

# Psy 410F-A: Capstone Seminar on the Self

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Office hours: Tuesdays 3:30-4:30 p.m., and by appointment

Class meets: 134 Psychology Building on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:15-3:30 p.m.

All course materials are available on niihka (<http://niihka.muohio.edu/portal>).

## Course overview

In this capstone, we will explore the insights provided by psychology in understanding “the self.” Reflecting on the self is one of the oldest lines of human inquiry, spanning many diverse disciplines ranging from philosophy to religion to art to literature. Recently, psychologists have examined the self, using the lens of the scientific method, to sketch out theory and build empirical findings that shed light on many important issues. In this capstone, we will begin with the insights provided by social psychologists, but we will draw heavily on other subdisciplines including cognitive, developmental, cultural, and clinical psychology.

This capstone seminar will probably be very different than most other courses students have taken. The expectations for student preparation and participation are considerable, but students will have great flexibility in tailoring psychological principles to understand their social world and themselves as individuals.

Some unique features of this capstone seminar...

- There are no textbooks or popular books in this course. Instead, we will read, discuss, critique, and expand on 22 key scientific readings, some of which are “classics” and others that represent cutting-edge, state-of-the-art work in psychology on understanding the self.
- The bulk of the course will be student-led discussions and analyses of class readings, not lectures. In each class, the professor will introduce new material relevant to course readings and discussion, but the integration of this material will occur in response to class discussions, not drive class discussions.
- Because success in this course hinges on student preparation and involvement, course participation is an important component of student evaluations. To encourage timely reading and reflection, “pop quizzes” will be given periodically at the very beginning of class to reward student reading and preparation.
- Two all-essay exams will be administered during the term. The exams will not only evaluate mastery of class concepts and readings, but they will assess active integration and synthesis across topics. In other words, students will not only need to understand a particular topic well, but identify connections and differences between and among topics discussed in class and in the readings.
- In addition to developing an understanding of course material from an abstract and academic perspective, students will also conduct their own self improvement project during the semester. Throughout the semester, students will integrate and apply course materials and concepts to working on something they wish to change and improve about themselves. Students will periodically report on their self-project through written means and an oral presentation at the end of the semester to the class.
- Because the oral presentations in the final week of classes represent the culmination of course-relevant activities, there is no final exam.

## Grades

| Source   | Points             |
|--|--------------------|
| Two exams (250 points each)                        | 500 points         |
| Two self-project written reports (100 points each) | 200 points         |
| Oral presentation of the self-project              | 100 points         |
| Class participation (5 points each, 22 days)       | 110 points         |
| Pop reading quizzes (10 points each, 14 quizzes)   | 140 points         |
| <b>Total Points</b>                                | <b>1050 points</b> |

Final grades will be determined by total points accumulated during the semester applied to this scale:

| Points     | Percent    | Grade |
|------------|------------|-------|
| 925 - 1050 | 93% - 105% | A     |
| 895 - 924  | 90% - 92%  | A-    |
| 865 - 894  | 87% - 89%  | B+    |
| 825 - 864  | 83% - 86%  | B     |
| 795 - 824  | 80% - 82%  | B-    |
| 765 - 794  | 77% - 79%  | C+    |
| 725 - 764  | 73% - 76%  | C     |
| 695 - 724  | 70% - 72%  | C-    |
| 665 - 694  | 67% - 69%  | D+    |
| 625 - 664  | 63% - 66%  | D     |
| 595 - 624  | 60% - 62%  | D-    |
| 0 - 594    | 0% - 59%   | F     |

The professor reserves the right to adjust the grading scale. If modifications occur, changes will only make it easier for students to get a better grade (i.e., the scale will never be adjusted against students). However, it would be unwise to anticipate that an adjustment will occur. Final grades are based on the final number of points earned as applied to the above grading scale, no exceptions. There is no end-of-semester negotiation period where students plea and barter for a better grade in the class. If students are dissatisfied with their performance in the class, discuss the situation with the professor early. Don't wait until it's too late.

