

Syllabus for the course
“Controversies in psychology”
4 ECTS

Approved
MP Academic Council
Protocol № ____ " __ " ____ 2016

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Department	Department of Psychology
Number of credits	4 credits
Contact hours	48
Self-study	104
Year of study	2nd year
Format of study	Without online courses

I. PURPOSE, RESULTS AND PREREQUISITES OF THE COURSE

Course prerequisites and formed competencies:

The course is an elective designed for second year master students and does not have any specific prerequisites. However, some exposure to introductory psychology, social psychology and/or (cross-) cultural psychology and clinical psychology at the undergraduate or graduate level is expected.

The working language of the course is exclusively English, which includes teaching, presentations, and all communications. In order for the student to be able to benefit from the course, an excellent ability to write, comprehend, and speak in English is required.

The duration of the course is 2 modules (56 academic hours, 4 credits)

Abstract:

This course examines highly cited or frequently discussed topics and articles that have been the source of considerable controversy in the fields of social, cognitive, and clinical psychology. That is, findings or observations that have led the scientific community to debate the interpretations and implications, methodology or replicability, the ethics of the study protocol, or even biases of the researchers. The list of research topics covered will be broad. Examples include Milgram's "shock experiment" and Zimbardo's prison study, Loftus' research on false memories, as well as topics related to the efficacy of antidepressants and psychotherapy. We will also discuss the nature vs. nurture debate on intelligence, multiculturalism, issues related to social neuroscience, and even pre-cognition. The course is in a seminar format and will require presentations and active participation. Students will be asked to debate the advantages and disadvantages of study methodologies, underlying theories, assumptions, and ethical implications. There are no course prerequisites, although students are expected to show interest in a broad range of topics in psychology.



II. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the course are:

- To familiarize students with controversies in psychology
- To develop an appreciation for how ethical, design, replicability, and political issues may influence what is considered controversial
- To foster critical thinking, open-minded discussions and respectful debate
- To develop students' capacities to be able to present controversial scientific research and examine the advantages and disadvantages from a research design, statistical, sociocultural and political perspective

Methodology of the course:

The course utilizes a combination of:

- Didactic lectures covering historical, contemporary, theoretical and empirical issues
- Practical classes involving discussions about topics in the field and analysis of videos
- Student presentations during seminars on controversial research and their biopsychosocial underpinnings
- Readings and assignments designed to facilitate greater depth of discussion and building connections between various disciplines within and beyond psychology (e.g., psychiatry, sociology)

III. LEARNING OUTCOMES

Results

- Students will become familiar with the essence of some controversial topics in psychology, the conflicting issues which might be related to those controversies (ethical, methodological, interpretive, and otherwise), and their role in contemporary social, clinical, and cognitive psychology
- Students will become familiar with common social and psychological preconditions for the presence of controversies, and will develop an appreciation of how to critically evaluate the empirical evidence base to come to their own conclusions
- Students will be given an insight into how controversies in psychology may elicit strong reactions in the scientific community or lay public and shape social discourse and future research and education.
- Students will prepare PowerPoint presentations during the seminars, and present information on controversial issues in psychology. Therefore, they will develop skills to synthesize and report information, as well as to understand better the core issues of controversial topics and critically discuss the scientific foundations of controversial research. Students will also develop openness to feedback during discussions, and develop debating skills

IV. COURSE PLAN



Lesson 1: Introduction

Course overview and issues: definitions, controversies in science, ethics, research design, replicability

Historical background: From Copernicus to 20th century conflict

Lesson 2: Authority and conformity research

Part I: Examination of Asch conformity studies, Milgram’s Shock experiments, Zimbardo Prison Experiment

Part II: Replication studies, ethical implications and aftermath

Lesson 3: Military Psychology and Psychological Operations

Military psychology, warfare and propaganda

Conspiracy theory or fact? A brief history and overview of research

Lesson 4: Controversies in Clinical Psychology: Diagnosis, Assessment and Treatment

Diagnosis of mental disorders: Do they exist?

Psychological and medical treatments of mental disorders: How do they work?

