# **PSY 493 “Psychology of Intersectionality”**

Fall 2025

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| **Instructor:** | Dr. Aldo Barrita | **Time:** | MW 12:40-2:00 PM |
| **E-mail:** | [barrita1@msu.edu](mailto:barrita1@msu.edu?subject=PSY%20493) | **Classroom:** | Snyder Hall C202 |
| **Office:** | Psychology 125C | **Office Hours:** | Mondays 2-3:30pm or Zoom Apt. |

# **Land Acknowledgement:**

Michigan State University occupies the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary Lands of the Anishinaabeg – Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. In particular, the University resides on Land ceded in the 1819 Treaty of Saginaw. We recognize, support, and advocate for the sovereignty of Michigan’s twelve federally recognized Indian nations, for historic Indigenous communities in Michigan, for Indigenous individuals and communities who live here now, and for those who were forcibly removed from their Homelands. By offering this Land Acknowledgement, we affirm Indigenous sovereignty and will work to hold Michigan State University more accountable to the needs of American Indian and Indigenous peoples.

# **Course Description:**

This upper-level undergraduate course explores the intersectionality of identity and mental health within the field of psychology, with a focus on the lived experiences of individuals from minoritized communities in the United States. Through a critical lens, students will examine how race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, disability, and other axes of minoritized identity intersect to shape mental health outcomes and access to care. The course will delve into mental health disparities, the impact of structural, systemic, institutional, and individual barriers, and the role of psychology in both perpetuating and challenging these inequities. Readings, discussions, and projects will encourage students to critically evaluate dominant psychological paradigms and engage with culturally responsive frameworks for understanding and addressing mental health in diverse populations.

# **Class Objectives:**

At the end of the course, students will demonstrate:

1. **Analyze** how intersecting identities (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, class, disability) influence mental health outcomes and experiences within the U.S. context.
2. **Evaluate** the impact of systemic, institutional, structural, and individual barriers on mental health access and treatment for people with minoritized identities.
3. **Critically assess** dominant psychological theories and practices for their relevance, inclusivity, and potential to perpetuate or disrupt mental health disparities.
4. **Apply** culturally responsive and justice-oriented frameworks to real-world case studies and interventions aimed at improving mental health equity.
5. **Build on** awareness of societal and systemic barriers (e.g., education, immigration, mental health infrastructure) that negatively impact individuals with multiple minoritized identities.

# **Required Text and Class Materials**

“Introducing Intersectionality”(second edition) Mary Romero Polity

We will also cover various peer-reviewed journal articles, all which will be posted in D2L.

D2L: I will regularly update class information on the website for the class at [d2l.msu.edu.](https://d2l.msu.edu/d2l/loginh/) This syllabus will be posted there, as well as links to some assignments and other course material..

# **Collective Knowledge:**

This course has been built and influenced by different mentors and scholars who teach psychology and related courses at other universities across the United States. Their collective knowledge, wisdom, and *consejos* (advice) have helped build and strengthen this course. As part of our collective knowledge, students should bring and share their ideas and cultural experiences throughout the semester. It is my hope that we will learn and grow as a collective throughout this course! Please share topics and resources that may expand our discussion in areas you believe our class needs to be strengthened.

# **Creating a safe space:**

I believe it is critical to develop a safe learning space in which sensitive issues and aspect of race and intersectionality can be addressed. Thus, it is important for us to explore our reactions (both cognitive and affective) to the readings and class discussions. Creating space involves providing a safe, nonthreatening environment. To accomplish this, I am encouraging you to respect one another’s contributions. This does not mean you have to agree with all positions or that you cannot voice opposition; it simply means letting others voice their opinions without interruptions or without fear of being attacked personally.

