# PSYCHOLOGY 280: SECTION 001 PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDERS

**Spring 2025**

TUESDAY, THURSDAY 3:00 – 4:20  
MCDONEL HALL, ROOM C107

# PART 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

**Disclaimer:** Elements of this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the professor. Any changes will be provided to students via email and on the course D2L website.

**General Course Information:** This course is delivered in person. Lectures will not be recorded or streamed on Zoom. Lecture slides will only be posted *after* the lecture. Plan to take notes during lecture with pen and paper (preferred) or a laptop. A TA will take notes during every class. If you would like to catch up on a missed lecture, please contact us to request notes, and come to office hours to talk about the lecture content.

**Contact Information:**

**Main Course Contact**

Google contact form: <http://bit.ly/4fkIqS1>

Please use this form for communication about the course, rather than emailing the professor or TAs directly. The form will route your message to the right person to handle it, with the information we need to respond effectively. If you email the professor or TAs directly, expect to get an automated message asking you to use the contact form instead.

**Professor:** Henry Cowan, Ph.D. (he/him)   
**Office:** Psychology107-E

**Email:** [hrcowan@msu.edu](mailto:hrcowan@msu.edu)

# Office Hours: Tues, 1:00-2:30pm

**Graduate TA:** Carolina Anaya

**Office:** Psychology 43

**Office Hours:** Wed, 9:30-11am

**Email:** [anayamal@msu.edu](mailto:anayamal@msu.edu)

**Undergraduate TA:**

**Zoom Office:**

**Office Hours:**

**Email:**

**Undergraduate TA:**

**Zoom Office:**

**Office Hours:**

**Email:**

**Undergraduate TA:**

**Zoom Office:**

**Office Hours:**

**Email:**

We are all here to help you master the course material and are happy to answer any questions that you might have. Stopping by office hours is the **best** place to start to get your questions answered outside of class time. If you cannot make office hours and you have a question about an assignment, due date, course content, or something similar, **please use the contact form linked above.** If you have a confidential question about a highly sensitive topic, you can email the professor directly.

**We will respond within 1-2 business days. Contacts after 4 PM Friday will not be answered until Monday. Please plan accordingly!**

**Course Description:** This course is designed to provide students with an introduction to mental health science and practice.

## Required eText & Available Resources:

Comer, R.J., & Comer, J.S. (2021). *Abnormal Psychology* (12th ed.). Macmillan Learning/Worth Publishers.

Class resources will be available on D2L. To start, you can find a copy of this syllabus under “Content”/ “Syllabus”.

You have access to the full e-book and Achieve, an easy-to-use web-based educational platform. Some of these materials will be used in class, such as clinical case videos. You will be asked to interact with other Achieve material for assignments (see more below). **To get started with Achieve, go to “Content”/ “Getting Started” in D2L**. If you prefer a hard copy of the textbook, you can purchase it via the MSU bookstore or online sites. You can also print sections of the e-book. You will need to register for Achieve to get access to the online assignments and interactive software (instructions [here)](https://macmillan.force.com/macmillanlearning/s/article/LaunchPad-Print-e-book-pages).

**Technical Assistance:** If you need technical assistance at any time during the course, or to report a problem, you can:

* Visit the MSU Help site at [http://help.msu.edu](http://help.msu.edu/)
* Visit the Desire2Learn Help Site at [http://help.d2l.msu.edu](http://help.d2l.msu.edu/)
* Call the MSU IT Service Desk at (517) 432-6200, (844) 678-6200, or e-mail at [ithelp@msu.edu](mailto:ithelp@msu.edu)
* Visit the Macmillan learning support page [here](https://macmillan.force.com/macmillanlearning/s/chat-with-us).

