Controversial Topics in Psychology
Psy 3690-800, 3 credit hours
Summer 4-week, Internet

Course Description
Catalog Description: Exploration of special interest or controversial topics in psychology

Overview: This course begins with instruction on critical thinking skills that you will apply when analyzing different perspectives on biological, developmental, emotional, psychological, and social issues. You will read different perspectives on each issue that will broaden your own views and improve your ability to examine controversial research. In doing so, you will find that intelligent people can have very different views on the same topic. This course will provide opportunities as stated in EIU’s mission for you to refine your ability to reason and to communicate clearly so as to become responsible citizens and leaders.

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D2L web site: https://www.eiu.edu/eiuonline/

Course Materials

Course Objectives

1. Respect and use critical and creative thinking, skeptical inquiry, and, when possible, the scientific approach to solve problems related to psychology.
2. Be able to weigh evidence, tolerate ambiguity, act ethically, and reflect other values that are the underpinnings of psychology as a discipline.
3. Improve your writing and debate skills by writing and debating about controversial topics.
4. Recognize, understand, and respect the complexity of individual differences.
5. Become a wise consumer of psychological research and information that you are exposed to through the media.
6. Increase your ability to understand and appreciate viewpoints that differ from your own.

Chapter-specific objectives are listed in the description of each chapter module in D2L.
Guidelines for Studying and Test Taking

- Please read these guidelines to improve your chances for success in this course and others.
- I also strongly recommend viewing Dr. Stephen Chew's video series on "How to get the most out of studying".
- View EIU Student Success Center's test taking tips at http://www.eiu.edu/~success/testtaking.php

Course Requirements

How to Think Straight about Psychology
The first and last part of the course are based on the textbook "How to think straight about psychology" and includes a summary of important points that will contribute to your ability to think critically about the issues we will discuss. Narrated PowerPoint lectures for this book are available for viewing in D2L. Although specific readings from this book are not required, I highly recommend you use it as a reference for greater understanding of the material that is summarized in the narrated PowerPoint lectures. The first quiz, based on these lectures, is worth a substantial number of points. Some of the quiz questions will test your ability to apply the critical thinking skills learned from these lectures.

Learning Modules
For each learning module, there are learning objectives that will help you prepare for the quiz questions. If you know the answers to these questions, you should do well on the quizzes. (You do not need to turn in your answers to these learning objective questions.)

Discussion Board Analyses
The controversial issues are those on which experts disagree, with reasonable arguments for both sides. Thus, there is no "correct" answer for any of these issues. Clearly, your values, beliefs, and religious or political views will play a role in which side you take. Your analysis of each issue that you post to the discussion board should meet or exceed the following criteria:

1. A paragraph summarizing the main points of the issue from the textbook (or other sources). A conversational presentation of the position in your own words will be preferred to just copying what was in the textbook.
2. Three or more statements evaluating one or both sides of the issue. This is where you would explain the strengths and weaknesses of the different arguments. Your training from the first module How to Think Straight About Psychology should give you the critical thinking skills that will help you evaluate the issues (e.g., problems with falsifiability, operational definitions, reliance on testimonials, over-interpretation of correlational data, multiple causation, etc.).
3. You should include 2 or more outside sources on the topic (not from the textbooks), which can be from journal articles, web sites, or other sources. You should cite these sources whenever you use information from them and provide the citation in the (Author, Year) format. Include the list of references at the end of your analysis.
4. A brief summary (at least several sentences) of your own opinion about the issue.
5. The total length of your discussion post should be between 250-350 words.

NOTE: You will not be able to see other students’ postings until you start your own discussion thread in that topic. Thus, students’ initial responses are not influenced by reading other students’ postings.
Grading Rubric for Discussion Board Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Incomplete 0 points</th>
<th>Need Improvement 3 points</th>
<th>Exceptional 5 points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue Summary</td>
<td>No summary of issue provided.</td>
<td>Not more than a couple sentences summarizing the issue.</td>
<td>Brief summary of both sides of issue provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>No evaluation of either side’s arguments.</td>
<td>1-2 statements evaluating the strengths and/or weaknesses of viewpoints.</td>
<td>3 or more statements evaluating the strengths and/or weaknesses of viewpoints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Sources</td>
<td>No outside sources.</td>
<td>One outside source.</td>
<td>Two or more outside sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>&lt; 2 paragraphs or no opinion stated.</td>
<td>2-3 paragraphs and/or opinion is limited.</td>
<td>Full 3-4 paragraphs, complete with opinion.</td>
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</table>

**Class Participation**

To encourage class participation, 50 points (12.5%) of your final grade will come from interaction that you have with other students in the class. For each of the 10 issues, you need to reply to one other student’s discussion board analysis. Of course, you are welcome to comment on more than one, and I encourage you to do so. Each reply should be several sentences long, be stated in a supportive manner, and can contain questions for further clarification, alternative viewpoints, and your own personal interpretations of the topic. Appropriate network etiquette should be followed at all times. Messages that are deemed inappropriate may be deleted.

You will have up to 3 days after the module’s deadline to post replies.

**Rules of Respect**

The classroom is meant to be a learning environment for the instructor and students. However, learning is inhibited when there is a lack of respect for one another’s individuality as well as for the class as a whole. The following are rules will help establish an encouraging classroom environment suitable for sharing ideas and learning.