# **Learning Process and Teaching Philosophy:**

I believe that learning occurs when students can make meaningful connections to the material presented. I believe that the meaning-making process occurs through relationships with 1) the instructor, 2) the course content, 3) peers, and 4) self. The assignments, expectations, tasks, and goals of this course are created to facilitate one or more of these relationships. If students are to benefit and learn from this course, then it will take a collaborative effort in which each student and the instructor is fully engaged in a collaborative effort to understand and make relevant the material that is to be learned. This includes challenging each other! I will practice clarity, transparency, authenticity, humility, and genuineness to the course and our relationship. My hope is that you will afford me the same and that you will engage meaningfully in all aspects of the course.

# **Attendance Requirements:**

Attendance will be recorded each class and will be part of your grade. Given the nature of this course, active class participation by everyone is essential; and punctual class attendance is mandatory. I expect that you will have completed the readings for each week prior to class to be ready to participate in class discussions. With that said, I understand LIFE HAPPENS, and so students will get full credit for attendance so long as this was 85% or more for the entire semester. Therefore, please do not hesitate to reach out if you need accommodations. You do not need to let me know you are not coming to class, except for Exam Days, Presentation Days or if you will be missing more than 2 continuous class. I do not need details other than “life happens”. It is your responsibility to get missing notes and covered material from your classmates. Special and approved circumstances approved by the college will not count against attendance policy, it is your responsibility to begin this process with the college.

# **Email Communication:**

I will respond regularly to email between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm Monday –Friday. If I have not responded to your email after two (2) business days, please resend the email. I will communicate all course-related materials and announcements using the email address you have listed in for D2L. You are encouraged to either check your email at least once a day or forward your account email to your preferred email provider. When emailing, please add to subject line “PSY 493” so I can quickly identify your email.

**In-Person Class Expectations:**

This class format is in-person, as such I will not record my classes nor provide hybrid options. However, given some academic commitments, I will give a few lectures live via Zoom, I have marked this on the course calendar (below). Attendance for either format as schedule remains required based on attendance policy for the class. Slides for class will be posted the day of class but will not include additional notes covered during class.

# **Disability Access:**

MSU 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 [www.rcpd.msu.edu.](https://www.rcpd.msu.edu/) Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation (“VISA”) form. Please present this form to the professor at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc.). All requests for accommodation should go through the RCPD office.

# **Mandatory Reporting:**

Essays, journals, and other 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 Department of Police and Public Safety) 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 Center.

# **Academic Honesty:**

Academic dishonesty is defined as conduct that violates these principles: (a) supplying or using work or answers that are not one’s own; (b) providing or accepting assistance with completing assignments or examinations; or (c) interfering through any means with another’s academic work. Please note: if you study together, be sure that you do not submit verbatim or near-verbatim answers to assignments. To do so violates both the spirit and the letter of academic integrity. It is imperative that the work you turn in is your own work – even if you study together and jointly prepare assignments. The penalties for dishonesty will vary from getting 0 points on an individual assignment up to getting a 0.0 grade for the entire semester. Consistent with MSU’s policy regarding penalty grades, all instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Office of the Registrar and your college.

# **Artificial Intelligence Policy:**

This class is defined as intensive-writing, as such course assignments include various short-essay responses and term-paper**. The use of ChatGPT or any similar AI platform or tool that generates written content for any of the class assignments are fully prohibited in this course**. The only exception will be using AI support for grammar and spelling detection, which programs like Word already have included. Please note there is a clear difference between you writing something that then is corrected for grammar vs. having an AI tool generate the content. When in doubt, you can check with me.

All written assignments will be turn-in virtually using D2L, which will include Turnitin AI detectors. At my discretion, I will also use other AI detector platforms. Any work submitted that shows evidence for AI generated content will receive 0.0 graded and will be reported to the college as part of academic dishonesty. I will not provide a second opportunity to submit any assignment that failed to follow this policy. This class is designed to help you improve your writing skills, particularly for academic content, as such, there will be zero tolerance if failing to comply with this policy.

# **Use of APA style**

All papers and written assignments must use APA formatting and style, including references, citations, use of non-biased language, etc. Students must refer to the APA Publication Manual, 7th edition, for all questions related to APA style.