# PART 2: COURSE SCHEDULE

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | ***Date*** | ***Topic*** | ***Reading*** | ***Assignment*** |
| **1** | **1/14** | Introduction and course overview | Chapter 1 |  |
|  | **1/16** | What is mental illness? Part 1: Classification |  | Intro Survey |
| **2** | **1/21** | What is mental illness? Part 2: Explanation | Chapter 3 |  |
|  | **1/23** | What is mental illness? Part 3: History | Readings on D2L | LC 1b |
| **3** | **1/28** | Assessment, diagnosis, & treatment | Chapter 4 |  |
|  | **1/30** | Quiz 1 & Overview of transdiagnostic approaches | Readings on D2L | Quiz 1 |
| **4** | **2/04** | Depressive disorders | Chapter 7 |  |
|  | **2/06** | Depressive and bipolar disorders |  | CC TBD |
| **5** | **2/11** | Anxiety disorders | Chapter 5 |  |
|  | **2/13** | NO CLASS |  |  |
| **6** | **2/18** | Stress- and trauma-related disorders | Chapter 6 |  |
|  | **2/20** | Quiz 2 (no lecture) |  | Quiz 2 |
| **7** | **2/25** | Self-harm & suicide | Chapter 8 |  |
|  | **2/27** | Emotional dysfunction as a transdiagnostic process | Readings on D2L | LC 5a |
|  | **3/04** | SPRING BREAK |  |  |
|  | **3/06** | SPRING BREAK |  |  |
| **8** | **3/18** | Schizophrenia and psychotic disorders: Clinical picture | Chapter 13 |  |
|  | **3/20** | Schizophrenia and psychotic disorders: Treatment | Chapter 14 (optional) | Midterm Survey |
| **9** | **3/11** | Overview of externalizing and personality disorders | Chapter 11 |  |
|  | **3/13** | Substance use & addictive disorders |  | CC Jorge |
| **10** | **3/25** | Quiz 3 & Hands-on demonstration of treatment | Chapter 10 | Quiz 3 |
|  | **3/27** | Eating disorders  (Guest Lecture – Blair Burnette, PhD) |  | LC TBD |
| **11** | **4/01** | NO CLASS | Chapter 15 |  |
|  | **4/03** | Dimensions of personality and psychopathology (Guest Lecture – Trevor Williams, PhD) |  | LC 13b, Discussion Questions |
| **12** | **4/08** | Lived experience of mental illness  (Guest speaker panel) | Chapter 16 |  |
|  | **4/10** | Mental health in childhood  (Guest Lecture – Hannah Tokish, MA) |  | CC Alicia |
| **13** | **4/15** | Mental health in late life | Chapter 17 |  |
|  | **4/17** | Quiz 4 & Careers in mental health |  | Quiz 4 |
| **14** | **4/22** | Society, culture, & mental health | Chapter 18 | Discussion Questions |
|  | **4/24** | Wrap-up discussion |  |  |
|  | **4/28-5/2** | Final Exam, Thurs, May 1, 5:45-7:45PM  McDonel Hall C107 | |  |

\* **Notes**

**Changes:** This is a tentative schedule. You will be notified of any changes**.**

**Readings:** Both lectures in each week (expect Week 1) will assume you have read that week’s reading..  
**Due Dates:** All quizzes will be held during regular class periods. All assignments will be due on the **Thursday** of the week they are assigned (i.e., they will close on the Achieve website at **11:59PM each Thursday**). There is only one exception: the final discussion questions will be due on Tues, April 22, because our last class will be Thurs, April 24.

# PART 3: INSTRUCTIONAL OJBECTIVES

**Course Objectives:** This course is designed to provide students with an introduction to clinical psychological science, including common mental illnesses and their treatment. It has recently been renamed from “abnormal psychology” to reflect current terminology in the field.

First, we will cover the foundations of the study of mental health (aka “psychopathology” in academic circles) through a look at its history and evolution, which will help to frame our discussions of current viewpoints on and various assessment and treatment strategies for mental health concerns. We will then cover the major categories of mental health disorders as defined by the current diagnostic system (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – 5th Edition-Text Revision), highlighting the most common concerns, anxiety and depressive disorders. We will also learn about mental health across the lifespan, from childhood to late life. We will end the class by discussing different ways ethics, the law, and broader society interface with mental health science and practice.

*Disclaimer:* Many professors teach this course, and we each teach it a bit differently depending on our backgrounds and interests. I am a clinical psychologist specializing in the development of psychotic disorders like schizophrenia, so I will have the most to say about these topics. My research interests include community engagement and lived experience, and so I will tend to emphasize the first-person experience of mental illness when possible (e.g., inviting guest speakers from the community). I am also a member of a consortium developing an alternative diagnostic model called the Hierarchical Taxonomy of Psychopathology, which defines mental illness using a dimensional or spectrum model (e.g., psychosis spectrum), rather than categorical diagnoses (e.g., schizophrenia). So I will emphasize transdiagnostic connections between various kinds of mental illness, as well as how mental illness and mental health exist on a continuum (e.g., when someone is struggling, it’s not enough to remove their symptoms, we also have to support and enhance their well-being!). If you have any questions or concerns about my approach, please feel free to bring them up during class or office hours.

