Principles of Learning  
PSYC 304; Section 001  
Fall, 2000

Instructor: Dr. Merry Sleigh  
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Office Hours: Mon: 1:45-2:15pm  
             Wed: 10:45-11:45am  
             Thu: 1:30-2:00pm  
...and by appointment

Additional reading materials will be distributed throughout the semester during class.

Course Objectives: This course is designed to be an overview of learning principles that guide animal behavior, particularly that of humans. Students will be expected to think critically about recent research findings and theoretical perspectives in the area. Emphasis will be placed on the application of learning principles to everyday life.

Grading: Final grades will be based on a 400 point scale: 280 points will be available in the lecture section of the course, while the remaining 120 points will be earned through participation in lab activities. You must be enrolled in the laboratory section to receive credit for the class.

Lecture section grading:
1) There will be two exams and a final exam, each worth 80 points. Exams will include material covered in class as well as material from the assigned readings. The format will be true/false, multiple-choice, and short answer. The final exam will be cumulative, but heavy emphasis will be placed on the most current material.

2) Students will be required to write two 20 point thought papers. The papers should be 2-3 pages, double-spaced and typed. These papers will require an understanding and application of learning principles. Paper topics and grading guidelines are discussed on pages 3 and 4 of the syllabus.

Note: NO makeup exams will be provided without a legitimate, documented excuse (e.g., grave illness requiring medical attention, court date). Students who know that they will miss an exam must notify the instructor at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled exam. Make-up exams will consist of essay questions. All papers are due at the start of the class on the scheduled date. Late work will be penalized two points for each day beyond the deadline.

Expectations: Class participation and discussion are essential for a complete educational experience. Students should be prepared to discuss topical issues related to textbook and readings. Oral defense of ideas is as important a skill as written presentation.

Extra Credit: Extra credit opportunities will be given throughout the semester during class lecture.

Honor System: The Honor Code of George Mason University will be strictly enforced in this course. It is a student’s responsibility to be familiar with the Honor Code and to abide by it at all times.

Special Needs: If any students have special needs, please see instructor.
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<th>Topic</th>
<th>Chapter(s)</th>
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<td>8/28 - 9/1</td>
<td>Introduction &amp; Research Methods</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
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<td>9/4</td>
<td><em>No Class – Labor Day</em></td>
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<td>9/6 - 9/11</td>
<td>Reflexes &amp; Simple Learning Processes</td>
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<td>9/13</td>
<td><em>Paper #1 Due</em></td>
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<td>9/13 - 9/27</td>
<td>Classical Conditioning</td>
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<td>9/29</td>
<td><strong>EXAM 1</strong> (Chaps. 1 – 4 and additional readings)</td>
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<td>10/2 - 10/13</td>
<td>Instrumental Conditioning</td>
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<td>10/9</td>
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<td>10/16 - 10/23</td>
<td>Schedules &amp; Theories of Reinforcement</td>
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<td>10/25 - 10/30</td>
<td>Reinforcement &amp; Punishment Compared</td>
<td>8, 9</td>
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<td>11/1 - 11/8</td>
<td>Observational/ Social Learning</td>
<td>no chapters</td>
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<td><em>No Class – Instructor Attending Conference</em></td>
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<td>11/6</td>
<td><em>Paper #2 Due</em></td>
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<td>11/10</td>
<td><strong>EXAM 2</strong> (Chaps. 5 – 9 and additional readings)</td>
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<td>11/13 - 11/27</td>
<td>Physiology and Learning: The Interaction Between</td>
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<td>Nervous System and Environment</td>
<td>hand-outs</td>
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<td>11/29 - 12/1</td>
<td>Function of Sleep</td>
<td>no chapters</td>
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<td>11/24</td>
<td><em>No Class - Thanksgiving</em></td>
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<td>12/4 - 12/8</td>
<td>Language &amp; Culture: The Uniqueness of the Human Experience</td>
<td>10, 11, 12</td>
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**FINAL EXAM:** Mon., Dec 18, 7:30 – 10:15 am (Chapters 1 – 12 and additional readings)
Learning Paper Requirements: 40 points
2 required, worth 20 points each

For this assignment, you will be required to write two 2-3 page papers, double-spaced and typed. Please use normal sized font and margins. The papers must be a minimum of two pages in length to receive full credit.

Papers will be graded based on the following: thoughtfulness, organization, support for main ideas, creativity and spelling/grammar. Late papers will be penalized two points for each day beyond the deadline. A paper submitted after the start of class on the assigned date will be considered one day late. Late papers should be placed in my mailbox (Sleigh) in King Hall or submitted during class time. Please do not e-mail papers or slide them under my office door.

The following criteria are intended to give you a framework around which to write your papers. Please use your creativity to turn these criteria into thoughtful, coherent papers. Make clear, logical arguments to support your opinions. The main requirement here is to think about how principles of learning apply to your own experiences. There are no wrong answers, only poorly written papers. Please feel free to contact me if any additional clarification or assistance is needed.

PAPER #1: Due September 13

- Think about three major lessons that you have learned in your lifetime. These life lessons may include skills (such as learning to play an instrument), personal values (such as the importance of education), or guiding philosophies (such as adherence to religious beliefs). The key is that these lessons must have value to you and your life.

- How did you learn about these lessons? What were the emotions, thoughts, and persons involved in the lesson?