# **Changes to Syllabus:**

This syllabus is a contract and agreement between the student and the instructor. The included schedule, policies, and assignments are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances or by mutual agreement between the instructor and class participants.

# **Assignment Requirements and Evaluation Criteria**

All assignments will be submitted via Canvas on the date indicated by each assignment, not through email or hard copies. Course assignments and grades are as follow:

1. **Midterms (3) (100 points for each exam; total of 300 points).** The exams will be in-person in class time. Exams will consist of multiple-choice items. Exam and scantrons will be provided. Please make sure to bring a pencil. See class schedule for specific content that will cover each exam. Exams will cover and include questions for all covered material, including class lectures, exercises, activities, readings, discussions, presentations, and video information. The specific date and time for each exam is specified in the course schedule provided in this syllabus.
   1. **To avoid make-up exams and because LIFE HAPPENS, I will replace your lower exam score with your next higher score by the end of the semester.** Only one exam score will be replaced. Make-up exams will be given only in extreme circumstances and only with advance notice to the instructor. If you miss more than one exam, only one of them will be replaced but for the second one, you will receive a zero for that exam, which will put your chances of passing the class at risk. Each exam should take 45-1hr on average to be completed, additional time will be provided for those that need it based on requested special accommodations.
   2. You will be allowed to bring notes for exam in the form of ONE 4x6 inches Index card. Both sides allowed.
2. **Weekly readings, attendance and Participation (25 points attendance & 25 points participation).** Each student will be responsible for completing the assigned readings before class time for the chapter/section. Class readings will come from the assigned textbook and assigned articles (detailed in the reader section). See the course Reader below course schedule. Students might get randomly called for participation based on covered material and assigned readings.
3. **Current Issues Class Group Presentation (100 points).** Students will set up teams (3 people max) and prepare a power-point presentation on a current issue(s)/topic(s) related to intersectional systems of oppression in the United States and their connection to psychology/well-being. Topics will overlap with areas covered in class (e.g., immigration, gender norms, LGBTQ issues, family). Because the assigned readings only provide an overview of the topic at hand, this assignment provides an opportunity for students to dive-in and thoroughly explore an area related to intersectionality and psychology they are most interested. Students’ presentation will go deeper than the readings provided in class to provide a more nuanced picture about the topic at hand. **The presentation must cover 12-15 minutes.** In preparing for their presentation, students will make sure to keep in mind the following:
   1. (**Teamwork, flow and content 30 points**) Each member must actively participate in the presentation, slides must show a flow and effort to summarize topics. Do not read from your slides (ok to have notes)
   2. (**Sources 30 points**) Your presentation must include **at least five** current resources (e.g., book chapters, journal articles) about the topics at hand, not including the readings already assigned by the instructor.
   3. (**Creativity and audience engagement 20 points**) When presenting the material, you must be engaging and involve members of the class, including but not limited to asking open-ended questions, showing a video relevant to your topic
   4. When video material are less than 2 mins, your presentation can be 12 mins. If it is longer than 2mins, you will need to present for 15 mins. Video/audio materials cannot be more than 5 mins in total out of entire presentation.
   5. You can be as creative as would like with this assignment. For example, you may create a game about the information you are sharing, etc. There is no minimum or maximum number of slides as long as you cover the information in a creative, organized, and comprehensive manner. For example, you may use a poem to highlight a specific concept or include samples of artwork that use intersectional approaches.
   6. (**Handout 20 points**) You need to create a **1-page handout** that describes the main concepts of your presentation. **Please email this handout to your class the day you are presenting so that your classmates have access to it.**
4. **Final Term Paper (150 points).** For your term paper, you will write a DEFINE AND CONTRAST lit review paper of 10 full double-spaced pages of content (not including covers or references, which should be part of the paper), that addresses TWO SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION with an INTERSECTIONAL LENS focused on mental health/psychology. You are welcome to use materials from class, but at minimum, 20 references (creditable sources) are required.
   1. **(Abstract Outline 20 point)** Submit a 2-page abstract and outline of your term paper (What is your research question, how would you break down your paper), how do you plan to break down your two topics (systems of oppression) and connect them.
   2. **(Draft 30 points)** Using your outline, you will send me a 4pg min initial draft with at least 8 references you will use using APA format for references.
   3. Full Content of **Final Term Paper will be 100 points**. More details and rubric will be provided.

