

# Seminar in General Psychology (Psyc 260, will be Psyc 110) (aka Basic Research Methods in Psychology)

**SYLLABUS --- Spring 2000**  
Monday 12:30pm - 1:20pm

*Prerequisites: This 1-credit course is only offered to freshman or sophomore undergraduate students who are co-enrolled in Psyc 100.*

**Contents:** A seminar exploring applications, implications, methods, and findings of psychology. This newly offered course is meant to stimulate the discussion and the exchange of ideas related to the principles of Psychology within a small-section class (up to 19 people) of psyc students enrolled in Psyc 100 (Introduction to Psychology). The content of the course will roughly parallel that of Psyc100, i.e. it will range from very basic neuroscience (the biology underlying psychology) to consciousness and the "altered states" (e.g. sleeping and dreaming) via development, sensation/perception, language, emotions, learning and memory, just to mention a few subjects. This course is NOT a study guide for Psyc 100, rather a parallel extension that will allow interested students to pursue some of the most fascinating psychological issues in greater depth. In addition, students enrolled in this course will be given the opportunity to interact with the instructor (Dr. Ascoli) as an advisor for one year (Fall 2000 and Spring 2001) after this semester.

**Class Location:** RA-123

**Instructor:** Dr. Giorgio Ascoli

Office location: Krasnow Institute, Rm. 217 ([click here for campus location](#))

Ph. x3-4383, E-mail: [ascoli@gmu.edu](mailto:ascoli@gmu.edu)

**Office Hours:** Monday 1:30pm - 3:30pm or by appointment.

**Texts:** You can either use the textbook adopted for your Psyc100 section, or (as an alternative) J.W. Kalat's "Introduction to Psychology", 5th edition (Brooks/Cole ITP). Internet readings linked to the online handouts will constitute a relevant portion of the study material (content of internet readings WILL be tested in the exams).

**Method of instruction and evaluation:** Weekly 50-minute lectures will have a large component of class interaction. Student attendance and participation is *strongly* encouraged (with questions and discussions during the seminars), and will affect your final grade. "Homework" thought questions are optional and their main purpose is to serve as a means for self-evaluation. If you do turn in your homework answers, I will read them and send feedback to you. There will be a mid-term exam and a final exam. Midterm exam will be an in-class, closed-book, multiple-choice quiz covering the first half of the course. The final will be take-home and in essay format (in the style of thought questions assigned throughout the semester), covering the entire, whole-semester program. Final grades will be based on the following components: class participation 30%; midterm exam: 30%; final exam: 40%. **Important:** I expect all students to be willing/able to use email and internet access (e.g. Netscape or Explorer). All handouts, assignments, and class-related notices WILL BE POSTED on the web at this site: <http://www.krasnow.gmu.edu/ascoli/Teaching/Psyc260/index.htm>

**Class schedule by (approx.) subject: follow links for required reading, thought questions, additional material, etc.**

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#	Date	CLASS TOPIC	Kalat's chapter # * means mandatory	PRE-Required Reading	Additional Online References	Optional thought question ("dire" before next class)
1	Jan 24	Course introduction and overview. The brain and the mind: first and third person perspectives. Materialism and dualism/mysterianism ("No matter what the mind is, never mind what matter is")	1, 2	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ GMU Psy100</li> <li>■ Psyc Dept.</li> <li>■ Dr. Ascoli's Home Page</li> <li>■ <u>Physiology of consciousness</u></li> </ul>	Briefly comment on the sentence "The mind what the brain does Do you (dis)agree? Is this issue related to your interest for Psychology
2	Jan 31	Neuroscience I: The brain and the neurons. Main structures and components (very basic neuroanatomy, cellular morphology). The interactions between the brain, the body, and the external world at the cellular level.	3*	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Adventures in Neuroanatomy!</u></li> <li>2. <u>Types of Neurons</u></li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <u>A glossary for neuroscience</u></li> <li>■ <u>Brain Imaging</u></li> <li>■ <u>The animated brain (need plugins)</u></li> <li>■ <u>Human brain tutorial</u></li> </ul>	What does it mean that certain cognitive functions are localized in certain regions of the brain? Can functions be localized in a single neuron?
3	Feb 7	Neuroscience II: Electric activity and the propagation/processing of information. Excitation and inhibition. Ionic currents, neurotransmitters, synapses, and drugs.	3*	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Action Potential</u></li> <li>2. <u>Synapses</u></li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <u>Neural communication</u></li> <li>■ <u>Neurotransmitters</u></li> <li>■ <u>Addiction's path</u></li> <li>■ <u>NIDA's Drug abuse</u></li> </ul>	Describe some structural and functional aspects of neurons at the cellular and sub-cellular level.
4	Feb 14	Development. Movie (#84) "Child Development" and class discussion. Brain plasticity, maturation, and aging. Damage and recovery.	10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Start smart (article and movie)</u></li> <li>2. <u>Teen brains</u></li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Psychological ages and stages</u></li> <li>• <u>TV and development</u></li> <li>• <u>Infant psychodevelopment</u></li> <li>• <u>NICHD</u></li> </ul>	Summarize your take on the movie shown in class. Describe some related 1st-person experience (if any).
		Sensation and perception. The binding				

5	Feb 21	problem, content & context, and split-brain patients. Visual representations and illusions. Blindsight.				
6	Feb 28	Learning: classical and operant conditioning. Animal models and neuronal correlates. Modification of behavior and "synaptic plasticity".				
7	Mar 6	Memory: implicit and explicit, working and long-term, declarative and operational... In-class examples & "tricks". What is memory after all?				
<i>March 13-19 Spring Recess</i>						
8	Mar 20	Mid-term exam (Classes 1-7). Exam will be in-class, closed-book, multiple choice format.				
9	Mar 27	Language and thought: Animal & human communication: parrots, apes, and human inter-cultural expressions. Abstraction, concepts and symbols.				
10	Apr 3	Consciousness: a modern scientific debate (Dennet, Chalmers, Churchland, Edelman, Penrose etc.). Qualia, self-awareness and higher-order thought ("I know that you know what she knows!").				
11	Apr 10	Motivation and emotions: homeostasis and equilibrium, free-will, stress. What is happiness? Is pain in animals the same as in humans?				
12	Apr 17	Psychological disorders. Excerpts from movies (#22): "The world of abnormal, part 5: Personality disorders" and (#26): "The world				

		of abnormal, part 9: schizophrenia".	
13	Apr 24	Sleep, dream, and altered states. The stages of sleep and "paradoxical" physiology of REM. The world of meditation and lucid dreaming:	
14	May 1	Intense Q&A session; final discussion.	
<i>Exam period (beginning 4:30PM on May 9) May 9-17</i>			