

Psy 420: Nonconscious Social Life

Professor: Allen McConnell
E-mail: mconnar@muohio.edu
Office: 213 Psychology Building
Phone: 529-2407
Hours: TBA

Class meets in PSYC 127
Tuesdays and Thursdays
Meeting time: 4:10 - 5:25 p.m.

This class is 56279 PSY 420

Psy 420 on the Web: <http://www.users.muohio.edu/mconnar/psy420.html>

Required texts

- Gladwell, M. (2005). *Blink: The power of thinking without thinking*. New York: Back Bay Books.
- Additional course readings provided on the Psy 420 Blackboard.

Course overview

Although we would all like to believe that we have complete access to, control of, and understanding about our thoughts that influence our behavior, recent work suggests that people are surprisingly “in the dark” about what’s in their head and how it affects their behavior. That is, it seems that a great deal of social life is governed by nonconscious processes, and that people’s awareness of these influences is surprisingly low. Instead, many would argue that much of one’s actions is governed by how the environment subtly primes behavior, how past experiences determine the future, and how one’s conscious awareness bears little resemblance to what actually determines one’s actions, feelings, judgments, and perceptions.

In the current course, we will examine the perspective that much of social life is determined by nonconscious processes. In particular, we will use Malcolm Gladwell’s national bestseller, *Blink*, as a general resource to frame a number of questions and issues related to this outlook on human behavior. In addition to considering this position, we will explore the extent to which the existent psychological literature supports such a controversial perspective. In addition to exploring the psychological literature that speaks to these issues, we will consider the implications of these insights for understanding the social world, including the current presidential election.

This course has several important goals:

- We will develop an in-depth and integrative understanding of how nonconscious processes and factors may influence important facets of everyday life.
- Also, we will explore both empirical demonstrations and theoretical derivations that are marshaled by proponents of the “power of nonconscious thinking” perspective.
- A broader theme in the current class is the challenge of studying phenomena empirically that seem invisible. That is, although it may seem difficult to understand nonconscious social life, one can find tractable ways to explore these processes and their implications with the right tools and theories. Although these lessons are important for the topic matter of this course, they more broadly illustrate the value of a systematic approach to understanding complex, real-world systems.
- Lastly, this course should help us understand how ever-present, yet seemingly invisible, psychological processes shape human behavior in the real world. That is, applying findings and theories should help us “make sense” of why people do the things they do. These insights should help us better understand the events we see in the news, the behavior of our friends and families, and perhaps most importantly... our own actions and their causes.

Grades

Qty.	Item	Points each	Total Points	Percent
22	Class participation	5	110	9%
14	Reading quizzes	10	140	11%
3	Exams			
	Exam 1	200	200	16%
	Exam 2	100	100	8%
	Exam 3	300	300	24%
2	Analysis papers	150	300	24%
1	Oral presentation	100	100	8%
Totals			1250	100%

During the semester, grades will be posted on-line at the course's website (see URL on the front page of this syllabus, they are *not* posted on Blackboard), listed by the last digits of students' Banner IDs. They will be updated periodically so students can monitor their performance in the course.

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

Points	Percent	Grade
1156 - 1250	93% - 100%	A
1119 - 1155	90% - 92%	A-
1081 - 1118	87% - 89%	B+
1031 - 1080	83% - 86%	B
994 - 1030	80% - 82%	B-
956 - 993	77% - 79%	C+
906 - 955	73% - 76%	C
869 - 905	70% - 72%	C-
831 - 868	67% - 69%	D+
781 - 830	63% - 66%	D
744 - 780	60% - 62%	D-
0 - 743	0% - 59%	F

The instructor reserves the right to adjust the grading scale. If modifications occur, such changes will only make it easier for you to get a better grade (i.e., the scale will never be adjusted against you). However, it would be extremely unwise to anticipate that an adjustment will occur. Final grades will be 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, they should discuss their situation with the instructor early in the term to identify ways to improve: don't wait until it's too late.

Exams

Three exams (mostly essay and short answer) will be administered periodically during the course, each of which is *not* cumulative. That being said, the material in the course builds on itself, so in a sense, it's all cumulative. The exams will focus on the readings, class discussions, and course lectures. Although the exam material will primarily reflect what is discussed in class, assigned material not discussed in class is fair game. However, exams will never assess trivial things. The goal of the exams is to assess how well students are learning and integrating the readings and class discussions, with a focus on research findings and relevant theories more so than on applications, but some application questions will be asked. There is no final exam.

