

# PSYC 216: Questioning Psychological Science in the Media

Fall 2020, Term 1 (Tues 5-8pm)

Online home: <https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/55971>

Professor: Andrew Rivers  
Student hours: Tues. 5-6pm & Thurs. 7-8am  
on *Collaborate Ultra*  
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**Additional hours always available by request!**

**Email policy:** Please include “PSYC 216” in the subject line. Note that emails may not be answered on weekends.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

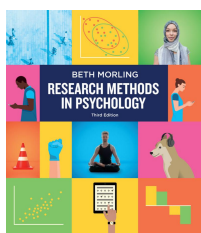
Psychological claims are all around us, but only some are backed by scientific evidence. Throughout this course, you will investigate how research is presented in the media (like in blogs, podcasts, news articles), and will critique it by applying basic principles of psychological research methods. As you become a more skillful consumer of psychological research, you will be able to translate psychological science to help others, and yourself!

## LEARNING GOALS

Over the course of this term, you should expect to:

1. **Evaluate** the validity of psychological claims in the media (or in everyday conversation)
2. **Scrutinize** the evidence being used to support psychological claims
3. **Distinguish** between experimental and non-experimental designs & match them to appropriate psychological claims
4. **Read** empirical scientific journal articles
5. **Construct** accurate summaries of psychological research that are appropriate for a lay audience
6. **Interpret** results presented in graphs and infographics
7. **Contrast** statistical effect size with statistical significance

## TEXTBOOK



The required text for this course is *Research Methods in Psychology: Evaluating a World of Information* (Morling, 2018). All additional readings and media material will be available on the Canvas course website. You will be expected to read, listen to, or watch all additional materials unless otherwise noted.

## LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Learning assessment (i.e., grades) will consist of the following components:

### 1) Piazza Participation

This term will be uniquely challenging in many ways, the most obvious being that we cannot physically be with each other as in a normal term. A discussion board through *Piazza* (accessible through Canvas) is intended to supplement our learning. You first need to sign-up for Piazza here:

[www.piazza.com/ubc.ca/winterterm12020/psyc2160012020w](http://www.piazza.com/ubc.ca/winterterm12020/psyc2160012020w)

Please use access code: **research!**

There are three different ways to contribute on Piazza:

- 1) Media Reflections are personal reflections on one of the 5 assigned media pieces that all students will be expected to read, watch, or listen to and then evaluate based on our knowledge of research methods.
  - A strong reflection note will clearly and correctly evaluate the assigned media piece, and/or underlying research article according to concepts we encounter during class. Although quality is more important than quantity, I expect that a strong response will average between 200-500 words in length.
- 2) Thoughtful or Helpful Replies are ways that we can help each other consider new ways of thinking about psychology in the media. Over the course of the term, you will receive credit for any combination of 20 *thoughtful* or *helpful* replies (see below for details).
  - *Thoughtful* replies inspire further discussion and can be posted in response to another student's media reflection or can be in response to other ongoing discussions about psychology in the media. Congratulating other students on strong media reflections is strongly encouraged, but must also be thoughtful to count! For example, replying "this was well-written" to a fellow student's media reflection is wonderful, but does not count for credit.
  - *Helpful* replies are those which correctly answer a straightforward question posed by a fellow student (e.g., "When are the TAs next office hours?").
- 3) Debunking Posts are meant to act as a culmination of our work this term. Each student will be expected to make one debunking post in which they find a psychological claim in media that is incorrect, and then discuss the reasons why this claim is incorrect.
  - Students should find articles or other media that has not already been 'debunked' in another student's post. You can search *Piazza* for keywords (like the author or title of your media) to see if your media has already been discussed.
  - A strong debunking post 1) clearly summarizes claim(s) made in the media source, 2) discusses limitation(s) of the claim, 3) proposes an alternative (and better!) claim that is justified, and 4) discusses how the audience would react differently to the alternative claim.

### 2) Popular Media Project

The major assignment for the course is your opportunity to describe a psychological concept to a lay audience. In this assignment you'll clearly introduce a psychological concept, summarize research literature, and examine at least two research articles *in-depth*. In doing this, you'll be explicitly evaluating the research methods used by scientists according to what you've learned in class (e.g., reliability, validity, strength of conclusions, and/or potential limitations).

The project may be completed in one of three ways:

- 1) A written paper that is completed individually
- 2) A short podcast (~5-8min) completed either individually or in a small group (2-3 people)
- 3) A short video or narrated presentation (~5-8min) completed either individually or in a small group (2-4 people)

### 3) Midterm Exam

There will be one midterm exam, which will assess understanding of material from lecture, textbook, and supplemental readings. More details about the exam will be announced as the date of the exam approaches.

