



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY

**Department of Psychology**  
**Contemporary Theories in Psychology**  
**Psychology 405 (L01) – Winter 2007**

**Course Outline**

**Class Location:** SH 0278

**Lecture Day/Time:** TR 15:30 (75 min)

**Instructor:** Dr. Hank Stam

**Office:** Admin 251C

**Phone:** 220-5683

**Office Hours:** TR 1:00-2:00 (or by apptmnt)

**E-mail:** [stam@ucalgary.ca](mailto:stam@ucalgary.ca)

**Readings**

For this course you will need a required package of readings and one textbook:

1. The readings for the course will be available on the web or given to you as attachments in the Blackboard program. There will be no need to purchase them.
2. There are two textbooks:
  - i) Dupré, J. (2001). *Human nature and the limits of science*. Oxford. (\$42.00 at the bookstore, for \$21.56 you can get a used copy on Amazon.ca)
  - ii) Gross, R. (2003) *Themes, issues and debates in psychology*. Oxford. (\$58.50 at the bookstore)

I will be posting Powerpoint notes, readings and information on where to obtain readings that are on the web in addition to any announcements on **Blackboard** (see [blackboard.ucalgary.ca](http://blackboard.ucalgary.ca) to log in). If you have questions about Blackboard, please go to <http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/blackboard/help.htm> for further instructions.

**Overview:** This course will focus on two interrelated sets of issues: (a) a critical examination of selected major theories and systems in twentieth century psychology, and (b) the development of new theory and methods of inquiry that have evolved from the critiques of these theories. In the process of examining these issues we will discuss the nature of science and psychology's place in science, and such concepts as theory, explanation, reductionism, determinism, intentionality and agency.

To emphasize theory is not to disparage research but to examine the presumed goal of all scientific activity, namely the development of theoretical statements which have as their aim either explanation (that is, they are 'true' statements about the world) or a pragmatic function (they allow the user to do things in the world not possible without the theory). Further, we will examine the questions that have been asked about the relationship between data and theory in science generally and in psychology in particular.

The course will then attempt to understand the relationship between explanations that work at different levels. Is a biological (physiological/neurological) explanation preferred over a psychological one? Is a cognitive or a behavioral explanation a 'true' explanation? Are 'explanations' preferred over 'reasons' in psychology? Is data more important than theory, or is theory required so that we can

'see' the data? All of these questions take place in a social and historical context that will be discussed as the course proceeds.

What then of particular theoretical claims in psychology? We will examine some foundational topics to evaluate the nature of knowledge claims about these topics and the different ways of evaluating these claims.

Note that in this course we will be following a problem based approach. This means that the lectures, readings, class discussions, as well as your own background and knowledge and your use of other sources such as libraries and the web are all resources for you to solve a set of classic problems in psychology. Of course, these are not problems that are amenable to easy solutions but instead are the problems that form the center of debates and discussions in contemporary theoretical work. The aim of this course is to provide you with the understanding of fundamental problems in psychological theory and to provide you with the tools to seek out possible solutions. I have divided the course into roughly seven major problem areas that we will cover in turn (see the Timetable). These are: 1. Foundations & Science, 2. Reductionism and Determinism, 3. Behaviorism, 4. Functionalism, 5. Cognitivism, 6. Evolution, 7. Human development and sociality, 8. Abnormality and Culture, 9. Meaning and Language, 10. Reflexivity and research practices.

### **University of Calgary Curriculum Objectives:**

This course is directly relevant to the core competencies. We will be engaged in addressing theoretical frameworks that form the foundations of critical and creative thinking in the discipline and that are focused on the analysis of problems at a foundational level. Much of this will require exposure to and mastery of abstract reasoning. The evaluations you will complete are designed to require you to engage in effective communication strategies and to require that you gather and organize information from diverse sources. It is expected that this course will generate insight into the production and maintenance of knowledge in psychology and will enhance your interpretive and assessment skills with respect to the evaluation of knowledge claims.

### **Evaluation**

**Course Requirements:** 3 Mini-Papers, 2 Term-Tests and a Final Exam.

I. Three Mini-papers: due as outlined below:

1. Thursday, February 1 (10%)
2. Tuesday, March 13 (14%)
3. Tuesday, April 3 (16%)

Your paper will address the questions outlined in the attached course timetable. The first mini-paper is worth only 10% of your final grade, a chance to get warmed up to this kind of assignment. The second is worth 14% and third is worth 16% each. In total, this means that your papers add up to 40% of your total grade.

In grading your papers I will be looking for the following: (a) clarity of language use and presentation, writing style and overall format and (b) the content of the argument or case you make, its relationship to the literature you cite and the general strength of your case. 'Strength' can mean both logical structure and rhetorical force; this will depend in part on how you are answering a question. In general, (a) and (b) here are, metaphorically, like 'artistic impression' and 'technical merit' in figure skating competitions (I have borrowed this metaphor from Dr. Marini in Education). By having you write multiple papers and tests (instead of one large one) the assessment ought to approach validity and reliability.

