

PSYCHOLOGY 309a
COGNITIVE PROCESSES

Section 001 Winter 2020-21, Term 1, Tu-Th 2:00-3:20

INSTRUCTOR

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The goal of this course is to give you a general introduction to human cognition, or the mental processes that support our perceptions, thoughts, emotions, decisions, and behaviors. However, it is not a course that emphasizes learning about the science of how we study cognition. Rather, it's a course that emphasizes learning how that science helps us to understand what we experiences in our own everyday lives. It's a course that teaches you how to observe your own mind and discover the nuances of how it works. As such, at the end of the course, the successful student should be able to:

1. Understand how the brain helps to reveal the structure and organization of our cognitive processes, and how this organization relates to our normal, everyday experiences.
2. Understand how biases in our cognitive processes impact our thinking, behavior, and decisions.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

The course consists of 12 one-week modules. The first four explore what we can learn about mental processes by studying the problems that arise in different neurological conditions. **The middle four** modules then examine different ways in which our everyday decisions and behaviors are influenced by biases in how our cognitive processes work. **The final four** modules then turn to the cognitive processes that support our abilities to think about other people, including both how they're organized in the brain and how biases in their function impact our social behaviors.

MODULE ORGANIZATION

The overarching goal behind the module organization is to facilitate asynchronous learning while also utilizing the actual assigned lecture time in a way all students can hopefully access, either via attending live or via watching a posted recording. Please note: all time references in the following are with respect to Vancouver time (either Pacific Daylight Time, or after early November, Pacific Standard Time).

Starting Video and Assignment: Posted Sunday evening - Due Tuesday morning

Each module will begin with the posting of a short introductory video on Canvas. This video will be posted on the "Modules" page by Sunday evening, and will include a question that needs to be answered as a graded Assignment (on the "Assignments" page) in Canvas by **8 am Tuesday morning**. The goal of this assignment is to get you thinking critically about a cognitive-related phenomenon, and to prepare for a short lecture on Tuesday. **This assignment will be marked as pass/fail (or 1 point for a pass, 0 points for not completing on time, or showing no evidence of having given the question actual thought).**

Live Lecture: Tuesday afternoon

At the start of class time **on the Tuesday of each week (2 pm)**, I will give a short, live lecture. There are two goals behind this lecture: (1) to present the science behind the weekly assignment, and (2) to prepare you for a short reading assignment that will be assigned later on Tuesday. The class will be given on Canvas, under a link on the "Collaborate Ultra" page, and will be recorded (and available on Collaborate Ultra, under "recordings") for those unable to attend live. **There is no marking for attendance.**

Reading Assignment: Posted Tuesday afternoon/evening

On Tuesday afternoon/evening, I will post a short reading assignment on Canvas (on the "Module" page) that builds on the topic being discussed in the week's module. This may be a research article, a news article, or an article/post drawn from some other on-line/media source. The week's module will end with a quiz (see below) that is based on this reading assignment and how it relates back to issues raised in the module's opening assignment. As such, the goal of this assignment is to extend our understanding of the module's topic by integrating what we read with the opening assignment and Tuesday's class. , but **there will be no marking of whether or not you chose to read the assignment itself; you are quite free to take the Quiz without reading the assignment.**

Live Question and Answer: Thursday afternoon

I will use **Thursday's class time** to hold an open office hour for questions arising from the reading assignment. Again, the class will be given on Canvas, under the Collaborate Ultra page, and will be recorded for those unable to attend live. For those who may have questions but can not attend the live class, we have several options. One is to email me your question by noon that Thursday and I can try to answer during the class. The other is to post it to the course message board on Canvas, where either another student may be kind enough to answer, or I can try to answer there as well (see below for more details regarding how we will use the course message board). **Again, there is no marking for attendance.**

Graded Survey: Posted Friday morning -- Due Saturday morning

On Friday morning at 8 am I will post a graded survey on the Quiz page on Canvas, where I will ask you a simple, open-ended question designed to get feedback on the module's topic. This is not a question to study for, but rather, it's designed to find out what you think about what you've learned -- what questions may have come up for you in the module's material, what you feel you've learned, or even what tweaks we could make to the course organization to improve things for the remainder of the term. **This assignment will be marked as pass/fail (or 1 point for a pass, 0 points for not completing on time, or showing no evidence of having given the question actual thought).**

Quiz: Posted Friday morning -- Due Saturday morning

On Friday morning at 8 am I will also post a 1 or 2 question short-answer quiz, on the "Quiz" page on Canvas. **The quiz will be available until 8 am Saturday, but once you start the quiz, you will only have 15 minutes to finish.** The quiz is open-book, open-note, and open-media. However, answers should reflect your own knowledge and understanding. I ask that you not consult with other students, friends, family members, or tutors while writing the quiz. Any student found to violate these expectations will get a "0" for that quiz. **Each quiz will be marked based on 4 total points possible.**

FINAL QUIZ

There will not be a final exam in this course, but there will be a cumulative final quiz. **This will be given in our assigned time-slot for finals, and will be available for 24 hours from our assigned start time.** As this will be a quiz, however, **once you start you will only have 45 minutes to finish.** Like the quiz given in each module, the final quiz is open-book, open-note, and open-media, but (1) answers should reflect your own knowledge and understanding, (2) I ask that you not consult with other students, friends, family members, or tutors while writing the quiz, and (3) any student found to violate these expectations will get a "0." **This quiz will be marked based on 12 total points possible.**

MISSED ASSIGNMENTS AND QUIZZES

This course is designed to allow maximum flexibility in when assignments and quizzes are taken. As such, **only under exceptional circumstances, and only when those circumstances are conveyed in a timely and responsible manner to the instructor, will any make-up opportunities be considered.** What the make-up consists of will be at the discretion of the instructor, with the understanding that to keep things fair for all students, most delays in taking assignments and quizzes typically warrant **a more rigorous assessment** of student knowledge.

