

PSY 420B: The Social Psychology of Crises

Professor: Allen McConnell PSY 420, Section B, CRN 86681
E-mail: mconnar@miamioh.edu On-line Synchronous using Zoom (see Canvas site)
Office: 316 Psychology Building Class: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:05 - 11:25 a.m. EDT
Phone: 513.529.2407
Student hours: Via Zoom, Tuesdays 2:45-3:45 pm, and at other times by appointment
<https://miamioh.zoom.us/j/85812932376?pwd=UElOeVJlQ03haZ2R2TlZlQVZkd2djZz09>

Readings

- PDF readings (and other course materials) available from the course's [Canvas site](#).
- Students will either purchase or checkout (library) a book for additional background on their crisis topic.

Course overview

In the face of a crisis, everyday people are transformed... sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. In a moment, a person can jump into a freezing river to save a complete stranger who's drowning after an airplane crash, and that same person might, under different circumstances, shoot the same stranger because an authority figure demands it. Indeed, recent events (e.g., the U.S. Capital insurrection, Hurricane Katrina) and historical crises (e.g., the Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima) reveal an array of powerful psychological outcomes for those in the middle of a crisis and for those watching from the outside.

A "crisis" is an unforeseen (by most people) event that significantly disrupts lives physically, psychologically, and culturally. Crises can be natural (e.g., earthquake) or human-caused (e.g., genocide), and they present challenges that will not be resolved without intervention. In this seminar, we will explore many psychological issues revealed in such crises, using COVID-19 as an on-going illustration. Students will pick a crisis of their own to analyze throughout the semester, exploring how social psychological processes affect human behavior in that crisis. Although there is no textbook for our class, students will be required to obtain a text-based resource (e.g., buying a book, checking one out at the library) for their work, and there will be a lot of reading in our course in the psychology literature. We will adopt a social psychological perspective to understand crises, but we will also gain important insights from other areas of psychology as well.

Course material is organized into four modules, each lasting three weeks long and capped off with an analysis paper. These modules cover illusions, bias, and threat (Jan 26-Feb 16), groups and prejudice (Feb 18-Mar 11), social interactions with others (Mar 16-Apr 6), and partisanship and misinformation (Apr 8-Apr 29).

This seminar has several goals...

- Students should develop an in-depth, integrative understanding of how approaching crises from a scientific perspective improves our understanding of human behavior in extraordinary situations.
- Also, students should be able to apply relevant theory and research findings to better understand their own behavior and those in the world around them when facing unexpected or extreme circumstances.
- In addition, students will have an opportunity to develop an in-depth understanding of an important real-world event of their choosing. They should not only develop an understanding of the psychological issues involved in this event, but appreciate its cultural, social, political, and economic dimensions as well.
- Lastly, this course should help students identify and understand psychological processes that affect human behavior in the real world that do not reach the threshold of "a crisis." That is, many of the elements of human behavior that we will study this semester play out, on a much smaller scale, in everyday life. One of the important "take home lessons" from our seminar is that, by studying the psychology of crises, we will better appreciate the psychology of everyday life. These insights should help us better understand the events we see in the news, with our friends, in our families, and within our communities.

Grades

Source	Points
Two in-term exams (200 points each)	400 points
Four analysis papers on crisis topic (120 points each)	480 points
End-of-semester key lessons (summary, comments, oral presentations)	100 points
Selecting crisis topic before the deadline	10 points
Obtaining book and background paper on crisis topic	60 points
Twenty on-line discussion responses on the readings (10 points each)	200 points
Class participation points (5 points per class)	100 points
Total Points	1350 points

Final grades will be determined by total points accumulated applied this 1300-point scale:

Points	Percentages	Letter
1203 - 1350	93% - 104%	A
1164 - 1202	90% - 92%	A-
1125 - 1163	87% - 89%	B+
1073 - 1124	83% - 86%	B
1034 - 1072	80% - 82%	B-
995 - 1033	77% - 79%	C+
943 - 994	73% - 76%	C
904 - 942	70% - 72%	C-
865 - 903	67% - 69%	D+
813 - 864	63% - 66%	D
774 - 812	60% - 62%	D-
0 - 773	0% - 59%	F