- Why were these particular lessons powerful to you? Was it the method of learning or the lesson itself? Why are some methods of learning more powerful than others? In other words, did the emotions and/or persons involved influence how powerful the lesson was for your life?

The point of the paper is to think about different methods of learning and why they are effective or ineffective. The more time you spend choosing your particular lessons, the more meaningful this paper will be to you as we discuss individual learning styles over the course of the class. You do not have to know anything about the principles of learning to write this particular paper. Base your answer on your personal experience. As the class continues, we will explore how your answers match (or don’t match) research findings.
PAPER #2: Due November 6

The objective of this paper is to take a critical look at your own childhood experiences with observational learning, learning that occurred through observing the behavior of others. To this end, think about your interactions with significant persons in your early environment. Think about both their obvious and subtle actions. You may want to ponder some of the following examples that were or were not provided to you:

- level of truthfulness
- interactions with significant others, friends, or extended family
- money management
- coping strategies & emotion management (disappointment, anger, etc.)
- manner in which motivation, initiative, perseverance, cooperation, priorities were modeled
- eating habits/ exercise habits (health & nutrition)
- time management
- gender roles

Everything that an adult does is a potential lesson to a watching child. And, children do not have the ability to justify, rationalize, or comprehend the world the way an adult is able to do. Children are very different organisms than adults in this way. With these thoughts in mind, incorporate the answers to the following question into your paper:

- What did you learn from the adults in your world as a watching child?
- How have the lessons that were modeled for you impacted your own behavior as an adult?
- Did the person modeling the lesson influence how well you learned it?
- Many times adults carefully monitor their obvious actions around children (such as cursing or watching violence), but they forget the impact of the more subtle actions (such as how they handle disappointment or how they respond to friends). How do you feel about the subtle actions that were modeled? Have these subtle learning experiences impacted your adult behavior?

Optional: Service Learning Credit

The Psychology Department offers 1 hour of service learning credit (PSYC 328) that can be earned in conjunction with a 3 credit, upper-level course. The credit is open to declared Psychology majors who have already taken at least 6 hours in Psychology. In order to earn the service learning credit through this course, students must do volunteer work during the semester in a community placement having some association with learning. To ensure that the service learning is appropriate for the course content, all placements must be agreed upon between both the student and the instructor of the course. All students, across various classes, who participate in this process meet regularly throughout the semester to discuss their experiences (beginning immediately). Any Learning student who chooses this option will also be expected to give informal feedback to the instructor and the class. If you are interested in this option, you need to pick up an interest form as soon as possible from Laura Gaither in the Center for Service and Leadership (Johnson Center 240H, 993-2900). The interest form will provide additional details about individual requirements.

Note: No more than 6 hours of credit can be earned in PSYC 327, 328, 421, 422, 548, and 549.
WebCT INFORMATION

This course is connected to WebCT, an internet based, course management tool. Although no formal grading in the course is connected with the use of WebCT, students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity. WebCT offers a way to access course information and to interact with both the instructor and fellow students. In addition, helpful hints, online practice quizzes, or extra credit opportunities may be posted through WebCT over the course of the semester. Look for these features on the bulletin board or as a new icon appearing on the homepage. Students who are not utilizing this system will not have access to these resources.

How to Access WebCT:

The first time you use WebCT, you must enter through the Welcome Page. The Welcome Page for our course can be reached at the following URL: http://webct.gmu.edu:8900/public/PSYC304001F00/index.html

From this page, you will be given the option to create an account and then, to log-in. After logging-in, you will be connected to the homepage for our course.

A second option for accessing the homepage is to go to http://webct.gmu.edu:8900/ and follow the prompts leading you to our Fall, 2000, Principles of Learning (PSYC 304) course. Following this route will cause you to bypass the Welcome Page and will, instead, lead you directly to the homepage. Do not use this option the first time you enter WebCT.

How to Create an Account and Log-in:

The first time you visit the Welcome Page, you should choose the option, CREATE ACCOUNT. At the prompt asking for your user name, type in your first initial and entire last name. For example, my log-in name would be msleight. You will also need to create a password for yourself to protect access to your personal information, such as your course grades. Choose a password, 4-8 characters in length, that you will be able to remember. I will not know your password, so you must remember it!

After you have created the account, you can access your account by choosing the LOG-IN option. To log-in, enter your user name and password to be connected to our homepage.

Examples of Course Features Available Through WebCT (Enjoy!):

Course Materials: The syllabus and paper requirements are available from this website. If you have questions about the date of assignments or the assignments themselves, you may check WebCT at any time.

Bulletin Board Discussion: The bulletin board is a tool which allows students and the instructor to post messages to one another, thereby continuing discussion outside of the classroom setting. Although I will periodically monitor the discussions, I will not be the main participant. The primary goal is to allow you to utilize each other as resources. You may use this forum to ask questions, discuss topical issues, share course-related stories, or create study groups. Posted messages may be read and responded to by any student in the course. All postings should be related to PSYC 304 in some manner. If you have individual questions or concerns that can not be appropriately addressed via the bulletin board, please feel free to contact me directly through e-mail.

Current Course Grade: Following the first exam, course grades will be posted on the website. The grade postings will include all grades earned, including updated extra credit points. Students may check their grades at any time (day or night) through the website.

E-mail the Instructor: You may e-mail me directly from this website.