Lesson 5: Nurture vs. Nature

Student Presentation 1: Environmental vs. genetic effects: Some of the controversies

Case study: Intelligence, genetics, and culture

Lesson 6: Social Priming

Examples of experiments: primed by the elderly, professors, and hooligans

Student Presentation 2: Controversies in social priming literature and replication issues

Lesson 7: Cognition: False Memories

Introduction to false memories: Memory is not like a video recorder

Student presentation 3: Recent research in false memories

Lesson 8: Precognition

Precognition effects: Are they real?

Student presentation 4: Recent research in precognition

Lesson 9: Social and Cognitive Neuroscience

Student Presentation 5: Social and Cognitive Neuroscience: Introduction and overview; Free Will

Student Presentation 6: Social neuroscience: Issues of replication

Lesson 10: Bias in Psychology

Political leanings in Psychology: Left or Right?

Student Presentation 7: Issues of gender, sexual orientation and identity

Lesson 11: Multiculturalism and Acculturation

Ethnic diversity, acculturation, social cohesion, and well-being: Conflicting findings?

Student Presentation 8: Recent research on ethnic diversity and ethnic density; living in multicultural societies



Lesson 12: Religion, Spirituality and Paranormal Science

Student Presentation 9: Spirituality, religiosity and health

Student Presentation 10: Research in parapsychology

Lesson 13: Debate

Poll the class on issues that are most controversial and randomly assign students to debate teams

Generate debate between teams (for and against particular issues, research findings and implications)

Lesson 14: Conclusions

The Future of controversies in the field: review and exam review

V. READING LIST

1. Required literature

Asch, S. E. (1956). Studies of independence and conformity: I. A minority of one against a unanimous majority. *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied*, 70(9), 1.

Baker, T. B., McFall, R. M., & Shoham, V. (2008). Current status and future prospects of clinical psychology toward a scientifically principled approach to mental and behavioral health care. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 9(2), 67-103.

Bale, J. M. (2007). Political paranoia v. political realism: on distinguishing between bogus conspiracy theories and genuine conspiratorial politics. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 41(1), 45-60.

Bem, D. J. (2011). Feeling the future: experimental evidence for anomalous retroactive influences on cognition and affect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 100(3), 407-425.

Dunn, D.S., Gurung, R.A., Naufel, K.Z., & Wilson, J.H. (2013). *Controversy in the Psychology Classroom: Using Hot Topics to Foster Critical Thinking*. American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

King, S. B. (2004). PSYOP and persuasion: Applying social psychology and becoming an informed citizen. *Teaching of Psychology*, 31(1), 27-30.

Lilienfeld, S. O. (2012). Public skepticism of psychology: why many people perceive the study of human behavior as unscientific. *American Psychologist*, 67(2), 111-129.

Loftus, E. F. (1993). The reality of repressed memories. *American Psychologist*, 48(5), 518-537.

Milgram, S. (1963). Behavioral study of obedience. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67(4), 371-378.



Nisbett, R. E., Aronson, J., Blair, C., Dickens, W., Flynn, J., Halpern, D. F., & Turkheimer, E. (2012). Intelligence: new findings and theoretical developments. *American psychologist*, *67*(2), 130-159.

Payne B. K., Brown-Iannuzzi, J. L., & Loersch, C. (2016). Replicable effects of primes on human behavior. *Journal of Experimental Psychology. General*, *145*(10), 1269-1279.
DOI:10.1037/xge0000201

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J. Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: a critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *88*(5), 879.

Reicher, S., & Haslam, S. A. (2006). Rethinking the psychology of tyranny: The BBC prison study. *The British Journal of Social Psychology*, *45*, 1.

Simonsohn, U., Nelson, L. D., & Simmons, J. P. (2014). P-curve: A key to the file-drawer. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, *143*(2), 534-547.

Smeets, T., Merckelbach, H., Jelicic, M., & Otgaar, H. (2017). Dangerously neglecting courtroom realities. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, *31*(1), 26-27.

Wagenmakers, E.-J., Wetzeis, R., Borsboom, D., & van der Maas, H. L. J. (2011). Why psychologists must change the way they analyze their data: The case of psi: Comment on BEM (2011) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *100*(3), 426-432

Zimbardo, P. G. (2006). On rethinking the psychology of tyranny: The BBC prison study. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *45*(1), 47-53.