# **Points Breakdown**

Exams (3 x 100 each) 300 points

Attendance & Participation 50 points

Team Presentation 100 points

Final Term Paper 150 points

**TOTAL 600 points**

# **Grading Breakdown**

4.0 = 541-600 points

3.5 = 522-540 points

3.0 = 498-521 points

2.5 = 462-497 points

2.0 = 438-461 points

1.5 = 402-437 points

1.0 = 378-401 points

0.0 = 0 -377 points

# **Course Schedule**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Week | Date | Topic | Readings & Important Agenda Items | Assignments |
| 1 | 8/25/25 | Introduction to the course | * Review Syllabus |  |
| 1 | 8/27/25 | What is intersectionality? How does it fit in Psychology? | * Ch 1 |  |
| 2 | 9/1/25 | **NO CLASS** | **NO CLASS Labor Day** |  |
| 2 | 9/3/25 | What is intersectionality? How does it fit in Psychology? | * Ch 1 | Sign-up for Groups |
| 3 | 9/8/25 | Historical backgrounds for Intersectionality | * Ch 2 |  |
| 3 | 9/10/25 | Historical backgrounds for Intersectionality | **Presentation 1** |  |
| 4 | 9/15/25 | Racial Oppression | Ch 3 + 1st Assigned Paper |  |
| 4 | 9/17/25 | Racial Oppression | **Presentation 2** |  |
| 5 | 9/22/25 | Ethnicity and Colonization | 2nd Assigned Paper | Abstract and Outline (2 pgs.) Due 9/22 11:59pm |
| 5 | 9/24/25 | **Review for Exam** | **Presentation 3**  **Review for Exam** |  |
| 6 | 9/29/25 | **EXAM 1** | **EXAM 1** |  |
| 6 | 10/1/25 | Gender and Sexual Oppression | Ch 4 + 3rd Assigned Paper **Presentation 4** |  |
| 7 | 10/6/25 | Gender and Sexual Oppression |  |  |
| 7 | 10/8/25 | Gender and Sexual Oppression | 4th Assigned Paper **Presentation 5** |  |
| 8 | 10/13/25 | Xenophobia and Citizenism | Ch 5 and 5th Assigned Paper |  |
| 8 | 10/15/25 | **NO CLASS** | **NO CLASS** |  |
| 9 | 10/20/25 | **NO CLASS** | **NO CLASS Fall Break** |  |
| 9 | 10/22/25 | **ZOOM CLASS**  Xenophobia and Citizenism | **Presentation 6**  6th Assigned Paper |  |
| 10 | 10/27/25 | **Review for Exam**  **TERM PAPER info** | **Review for Exam**  **TERM PAPER info session** |  |
| 10 | 10/29/25 | **EXAM 2** | **EXAM 2** |  |
| 11 | 11/3/25 | **Guest Lecture in Person** | **Dr. Ignacio Acevedo**  *Can belonging both afirm and challenge intersectionality? Learning from Hñähñu communities in ra Batha ra 'Bot'ähi* |  |
| 11 | 11/5/25 | **ZOOM Guest Lecture** | **Richard Chang**, University of Nevada, Las Vegas “*Asian American Experiences with Racial Microaggressions”* | **Draft Due 11/7 at 11:59pm** |
| 12 | 11/10/25 | Wealth Gap and Classism | **Ch 6** |  |
| 12 | 11/12/25 | Wealth Gap and Classism | **Presentation 7**  **TERM PAPER info session** |  |
| 13 | 11/17/25 | Ableism | 7th assigned Paper |  |
| 13 | 11/19/25 | **Guest Lecture In-person** | **Dr. Gabriel Johnson**  *Masculinity on Black Men Race Gender and Sexual Expression* |  |
| 14 | 11/24/25 | Social Justice | **Presentation 8**  Conclusion Chapter |  |
| 14 | 11/26/25 | **NO CLASS** | **NO CLASS** |  |
| 15 | 12/1/25 | **Zoom Exam Review**  **TERM PAPER info session** |  |  |
| 15 | 12/3/25 | **Exam 3** | **Exam 3** | **Term Paper Due Saturday 12/6 @12 noon EST** |
| 16 | 12/9/25 12:45-2:45pm | **FINAL EXAM DAY**  **Final Check-ins** | No Exams but I will be present for any questions or approved make-up activities. |  |