Use current material from the literature. This you can find in volumes of journals such as Psychological Review, Brain and Behavioral Sciences, American Psychologist, Canadian Psychology, Theory & Psychology, Philosophical Psychology, Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, Cognition, or other major publications which are available in our library or occasionally, on the web. Beware of the quality of web-based materials. If you are writing a paper with an historical emphasis, use original sources. Ask me if you are uncertain about an article or a journal. Your papers should be approximately 1,000 words in length, maximum, or about 4 typed, double-spaced pages - they can be shorter, depending on how well you present your case. I expect typed work in all instances.

You can be late with one of the three papers (3 days maximum) without asking me or requiring permission. More than one late will require an excuse or I will deduct 1 point-per-day for lateness.

Please note that, despite the use of Blackboard and other web resources, I will not accept papers that are sent to me electronically. It is difficult and tedious to grade material on a computer screen hence I will only accept hard copies of your papers.

II. Two term-tests: These tests will consist of very short answer questions based on the readings and lecture material (12% each for a total of 24%).

1. Tuesday, February 13
2. Tuesday, March 20

III. In class Final Exam: On Thursday, April 12 you will receive a list of about 10 questions. Some of these questions will appear on the in-class, Registrar Scheduled, final exam. (value is 36%).

### **Grading System:**

The final percentage obtained in the course will be assigned according to the following scale. In case of percentages I will round up:

<u>Letter grade</u>	<u>Percentage Obtained</u>
A+	96-100
A	90-95
A-	85-89
B+	80-84
B	76-79
B-	72-75
C+	67-71
C	63-66
C-	59-62
D+	54-58
D	50-53
F	<50

Style: In writing your papers you must use the style of the American Psychological Association (see the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Fifth Edition, 2001). Pay particular attention to the Referencing system and the "Guidelines to Reduce Bias in Language," pages 61-76 of the manual. Document every idea that is not commonplace by reference to the source from which you obtained it. If in doubt, consult the Publication Manual.

**Reappraisal of Grades**

A student who feels that a piece of graded term work (term paper, essay, test, etc.) has been unfairly graded, may have the work re-graded as follows. The student shall discuss the work with the instructor within fifteen days of being notified about the mark or of the item's return to the class. If not satisfied, the student shall immediately take the matter to the Head of the department offering the course, who will arrange for a reassessment of the work within the next fifteen days. The reappraisal of term work may cause the grade to be raised, lowered, or to remain the same.

If the student is not satisfied with the decision and wishes to appeal, the student shall address a letter of appeal to the Dean of the faculty offering the course within fifteen days of the unfavourable decision. In the letter, the student must clearly and fully state the decision being appealed, the grounds for appeal, and the remedies being sought, along with any special circumstances that warrant an appeal of the reappraisal. The student should include as much written documentation as possible.

**Academic Accommodation**

*It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodations.* If you are a student with a documented disability who may require academic accommodation and have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, please contact their office at 220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. You are also required to discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of this course.

**Absence From A Test**

Make-up exams are not an option without an official University medical excuse (see the University Calendar). You must contact the instructor before the scheduled examination or you will have forfeited any right to make up the exam. At the instructor's discretion, a make-up exam may differ significantly (in form and/or content) from a regularly scheduled exam. Except in extenuating circumstances (documented by an official University medical excuse), a makeup exam is written within two (2) weeks of the missed exam.

A completed Physician/Counselor Statement will be required to confirm absence from a test for health reasons. The student will be required to pay any cost associated with the Physician/Counselor Statement.

**Academic Misconduct**

Intellectual honesty is the cornerstone of the development and acquisition of knowledge and requires that the contribution of others be acknowledged. Consequently, plagiarism or cheating on any assignment is regarded as an extremely serious academic offense. Students should examine sections of the University Calendar, which present the Statement of Intellectual Honesty and definitions and penalties associated with Plagiarism/Cheating and Other Academic Misconduct. Please note that I take any form of intellectual dishonesty as a very serious offence against everything for which a university stands and will deal with it accordingly.

**Important Dates**

The last day to drop this course and **still receive a fee refund** is January 19, 2007.  
The last day to withdraw from this course is April 13, 2007.

**Student Organizations**

Psychology students may wish to join the Psychology Undergraduate Students' Association (PSYCHS). They are located in the Admin Building, room 170 and may be contacted at 220-5567.

### Course Credits for Research Participation

Students in most psychology courses are eligible to participate in Departmentally approved research and earn credits toward their final grades. A maximum of two credits (2%) per course, including this course, may be applied to an individual's final grade. Students can create an account and access the Research Participation System website at <http://ucalgary.sona-systems.com>. The last day to participate in research is April 12, 2007.