*By the end of this course, students should be able to:*

# explain the historical and social context of mental health science and practice

# compare and contrast scientific approaches to the study of mental health

# define common mental health disorders and dimensions across the lifespan

# identify common assessment tools and treatments for mental health concerns

# explain current understandings of the causes of and maintenance factors involved in mental health concerns

# appraise the interface between ethics, law, society, and mental health

**My personal goals for this course are that you are knowledgeable about:**1) Different ways of studying and classifying mental health, including categorical versus dimensional models and clinical versus recovery-oriented perspectives.

2) The conceptual and historical context of the “mental illness” concept and specific diagnoses.

3) Transdiagnostic processes that cut across traditional diagnostic categories.

4) Cultural factors, including how we might differentiate “mental illness” from reasonable reactions to conditions of suffering.

**Format and Expectations:** Class meetings will be a mix of formal lecture, active learning exercises/discussion, and case presentations (sometimes with video). Regular attendance and participation in class discussion is expected. Attending each session, completing the required reading, and participating in active learning/discussion will help you do the best you can in this class. Lectures will *complement* readings and thus doing both will maximize your ability to fully grasp the material. Success on class assignments will be *more likely* if you have *both* attended class meetings and read the book. If absent, it is your responsibility to obtain notes from a friend or access the TA notes posted on D2L. In general, outside of class time, questions should be directed to the course contact form. We will help with inquiries sent through the form to the best of our ability. If you need to discuss something confidentially, you can contact Prof. Cowan directly.

**Anonymous Questions about Mental Health:** You may have things you're curious about but feel hesitant to speak up in class or email me directly. Talking about mental health can still feel a bit uncomfortable. For this reason, we have a separate form where you can submit anonymous questions about mental health or psychopathology for me to cover in class.

You can find the form \*\*\* or on D2L under Announcements.

**Evaluation/Grades:** Grades will be based on 3 class participation exercises, 3 “Learning Curve” (LC) exercises online, 3 “Clinical Choices” exercises online, and 3 in-person quizzes. Due dates for all assignments are included in the Course Schedule below.

**PLEASE NOTE**: You will be \*graded\* on 3 class participation exercises, 3 Learning Curve exercises, 3 Clinical Choices exercises, and 3 quizzes. In the schedule above, you will see 4 participation exercises, 4 Learning Curves, 4 Clinical Choices, and 4 quizzes. Your lowest grade in each category will not be counted. This means that you are free to skip one assignment from each category, no questions asked (1 class participation, 1 Learning Curve, 1 Clinical Choice, and 1 quiz).

**PLEASE NOTE**: If you are unable to complete an assignment due to an illness/medical issue, personal or family emergency, mental health- or stress-related concern, etc., you do **not** need to contact us ahead of time to request an extension. Feel free to skip the assignment. As long as it is your first missed assignment in that category, it will not affect your grade in the course. This policy is designed to be fair to all students and to give you the flexibility to handle unexpected situations as they come up. Note that we will typically **not** grant extensions or make-up assignments outside of this policy (except in exceptional circumstances, e.g., hospitalization, natural disaster, death of a close friend or immediate family member). Please plan accordingly.

**About the assignments**

Class participation exercises are submitted through D2L and should take about 5 minutes each. These include:

* Two surveys about yourself and your expectations/experiences in the course (an introduction survey in the first week of class and a midterm survey in the week after Spring Break).
* Two sets of discussion questions for interactive class sessions near the end of the semester (for a guest speaker panel with lived experience of mental illness, and for the final class session where we will wrap up and discuss everything we learned over the semester). Each time, you will get full credit for submitting 2 or more discussion questions. You do not need to reference the textbook or other readings for these questions. Just ask whatever’s on your mind about the course material.

Learning Curve exercises require you to complete a series of questions about a particular chapter. Each LC has a target number of points, and you will get full credit as soon as you meet the target. LC exercises adapt to your answers such that questions get harder when you answer one correctly and get easier if you answer one incorrectly. On average, LC exercises will take 20-30 mins to complete.

Clinical Choices exercises involve reading case material, watching video clips, and answering questions about fictional cases. To get full credit for the assignment, you must finish reading the case material, watch the videos, and answer the questions. You do not need to answer the questions correctly to get credit. You simply need to participate fully in the exercise to obtain credit for each one.

