Social Psychology
Psychology 2606

Dr. Patrick R. Vann
Office Hours: By Appointment
Phone: 303-440-4080
E-Mail: PRVann@aol.com

Course Philosophy

This course is designed to provide you with the basic tenets of social psychology. Using classic and current research as our primary resources, we shall discuss and analyze "why we do what we do." Social psychology historically has been devoted to understanding "normal" human behaviors. Topics such as attraction, love, aggression, conformity and social cognition are just some of the examples that we will investigate.

Ours is the only century in which human social behavior has not been a major focus of study! We are just beginning to form even the most basic understanding of such topics as aggression, love, belief formation, etc., simply put, our question is age old: WHY DO WE - YOU AND I - BEHAVE THE WAY WE DO???

This class is a small step in trying to answer, or at least speculate, about possible answers to this question. Why do we help vs hurt? Why do we love and hate the same person? Why are certain groups identified for abuse? Our questions have no easy answers, but the joy of the class is in the asking and speculation.

We are looking to provide you with a working proficiency of the knowledge base that is available. We want to be provocative, yet humane. In a sense, the course is the study of who and what we are as social animals.

While our course is comprehensive by design, I don't want to miss out on what is of personal value to each of you. As such, the course is seen as a classic, liberal arts approach to social psychology. Few of you will become social psychologists, but you, hopefully, always remain fascinated by the human condition.

I am very interested in both the theoretical and the applied aspects of the field. With each topic, I will be asking you to apply what you read to your own experiences. What I would hope that you achieve as you leave the course is an increased appreciation for the complexities of human behavior.

Course Structure

Class time will be spent in lecture, discussions, group work, films and guest speakers. It is a lot to try and do in a short period, but I am quite sure it will be both interesting and fun! My teaching style is Socratic in nature. What this means for you is that I shall be asking you numerous questions regarding the readings and other course activities. I firmly believe this is the best single way for me to find out what you know. We have a great deal to learn from each other and the Socratic style is a good way to share that knowledge. Your full participation is expected. I should very much like to know not only what you think, but more importantly, why. Your ongoing involvement in this process is essential to our mutual success.
Course Topics

Typically, social psychology courses have been concerned with topics such as aggression, conformity, self-cognition, persuasion, prejudice, etc. We will be covering these topics, but not in the typical fashion. This term we will look at the aforementioned topics via recent publications on social problems, the idea being to use current literature as a pathway to investigation. As we read, I will be asking you to identify where, when and how the classic issues of social psychology are being demonstrated. For example, if we are reading an article on race relations, it would be quite easy to identify the forms, consequences and ramifications of prejudice.

Consultation

I want to encourage each and every one of you to come into my office at any time throughout the course. If there is anything I might do to enhance your learning, I want to do so. Please feel free to call me so that we might set up a mutually convenient time to meet.

Assessment

There will be three methods of evaluating your work:

First, will be the more traditional combination of objective/short answer/questions format in-class exam.

Second will be a take-home essay exam. I will ask you three essay questions of which you will select only one. This essay question will be broad based - i.e. asking you to show various relationships both across and within the theories.

Third will be a brief four to six page paper on a topic of your choice. The only provision is that this topic MUST be international in flavor. Specifically, I am looking for a compare and contrast style of paper. For example, compare and contrast child rearing practices in a third world country with those of the United States, etc.

Each of the above will constitute 30% of your mark. The remaining 10% will come from your attendance and on-going participation.

N.B. No make-up exams or late papers!

Extra Credit

You will also have the option of extra credit. Throughout the term I will ask you to write a single page reaction to various topics, speakers, films etc. These short reaction papers are completely optional. They will work only in a positive fashion - namely to raise your grade. Not doing the extra credit will not negatively affect your mark in any way. These short papers must be turned in on the last day of class.
Readings for the Week of:

Aug. 26  Introduction to Social Psychology
Sept.  2  Chapter 2     The Self in a Social World
Sept.  9  Chapter 3     Social Beliefs and Judgment
Sept. 16  Chapter 4     Behavior and Attitudes
Sept. 23  Chapter 5     Genes, Culture and Gender

Review of Current Literature for Chapters 2-5

Sept. 30  In-class exam-objective and short essay style.
          ***Please remember no make-up exams or late exams accepted!***

Oct.  7  Chapter 6     Conformity
          (FALL BREAK 10/10-10/11)
Oct. 14  Chapter 7     Persuasion
Oct. 21  Chapter 8     Group Influence
Oct. 28  Chapter 9     Prejudice

Essay Exam Questions Passed Out****

Nov.  4  Chapter 10    Aggression
          Essay Exams Due!!
Nov. 11  Chapter 11    Attraction and Intimacy
Nov. 18  Chapter 12    Altruism
Nov. 25  THANKSGIVING WEEK – No classes
Dec.   2  Current Research Issues in Social Psychology
Dec. 11  All Papers Due – LAST CLASS