There are 1350 total points available, but the grading scale is based on 1300 points (i.e., 1300 points=100%), which means there are 50 “cushion points” available. Cushion points provide students with flexibility should students experience challenges or disruptions during the semester (e.g., being sick, technical snafus). Students should view cushion points as something to “save for a rainy day” to help meet potential challenges during the course of the semester. Also, please note that late work, regardless of the circumstances, will not be accepted (remember, there are 50 points of grade cushion available). Please submit assignments on time, and work ahead so deadlines are not an issue!

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 total points earned, no exceptions. There is no end-of-semester negotiation period where students beg for better grades. Students who are dissatisfied with their class performance should discuss the situation with the professor early in the semester to identify ways to improve their performance in class.

Selecting a crisis to analyze

Each student will choose a crisis to analyze throughout the entire semester. Each student must select a *unique* crisis (i.e., no duplicates in topics among students are allowed). Once students select their crisis topic, they must stick with it for the entire semester. For an event to constitute “a crisis,” it must be an unforeseen (by most people), life-altering event that significantly disrupts everyday life physically, psychologically, and culturally for those involved. The crisis can be natural (e.g., earthquake) or human-caused (e.g., genocide), and it need not be associated with a large number of deaths or injuries (though many crises probably will). It may have occurred in moments or have unfolded over many years. It must be a *historical* event that is well documented, and one for which students can find adequate information (including a book on the crisis). Students must choose their event on the second day of class, and they should identify a couple of “backups” too. Students who have a list of crises in mind will get to pick first (picking order will be randomly determined). For those who cannot generate a list of potential crises, a list of candidates will be provided from which they can choose from after the first group picks (once again, the order of choosing will be randomly determined). Once a crisis is selected, it is unavailable to other students (i.e., first-come, first-served). Throughout the semester, students will author four different papers that span the topics in the syllabus; thus, picking a crisis that reveals many themes (e.g., illusions of control, stereotyping, conformity, misinformation, gratitude, volunteerism) will provide students with greater flexibility in writing their analysis papers. Finally, because COVID-19 will be used as an on-going example throughout our class, it is unavailable as a topic to students.

Analysis papers

Throughout the semester, students will write crisis analysis papers. These papers are individual projects (i.e., they are not group projects), and they must be conducted individually. Each student will select a crisis topic (see above) and consider the implications of course-related materials (i.e., readings, class discussions) for understanding its psychological underpinnings throughout class. The course is organized around four modules, each covering 4-5 readings (with Exam 1 after Module 2, and with Exam 2 after Module 4). At the end of each module, students will write an analysis report (approximately 500-750 words, or 2-3 pages of text, double spaced, with normal font and margins) to explain how material from the current module explains important elements of their crisis. These papers provide students with opportunities to apply theory and findings from the course. The professor must approve the analysis topic no later than Thursday, January 28, and he reserves the right to determine whether a particular topic is suitable for the class.

The four analysis papers will integrate material from the relevant module of study to explain important aspects of the crisis topic. Each paper will be due after covering 4-5 readings in a module, and there will be a “day off” at the end of each module to provide students with time to integrate materials into their papers. To ensure that students acquire “more than internet knowledge” of their crisis topic, they are required to obtain a book and provide a 500-word summary of the crisis (approximately 2 pages of text, double space, with normal fonts and margins) based on book material, due on February 9. More details will be provided on Canvas.

On-line discussion questions for readings

For each day of class where there is an assigned reading (20 days), there will be a reading discussion question posted on-line to assess student reading and to facilitate student reflection before each class. Posts must be completed before the start of class on the day the paper is discussed, each worth 10 points (graded in an all-or-nothing fashion). These questions will not be difficult, require only a few sentences to answer, are designed to reward students for keeping up with the reading (students cannot read others’ posts until after they post their own), and often serve as “starting points” for class discussions. Although students can “answer the questions” without extensive reading in some cases, students who approach readings with the sole goal of “how do I answer the discussion question” will be poorly prepared for exams or for writing analyses papers.

