D2L every Wednesday by 7:00p) to these two questions: (a) What were the most interesting aspects of the readings? (b) What are the strengths and weaknesses of a given theory, approach or model.

In addition, each student will lead class discussion at least once.
Homework Assignments
There are four take-home assignments, each worth about 10% of your grade (40% total). The assignments are broad ranging in terms of content and scope, and are designed to build critical thinking and analytical reasoning skill. In the exercises, students will rigorously analyze theory, predictions, research methods, and the interpretation of findings from the primary literature. In addition, formal models of behavior and psychological systems are analyzed using the tools of decision and game theory.

Exam: There is one exam in this course worth 20% of your grade. It is a written take-home exam that is due 10-Nov.

Writing Assignment
The writing assignment will be on a specific area relevant to your own research interests (20%). The paper will be written as a research proposal designed to test hypotheses informed by a theoretically integrative, social psychological perspective. The paper should be written in APA format, and range from 7-10 double-spaced pages (excluding references).

Academic Integrity
Every student is held responsible for knowing the academic integrity policy at MSU. Information regarding this policy is available at: https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/dishonestystud.html

Open Dialogue and Free Expression
Students should feel free to voice questions and comments relevant to the course material during lectures, via email or during office hours. Ideally, we should all be committed to the concepts of free expression and the university environment as the marketplace of ideas where ideas compete, and an honest treatment of sensitive topics is sometimes necessary for a meaningful educational experience. More information about you the importance of free speech on universities and colleges is available at: http://www.thefire.org/about-us/mission/

Tentative Reading List

Wk1  Introduction
Wk2  Evolutionary Psychology.  

Wk3  Social Neuroscience and Psychophysiology.  
Wk4  
*Decision Heuristics and Game Theory.*

Wk5  
*Groups I: Social Identity and the Self*

Wk6  
*Social Influence I*

Wk7  
*Self-Esteem and Belonging.*

Wk8  
*Social Perception.*


**Wk9**  
*Moral Psychology & Prosociality.*


**Wk10**  
*Close Relationships, Love and Sex.*


**Wk11**  
Midterm Exam (no meeting)

**Wk12**  
*Groups and Personality.*


Wk13  Thanksgiving (no meeting)
Wk14  Aggression and Social Dominance: TBA
Wk15  Cognitive Consistency and Dissonance. TBA