

RESEARCH METHODS IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY (SOP 4214C)

Fall Term, 2008 Sections 5847 (MW4) & 5848 (MW6)

Meeting Locations: T5&6, Th6 - PSY 130 / MW4 or MW6 – Psy 191 (Computer Lab)

Lab Office Hours: Section 5847 (M4), Section 5848 (M6) – Psy 191 (Computer Lab)

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Section 5848

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Objective: The objective of the course is to provide you with the fundamentals of research methodology that are necessary to prepare you for conducting and evaluating research in social psychology. You are assumed to have a strong intrinsic interest in understanding the rationale, assumptions, advantages, and disadvantages of the methods used by social scientists.

The course covers the methods and techniques that are used in the scientific study of social behavior. Topics fall into three broad, interrelated categories: scientific thinking, research procedures and methodology, and statistical considerations. Under scientific thinking, we will examine the nature of the scientific method and its application to understanding, predicting, and changing human behavior. Biases in knowledge and fallacies in thinking will be examined, along with ways to minimize these problems. We will discuss questions such as: What differentiates science from pseudoscience? Why are people drawn to magical thinking and superstitious beliefs? Is scientific knowledge objective or subjective? Under research procedures and methodology, we will examine specific fundamentals and issues associated with descriptive, correlational, and experimental research. These include such topics as scaling and measurement (e.g., construction of attitude scales), reliability and validity, scientific sampling, experimental design, and research ethics. Finally, under statistical considerations, we will discuss the role and use of statistics in behavioral research, including why research design and statistical analysis are intertwined.

An important component of the course is the lab experience, during which you will get “hands on” knowledge in how to: do library searches for background information, gather data, perform statistical analyses via computer, and write up reports of the research results in APA style. Science is a public endeavor. Researchers write up their work, conforming to normative standards for presenting data, and then submit it for peer review. The lab portion of the course provides experience in how to do so.

TEXTS

Leary, M. R. (2008). *Introduction to behavioral research methods* (5th ed.). New York: Allyn & Bacon.

Stanovich, K. E. (2007). *How to think straight about psychology* (8th ed.). New York: Allyn & Bacon.

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th ed.). (2001). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Leary is the main text and presents the specifics of research methodology. The Stanovich paperback provides an introduction to the critical thinking skills that will help you approach problems in

psychology. It describes, in a very readable fashion, what the scientific method is and how it helps cut through the errors and biases inherent in many of our everyday beliefs. Along the way, it presents theory and research from social psychology to illustrate biases and to show how problems are investigated. It also illustrates why a skeptical attitude is at the heart of the scientific enterprise. The APA Publication Manual is the major style guide for the preparation of papers in psychology, as well as many other disciplines in social science. Lab papers must be prepared in APA style.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The most important knowledge you can acquire in college is to understand how to critically evaluate ideas and get your own answers. In the case of a psychology major interested in social psychology, this involves learning how to interpret and conduct social research. It is expected that you want to learn as much as you can about science and research procedures as they apply to human behavior. Class lectures will cover a limited number of topics in greater detail, as opposed to trying to cover every topic in the texts and producing only a superficial laundry list of information. You are expected to attend class and participate in discussions. Course grades will be based on exam scores, papers, lab work, and attendance/participation (see below).

EXAMS

There will be three exams. Each will cover the relevant lectures and class discussions, plus the chapters below. The exams are not cumulative.

EXAM 1 - Tuesday, September 30

Leary: Chaps 1, 2, 3, 8, 9

Stanovich: Chaps 1-6

EXAM 2 - Tuesday, November 4

Leary: Chaps 9, 12, 13, 4, 5 (pp. 109-126), 15 (pp. 353-377)

Stanovich: Chaps 7-9

EXAM 3 - Tuesday, December 9

Leary: Chaps 5 (pp. 126-141), 6, 7, 10, 11, 14

Stanovich: Chaps 10-12

CLASS LECTURES AND DISCUSSIONS

Class lectures and discussions will focus on the following topics in this tentative order.

1. Scientific Method

Methods of Knowledge; Cognitive Biases; Logical Positivism & Post-Positivism; Logic of Confirmation & Disconfirmation

2. Types of Research Methods: Descriptive, Relational, Experimental

3. Reliability and Validity

4. Logic of Experimental Design

*** EXAM 1 (Tuesday, September 30) ***

5. Quasi-experimental Designs

6. Artifact Problems

7. Self-Report Methods

8. Sampling

*** EXAM 2 (Tuesday, November 4) ***

9. Ethics
 10. Basic Statistics
 11. Statistical Conclusion Validity
Power & Effect Size
 12. Regression and Statistical Control
- *** EXAM 3 (Tuesday, December 9) ***

PAPERS

There will be three required papers. The first will report the results of two simulated studies that will be conducted using “canned” data sets in the laboratory portion of the course. The objectives of Project 1 are to familiarize you with doing data analyses using SPSS (a statistical computer package), organizing and presenting data in a written report, and writing the report in APA style. The second paper will report the results of a study that the class designs in the lab and runs in a field setting. Class members will pool the data they collect, analyze the pooled data set, and write a report of the findings.