Class participation

Class participation and attendance will be assessed each class throughout the semester. The participation grade for each class is 5 points, and thus, missing class will result in a zero for that day (even if the absence is excused). Students who habitually do not contribute to class will lose points even if they attend class (they will receive a warning from the professor to participate before losing points). Because much of this course is discussion oriented and the class size is small, participating is essential. Even though holding discussions over Zoom can be more challenging than in-person classes, it's still important to actively participate in class discussions even though they are on-line. Students who dominate class discussions excessively will receive "gentle encouragement" from the professor to provide space so their colleagues can participate as well.

Exams

Two essay exams will be administered during the semester, each one covering material presented since the previous exam (i.e., they are not cumulative). There is no final exam. Although exams are important, they only constitute 30% of the course grade. Exams are take-at-home exams and will be available on Canvas on the day before the exam due date (i.e., March 10 and April 26 at 10:05 a.m. EST), and they are due on the following day (i.e., March 11 and April 27) by 5 p.m. EDT, giving students more than 24 hours to complete them. Exams are scanned by plagiarism software, and evidence of "copying among students" will be viewed as plagiarism by *all* individuals (do not share your exams or work on exam answers together -- each exam must be exclusively each student's own work and writing). Although 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. Exams 1 and 2 are due on dates when Analysis Papers 2 and 4 (respectively) are also due; however, students have an *entire week off* before these papers and exams are due, so there is plenty of time to write each paper and study for exams (so do not procrastinate!).

End-of-semester crisis topic presentations

During the last week of the semester, students will provide end-of-semester share outs of their crisis topic. Specifically, they will post a summary of key lessons related to their crisis on the Canvas site (due by May 4), provide their comments on others' key lessons (due by May 6), and make a short oral presentation to the class about their crisis topic lessons (May 4 or 6). More details will be provided later in the semester.

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, including work from another student, a website, a book, or failing to provide appropriate citations for others' ideas
- Allowing other students to submit one's work as their own
- Possessing prohibited materials during a test or quiz in any form (e.g., notes, internet access, texting)
- 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 appropriate academic conduct will not be accepted as an excuse for academic misconduct (see *Miami Student Handbook*, Chapter 5). Please see the professor for clarification regarding any of the above policies. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with the professor if they suspect that another student has engaged in academic misconduct.

Class policies

RTFS: Countless hours have gone into crafting this detailed syllabus. Before asking a question, please read the syllabus! Most questions (e.g., “Is Exam 2 cumulative?” [no], “I know I missed the assignment, but can I turn it in late and get some points?” [no], “Do I really need a book, there are a lot of cool website devoted to my crisis topic?” [yes, everyone needs to obtain a book]) are easily answered by reading the syllabus.

Writing competency: Writing competency is expected in all assignments. Students needing assistance with their writing skills should contact the Howe Center for Writing Excellence (<http://miamioh.edu/hcwe>).

Assignments: Assignment due dates are posted in the syllabus. With the exception of exams, all other assignments are due on dates listed on the syllabus (last page) before 10:05 a.m. EDT (the start of class). Any alterations that entail making assignments due at an earlier date will be announced at least one week in advance of a deadline (any changes will be announced in class, and it is each student’s responsibility to attend to these announcements). All assignment deadlines are Eastern Daylight Time (i.e., Oxford time), regardless of the time zone where a student currently resides.

Special considerations: In situations where special, documented circumstances exist (e.g., official university obligations, religious observances), special arrangements can be made with the professor. However, students must make these arrangements before the end of the second week of the semester and provide documentation for them. Also, please note that most assignments can be completed in advance, thus the majority of conflicts with a due date do not require accommodation (e.g., a religious observance falling on a Tuesday due date is not an issue because the work can be submitted before that particular day).