LC and Clinical Choices exercises can be completed using your book and notes – i.e., they are open book/note assignments. LC and Clinical Choices exercises are due by the beginning of class time on the date the exercise is listed. For example, LC 1b. is listed in the “Assignment” section for 1/18. That means, you must complete LC 1b. no later than 10:30am on 1/18. [\*\*\*update here\*\*\*]

Quizzes are available for 24 hours from Thursday at 5:00 pm through Friday at 5:00 pm on the days listed in the syllabus. We will email a reminder each Thursday morning that a quiz will be administered. **The quizzes will be open book/note and consist of 20-30 multiple-choice questions each.** They will test your understanding of terminology, concepts, and evidence associated with these concepts (e.g., research results), and your ability to integrate and apply this material. **Quizzes will cover content from the book** **and lectures/class discussion.** Success on the quizzes will be **far more likely** if you have the advantage of lectures, reading, and the in- class activity materials. **Once you begin each quiz, you will have 1 hour to complete it.**

**Quizzes cover the following:**

Quiz 1: Chapters 1, 3, 4

Quiz 2: Chapters 5, 6, 7

Quiz 3: Chapters 8, 11, 13

Quiz 4: Chapters 10, 15, 16, 17

Quiz 5: All chapters

A TA will be available on Zoom during some portions of the 24-hour quiz windows to answer any questions you have about the quiz items. If you have quiz questions outside of these Zoom times, please email one of your TAs.

**If you have technical difficulties with the internet or D2L/Achieve during completion of class assignments, please see the resources listed above under Technical Assistance.** TAs generally cannot help with internet or D2L/Achieve problems.

# Final Grade Policy:

**Calculation:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Assignment | Number | Percent of Grade |
| Class Participation | 3 | 10% |
| Learning Curve | 3 | 15% |
| Clinical Choices | 3 | 15% |
| Quizzes | 3 | 40% |
| Exam | 1 | 20% |
| **Total** |  | **`100%** |

At the end of the term, the highest grade will be considered a “perfect” score of 100%.

The grading scale will then be based on this “perfect” score, i.e., 90-100% of that score will be a 4.0, 85-89% will be a 3.5, 80-85% will be a 3.0. The full grading scale will be:

# 90-100% = 4.0

* **85-89% = 3.5**
* **80-84% = 3.0**
* **75-79% = 2.5**
* **70-74% = 2.0**
* **65-69% = 1.5**
* **60-64% = 1.0**
* **59% or less = 0.0**

**Only under extreme extenuating circumstances will an incomplete in the course be offered.**

**Extra Credit:** Extra credit (worth an additional 3% on your final grade in the course) may be obtained **one** of the following two ways.

1. Complete 7 hours of SONA research participation (the last day to participate in SONA is \*\*\*).

**OR**

1. Complete a written assignment in which you analyze seven cases and decide on the likely diagnosis(es) for each case. The paper should be 7 pages, with a 1-page summary FOR EACH CASE, describing your rationale for choosing those specific diagnoses. Explain why you chose the diagnosis you did, and why you did not choose other, related diagnoses. Because you will need to know diagnostic criteria for most/all of the disorders we cover to complete this assignment, details for this assignment will be provided near the end of the semester.

**\***Note you must choose one option: extra credit will **not** be given for both.

# PART 4: COURSE POLICIES

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at [rcpd.msu.edu](https://rcpd.msu.edu). Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued an accommodation letter. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (quiz, etc.). Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible.

**Religious Observance:** It has always been the policy of MSU to support students and faculty in observing those holidays set aside by their chosen religious faith. If you wish to observe a religious holiday and it conflicts with an assignment due date, it is your responsibility to make arrangements with Prof. Cowan at least 24 hours in advance of the observance.

**Technology Use:** Research shows that humans are not able to multi-task. If you are browsing the internet, texting, or looking at social media, you are missing what is being said in class. You may use electronic devices (laptops, tablets, etc.) in class, but research shows that people learn best when taking notes with pen and paper. Phones are permitted, but we strongly suggest that you avoid being on your phone (or the internet) during in-person class periods, as you will likely miss important information. Disruptive behavior in class (including distracting use of technology) will not be tolerated.