### MINI-PAPERS

1. Find one experimental or empirical study in any of the journals of the American Psychological Association (do not use any other journals) from 2005-2006 only (a regular article in one of the journals listed below, not a short-report, a review article or any other non-empirical paper). Your article should be an analysis of the way in which a reductive strategy has been used. That is, some very ordinary phenomenon (e.g., feeling sad) has been transformed into a scientific object (e.g., depression) using some set of tools. Evaluate this research study from the perspective of our class discussion and the readings. Note any distinctions between 'fact' and 'data' or between 'theory' and 'data'. How are the data produced, how are they made 'visible', how are they turned into a theoretical product? Finally, how is the entire article produced as a piece of 'science'? Attach a copy of the article to your paper.

Due: Thursday, February 1.

2. Find a research article in any standard psychology journal that is explicitly cognitivist or explicitly on consciousness. Evaluate cognitivism or the problem of consciousness by writing a brief review of that article. Develop a clear argument in your paper. Demonstrate the way that the functional nature of cognitive arguments or work on consciousness work in this paper. You may use historical examples or contemporary ones for this mini-paper but it must be a research article in an academic journal. Be sure to attach a copy of the article to your paper.

Due: Tuesday, March 13.

3. Coin a new term (a neologism) to describe a new or different phenomenon not typically described or discussed in psychology. Write a mini-theory describing this phenomenon. You should develop a clear argument in your paper. I will be posting several examples of good papers from previous years on Blackboard.

Due: Tuesday, April 3.

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List of APA journals for Assignment 1 (only) – your article must come from this list, any other source will be disallowed!

Behavioral Neuroscience;  
Developmental Psychology;  
Experimental and Clinical Pharmacology;  
Health Psychology;  
Journal of Abnormal Psychology;  
Journal of Applied Psychology;  
Journal of Comparative Psychology;  
Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology;  
Journal of Counseling Psychology;  
Educational Psychology;  
Journal of Experimental Psychology (JEP):  
Animal Behavior Processes;  
JEP: Applied; JEP: General;

JEP: Human Perception and Performance  
JEP: Learning, Memory, and Cognition  
Journal of Family Psychology  
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology  
Neuropsychology  
Professional Psychology: Research and Practice  
Psychological Assessment  
Psychological Methods  
Psychology and Aging; Journal of  
Psychology, Public Policy, and Law.

## Timetable and Readings - Psychology 405, Winter 2007

Week 1 (January 9, 11): Rhetoric and Language - Theories and Facts.

Readings: 1. Stam, Notes I  
2. Gross, Chapter 15  
3. Harré, R. Varieties of Theorizing

Week 2 (January 16 & 18): Foundations of science, psychological and otherwise.

Readings: Chapter 11 of Gross

Week 3 (January 23 & 25): Reductionism: Brains and stuff.

Reading: Stam, Notes II

Week 4 (January 30 & February 1): Reductionism and Determinism: Physics Envy

Reading: Butterfield, Jeremy (1998). Determinism and indeterminism.

Week 5 (February 6 & 8): Behaviorism and its demise

Reading: 1. Skinner, B. F. (1950). *Are theories of learning necessary?*  
2. W. M. O'Neil *American Behaviorism*

Week 6 (February 13 & 15): Functionalism, Cognitivism & Consciousness: If I can drive a car why can't I explain how it works? [Feb. 13, Term Test I]

Readings: 1. Stam, Notes – Cognition  
2. Gross, Chapter 13  
3. Carruthers

Reading Week: February 18 - February 24

Week 7 (February 27 & March 1): Evolutionary Theory

Reading: 1. Dupré, Chaps. 1 - 5

Week 8 (March 6 & 8): Human development and sociality

Readings: Gross, Chaps 2 & 5

Week 9 (March 13 & 15): Abnormality and Culture

Readings: Gross, Chaps. 7 & 8

Week 10 (March 20 & 22): Meaning and Language [March 20, Term Test II]

Readings: 1. Stam, Notes on hermeneutics and related issues.

Week 11 (March 27 & March 29): Social mind and the problem of socio-rationalism

- Readings:
1. G. H. Mead, *The social self*.
  2. Vygotsky, Chap. 7 of *Thought and Language*
  3. Jim Wertsch and Mike Cole, *The role of culture in Vygotskyean-informed psychology*

Week 12 (April 3 & 5): Talk in Action; Action in Talk!

- Reading:
1. Michel & Wortham, *Clearing away the self*.
  2. Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré *Positioning: The discursive production of selves*.
  3. Potter, *Discourse analysis and constructionist approaches: Theoretical background*

Week 13 (April 10 & 12): Returning to fundamental questions

- Readings:
1. Dupré: Chap. 7.
  2. Gross, Chap. 12

April 12, Questions for Final Exam distributed.