Accommodations: Students with a disability who feel that they may need a reasonable accommodation to fulfill the essential functions of the course listed in this syllabus, or students with physical, medical or psychiatric disabilities, or students with AD(H)D or specific learning disabilities are encouraged to contact the Miller Center for Student Disability Services (<https://miamioh.edu/student-life/sds/>; 513.529.1541, V/TTY).

Uploads and electronically-submitted assignments: All assignments require uploading documents to Canvas. Uploaded documents must in one of three formats: PDF (Acrobat’s Portable Document Format), DOC (Microsoft Word’s Document format), or RTF (Rich Text Format). All other formats (e.g., JPEG, Mac Pages) cannot be read by Canvas, and they will receive zeros because Canvas cannot process them, no exceptions. All documents will be scanned to ensure authentic scholarship (see academic integrity policy). Students with questions (e.g., how to upload documents, questions about academic integrity) should ask well before assignments are due (e.g., problems with uploading or uncertainty about how to use Canvas will not excuse late or incomplete assignments). If Canvas is unavailable immediately before a deadline, email the assignment to the professor to ensure it is not late (but only do this if Canvas is down, and make sure you have tried Canvas multiple times on the due date; the email timestamp will serve as the indicator of whether the work was completed on-time, and emailed assignments after the due date and time will not be considered). Once students have uploaded an assignment to Canvas, they must double check to make sure it was received and posted correctly. Failure to double-check that an uploaded assignment was uploaded is a student responsibility. Canvas does not “lose things,” so statements such as, “I know I uploaded it, I don’t know what happened, maybe our WiFi wasn’t working” will not excuse missing work. Students spend a lot of time on their coursework, so it’s important that they spend an extra moment to *confirm* that their uploaded assignment arrived in good shape. Missing assignments will receive zero points.

Course materials, recordings, and legal disclaimers: Attending class, obtaining course materials, and taking notes (on class discussions and course readings) are each student's responsibility. The professor will not lend out notes or other materials under any circumstances. If students miss class, they should get notes from a colleague to catch up on what was missed. The professor will plan to record each class on Zoom, making it available for later review, but students are still expected to attend each class "live." Students may lend notes to fellow students in the same course as long as they do not financially profit from doing so.

Illnesses and significant health disruptions: Should a student become seriously ill and unable to complete assignments for a sizable portion of the class because of illness, the student should contact the professor immediately by email to determine how alternative arrangements might be made. Students are ultimately responsible for the material covered in class, regardless of whether the student is absent or present. If a student's absences are of significant duration or severity, the professor will advise them about available options, including assigning an incomplete grade (see below) or requesting a medical withdrawal.

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 student hours and will answer e-mail questions promptly. Points are earned in small, multiple increments rather than in a couple of monolithic assignments. There are 50 cushion points built into class, providing students with flexibility to handle adversity during the semester. Deadlines for dropping classes and withdrawals are provided by the Office of the Registrar. Students who miss these deadlines assume responsibility for the consequences. Please consult Miami's official publications regarding deadlines and university policies.

Exam make-ups: There are no make-ups for missing an exam for an unexcused reason. An unexcused absence occurs when 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 Dean Makaroff supporting one's absence. There are no exceptions to this policy. Students who miss an exam should contact the professor as soon as possible to address the situation and use *multiple* methods of contact (e.g., e-mail, telephone). Students have a more-than-24-hour window for completing course exams, providing them with extra flexibility to make sure they complete these important, time-restricted assignments.

Classroom conduct, respecting others: Students are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful and civil manner in class, and they are encouraged to express their opinions and beliefs. It is 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-politically-correct views. However, bigotry or disrespectful behavior is unacceptable.

Disruptive conduct (e.g., distracting texting and computer use, conversations in class) is unacceptable and students who disrupt class (for students or for the professor) will be asked to leave class. Further, even though this course is being delivered on-line, students should treat each other with respect even if, at times, the forms of communication may seem less formal (e.g., posting a comment in an on-line chat window should not be viewed as less formal than saying something aloud in the presence of others). Please be courteous and respectful in all forms of communication and interaction in our course.