### 4) Final Exam

The final exam will be *cumulative*, and will assess understanding of material from lecture, textbook, and supplemental readings. More details will be announced as the finals period approaches.

### 5) Participation in Psychological Research (Extra Credit)

Students can earn up to 3% extra credit by participating in accredited psychology experiments at UBC. As an alternative to participating in studies, students can complete writing projects, in which you read and summarize a research article. See the HSP website for detailed information including due dates and submission procedures for the writing projects. To take advantage of this extra credit and learning opportunity, see <https://ubc-psych.sona-systems.com>

GRADING BREAKDOWN		
ASSESSMENT TYPE	Total %	DUE DATE(S)
1) <i>Piazza</i> participation		
• 5 Media Reflections	5%	9/29, 10/13, 10/27, 11/10, 11/24
• 20 Thoughtful/Helpful posts	2%	10 pre-midterm, 10 post-midterm
• 1 Debunking Post	3%	11/24
2) Popular Media Project	25%	12/3
3) Midterm Exam	25%	10/20
4) Final Exam	40%	TBA
5) Participation in Research (HSP)	+3%	Before term end
Total	100% (+3%)	

### BONUS *Oops! Token* (x1)

Even if we are diligent in keeping up with course material and diligent in our planning for the weeks ahead, *sometimes \_\_\_\_\_ happens!* Each student will receive an *Oops! Token* that they can use once during the term. The token may be used in the following ways:

- “Oops, I forgot to complete my *Media Reflection* by the due date!”
  - If you use the *Oops! Token*, you can submit without penalty for 5 days after the due date.
- “Oops, I didn’t make at least 20 thoughtful/helpful posts!”
  - If you use *Oops!*, you’ll receive credit for 5 extra posts.
- “Oops, I didn’t complete the popular media project by the due date!”
  - If you use *Oops!*, you’ll receive an additional 24 hours to submit.
- “Oops, I missed the midterm exam!”
  - If you use *Oops!*, your score on the final exam will count for both exams.
- “Oops, it’s the end of the term and I don’t see any more HSP studies available!”
  - If you use *Oops!*, you’ll receive 1 HSP credit.

**Fine Print:** The *Oops Token!* is a ‘no questions asked’ benefit, you can use it whenever you’d like and for whatever *oops!* might have happened. The *Oops Token!* CANNOT be used for the final exam. Additionally, the *Oops Token!* cannot be used after you have taken the midterm exam.

To use the *Oops Token!*, send an email to Prof. Andrew with “Oops” somewhere in the subject line, and let me know which option above you’d like to use your token for (no reason necessary!)

## GENERAL COURSE POLICIES:

This course will take the form of ‘distance learning.’ Because students are all over the world right now, class will be *asynchronous* – meaning that I will record lecture videos and upload them to our Canvas site. Attendance at announced student hours on *Collaborate Ultra* is not mandatory, but is encouraged.

To complement *asynchronous* lectures, I will hold both morning and evening weekly student hours so that, no matter where in the world you currently are, you’ll be able to meet with me.

**Meetings:** Meetings, either during listed student hours or scheduled via email, are the best way to ask questions about course material. I encourage everyone to take advantage of scheduled student hours and note that I am *\*happy\** to schedule individual meetings with you.

**Lecture Videos & Lecture Notes:** I will record and post lecture videos covering class material. This means that you do not need to be present during our scheduled class times – watch the lectures at your convenience (hopefully in a nice park while you get some sun!). Lecture slides in .pdf form will be posted online alongside the videos. Lecture slides are not meant to substitute for watching lecture videos.

**Psychology Department’s Policy on Grade Scaling:** In order to reduce grade inflation and maintain equity across multiple course sections, all psychology courses are required to comply with departmental norms regarding grade distributions. According to departmental norms, the mean grade in a 200-level class is 72% *for an exceptionally strong class*, 70 *for an average class*, 68% *for a weak class* with a standard deviation of 14 percentage points. Scaling is likely to be used in order to comply with these norms; grades may be scaled up or down as necessary by the professor, department, or school. Therefore, grades are *never* official until they appear on your academic record.