## Exams

Two exams (essay and short answer) will be administered during the course. Each exam will only cover the material presented since the previous exam (i.e., they are not cumulative). Also, there is no final exam. The exams will focus primarily on the readings, course discussions, and additional content presented by the professor. Although the exam material will primarily reflect what is discussed in class, reading material that is assigned but not discussed in class is fair game. However, exams will *never* assess trivial aspects of the readings. The primary purpose of the exams is to assess how well students are learning and integrating the readings and class discussions. Their focus is on research findings and theories more so than on applications.

## The Self-project

During the semester, each student will maintain an on-going self-project. These projects are individual projects (i.e., they are not group projects), and they must be conducted individually. Each student must identify a topic for self-understanding and self-improvement (e.g., community service, exercise regimen, reduction in swearing, saving money) that can be monitored on a weekly basis. The purpose of the self-project is to provide a work-in-progress where students *apply* theory and findings from the course to a concrete, self-relevant situation. Students are expected to pick a project that is meaningful and important to them, and they should select a project that they feel comfortable discussing with others because they will report on their project in two written reports to the professor and in one oral presentation to the entire class. When students choose a topic, they assume any responsibility for potential embarrassment or self-focused attention that their project brings to them. The instructor must approve the topic by Tuesday, August 30. Projects that are deemed immoral, illegal, unsafe, or distasteful will not be approved (at the instructor's discretion). Each project must have a quantifiable goal and an objectively-measurable weekly state (e.g., a student may want to build to a goal of running 20 miles a week by the end of the semester, and one can measure the number of miles one runs).

Twice during the semester, students will prepare written reports (each 3-4 pages, double-spaced, normal fonts and margins) that present an account of their semester-to-date monitoring and an analysis of how concepts discussed in class since the last report are being applied to the self-project. In other words, students are to look for ways to integrate theories and research findings discussed in class toward their self-project goal, and discuss how they have applied them to their self-project. These reports are submitted on-line (details will be provided later in the semester), and they are subject to a 10% penalty for each day they are late. During the last week of the semester, each student will present a short (approximately 6-8 minute) oral presentation about their project, summarize the monitoring of the behavior, explain how principles covered in the course were employed in the project, and discuss the project's overall success. When self-projects are successful, the student will provide an analysis of what made it a success. When self-projects are unsuccessful, the student will provide an analysis for why the project failed and what could have led to a more successful outcome.

## Quizzes

During the course of the semester, short pop quizzes (14 total) on assigned readings will be administered to reward students for keeping up with their readings. They will not be difficult. If students complete their readings, this will be the easiest 11% of the grade. They will be administered at the very beginning of class. If students are late to class or miss class, they cannot make them up (even with a documented excuse).

## Class participation

Class participation and attendance will be assessed each class for which there is a reading assignment. Missing class will cost students 5 points per day (even if the absence is excused). Students who habitually say nothing will lose points even if they attend class (they will receive a warning from the instructor to speak up). Because much of this class is discussion oriented, participating is essential.

## Academic integrity

Both Miami University and the Department of Psychology are dedicated to providing a learning environment based not only on academic excellence but on academic integrity as well. In this course, it is expected that students will adhere to all Miami University guidelines regarding academic misconduct (see Chapter 5 of the *Miami Student Handbook: Academic Integrity* for details). Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to:

- Submitting work (homework, papers, etc.) conducted for another course without professor approval
- Submitting the work of another individual or party (whether in part or in whole) as one's own
- Possessing prohibited materials during a test or quiz
- Providing or receiving assistance from another student without the professor's permission.

Engaging in academic misconduct can result in penalties ranging from a *minimum* of an F on the assignment to an F in the course, an "AD" signifying academic dishonesty on Miami transcripts, academic suspension, and expulsion from Miami University. Misunderstanding of appropriate academic conduct will not be accepted as an excuse for academic misconduct (see *Miami Student Handbook*, Chapter 5, Section 1.5.A). Any evidence of academic misconduct by a group of students will be considered academic misconduct by all parties involved. The professor has *zero tolerance* for academic misconduct and will pursue every avenue of punishment available. Please see the professor for clarification regarding any of these policies. Students are also encouraged to meet with the professor if they suspect another student in the course has engaged in academic misconduct.

