

Principles of Learning

PSYC 304; Section 001 A01

Summer, 2003

Instructor: Dr. Merry Sleigh

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Office Hours: Wed 11:00-11:30am &
available after class each
day by appointment

Text: Domjan (1998) The principles of learning and behavior. (4th ed.) Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole
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: 260 points will be available in the lecture section of the course, while the remaining 140 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 one 20 point thought paper. The paper should be 3-4 pages, double-spaced and typed. Paper topic and grading guidelines are discussed on page 3 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. The paper is 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.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

| <u>Day</u> | <u>Topic</u> | <u>Chapter(s)</u> |
|-------------|---|-------------------|
| 5/19 | Introduction & Foundations of Learning | 1, 2 |
| 5/20 | Simple Learning Processes | 2 |
| 5/21 - 5/22 | Classical Conditioning | 3, 4 |
| 5/22 | Paper #1 Due | |
| 5/26 | <i>No Class – Enjoy Memorial Day!</i> | |
| 5/27 | CC Review & Intro to Instrumental Conditioning | 5 |
| 5/28 | EXAM 1 (Chaps. 1 – 4 and additional readings) | |
| 5/29-6/2 | Instrumental Conditioning | 5 |
| 6/3 | Schedules & Theories of Reinforcement | 6, 7 |
| 6/4 | Reinforcement & Punishment Compared | 8, 9 |
| 6/5 | Observational/ Social Learning | no chapters |
| 6/9 | EXAM 2 (Chaps. 5 – 9 and additional readings) | |
| 6/10-6/11 | Physiology and Learning: The Interaction Between Nervous System and Environment | hand-outs |
| 6/12-6/16 | Language & Culture: The Uniqueness of the Human Experience | 10, 11, 12 |
| 6/17 | Function of Sleep | no chapters |
| 6/18 | <i>No Class - Reading Day</i> | |

FINAL EXAM: Thursday, June 19, 1:30 - 4:15pm (Chapters 1 – 12 and additional readings)

Learning Paper Requirement: 20 points

Due May 22nd

For this assignment, you will be required to write a 3-4 page paper, double-spaced and typed. Please use normal sized font and margins. The paper must be a minimum of three pages in length to receive full credit.

The paper will be graded based on the following: thoughtfulness, organization, support for main ideas, creativity and spelling/grammar. A late paper 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. A late paper should be placed in my mailbox (Sleigh) in King Hall or submitted during class time. Please do not e-mail your paper or slide it under my office door.

The following criteria are intended to give you a framework around which to write your paper. Please use your creativity to turn these criteria into a thoughtful, coherent paper. 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.

- 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.