2. Optional literature

Bem, D. J., Utts, J., & Johnson, W. O. (2011). Must psychologists change the way they analyze their data? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *101*(4), 716-719.

Chambless, D. L., & Ollendick, T. H. (2001). Empirically supported psychological interventions: Controversies and evidence. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *52*(1), 685-716.

Hoffman, D. H., Carter, D. J., Lopez, C. R.V., Benzmilller, H.L., Guo, A. X., Latifi, S. Y., & Craig, D. C. (2015b, September 4). *Report to the special committee of the board of directors of the American Psychological Association: Independent review relating to APA Ethics Guidelines, national security interrogations, and torture (revised)*. Chicago, IL: Sidley Austin LLP.
<http://www.apa.org/independent-review/revised-report.pdf>

Lilienfeld, S. O. (2012). Public skepticism of psychology: why many people perceive the study of



human behavior as unscientific. *American Psychologist*, 67(2), 111-129.

Kawakami, K., Dovidio, J. F., & Dijksterhuis, A. (2003). Effect of social category priming on personal attitudes. *Psychological science*, 14(4), 315-319.

Turkheimer, E., Pettersson, E., & Horn, E. E. (2014). A phenotypic null hypothesis for the genetics of personality. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 65, 515-540.

Tracey, T. J. G., Wampold, B. E., Lichtenberg, J. W., & Goodyear, R. K. (2014). Expertise in psychotherapy: An elusive goal? *American Psychologist*, 69(3), 218-229.



VI. GRADING SYSTEM

Form of assessment	Deadline	% in the final grade	Main Idea	Main Requirements	Grading Criteria
<i>Debate</i>	Lesson 13	5%	Participation in the final debate session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with a position during the debate Actively support the chosen position and providing the necessary evidence to support it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarity of communication, respecting others Relevant reasoning, confirming the position chosen, open to alternate evidence Usage of relevant research, readings and/or personal reflections
<i>Attendance</i>	All course	10%	Attendance, participation in discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend the lectures and seminars Engage with the core readings Actively participate in discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistency of attendance (or informing the professor of occasional absences) Relevant research, readings, and/or personal reflections and questions during discussions Clarity of communication, respecting others
<i>Student Presentations</i>	Lessons 11-22 (depending on your topic)	25%	PowerPoint presentation based on additional literature of the chosen theme. Made by small groups of two (2) students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 60 minutes (40min for presentation itself; 20min for discussion) E-mail or meet with the instructor prior to the presentation for guidance Distribution of chosen literature to the group (1-2 core articles, 1-2 additional articles at least a week before the presentation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Power Point slides References Articles distributed to group Presentation content Facilitation of discussion/presentation style Overall impression
<i>Mid-Term Exam</i>	Lesson 5	25%	Quiz based on prior lectures and reading materials (covered in literature up to and including lesson 5).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 40 minutes Multiple-choice mostly Some short-answer questions Closed-book 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Correct option for multiple choice Evidence-based or relevant, well-written and succinct short-answers



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English-taught Master’s programme “Applied Social Psychology” (37.04.01 Psychological Sciences)

<i>Final Test</i>	The last week of classes	35%	Quiz based on prior lectures and reading materials covered throughout the course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 hour• Multiple-choice mostly• Some short-answer questions• Closed-book	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Correct option for multiple choice• Evidence-based or relevant, well-written and succinct short-answers
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See text below for further details



Formula for the final grade

The final grade consists of several parts and the details of the requirements for each part are discussed above in sections III and IV:

- *Mid-Semester Exam (ME): 25%* (see lesson 5)
- *Presentation (P): 25%* (see lessons 6-11)
- *Debate participation/preparation (D): 5%*
- *Final (In Class) Exam (FE): 35%*
- *Attendance and General Participation/Professionalism (AP): 10%*

(Please inform the instructor if you are unable to attend class; you are expected to contribute to the discussions)

Formula for the final grade:

$$\text{Final grade (\%)} = 0.25 * \text{ME} + 0.25 * \text{P} + 0.05 * \text{D} + 0.35 * \text{FE} + 0.1 * \text{AP}$$

Comment on final grade and exam: Final percentages are converted to a 10-point scale (10 is considered "outstanding"; 8 to 9 is considered to be "very good" to "excellent", 6 to 7 is considered to be "good", 4 to 5 is considered "satisfactory", and below 4 is considered a "fail").