## Class policies

**Assignments:** Assignment due dates are posted in the syllabus. The professor reserves the right to alter the syllabus at any time as warranted. However, the professor will make such revisions at least one week ahead of a particular due date if it entails making assignments due at an earlier (rather than a later) date. Any alterations will be announced in class. Although such modifications will be communicated in advance, it is the student's responsibility to attend to these announcements. Students assume complete responsibility for missing alterations to the course.

**Special considerations:** In situations where special and documented circumstances require that a student not take an exam during a scheduled time (e.g., arrangements for students with learning disabilities, an official university obligation during class time, religious observances), special arrangements can be made with the professor. However, students must make these arrangements with the professor at the beginning of the semester and provide documentation regarding the circumstances. Students who fail in their responsibilities accept the consequences (e.g., fail a missed exam).

**Classroom conduct:** While in class, people are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful and civil manner. Students are encouraged to express their opinions and beliefs. It is quite another thing, however, to be disrespectful or rude to students or to the professor. It is fine to disagree with others and to express non-PC (politically correct) or non-mainstream views. However, bigotry and disrespect is unacceptable.

Relatedly, disruptive conduct (e.g., distracting laptop use, conversations during class) is unacceptable and students who disrupt class (either for their fellow students or for the professor) will be asked to leave class. Students who want to spend classroom time reading the paper, Facebooking, watching movies, playing videogames, talking to friends, or sleeping should stay at home.

*Course materials, recordings, and legal disclaimers:* Attending class, obtaining readings, and taking notes are each student's responsibility. The professor does not lend out notes or course-related materials under any circumstances. The professor is very happy to meet with students to discuss class content, but he will not reconstruct what took place in class. Students should ask classmates to borrow their notes to catch up.

The content of this course is the intellectual property of the professor and is covered by copyright law. The exams and handouts in this class are copyrighted. Any sale, reproduction, or retransmission of course-related materials (including exams or exam questions) is a violation of U.S. Copyright Law, and any parties (students or commercial enterprises) involved in such activities are subject to both criminal and civil prosecution. Students are allowed to provide or lend notes to fellow students, provided they do not financially profit from doing so. The commercialization of class notes, however, is strictly prohibited.

The professor provides students with the right to record the audio content of class for personal study purposes only. Students do not have the right to retransmit, post, share, or disseminate such recordings (e.g., upload to YouTube) without the professor's express approval. At no time is any student allowed to videotape or capture video content or images from class. Violating these policies will result in a student receiving a failing grade in the class and may subject the student to criminal and civil prosecution from the professor for copyright violation and from fellow students for violations of personal privacy.

*Exams and make-ups:* There are no make-ups for missing an exam for an unexcused reason. An unexcused absence is considered to be an absence where a student (1) did not obtain prior permission from the professor concerning the absence or (2) did not provide documented evidence justifying the absence. Valid documented evidence can be one of three things: (1) a signed note from a health care professional stating that the student was sick and unable to attend class, (2) a letter from a funeral home or clergy on their letterhead indicating that one attended a memorial service, or (3) a letter from the dean supporting one's absence. There are no exceptions to this policy. If students miss an exam, contact the professor as soon as possible to let him know about the situation, and use *multiple* methods, including e-mail and phoning.

*Reading pop quizzes:* Periodically, unannounced reading quizzes will be administered at the beginning of class. These quizzes will be brief (i.e., 2-3 sentence answers) and cover very basic aspects of the readings assigned for that day. Pop quizzes are graded as all or nothing (i.e., no partial credit) and will be returned to students at the next class session. Students who miss class (even for an excused reason) or arrive late for class cannot make up quizzes. Each quiz is less than 1% of the total points, so missing any particular quiz will have little impact on one's overall grade (missing several, on the other hand, will have a greater impact).

*Class participation:* Students are expected to actively participate in each and every class. For each of the 22 classes where there is a reading assignment, class participation will be assessed by the professor in an all or nothing fashion. Class participation points cannot be made up if students miss class (even if for an excused reason -- you cannot participate in class if you are not in class).