**Limits to Confidentiality:** Materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues to protect the health and safety of MSU community members and others. As the instructor, I must report the following information to other University offices (including the MSU Police Department) if you share it with me:

* Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child,
* Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff, and
* Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the [MSU Counseling](https://caps.msu.edu/) [Center](https://caps.msu.edu/).

**Mental Health Services:** College students are often confronted with situations that may interfere with academic success such as stress, trauma, sleep problems, juggling responsibilities, life events, relationship concerns, and feelings of anxiety, hopelessness, or depression. If you or a friend is struggling, we strongly encourage you to seek support.

Helpful, effective resources are available on campus, and most are at no charge.

* + Check-in with your academic advisor if you are struggling in multiple classes, unsure whether you are making the most of your time at MSU, or unsure what academic resources are available at MSU.
  + Access CAPS Services for new counseling and psychiatric services by making a [CAPS Phone Request](https://msu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9GNsDVC3VlH3wnr) at<https://msu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9GNsDVC3VlH3wnr>.
  + CAPS is providing remote crisis services 24/7/365. Students can call 517-355-8270 and press “1” at the prompt to speak with a crisis counselor. Other prompt options are available for those not in crisis. Visit [https://caps.msu.edu](https://caps.msu.edu/) for additional information and resources.

**Academic Honesty:** The Spartan Code of Honor states, "As a Spartan, I will strive to uphold values of the highest ethical standard. I will practice honesty in my work, foster honesty in my peers, and take pride in knowing that honor is worth more than grades. I will carry these values beyond my time as a student at Michigan State University, continuing the endeavor to build personal integrity in all that I do." In addition, Article 2.III.B.2 of the Student Rights and Responsibilities ([SRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities.html)) states that "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." The Psychology Department adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in [General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/regulations/general-student-regulations.html); [the all-](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/regulations/student-group-regs-rulings-policies-ordinances/integrity-of-scholarship-and-grades.html) [University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/regulations/student-group-regs-rulings-policies-ordinances/integrity-of-scholarship-and-grades.html); and [Ordinance 17.00,](https://trustees.msu.edu/bylaws-ordinances-policies/ordinances/ordinance-17.00.html) [Examinations](https://trustees.msu.edu/bylaws-ordinances-policies/ordinances/ordinance-17.00.html). Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any source. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course, or work that is based on another student’s work (whether they are in this course or not). Students who violate MSU academic integrity rules may receive a penalty grade, including a failing grade on the assignment or in the course. Contact your instructor if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your course work. (See also the [Academic Integrity webpage](https://ossa.msu.edu/academic-integrity).)

**Acceptable and Unacceptable Use of AI:** Generative AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT) can be very helpful. I use them in my work regularly. But they often give inaccurate, misleading, or shallow answers to questions about complex topics (like psychological disorders). This means \*you\*, the user, have to know enough about the material to evaluate the AI’s answer and notice any errors. This course is designed to teach you the knowledge you need to evaluate AI answers about psychological disorders. Therefore, it would defeat the purpose of this class to use AI tools in your assignments. **Some uses of AI (e.g., copy-pasting discussion questions out of ChatGPT, using ChatGPT during an open-book quiz) would also violate MSU’s academic honesty policies**. For these reasons, **I strongly recommend that you do not use any AI tools for this class.**

When in doubt about permitted usage, please ask for clarification.

**Use and Commercialization of Course Material:** The materials on the course D2L website are only for the use of students enrolled in this course for purposes associated with this course and may not be retained or further disseminated. Commercialization of lecture notes and university-provided course materials is not permitted in this course. The materials on the course D2L website may be protected by copyright; any further use of this material may be in violation of federal copyright law.

**Disruptive Behavior:** Article 2.III.B.4 of the [Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR)](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities.html) for students at Michigan State University states: "The student's behavior in the classroom shall be conducive to the teaching and learning process for all concerned." Article 2.III.B.10 of the [SRR](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/student-rights-responsibilities/article-two-academic-rights-and-responsibilities.html) states that "The student and the faculty share the responsibility for maintaining professional relationships based on mutual trust and civility." [General Student Regulation](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/regulations/general-student-regulations.html) [5.02](https://spartanexperiences.msu.edu/about/handbook/regulations/general-student-regulations.html) states: "No student shall . . . interfere with the functions and services of the University (for example, but not limited to, classes . . .) such that the function or service is obstructed or disrupted. Students whose conduct adversely affects the learning environment in this classroom may be subject to disciplinary action.”