TERM MARKS

Marks for the term will be based on **a total of 84 points** (12 assignments x 1 point each, 12 graded surveys x 1 point each, 12 quizzes x 4 points each, and 1 final quiz x 12 points). However, if the

grade distribution for the final course marks fails to meet the Psychology Department's norms, scaling will be applied to final course marks. For details on scaling course marks, please see below.

DEPARTMENT SCALING POLICY

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 for final course marks. According to departmental norms, the mean course mark in a 300-level class is 70 for a good class, 68 for an average class, and 66 for a weak class, with a standard deviation of 13. Final course marks may be scaled up or down as necessary by the professor or department in order to comply with these norms. For official UBC policy on grade scaling, please see: <http://students.ubc.ca/calendar/index.cfm?tree=3,42,96,0>. **However, please note that for Term 1 2020-2021, the Department of Psychology is allowing for a 5-point higher mean than normal.**

CONTACTING THE INSTRUCTOR

To avoid having your emails automatically deleted as spam, the subject header must read "Psych 309." The answers to questions regarding lecture/reading content may often be useful for the entire class to hear. As a consequence, questions may be answered in the live lecture rather than via email. Please also note that while I try to be responsive to student emails, there are limits that must be put in place when dealing with large classes. Unfortunately, in a large lecture course I can not respond to students who generate excessive/frequent emails or who generate long lists of questions, as in the name of fairness it would be impossible for me to provide this level of service to all students. **Finally, in order to promote good problem solving skills, I will deduct 1 point from a student's final course mark for each email question that can be answered by consulting this syllabus, the Department of Psychology web page, and/or the UBC web page.** Examples of such questions would be *When is the next quiz?*, *Where/when is the final?* and *What are the assigned readings for the next exam?*

ACADEMIC CONCESSIONS

Arts Students must contact Arts Advising as soon as you are aware you may need an [in-term concession](#). Please review [their website](#) for concession criteria as well as process to follow. Students in other Faculties should contact their Faculty advising office for direction.

OUTSIDE RESOURCES

If you run into trouble and need information on effective studying, preparing for exams, how to take notes, or manage your academic time, free workshops and advice are available from the Student Resources Center, which can be reached through the School and College Liaison Office at 822-4319. 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 and cultural 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 here: (<https://senate.ubc.ca/policies-resources-support-student-success>)

COURSE SCHEDULE

MODULE 1 : *MINDING THE BRAIN*

A basic introduction to how mental processes are organized in the brain, and what we can learn about cognition through studying the problems that arise in different neurological conditions.

Begins: Week of September 13

MODULE 2 : *TWO WAYS OF SEEING*

It is sometimes said that we see with our brains, not our eyes. Here we look into why this is, and how vision doesn't just allow us to see things, but helps us to reach out to the world around us.

Begins: Week of September 20

MODULE 3 : *USING YOUR WORDS*

Like vision, language also holds some interesting surprises when you look into the brain. This module explores two different sides to using our words, and why we might sometimes use bad ones.

Begins: Week of September 27

MODULE 4 : *IMPOSTERS, PSYCHOPATHS, AND THE BEAUTY OF IT ALL*

We complete our initial tour into the brain by looking at how disorders of emotional processing expose the depths to which emotion indelibly colours much of what we think, decide, and do.

Begins: Week of October 4

MODULE 5 : *THE JOY OF FREE AND HOMEMADE STUFF*

In this module we leave the brain to begin exploring more purely "cognitive" issues, and in particular, biases in how we think. First up — why we like free stuff, and stuff we make ourselves.

Begins: Week of October 11

MODULE 6 : *THE PAIN OF LOSING STUFF*

We continue our tour of cognitive biases by examining how we humans have a particular sensitivity to negative things, especially when it comes to losing (vs. gaining) money and other prized stuff.

Begins: Week of October 18

MODULE 7 : *THE UPSIDE TO NOT THINKING*

A less common way to think about cognitive biases is in terms of thinking itself. Namely, if it can be good to "sleep" on a big decision, why is that? How can not thinking lead to better decisions?

Begins: Week of October 25

MODULE 8 : *THE FEEL OF THINKING*

Sometimes when we're thinking through a test problem it can feel easy, while other times it can feel hard. How do these feelings bias our problem solving and our sense of whether an answer is right?

Begins: Week of November 1

MODULE 9 : *MIRRORS AND MIMICRY*

For the last set of modules our focus turns to social thinking. We begin by returning to the brain and looking at how for us humans, understanding others begins with sensing and moving our own bodies.

Begins: Week of November 8

MODULE 10 : *READING MINDS*

For us humans, to fully understand others is to be able to understand what they think. But how do we go about thinking about other peoples' thoughts, especially when they try to hide them from us?

Begins: Week of November 15

MODULE 11 : *THE HARSH SELF-CRITIC*

Cognitive biases aren't limited to thinking about free stuff, losing stuff, and things like that. We also have biases in thinking about what others think — especially in what we think they think about us.

Begins: Week of November 22

MODULE 12 : *WHY BOSSES DON'T LAUGH*

We finish the term with a second social bias, in this case, how our thinking and behavior is influenced by our relative status within a group. We learn why bosses don't laugh, but their employees do.

Begins: Week of November 29