Rounding rule: If the percent being rounded ends with 5 to 9, the percentage is rounded up. If the percent being rounded ends with 0 to 4, the percentage is rounded down (e.g., 76% is rounded up to 80% or a grade of "8" and 63% is rounded down to 60% or a grade of "6").

All exams are held in-class. There are no exams during formal exam weeks.

VII. EXAMINATION TYPE

Student Presentations

Background: Presentations on specific advanced topics concerning controversies in psychology are conducted during the seminars (see *Course Schedule* on topic titles for lessons 6-12). While the lectures tend to be more general, these student presentations are intended to familiarize the audience in greater depth with more specific topics in the field. The purpose of these presentations is also to develop links between different research studies related to a controversial topic in psychology, form a more elaborate understanding of each issue by careful examination of the controversy, explore existing research design issues and ideas for future research to help resolve the controversy, or at least answer an aspect of it. Another purpose of this section of the course is for graduate students to further develop effective skills in presenting research in English. Try to make the presentation stimulating using thought-provoking research findings and deliver this information effectively using PowerPoint and/or other media.

General presentation instructions: Students will work in small groups of 2 students (if there are



insufficient student pairs, there may be a few individual student presentations) and prepare presentations synthesizing recent literature which integrate relevant controversial phenomena. You will also give examples of potential future research ideas which may help answer unsolved questions in your topic area. You are expected to e-mail or meet with the instructor prior to the presentation for guidance regarding any questions you may have. Please note that I do not expect your presentation to be exhaustive; rather it may be focused on a select group of studies or findings and should be cohesive.

Students will utilize HSE electronic resources to find relevant literature and will email the group at least one article prior to the presentation.

Parameters: The presentation will be one academic hour (40 minutes), and will be done in PowerPoint format and should include about 10+ references. You may use videos and multimedia (optional) to make your presentation more stimulating. Following your presentation, you will also facilitate a discussion session with the group and instructor (i.e., have some thoughtful questions ready!), which should last 20 minutes (0.5 academic hours). Note: there will often be two presentations per lesson (see schedule above), so please efficiently complete your full presentation and discussion in your allotted time of 1 hour (60 minutes). You may need some technical time to set up your PowerPoint presentation, so consider coming early.

Readings: The student presentation topics (see Course schedule) require student presenters to find 1-2 relatively recent research articles or reviews published since 2000 to distribute to the instructor and classmates (older articles are acceptable if they are still frequently cited in recent literature). One week prior to the presentation, student presenters email these readings to the group, the teaching assistant, and the instructor for review and to stimulate a discussion during the seminar that they will lead. *Immediately prior to the presentation, students are to email their PowerPoint slides to the instructor and the student group for reference.*

Grading criteria: The grade for the presentation will depend on the student’s appropriate depth of the description of the controversial topic, critical synthesis of relevant research, including review of relevant peer reviewed articles; identifying appropriate challenges with existing research related to the topic or reactions to this research (e.g., researcher biases, research design problems, ethical concerns); the degree to which the presentation information was clearly presented in the slides (e.g., correct English, use of references, clear points); the clarity of communicating one’s ideas verbally to the audience, the student’s engagement in facilitating discussion, openness to ideas, and structuring of the presentation (e.g., have an introduction, review of the literature, synthesis, limitations, future research, summary and conclusions, reference list, etc.).

Mid-Term Exam

This exam is in the format of a quiz and will last for 1 academic hour (40 minutes) at the end of lesson 6. The format will be multiple choice and/or short answer. Questions will be related to the information covered in the topics and readings covered up to and including lesson 6.

Grading criteria: Identification of the best or correct answer for the multiple-choice component. Quality of responses (evidence-based or relevant, well-written and succinct) for the short answer component.



Debate Participation

In order to reinforce learning and encourage further discussion and effective (i.e., logic and evidence-based) communication, a debate will take place during lesson 13. Each student is expected to take part in the debate. First, students will be asked to complete a poll of topics they found interesting in the course. Second, the poll results will be discussed. Thirdly, each student will be randomly assigned into a group and to lay out arguments in support of an aspect of a controversial topic identified in the poll. Finally, students will be asked to switch sides and continue debating.