The Miami Department of Psychology is strongly committed to diversity and inclusion (for details, visit <https://www.miamioh.edu/cas/academics/departments/psychology/about/diversity-inclusion/index.html>). Here is a statement adopted by the Department of Psychology on diversity and inclusion:

We, members of the Department of Psychology, value diversity and inclusion because the goal of psychology is to improve understanding and outcomes for all individuals. We value persons of all identities, including dimensions such as age, culture, national origin, ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and others. As psychologists, we understand that diverse groups bring diverse perspectives; this diversity produces better outcomes in a variety of contexts, including learning and decision making, and our ability to work with one another. Consistent with these values, our department actively seeks opportunities to increase and improve understanding of diversity. These enduring efforts include conducting research with diverse populations on topics related to intergroup understanding and asking questions that are relevant to different groups. We promote the academic and professional development of students, faculty, and staff from different backgrounds and provide education to improve intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes for all members of our academic community. We endeavor to actively engage in positive behaviors in order to achieve these goals. In sum, we value diversity because multiple perspectives improve our ability to understand psychological processes and to understand and contribute to the communities we serve.

Semester schedule

Assignments are due on the day indicated before 10:05 a.m. EDT (i.e., the start time of class), except for exams (due by 5 p.m. EDT), as indicated below. All readings are for entire PDFs of scientific papers (listed by authors and publication year), which are available on our Canvas site. This syllabus was updated on 18apr2021.

Date		Topic	Assignments
Week 1	Tu 1/26 Th 1/28	Introduction to the course Psychology responding to COVID	Van Bavel et al. (2020); Select crisis topic
Week 2	Tu 2/2 Th 2/4	Illusion of control Positive illusions	Langer (1975) Makridakis & Moleskis (2015)
Week 3	Tu 2/9 Th 2/11	Assumptions and bias Perceptions of threat	Lord & Taylor (2009); Background paper Cole et al. (2013)
Week 4	Tu 2/16 Th 2/18	No class: Research day Threat and prejudice	Analysis Paper 1 Schaller & Neuberg (2012)
Week 5	Tu 2/23 Th 2/25	Self-fulfilling prophecy Cultural tightness and prejudice	Snyder et al. (1977) Jackson et al. (2019)
Week 6	Tu 3/2 Th 3/4	Deindividuation Perspective taking	Haslam & Loughnan (2014) Todd & Galinsky (2014)
Week 7	Tu 3/9 Th 3/11	No class: Wellness Day Exam 1 (available 3/10, due 5 p.m.)	Analysis Paper 2
Week 8	Tu 3/16 Th 3/18	Aggression Compliance and conformity	Anderson & Bushman (2002) Cialdini & Goldstein (2004)
Week 9	Tu 3/23 Th 3/25	Stress and reappraising it No class: Wellness Day	Crum et al. (2020)
Week 10	Tu 3/30 Th 4/1	Volunteering Gratitude	Snyder et al. (2004) Emmons & Mishra (2011)
Week 11	Tu 4/6 Th 4/8	No class: Research day Political extremism and conspiracies	Analysis Paper 3 Van Prooijen & Van Vugt (2018)
Week 12	Tu 4/13 Th 4/15	Misinformation and fake news Correcting misinformation	Schwarz et al. (2016) Lewandowsky et al. (2012)
Week 13	Tu 4/20 Th 4/22	Political partisanship and bias No class: Research day	Van Bavel & Pereira (2018)
Week 14	Tu 4/27 Th 4/29	Exam 2 (available 4/26, due 5 p.m.) Back to the future and recap	Analysis Paper 4 Soper (1919)
Week 15	Tu 5/4 Th 5/6	Oral presentations Day #1 Oral presentations Day #2	Post key insights from crisis project Provide feedback on others' posts