The third paper will be a research proposal. It is the type of proposal you would have to write before you could run a senior thesis or, in graduate school, a Master’s thesis or dissertation. Pick a topic in social psychology that interests you and generate a hypothesis (or set of hypotheses) you would like to test. The paper will consist of two key sections: (a) an introduction that reviews the relevant literature, justifies the hypothesis, and explains why it is worth testing, and (b) a method section that describes precisely how you will test your hypothesis. You do not actually have to run the study. Nonetheless, the proposal is a major endeavor in which you will have to do a thorough literature review and apply your knowledge of research methods to the creation of a research project. Your paper will include a title page, abstract, introduction, methods section, reference list, and an appendix that includes all relevant scales, questionnaires, etc. for the proposed research. Consult with the lab instructor and me to help you narrow down the choices, get hints about useful readings, develop your hypotheses, and so forth. You will be asked to decide on a general topic area and get it approved by your lab instructor.

To get an idea of what a research article should look like, look through published articles in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* or *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. These are exemplars for papers, except that you will not have a results section or a discussion section since you will not actually be running your proposed research.

LAB COMPONENT

The lab component of the course provides hands-on experience and relevant research skills. There are five major objectives of the lab.

(1) Learn how to conduct a library search for background information in psychology. When doing a research project, one of the first steps is to find out what prior knowledge exists in the area. This involves doing a library search for prior theory and research.

(2) Learn how to write up a paper in APA (American Psychological Association) style. APA style is the format used by nearly all psychology journals and by many journals in other areas of social science. You will use APA style when writing up papers for the course.

(3) Learn how to perform data analyses using SPSS, one of the more popular statistical packages used in social science. You will be given data and shown how to conduct basic analyses, including calculating descriptive statistics, correlations, regression, t-tests, and ANOVA.

(4) Get hands-on experience in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data.

(5) Get first-hand experience developing a research proposal on a topic of your choice.

GRADING

Exam 1 = 100 points	Final grades will be based on the following distribution:
Exam 2 = 100 points	90% = A
Exam 3 = 100 points	86% = B+
Paper 1 = 80 points	80% = B
Paper 2 = 80 points	76% = C+
Paper 3 = 100 points	70% = C
Attendance & Participation = 20 points	66% = D+
TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE = 580	60% = D
	below 60% = E

Excuses will rarely, if ever, be accepted for missing an exam. If make-up exams are given, they usually will include fill-in-the-blank and essay items as well as multiple-choice items. Depending on the circumstances, the grade on a make-up exam may be lowered by up to the equivalent of 1 full letter grade to compensate for the additional study time. Similarly, if you turn in a late paper, its grade will be reduced to compensate for the additional preparation time.

Regarding accommodations for students with disabilities: Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

ETHICS

In research, as in life generally, ethical principles are of paramount importance. Integrity and fidelity are vital to the scientific enterprise and are core components of APA's ethical code. Students are expected to exhibit exemplary ethical conduct in the course. The University's honesty policy regarding cheating and the use of copyrighted materials will be enforced. The University's honesty policy can be found at: <http://itl.chem.ufl.edu/honor.html>

LAB SCHEDULE

The lab will meet on Wednesday 4th period (section 5847) or Wednesday 6th period (section 5848). Office hours for the lab will be the same period on Mondays (if your lab meets W4, then the office hours are M4; if your lab meets W6, then office hours are M6). During lab office hours, you can ask additional questions, get additional help with lab work, and practice working with SPSS on the computers. The lab instructors will be available during the lab office hours.

In order to write your first paper, you must know how to conduct library searches, learn how to use SPSS for basic data analyses, and learn APA style for presenting your results. You will dive into these topics during the first few lab classes.

Lab Class	Topic
1. Aug 27	Introduction, description of Project 1
2. Sept 3	Project 1; SPSS introduction; APA style
3. Sept 10	Continue work on Project 1; SPSS; APA style
4. Sept 17	Continue work on Project 1; SPSS; APA style
5. Sept 24	Continue work on Project 1; SPSS; APA style
6. Oct 1	Continue work on Project 1; SPSS; APA style
7. Oct 8	Project 1 due. Overview of Project 2.
8. Oct 15	Continue work on Project 2.
9. Oct 22	Continue work on Project 2.
10. Oct 29	Continue work on Project 2.
11. Nov 5	Project 2 due. Discuss Project 3.
12. Nov 12	Continue work on Project 3.
13. Nov 19	Continue work on Project 3.
14. Nov 26	Continue work on Project 3.
15. Dec 3	Project 3 due.

No Class on December 10