

**PSY 458 Learning
Syllabus
Fall, 2008**

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Office Hours: Mon: 9-10 am
2-3 pm
Tues: 9-10 am
Wed: 2-3 pm
Thurs: 1-2 pm

Course Description

- PSY 458 examines the theoretical and philosophical foundations of the experimental analysis of behavior. Additionally, PSY 458 examines the principles of classical and operant conditioning including aversive control of behavior through punishment and avoidance learning, and the theoretical basis for behavior therapy techniques and applications of learning principles in education and health settings. 4 seminars. Prerequisite: PSY 201 or PSY 202 or equivalent, junior standing.

Course Objectives

- PSY 458 enables students to learn about the branch of psychology that deals with how people and animals learn, and how their behaviors are later changed as a result of this learning. Because the psychology of learning is such a broad topic, and nearly all of our behaviors are influenced by prior learning experiences in some way, the course will concentrate on providing an understanding of the general principles applicable to many different species and many different learning situations. Specifically, PSY 458 focuses on
 - The nature of scientific theories of learning,
 - Behavioral and cognitive approaches to learning,
 - Early theories about the association of ideas and the physiological facts and theories related to associationism,
 - Innate behavior patterns and habituation,
 - Basic principles of classical conditioning,
 - Classical conditioning as it is used in therapy,
 - Theories and research on classical conditioning including types of associations, biological constraints on classical conditioning, the form of the conditioned response, and physiological research on classical conditioning,
 - Basic principles of operant conditioning,
 - Research of B. F. Skinner,
 - Biological constraints on operant conditioning,
 - Reinforcement schedules,
 - Functional analysis of behavior and real-life applications,
 - Avoidance and escape learning,
 - Learned helplessness,
 - Behavior decelerators in behavior therapy,
 - Theories and research in operant conditioning including the role of the reinforcer,
 - Introduction to behavioral economics,

- Theories of imitation, and observational learning,
- Media violence and aggressive behavior,
- Modeling in behavioral therapy.

Required Text

- *Learning and Behavior*, written by James E. Mazur. Sixth Edition. Pearson/Prentice Hall. 2006.

“Because examples of learning and learned behaviors are so numerous, the goal of most psychologists in this field has been to discover general principles that are applicable to many different species and many different learning situations. What continues to impress and inspire me after many years in this field is that it is indeed possible to make such general statements about learning and behavior. This book describes some of the most important principles, theories, controversies, and experiments that have been produced by this branch of psychology in its first century.” [Mazur, pg. xv]

Recommended Readings:

- In addition to the text, there are several articles that I recommend that you read. Opportunities for extra credit will be provided to you on each test regarding these readings. In some cases, these articles are the original articles written by a famous scientist, e.g. B. F. Skinner, and in other cases they may be about someone famous, e.g. Ivan Pavlov. The articles will be available on the web site, "Classics in the History of Psychology" at <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/> and you can download them into your computer. Sometimes I'm asked by students as to what *in* the article should they concentrate on. My answer is that you should ask yourself “what are the main points of the article: What themes emerge?” “What evidence is the author using to support his/her argument?” If the article describes an experiment that is critical to these questions, you should be able to describe it and its results.

Evaluation

- **Exams:** Evaluation of your performance will include two mid-term exams and a final exam. Each test will cover lecture material, material from the text, and material from the assigned readings. To help you study for the exams, there will be learning objectives to cover the material from the text. My policy on learning objectives is if there is material in the text that is NOT covered by a learning objective, you are not responsible for it and it will NOT be on the test.

The two mid-term exams will be multiple choice and short answer. There will be no make-up exams unless a legitimate and emergency excuse is presented. The make-up exam may or may not be of a different format (short-answer/essay).

I have made up some sample tests that reflect the kinds of questions that may be on the exams. There is a sample test for each of the midterm exams and the final exam. You can find the sample tests on the PSY 458 web site which you will be able to access through blackboard.

The final exam will be a combination of multiple-choice, short answer, and essay. The multiple choice and short answer questions will only be based on the last third of the

course. The essay question, however, will be designed to require you to access material that you have learned throughout the quarter, whether from lectures or the textbook.