**Note:** A excellent discussion of the rationale for grade scaling by a UBC Psychology professor is available here: <https://www2.psych.ubc.ca/~schaller/scaling.htm>

**Psychology Department’s Policy on Academic Misconduct:** Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic misconduct are very serious concerns of the University, and the Department of Psychology has taken steps to alleviate them. In the first place, the Department has implemented software that can reliably detect cheating on multiple-choice exams by analyzing the patterns of students’ responses. Strong evidence of cheating or plagiarism may result in a zero credit for the work in question. According to the University Act (section 61), the President of UBC has the right to impose harsher penalties including (but not limited to) a failing grade for the course, suspension from the University, cancellation of scholarships, or a notation added to a student’s transcript. All graded work in this course, unless otherwise specified, is to be original work done independently by individuals. If you have any questions as to whether or not what you are doing is even a borderline case of academic misconduct, please consult your instructor. For details on pertinent University policies and procedures, please see Chapter 5 in the UBC Calendar (<http://students.ubc.ca/calendar>) and read the University’s Policy 69 (available at [www.universitycounsel.ubc.ca/policies/policy69.html](http://www.universitycounsel.ubc.ca/policies/policy69.html)).

**Acknowledgements:** I want to cite those who I learned from in creating this syllabus. Portions are inspired by Dr. Kristie Dukewich, Dr. Catherine Rawn & Dr. Grace Truong. Thank you!

## Reach out and ask for help if you need it

*University students often encounter setbacks from time to time that can impact academic performance. If you run into difficulties and need assistance, I encourage you to contact me by email and we can coordinate a meeting (or not if you'd prefer to stick to email). I will do my best to support your success during the term. This includes identifying concerns I may have about your academic progress or wellbeing through Early Alert. With Early Alert, faculty members can connect you with advisors who offer students support and assistance getting back on track to success. Only specialized UBC advisors are able to access any concerns I may identify, and Early Alert does not affect your academic record.*

For more information, visit [www.earlyalert.ubc.ca](http://www.earlyalert.ubc.ca)

For information about addressing mental or physical health concerns, including seeing a UBC counsellor or doctor, visit [students.ubc.ca/livewell](http://students.ubc.ca/livewell)

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## Healthy Lifestyles

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions.

Details of the policies and how to access support are available on [the UBC Senate website](#).

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## Diversity and Inclusion

**Diversity and Inclusion:** Similar to the broader UBC community, the Psychology Department—and this class—seeks to build a community where students feel included and are treated equitably. This class aims to be inclusive of gender identity, gender expression, sex, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, political and religious affiliation, ability, health, and age (this is not an exhaustive list!). Students, instructors, visitors, and readings may sometimes raise controversial and/or sensitive issues. Respectful and productive discussion is encouraged, and students should feel safe to explore ideas without fear of being judged. Our goal is not to always agree, but rather to disagree without being threatening or alienating. However, if a statement or behaviour is likely to offend others or make others feel alienated in any way, it should not be shared with the class (but can be shared with me after class or in student hours). If at any point you feel offended, threatened, or alienated by anything that happens in our class, please feel welcome to let me or a TA know.

<b>Week</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Read</b>	<b>Notes &amp; Due Dates</b>
1	Sept 7-11	Welcome, Syllabus, & Critical Thinking	Ch. 1	- Please ensure you have access to the textbook and review the syllabus
2	Sept 14-18	Sources of Information	Ch. 2	
3	Sept 21-25	3 Claims, 4 Validities	Ch. 3	- We will discuss the <u>Popular Media Project</u> in more detail
4	Sept 28- Oct 2	Data Visualization		- <u>Media Reflection #1</u> due Tuesday (9/29) at 11:59pm
5	Oct 5-8	Ethics in Psychology	Ch. 4	
6	Oct 12-16	Identifying Good Measurement	Ch. 5	- <u>Media Reflection #2</u> due Tuesday (10/13) at 11:59pm
7		Midterm Exam		- <u>Midterm Exam</u> at 5pm on Tuesday (10/20) - At least 10 helpful/thoughtful <i>Piazza</i> posts prior to the midterm
8	Oct 26-30	Surveys	Ch. 6	- <u>Media Reflection #3</u> due Tuesday (10/27) at 11:59pm
9	Nov 2-6	Sampling & Frequency	Ch. 7	- Good time to start looking for an article for your <u>Debunking Post</u> 😊
10	Nov 9-13	Bivariate & Multivariate Research	Ch. 8 & 9	- <u>Media Reflection #4</u> due Tuesday (11/10) at 11:59pm
11	Nov 16-20	Experiments	Ch. 10 & 11	
12	Nov 23-27	Final Project Consultations		- <u>Debunking Post</u> any time before Tuesday (11/24) at 11:59pm - <u>Media Reflection #5</u> due Tuesday (11/24) at 11:59pm
13	Nov 30 – Dec 4	Special Topic		- <u>Popular Media Project</u> due Thursday (12/3) at 11:59pm
-	Dec 7 – 22: <b>FINAL EXAM PERIOD</b>			