Analysis papers

An important force influencing the United States is the ongoing political tension between conservatives and liberals. Important issues such as the government's role in the economy, health care, civil liberties, public policy, and national defense are often shaped by political partisanship. During the semester, each student will consider the implications of nonconscious social life for *ongoing* issues (i.e., events from 2009) involving political partisanship. There are papers due on 10/15 and 11/17. For each paper, students will consider the implications of the relevant material (i.e., 8/27-10/8 for Paper 1, 10/20-11/17 for Paper 2) and explain how nonconscious social processes underlie political partisanship in this country. Whereas the exams focus more on theory and concepts, the papers focus on the application of these principles to understanding this issue.

These papers are individual projects (i.e., they are not group projects), and they must be written individually. Further, any act of plagiarism will be dealt with *severely* (see class policies). What aspects of political partisanship a student discusses is up to the student. The papers will be approximately 4-5 pages in length (double spaced, normal margins and fonts). It is expected that students will bring to bear at least 4 different principles in each paper. Details regarding the assignment will be provided in a handout to be circulated early in the semester. Each paper must be submitted both in printed form (in class to the instructor) and electronically (through Blackboard). The electronic versions will be submitted to plagiarism-detection software to verify that the work is original, and students will be required to read and sign statements regarding plagiarism and the penalties involved for plagiarism.

Oral presentations

During the last week of class, students will analyze a topic of their own choosing (it must be approved by the instructor by 12/2) in a 5-7 minute in-class presentation. Students can pick any topic (except for political partisanship), but each student must have a unique topic (no duplicates). The goal of the presentation is to provide a showcase for students to "pull everything together" and analyze a new topic of their own interest.

Quizzes

During 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 before class, 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 are absent, they *cannot* make them up (even with a documented excuse).

Class participation

Following the first week of classes, student involvement in class discussions will be assessed by the instructor (22 classes, 5 points/class). Students who participate in class (e.g., contribute to discussions, raise questions) will receive credit for their involvement. Those who say nothing will not. Because our seminar is quite small, class participation is essential for its success. It is the intent of the instructor that this "requirement" will be relatively transparent and that students will naturally be inclined to participate in class discussions.

Class policies

Academic integrity: Any act of academic misconduct (including, but not limited to, lying, cheating, plagiarism) will not be tolerated and will be punished to the fullest extent in accordance with Miami University policy on academic integrity (see Procedures for Addressing Cases of Academic Dishonesty, Part I, Chapter 5, 2009 Manual for Academic Deans, Chairs, and Program Administrators). Any evidence of academic misconduct by a group of students will be considered academic misconduct by all parties involved.

Assignments: Assignment due dates are posted in the syllabus, and they are due during the regularly-scheduled class period (i.e., an assignment is late if handed in later in the day after class). In essence, this syllabus serves as a contract between the instructor and students. The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus at any time as warranted. However, the instructor will make such revisions at least one week ahead of a particular due date if it entails making assignments due at an earlier date. Any alterations will be announced in class. Although such arrangements will be communicated in advance, it is the student's responsibility to attend to these announcements. Students who do not attend class assume the 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 disabled students, being a member of an athletic team that has an official obligation during class, religious observance), special arrangements can be made to accommodate such needs. However, such students must make arrangements with the instructor at the beginning of the semester and provide official documentation regarding these circumstances.

Course notes and readings: Attending class, obtaining readings, and taking notes are student responsibilities. The instructor will not lend out readings, notes, or reproduce a lecture under any circumstances. Students who miss classes should ask classmates to borrow their notes. In addition to the Gladwell text, there are additional papers that are assigned for reading (provided as PDFs through the Blackboard website). It is the students' responsibility to obtain these papers (do not wait until the last minute to download them).

