Psychological and Sociocultural Perspectives on Health

PSYC 2A – Summer 2015

Instructor: Michael Polito, PhD
Office Phone #: 781-736-3252

Office Hours: By appointment
Email: mpolito@brandeis.edu

Textbook:

Additional readings will be posted (see readings below)

I. Course Description: What is this course about?
This course surveys topics in psychology, sociology and anthropology and analyzes the relevance of these three disciplines for the mental and physical health of individuals and societies. It has the dual aim of offering pre-health and pre-clinical students a combination of topical knowledge and analytic competencies required for broad, liberal arts problem-solving, modern medical school and clinical psychology curricula and entrance exams. This course will introduce you to the science of the mind and behavior, but it will also introduce you to a wide range of views regarding the social construction of self and others. Throughout the course of the semester, we will be learning about and using methodologies that span the psychological and sociocultural approaches to health (e.g., sociology and anthropology). Thus, three main models will be used throughout the course of the semester: the health psychology/scientific method model, the medical model, and a sociocultural model.

This course is designed to be like a tasting menu at a fancy restaurant – you will get the opportunity to try the various perspectives in the field of health and see which one or ones excite you. You will get a broad overview of behavioral neurosciences, sensation and perception, social psychology, developmental psychology, theories of personality, clinical psychology and health psychology. We will be taking a topical approach, examining many different perspectives on human behavior. To make the semester coherent, we will be emphasizing common themes that hold the various perspectives on health together. Thus, for each topic, the three different perspectives will be considered and the information always applied back to health.

Each unit, online lectures are supplemented with slides, activities, student discussions, guest lectures, moderated discussions between health professionals, surveys and other innovative content. It is my hope that each of these approaches will enrich your experience this semester and increase your understanding of biological, psychological, sociocultural factors in health, health education, and health policy.

Please note: although the coverage of the topics relies on a generalist approach and is introductory in nature, the course as a whole is very rigorous, with some challenging readings and assignments.

II. Course Goals:
As has been noted in the MCAT 2015 Preview Guide, we live in an age of rapid scientific and medical advances, tremendous changes in the health care system (in delivery, demands, and policy), and because of globalization, migration, political upheaval, and changes based on technology, the world is a much more diverse and interconnected place. For those interested in health care, or planning on working with the health care system (or just those of us who are going to require healthcare), a basic understanding of the current knowledge base in biology, psychobiology, and important sociocultural aspects is essential. This course is designed to provide that basic knowledge.
But more than that, this course is designed to integrate medical, behavioral, and sociocultural frameworks in interpreting emerging knowledge. To do this, you will need to learn the various research techniques of each of the frameworks, and understand the relative strengths and weaknesses of each. Thus, a second goal is to train you in the analytic and critical thinking skills necessary to interpret the overwhelming volume of existing and emerging knowledge.

III. Course Requirements:

A. Examinations: three tests, each worth 100 points. All exams will be unit tests (NO cumulative exams). The format for each exam will include a combination of multiple choice and short-answer questions (which may include some matching). Lecture, Bidirectional Learning Tool (BLT; this reflects pre-recorded video conversations with experts or exemplary students in which the online student also will provide direct input by text, video, or multiple choice questions) discussions, reading assignments, activities are all fair game for material. Each exam will be take-home; you may use all available material, but you may not collaborate with any class member on the exams. An honor pledge for each exam will be signed and violations of the honor code will be reported to the Brandeis Honor board. The ONLY excuses acceptable for turning in a late exam are illness (documented by a note from a physician), funeral of close friend/relative (documented by a funeral notice or funeral bulletin), mandatory religious obligations or other unavoidable circumstances or University activities. If one of these difficulties occurs, you should immediately contact the office of Academic Services, who will document the difficulties and take care of notifying your professors. You may turn in an early exam.

B. Activities: Each unit has an activity associated with it. These are designed to help internalize the course information and will often have an additional focus that was not in the lecture. The activities will range from responses to standard text assignments to online wall discussions. Specific details will be posted in the course web site. Each assignment will be worth 10 points. Activities will be due 24 hours prior to your live session. Late assignments will be docked 1 point, with an additional 1-point penalty for each day that the assignment is late. Computer problems are no excuse (see below for information about technological support).

If you need some assistance with your assignments, please plan to talk to your course instructor. The Writing Program at Brandeis University also offers helpful services: http://www.brandeis.edu/programs/writing/.

