

## **ADVANCED RESEARCH METHODS IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY (SOP 6219C)**

Fall 2007

Class Times: TR 6-7 Periods

Location: T: PSY 230; R: PSY 130

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Office Hours: TR 8 & by appointment

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

*Objective:* The objective of the course is to provide graduate students with the fundamentals of research methodology that are necessary to prepare them for independent careers in social psychological research. Students are assumed to have a strong intrinsic interest in understanding the rationale, assumptions, advantages, and disadvantages of the methods used by social psychologists. It also is assumed that you have had undergraduate courses in research methods and statistics.

Course 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 influencing human behavior. In this context, we will discuss the philosophy of science, including such topics as scientific explanation, determinism and causality, and objective vs. subjective aspects of science. 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 of statistics in behavioral research.

### **Required Readings**

#### **Texts:**

Whitley, B. E., Jr. (2002). *Principles of research in behavioral science* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Abelson, R. P. (1995). *Statistics as principled argument*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum.

Whitley is the primary textbook for the course. It provides a graduate-level treatment of methodological fundamentals in social psychology. Abelson offers an excellent discussion of the role of statistics in behavioral research.

In addition, specific days will include the discussion of central topics and debates. The readings on these occasions will consist of articles that explore specific issues that have enduring, often controversial, importance.

#### **Articles:**

Is social psychology a science?

Gergen, K. J. (1973). Social psychology as history. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26, 309-320.

Schlenker, B. R. (1974). Social psychology and science. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 29, 1-15.

What kind of science should social psychology be?

Rozin, P. (2001). Social psychology and science: Some lessons from Solomon Asch.

*Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5, 2-14.

Branden, N. (1996). *Taking responsibility: Self-reliance and the accountable life*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (Chapter 2, freedom & responsibility)

Moderators vs. Mediators: How to Tell Them Apart

Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 1173-1182.

If you are interested in further information, check out these sites:

Dave Kenny's web page on mediation: <http://davidakenny.net/cm/mediate.htm>  
<http://www.psych.ku.edu/preacher/sobel/sobel.htm> (Sobel test for mediation effects)  
[www.public.asu.edu/~davidpm/ripl/mediate.htm](http://www.public.asu.edu/~davidpm/ripl/mediate.htm)

Spencer, S. J., Zanna, M. P., & Fong, G. T. (2005). Establishing a causal chain: Why experiments are often more effective than mediational analyses in examining psychological processes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 89, 845-851.

External Validity

Anderson, C. A., Lindsay, J. G., & Bushman, B. J. (1999). Research in the psychological laboratory: Truth or triviality? *Current Directions in Psychological Research*, 8, 3-9.

Sears, D. O. (1986). College sophomores in the laboratory: Influences of a narrow data base on psychology's view of human nature. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 515-530.

Using Self-Report Measures: A Cautionary Tale

Schwartz, N. (1999). Self-reports: How the questions shape the answers. *American Psychologist*, 54, 93-105.

Research Writing

Sternberg, R. J. (1992). How to win acceptances by psychology journals: 21 tips for better writing. *APS Observer*, 5, 12-14.

Bem, D. (1987). Writing the empirical journal article. In M. P. Zanna & J. M. Darley (Eds.) *The compleat academic* (pp. 171-201). New York: Random House.

Kerr, N. L. (1998). HARKing: Hypothesizing after the results are known. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 2, 196-217.

## Grading

Your grade will be based on two elements: (1) Class contributions, including your participation in class discussions, and (2) your performance on three exams. The exams are scheduled for Tuesday, September 25 (Exam 1), Tuesday, October 30 (Exam 2), and Tuesday, December 4 (Exam 3). More information will be provided about these as we go along.

Class attendance is expected. It goes without saying that the class contribution component of your grade takes a big hit if you miss class. I'll be glad to provide personal feedback about the class contribution component of your grade as we go along. If you have any questions about it, please feel free to talk to me.

## Class Topics

Class time will be devoted to the discussion of a limited number of specific topics. Class coverage must

be selective, because we cannot possibly cover in class all of the material in the texts during the semester. You are responsible for mastering the material in the texts, regardless of whether we talk about a specific topic in class.

I will try to cover as much as possible during the semester, but I would rather explore a smaller number of topics more fully than skim through volumes of information that merely regurgitates the text. Nonetheless, if you have any questions about material in the text, please ask them during or after class. Or, if you read about a topic that you would like to cover during class and you think might not be on the coverage list (or we already passed it over), please let me know. The topics are flexible and can be modified based on class interests.

Here is the tentative list of topics.

1. Scientific Method
2. Philosophy of Science
  - Positions on Science (Positivism, Post-positivism, & more)
  - Interplay: Theories and Data
  - What Makes a Good Theory?
3. Types of Research
4. Measurement, Reliability, and Validity
5. Correlation, Regression, and Statistical Control
- EXAM 1
6. Structure & Logic of Experimental Designs – Experimental Control
  - Experimental validities and threats to validity
  - Interrelationships between design and statistics
7. Quasi-Experimental Designs
8. Social Psychology of Behavioral Research
- EXAM 2
9. Observational Methods
10. Self-Report Methods
11. External Validity
12. Sampling
13. Ethics
14. Writing
- EXAM 3

## **Readings for the Exams**

### **Exam 1**

Whitley: Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 8

Readings: Social Psychology as Science or History (Schlenker / Gergen)

What Form Should Social Psychology Be? (Rozin / Branden)

Mediation and Moderation (Baron & Kenny / Spencer, Zanna, & Fong)

### **Exam 2**

Whitley: Chapters 6, 7, 9, 10, 13

Abelson: Chapters 1-6

### **Exam 3**

Whitley: Chapters 3, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18

Abelson: Chapters 7-9

Readings: External Validity (Sears / Anderson, Lindsay, & Bush)

Self-Reports (Schwartz)

Writing in Psychology (Sternberg / Bem / Kerr)

Note for Exam 3: You should read chapters 15, 16, 17, and 18 in Whitley, but these will receive relatively less attention than the other chapters.