- **Paper:** Guidelines for the paper can be found on the PSY 458 web page. The paper should be between 5-6 pages, no longer and no shorter, double-spaced, typed with 12-point font and a title page (not counted as part of the 5-6 required pages). I would recommend that you follow APA style format.
- **Class Participation:** While I do not require you to attend class (I will not be taking role except for the first day), your participation helps make the class more enjoyable for all as well as contributing to your learning experience. While most, if not all, of the lectures will be presented via PowerPoint, I encourage discussion and questions. There may be occasions for small group discussions as well.

Test 1	25%	70 points
Test 2	25%	70 points
Final	25%	70 points
Paper	25%	70 points
Total	100%	280 points

Grading

- I grade on a criterion/modified curve system of grading. What that means is that I adopt a maximum cutoff of 90% and above for an A grade, 80-89% for a B, 70-79% for a C, 60-69% for a D, and below 60% is an F. If you earn 90% or over on a test, you earn an A on that test. This is true regardless of how many in the class earn 90% or over on the test. The advantage to you is that you know before taking the test what you need to do to score an A on the test. However, if, when grading the test, I decide that I should lower the cutoff, for example, for an A grade, lower it from 90% to perhaps 88%, then that means that anyone achieving 88% or more of the total possible points on the test will receive an A grade. This is true for a B, C, D, or F grade as well. [The reasons why I might decide to lower the cutoffs are usually because after grading the test I find the cutoffs result in a skewed distribution of grades ((e.g. no one in the class got over 90% and I, therefore, judge the test as too difficult).]

To determine the course grade, I simply add up the points you've earned throughout the quarter and see where you fall in the distribution listed below. However, you should keep in mind that the percentage distribution below assumes that the cutoffs for the tests were all using the default cutoffs of 90% for an A, 80% for a B, 70% for a C, 60% for a D, and below 60% for an F. In reality, the cutoffs for the course grade might be somewhat lower, depending on whether, for one or more of the tests, the cutoffs were lowered, as I discussed above. In that case, I take an average of the cutoffs used for all three tests.

93 - 100%	A	73 - 76.5%	C
90 - 92.5%	A-	70 - 72.5%	C-
87 - 89.5%	B+	67 - 69.5%	D+
83 - 86.5%	B	63 - 66.5%	D
80 - 82.5%	B-	60 - 62.5%	D-
77 - 79.5%	C+	Below 60%	F

Class Outline

Week of	Topic	Textbook	Recommended Reading
Sept. 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ History of the Psychology of Learning ➤ Behaviorism 	Chapter 1 Chapter 2	1. <i>Watson</i>
Sept. 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Innate Behavior & Habituation ➤ Basic Principles of Classical Conditioning 	Chapter 3 Chapter 4	2. <i>Watson & Raynor</i>
Oct. 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Basic Principles of Classical Conditioning 	Chapter 4	3. <i>Jones</i>
Oct. 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mid-term Exam 1: Wed. Oct. 15 	Ch. 1, 2, 3, 4,	1, 2, & 3
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Theories of Classical Conditioning 	Chapter 5	
Oct. 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Theories of Classical Conditioning ➤ Basic Principles of Operant Conditioning 	Chapter 5 Chapter 6	
Oct. 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Basic Principles of Operant Conditioning ➤ Reinforcement Schedules 	Chapter 6 Chapter 7	4. <i>Breland & Breland</i>
Nov. 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mid-term Exam 2: Wed. Nov. 5 	Ch. 5, 6, 7	4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Avoidance & Punishment 	Chapter 8	
Nov. 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Avoidance & Punishment ➤ Theories of Operant Conditioning 	Chapter 8 Chapter 9	6. <i>Skinner</i>
Nov. 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Theories of Operant Conditioning 	Chapter 9	
Nov. 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Theories of Operant Conditioning ➤ HOLIDAY: Thanksgiving 	Chapter 9	
Dec. 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Observational Learning ➤ PAPER DUE: DEC. 3 	Chapter 12	
Dec. 8: Final Exams Week	Final Exam: Monday, Dec. 8, 4:10-7 pm	Ch. 8, 9, 12	6