

Teaching Philosophy

"The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled" --Plutarch



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.

Instructor:	Jeffrey R. Stowell
Office Room:	1055 Physical Sciences
Office Phone:	217-581-2279
Home Phone:	217-348-6286
E-mail:	jrstowell@eiu.edu
Office Hours:	Wednesday 11:00am - 1:00pm
D2L web site:	https://www.eiu.edu/eiuonline/

Course Materials

Slife, B. (2012). Taking sides: Clashing views on psychological issues, (17th ed.): McGraw-Hill, New York, NY.

Stanovich, K. (2007). How to think straight about psychology, (8th ed.): Allyn & Bacon, Boston, MA.

Course Objectives

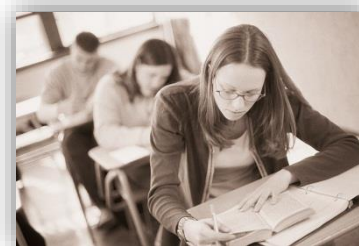
1. Respect and use critical and creative thinking, skeptical inquiry, and, when possible, the scientific approach to solve problems related to psychology.
2. Be able to weigh evidence, tolerate ambiguity, act ethically, and reflect other values that are the underpinnings of psychology as a discipline.
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

- 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

Criteria	Incomplete 0 points	Need Improvement 3 points	Exceptional 5 points
Issue Summary	No summary of issue provided.	Not more than a couple sentences summarizing the issue.	Brief summary of both sides of issue provided.
Critical Thinking	No evaluation of either side's arguments.	1-2 statements evaluating the strengths and/or weaknesses of viewpoints.	3 or more statements evaluating the strengths and/or weaknesses of viewpoints.
Outside Sources	No outside sources.	One outside source.	Two or more outside sources.
Length	< 2 paragraphs or no opinion stated.	2-3 paragraphs and/or opinion is limited.	Full 3-4 paragraphs, complete with opinion.
Overall Score	Incomplete 0 or more	Need Improvement 12 or more	Exceptional 18 or more

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 that 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. However, please do not disclose traumatic or exceptionally personal events that could make other students feel uncomfortable (e.g., divorce, abuse, personal health concerns). Because 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 web site (see link above) has a few practice quiz questions, some of which will be on the actual quiz.

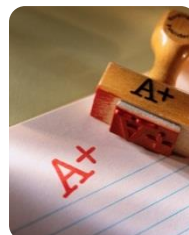
- **You may use your book, notes, and any other resources except for other people when taking your quizzes.** Although the quizzes are open book, you'll find that they really test your ability to think critically, compare viewpoints, and synthesize the material.
- The first quiz, based on *How to think 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. D2L 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

Assignment	Points
Quizzes/Exams	100
Issue Analyses (10 issues X 20 points)	200
Class Participation	50
Research Paper	50
Total	400



- 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. **Late assignments may be penalized 20%.**

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.

Lecture Topic	Textbook Issue#	Due Date
How to think straight about psychology (Stanovich book with PowerPoint lecture)		May 19
Is Homosexuality Biologically Based?	2	May 21
Is American Psychological Research Generalizable to Other Cultures?	4	May 22
Memorial Day Holiday		May 25
Education and IQ	Special issue	May 26
Are Today's Youth more Self-Centered than Previous Generations?	7	May 27
Can Positive Psychology Make Us Happier?	9	May 29
Is Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) a Real Disorder?	12	June 2
The Ashley Treatment	Special issue	June 4
Does Facebook Have Generally Positive Psychological Effects?	13	June 5
Should Psychologists Abstain from Involvement in Coercive Investigations?	16	June 8
Does the Evidence Support Evolutionary Accounts of Female Mating Preferences?	17	June 10
Course Summary (Final Exam). Refer to the Stanovich book and recorded PowerPoint Lecture in D2L.		June 12
Research Paper Due		

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

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in [EIU's Code of Conduct](#). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards. Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated. As a student, you have a personal responsibility to maintain high standards of academic conduct to preserve academic integrity. Academic misconduct will result in zero points for the assignment and appropriate disciplinary action, according to university guidelines.

Students 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.

Student Success Center

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the [Student Success Center](#) 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.

Early Alert System

Eastern maintains an Early Alert System (EAS) to help students know when they are not performing up to academic standards. Alerts may be given for poor attendance, not turning work in on time, or doing poorly on an assignment or test. EAS staff will contact you to help you find resources to help you be a successful student. Resources may include time management, study skills, test-taking, finding tutors, or other resources related to academic issues. I will use the EAS if I believe you could benefit from talking to a success coach about these issues.