*Incompletes:* Except for cases of documented medical or family emergencies, incompletes will not be given. There is no need for students to do badly in this class: the professor will be available for meetings during office hours or by appointment, and he will answer e-mail questions promptly. Moreover, there are 50 "extra" points available to students (i.e., 1050 points total, but the grading scale is based on 1000 points), giving students "bonus points." Deadlines for dropping classes and withdrawals are provided in the General Bulletin and the Academic Calendar information published by the Office of the Registrar. Students who miss or neglect these deadlines assume responsibility for the consequences. For more details, consult Miami's official publications regarding deadlines and university policies.

## Semester schedule

Assignments are due on the day listed. Readings are PDFs available on niihka, listed by authors. Self-project reports are to be submitted on-line, and must be turned in no later than 3:30 p.m. on the day listed below. Students may (and are encouraged) to turn in written reports early (note there is no class on these days).

|         |                  |                        |   |   |
|---------|------------------|------------------------|---|---|
| Week 1  | Tu<br>Th         | 8/23<br>8/25           | Introduction to class<br>Introduction to the self   | McConnell et al. (in press)                           |
| Week 2  | Tu<br>Th         | 8/30<br>9/1            | Introspection<br>Automaticity   | Nisbett & Wilson (1977)<br>Bargh & Chartrand (1999)   |
| Week 3  | Tu<br>Th         | 9/6<br>9/8             | Self-perception<br>Cognitive dissonance   | Dutton & Aron (1974)<br>Comer & Laird (1975)          |
| Week 4  | Tu<br>Th         | 9/13<br>9/15           | Hypocrisy and self-affirmation<br>Salience of the self  | Fried & Aronson (1995)<br>Gilovich et al. (2000)      |
| Week 5  | Tu<br>Th         | 9/20<br>9/22           | Self-awareness<br>Social comparison   | Hull et al. (1983)<br>Mussweiler et al. (2004)        |
| Week 6  | Tu<br>Th         | 9/27<br>9/29           | Goals<br>Self-control   | Fitzsimons & Bargh (2004)<br>Vohs & Heatherton (2000) |
| Week 7  | <b>Tu<br/>Th</b> | <b>10/4<br/>10/6</b>   | <b>Exam I<br/>No class (work on self-project report)</b>  |   |
| Week 8  | <b>Tu<br/>Th</b> | <b>10/11<br/>10/13</b> | <b>No class (work on self-project report)<br/>Self-Project Report #1 due (no class, submit on-line)</b> |   |
| Week 9  | Tu<br>Th         | 10/18<br>10/20         | Self-concept representation<br>Self-discrepancies   | McConnell et al. (2009)<br>Higgins (1997)             |
| Week 10 | Tu<br>Th         | 10/25<br>10/27         | Implicit theories<br>Perceptions of control   | Renaud & McConnell (2007)<br>Langer (1975)            |
| Week 11 | Tu<br>Th         | 11/1<br>11/3           | Self-esteem<br>Positive illusions   | Cialdini et al. (1976)<br>Taylor & Brown (1988)       |
| Week 12 | Tu<br>Th         | 11/8<br>11/10          | Self-handicapping<br>Group associations   | Hirt et al. (1991)<br>Correll & Park (2005)           |
| Week 13 | Tu<br>Th         | 11/15<br>11/17         | Stereotype threat<br>System justification   | Steele (1997)<br>Jost & Hunyady (2005)                |
| Week 14 | Tu<br><b>Th</b>  | 11/22<br><b>11/24</b>  | Culture<br><b>No class (Thanksgiving Day)</b>   | Markus & Kitayama (1991)                              |
| Week 15 | <b>Tu<br/>Th</b> | <b>11/29<br/>12/1</b>  | <b>Exam 2<br/>Self-Project Report #2 due (no class, submit on-line)</b>                                 |   |
| Week 16 | <b>Tu<br/>Th</b> | <b>12/6<br/>12/8</b>   | <b>Self-Project Oral Presentation Day #1<br/>Self-Project Oral Presentation Day #2</b>                  |   |