1. **Privacy and confidentiality.** Most likely there will be times when class members share personal experiences and beliefs. Since we all benefit from hearing each other’s perspectives, we must be respectful of those who feel comfortable in sharing this personal information. Therefore, we will have an understood policy that nothing shared in class can be divulged outside of the class. While you may discuss general issues with others, you cannot share any information that may identify another member of the class.
2. **Risk taking.** To learn from each other we are going to ask each other to “step out of their comfort zones.” We may be expressing ideas that others do not agree with, or listening to ideas that challenge our own beliefs or preconceptions. Be willing to listen to one another and be prepared to be respectfully challenged when controversial issues arise.

3. **Support.** If we are asking each other to step out of their comfort zones, we need to be there to support one another. This does not mean you have to agree with someone. It means that you have to allow her/him the space and freedom to express her/himself. It is difficult to take risks if you are concerned that people will attack your ideas.

4. **Respect.** Every individual's perspective is valued and considered legitimate for that person. Respect that someone’s ideas may be different from your own and try to understand where that person is coming from. Being open to other perspectives is important to academic and personal growth.

5. **No “put downs.”** All comments should be made with the desire to educate, not hurt. You can express disagreement with an issue or idea, but be aware of HOW you express yourself. Also, express WHY you disagree...this continues the learning process for all of us.

**Quizzes**
The purposes of the quizzes are to check your understanding of the assigned reading material and to enhance your critical reasoning skills. Multiple choice and short answer items on the quizzes will be based on material covered in lectures and in the textbook. Multiple choice questions are worth 1 point each and short answer questions are usually worth 2-4 points. The quiz questions will correspond closely to the unit objectives. The textbook website (see link above) has a few practice quiz questions, some of which will be on the actual quiz.

- **You may use your book, notes, and any other resources except for other people when taking your quizzes.** Although the quizzes are open book, you’ll find that they really test your ability to think critically, compare viewpoints, and synthesize the material.
- The first quiz, based on *How to think straight about psychology*, is worth 30 points and is about half multiple choice and half short answer.
- Quizzes based on the controversial issues are all multiple-choice and have only 4-6 multiple choice questions. The rest of the points for the chapter come from your writing assignments.
- The last quiz, based again on *How to think straight about psychology*, is worth 20 points and is all short answer.
- The quizzes on the issues are timed (30 minutes), but you should have enough time to not feel rushed. The timer begins once you open the quiz.
- If you have problems while taking a quiz, such as the network going down or your computer crashing, please complete the quiz at the next possible time. You may have a warning that your time has expired, but it will still save your answers. Then, send me an e-mail explaining why your time went over. Desire2Learn records all the quiz times.
- Make up quizzes will only be given for University-approved absences that extend beyond the normal time to take the quiz.
- After the quiz has been graded, you can immediately view your results on the multiple choice questions. Short answer questions will be graded within 3 days after the quiz deadline.
- The quizzes will be available until the dates listed below. All other assignments for the chapter will also be due on that date.
**Research Paper**
You will write a research paper on a controversial topic of your choice. Obviously there are many more controversial issues than what we will cover in this class. This is an opportunity for you to explore a topic of your interest and to demonstrate your ability to write a persuasive paper based on findings in the literature. The complete instructions are found in the content folder “Research Paper” in D2L.

**Grading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes/Exams</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue Analyses (10 issues X 20 points)</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>400</strong></td>
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- A (89%) 356-400 points
- B (79%) 316-355 points
- C (69%) 276-315 points
- D (59%) 236-275 points

**Reading Schedule, Important Dates**
Warning: this course is only 4 weeks long instead of 16 so it goes quickly! Don’t get behind. Due dates apply to the quizzes and the Discussion Board Analyses. Discussion replies can be posted up to 3 days after the issue deadline.

**Special Issues:** Some of the issues will be based on reading articles that are you can get from Booth Library e-reserve. Search for the course: PSY 3690-800 and use the password: js3690. Other special issue readings will be linked directly from the learning module for the special issue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lecture Topic</th>
<th>Textbook Issue#</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to think straight about psychology (Stanovich book with PowerPoint lecture)</td>
<td></td>
<td>May 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Homosexuality Biologically Based?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>May 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is American Psychological Research Generalizable to Other Cultures?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>May 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorial Day Holiday</td>
<td></td>
<td>May 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and IQ</td>
<td>Special issue</td>
<td>May 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are Today’s Youth more Self-Centered than Previous Generations?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>May 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can Positive Psychology Make Us Happier?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>May 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) a Real Disorder?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>June 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ashley Treatment</td>
<td>Special issue</td>
<td>June 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does Facebook Have Generally Positive Psychological Effects?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>June 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should Psychologists Abstain from Involvement in Coercive Investigations?</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>June 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the Evidence Support Evolutionary Accounts of Female Mating Preferences?</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>June 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Summary (Final Exam). Refer to the Stanovich book and recorded PowerPoint Lecture in D2L.</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 13</td>
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**Research Paper Due**

View the [university's academic calendar](#) for academic registration deadlines.
**Individuals with Disabilities**

If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS). All accommodations must be approved through ODS. Please stop by Ninth Street Hall, Room 2006, or call 217-581-6583 to make an appointment.

**Academic Misconduct**

Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU’s Code of Conduct (http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.

**Student Success Center**

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (http://www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, text taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.