Classroom conduct: While in the classroom, people are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful and civil manner. It is quite all right (and downright encouraged) for people to express their opinions and beliefs in an impassioned fashion. It is quite another thing, however, to be disrespectful or rude to students or to the instructor. It is fine to disagree with others, and it is okay to express non-PC (politically correct) views. However, disrespectful conduct will not be accepted. Disagreeing with others is fine and expected, but being disagreeable is not. In class, listen to others, participate, and be involved. If you want to read the paper, talk to friends, Facebook, or sleep — stay at home. Finally, please turn off your cell phone in class.

Make-ups: There are no make-ups if you miss an exam or a report due date because of an unexcused absence. An unexcused absence occurs when a student (1) did not obtain prior permission from the instructor concerning the absence or (2) did not provide documented evidence justifying the absence. Documented evidence can be one of three things: (1) a note from a physician or nurse stating that you were too sick to attend class, (2) a letter from a funeral home or clergy on their letterhead indicating that you attended a memorial service, or (3) a letter from Dean Schilling. There are no exceptions to this policy. There are absolutely no make-ups for quizzes. If students miss a quiz, they will receive a zero (regardless of the circumstances, even if they have an excuse).

Incompletes: Except for cases of documented medical or family emergencies, incompletes will not be given. There is no need for you to do badly in this class: the instructor will be available for meetings and will answer e-mail questions promptly, the structure of the class (e.g., many reading quizzes) provide constant feedback to students about their progress in the class, and points are earned in small chunks rather than a couple of monstrous exams. Deadlines for dropping classes and withdrawals are provided in the General Bulletin and the Academic Calendar information published by the Office of the Registrar. These resources provide Miami's official details regarding deadlines and university policies.

Semester schedule

This is the breakdown of the semester day by day. *Assignments are due on the day listed.* That is, the date reflects the due date, not the assignment date. Readings are either entire chapters from Gladwell's *Blink* text or readings from the Blackboard website (listed by authors, including two from Gladwell's *Outliers* book).

		Topic		Assignment
Week 1	Tu	8/25	Welcome and overview of the class	
	Th	8/27	Introduction to the topic	Gladwell <i>Blink</i> preface; Dijksterhuis et al. (2006)
Week 2	Tu	9/1	Introspection awry	Nisbett & Wilson (1977)
	Th	9/3	Neobehaviorism	Bargh & Chartrand (1999)
Week 3	Tu	9/8	Nonconscious self-fulfilling prophecies	Chen & Bargh (1997)
	Th	9/10	Systemic self-fulfilling prophecies	Gladwell (<i>Outliers: The Matthew Effect</i>)
Week 4	Tu	9/15	Nonconscious feelings	McConnell & Leibold (2001)
	Th	9/17	Making sense of the world	Dutton & Aron (1974)
Week 5	Tu	9/22	Exam 1	
	Th	9/24	Thin slices	Gladwell 1
Week 6	Tu	9/29	Room with a cue	Gosling et al. (2002)
	Th	10/1	Thin slices with race	Richeson & Shelton (2005)
Week 7	Tu	10/6	The locked door	Gladwell 2
	Th	10/8	Winning at trivial pursuit	Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg (1998)
Week 8	Tu	10/13	No class — Writing Day	
	Th	10/15	Exam 2	Analysis paper 1 due
Week 9	Tu	10/20	Warren Harding is so presidential	Gladwell 3
	Th	10/22	Implicit-explicit knowledge discrepancies	McConnell et al. (2008)
Week 10	Tu	10/27	Fog of war	Gladwell 4
	Th	10/29	Thinking too much	Wilson & Schooler (1991)
Week 11	Tu	11/3	Influence and compliance	Cialdini (1995)
	Th	11/5	The complexity of preferences	Gladwell 5
Week 12	Tu	11/10	Speed dating	Finkel & Eastwick (2008)
	Th	11/12	No class — Writing Day	
Week 13	Tu	11/17	Developing expertise	Gladwell (<i>Outliers: 10,000 Hours</i>); Paper 2 due
	Th	11/19	Seven seconds in the Bronx	Gladwell 6
Week 14	Tu	11/24	Reflections on nonconscious processes	
	Th	11/26	No class — Thanksgiving Break	
Week 15	Tu	12/1	Are cops biased?	Correll et al. (2007)
	Th	12/3	Exam 3	
Week 16	Tu	12/8	Oral presentations — Day 1	
	Th	12/10	Oral presentations — Day 2	