# **Late Assignments**

Unless officially approved, I will not accept late assignments, please stay on top of due dates and times marked in the syllabus.

# **Viewing Grades**

I will aim to have the grades for each of the assignments or exams a week from the day they are completed/submitted. In the event this takes longer, I will inform you. After exams are graded, I will email the average scores for the class. I will post your grades in D2L.

# **Concerns with Grades**

While I will provide a rubric for most graded assignments, I recognize there is still a level of subjectivity. As such, you can challenge any grade for any assignment if you feel this should be reviewed again. The process to do so: 1) Write a one-page document where you express your concern (which assignment and or question you feel was not graded correctly), 2) Provide some explanation or evidence on why you think the grade was incorrect (give the answer or response you think was correct, reference lecture or class materials etc.), 3) Make sure to send this request within ONE week from the day grade was posted. If you follow these directions, I will review the score/grade. Note this can then mean your entire assignment will be re-evaluated which can move your score UP or DOWN or stay the same. Filing a request for re-evaluation of a graded assignment does not mean your grade will be changed, if not evidence for this is found. I will always follow up with an email after 2 weeks from the request and the option to meet and chat if you need additional information.

# **Academic Honesty as a Spartan:**

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-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). Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, papers 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 to satisfy the requirements for this course. 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).)

# **Inclusive Environment.**

MSU is committed to creating and maintaining an inclusive community in which students, faculty, and staff can work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination. The Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) reviews concerns related to discrimination and harassment based on sex, gender, gender identity, race, national origin, religion, disability status, and any other protected categories under the University Anti-Discrimination Policy (<https://www.hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/university-wide/ADP_policy.html>) and Policy on Relationship Violence and Sexual Misconduct (<https://civilrights.msu.edu/policies/rvsm.html>). If you experience or witness acts of bias, discrimination, or harassment, please report these to OIE: <http://oie.msu.edu/>.

**Class Materials and Discussion Usage**

It is important to promote a vibrant exchange of ideas while respecting the privacy of students taking this class. Comments taken out of context are often misleading and undercut the environment of trust and respect that is essential for learning. Given these factors and the importance of supporting one another, recordings of the class, lecture notes, other materials created by the instructor, and screenshots of the class (including online discussions) should not be uploaded to other online environments. Impermissible use of class recordings and lecture notes or other material may violate the rights of other students and the MSU Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy (<https://ossa.msu.edu/srr>).

# **Disruptive Behavior:**

Article 2.III.B.4 of [Student Rights and Responsibilities](http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/student-rights-and-responsibilities-at-michigan-state-university/article-2-academic-rights-and-responsibilities) 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 states that "The student and the faculty share the responsibility for maintaining professional relationships based on mutual trust and civility." [General Student Regulation 5.02](http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/regulations/general-student-regulations) states: "No student shall . . . obstruct, disrupt, or interfere with the functions, services, or directives of the University, its offices, or its employees (e.g., classes, social, cultural, and athletic events, computing services, registration, housing and food services, governance meetings, and hearings).” Students whose conduct adversely affects the learning environment may be subject to disciplinary action through the Student Judicial Affairs office.