C. Class attendance and participation: Class discussions and active participation is extremely important to learning and mastering the material. You are expected to come to the synchronous live sessions prepared to discuss the assigned readings or participate in the activities. In addition, discussion questions will be posted on line for each unit. You are expected to post comments or your own questions about the reading on a unit-by-unit basis, as directed. You are expected to post your responses to the public questions for the roundtables on the discussion board (and this will be part of the 10 points for discussion for each unit). You will also be able to read other students’ postings and interact this way. Finally, you are also expected to participate in the live session synchronous discussions on a unit-by-unit basis (part of the 10 points for discussion per unit).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100 each = 300</td>
<td>Exam 1, 2, and 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 each = 140</td>
<td>Unit Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 each = 140</td>
<td>Student Participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. Evaluation: Your grade will be based on exams, asynchronous and online discussion forum participation, synchronous participation, and unit activities (to be provided in detail online). Your grade will be on a standard percentage grading scale (A ≥ 95%, A- 90-94.9%, B+ 87.5-89.5%, B 82.5-87%, B- 80-82%, C+ 77.5-79.5%, C 72.5-77%, C- 70-72%, D+ 67.5-69.5%, D 62.5-69%, D- 60-62%)
V. **Technological Support** Brandeis’s LTS is your point-of-contact for questions and issues that you have about our learning management system LATTE and the live session software Adobe Connect. They are available to introduce you to and assist you with using all of LATTE’s features, including accessing your coursework, assignments, and live sessions. You will be contacted with information from LTS in the week before class.

VI. **Special Needs** If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University or other collaborating universities and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please contact me immediately.

VII. **Academic Honesty:** You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as section 5 of the Rights and Responsibilities handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from Brandeis University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.

VIII. **Personal Reactions To Topics**
Sometimes material covered in a Psychology class can bring up personal feelings and reactions that you may not know how to handle. In these cases, please feel free to make use of the counseling services available on your campus (Brandeis students, the Psychological Counseling Center is located in the Mailman House at (781) 736-3730. More information is available on their website: [http://www.brandeis.edu/pcc/](http://www.brandeis.edu/pcc/).

### Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Live Session Dates</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Important Highlights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro: 6/1</td>
<td>Introduction, Course Structure</td>
<td>Troubleshooting Adobe Connect issues, Syllabus, introductions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 1 Th 6/4</td>
<td>Thinking critically about stress, health, and functioning</td>
<td>Case study and three health professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 2 Mon 6/8</td>
<td>Body and Soul: The Biology of the Mind and Consciousness</td>
<td>Guest lecture on substance abuse and addiction; mindfulness meditations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 3 Th 6/11</td>
<td>From Raw Energy to Meaning</td>
<td><em>The Itch,</em> and cultural influences on perception: a guest lecture (Professor Anita Hannig)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 4 Mon 6/15</td>
<td>Problem Solving and Linguistic Framing</td>
<td>Sticks and stones…words can definitely affect the way we think and decide: a guest lecture (Professor Anita Hannig)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 1 Due 6/18</td>
<td>Units 1-4</td>
<td>Due Thursday 6/18 by 4pm EDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 5 Mon 6/22</td>
<td>Drooling, Operating, and Social Influence</td>
<td>Roundtable on the ways in which peer and media influences substance use – modeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live Session</td>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>Topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 6</td>
<td>Th 6/25</td>
<td>Memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 7</td>
<td>Mon 6/29</td>
<td>Life Span Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 8</td>
<td>Th 7/2</td>
<td>Stop Crying or I’ll Give you Something to Cry about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/6</td>
<td></td>
<td>NO CLASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 9</td>
<td>Th 7/9</td>
<td>Stress, Health, and Wellness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 2</td>
<td>Due 7/13</td>
<td>Units 5-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 10</td>
<td>Th 7/16</td>
<td>Self, Identity and Personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 11</td>
<td>Mon 7/20</td>
<td>Social Influences, Interactions, and Persuasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 12</td>
<td>Th 7/23</td>
<td>Understanding Social Structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 13</td>
<td>Mon 7/27</td>
<td>Things that Divide Us: Factors that Promote Social Inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 14</td>
<td>7/30</td>
<td>Psychological Disorders and Treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 3</td>
<td>Due 8/3</td>
<td>Units 10-14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Topical Readings and Assignments
Unit 1: Thinking critically about stress, health, and human functioning:

Required:
Text Chapter 1
Case Study on Josie
Unit 2: Body and Soul: The Biology of the Mind and Consciousness

Required:
Text Chapters 2, 3

Unit 3: From Raw Energy to Meaning

Required:
Text Chapter 6

Unit 4: Problem Solving and Linguistic Framing

Required:
Text Chapter 9

Unit 5: Drooling, Operating, and Social Influence

Required:
Text Chapter 7

Unit 6: Memory

Text Chapter 8

Unit 7: Life Span Development

Required:
Text Chapter 5

Unit 8: Stop Crying or I’ll Give you Something to Cry about

Required:
Text Chapters 11, 12 (pp. 458-486)

Recommended:

Unit 9: Stress, Health, and Wellness

Required:
Text Chapter 12 (pp. 486-511)


**Recommended:**


**Unit 10: Self, Identity and Personality**

**Required:**

Text Chapter 13


**Recommended:**


**Unit 11: Social Influences, Interactions, and Persuasion**

**Required:**

Text Chapter 14


**Recommended:**


**Unit 12: Social Structures**

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


Unit 13: The Things that Divide Us: Factors that Promote Social Inequality

Required:


Recommended:


Unit 14: Psychological Disorders and Treatment

Required:


Recommended:


read for the gist of this article