Grading criteria: bringing up relevant research, readings, and/or personal reflections, providing logical reasoning sufficient to support one’s statements, clarity of communication, maintaining respectful interactions with others.

Final Exam

This exam is in the format of a quiz and will last for 1 hour at the end of the course. The format will be multiple choice and/or short answer. Questions will be related to the information covered in the topics and readings during the whole course.

Grading criteria: Identification of the best or correct answer for the multiple-choice component. Quality of responses (evidence-based, logical, and relevant, well-written and succinct) for the short answer component.

Attendance and Participation/ Professionalism

Students are expected to attend the lectures and seminars, engage with the core readings, and actively participate in discussions (e.g., presenting clear points and arguments in a respectful way). If you are absent, please inform the professor and TA, and e-mail a comment based on the readings, so we know you are keeping up. It is also recommended that you communicate with other students on the lecture materials. More than two absences are strongly discouraged.

Grading criteria: Consistency of attendance (or informing the professor of occasional absences), bringing up relevant research, readings, and/or personal reflections and questions during discussions, clarity of communication, maintaining respectful interactions with others.

VIII. METHODS OF INSTRUCTIONS

The course is arranged in forms of lectures and seminars. Lecturers in form of presentations provide key information, but the majority of work is done during discussions in small groups. Materials for class activities are provided in printed and electronic form.

If necessary, for students with different disabilities (visual impairments, hearing impairments, disorders of the musculoskeletal system) and students who are undergoing the individual programs of rehabilitation, the following options may be offered (taking into account their individual psychophysical characteristics): materials in printed form and in the form of an electronic document; individual tasks and consultations.

IX. SPECIAL EQUIPMENT AND SOFTWARE SUPPORT



1. Software

№	Name	Access conditions
1.	Microsoft Windows 7 Professional RUS Microsoft Windows 10 Microsoft Windows 8.1 Professional RUS	<i>From the local network of HSE (agreement)</i>
2.	Microsoft Office Professional Plus 2010	<i>From the local network of HSE (agreement)</i>

2. Professional data base, informational referral systems, internet sources (electronic educational resources)

№	Name	Access conditions
Professional data base, informational referral systems		
1.	American Psychological Association	<i>From the local network of HSE (agreement)</i> <i>URL: www.apa.org</i>
Internet sources (electronic educational resources)		
1.	Open education	<i>URL: https://openedu.ru/</i>

3. Material and technical support of the discipline

Classrooms for lectures on the discipline enable the use and demonstration of thematic illustrations that correspond with the program disciplines and includes:

- Personal computers with Internet access (operating system, office software, antivirus software);
- Multimedia projector with the remote control.

Classrooms for practical and laboratory classes of the discipline: “Controversies in Psychology” have the Internet access to the electronic informational and educational environment of the HSE.



Appendix 1. EXAMPLES OF ASSESSMENT FACILITIES

Examples of Final Exam questions:

Instructions: Please select the best answer. Each question is worth one point unless otherwise specified. Questions are based on lectures and core articles. Most items are multiple choice with one correct answer choice, although others will require you to write a brief response. Maximum word counts are approximations but do not write lengthy responses. This is a closed book exam and no electronic devices are allowed.

The total score of 35 points of this test is weighted 35% of the final grade for the course. The exam also includes test items which will be used as bonus points

Full Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Which one of the following is an example of social priming:

- On a computer task showing a shorter reaction time to “nurse”; after participants see “doctor”; on the screen
- Being more likely to walk slowly to an elevator if participants complete a crossword puzzle related to the concept of the elderly
- On a computer task showing a shorter reaction time to “elderly”; after participants see a walking stick on the screen
- Acting rudely because of latent racism rather than activated stereotypes
- b and c

2. Fill in the blanks.

Social priming is the recent use of a _____ construct or _____, even in an earlier or _____ situation, carries over for a time to exert an _____, passive influence on the interpretation of behaviour.

- trait, biased, related, unintended
- state, drive, related, intended
- trait, stereotype, unrelated, unintended
- all of the above fit the definition
- none of the above fit the definition

3. Which of the following may have potentially contributed to controversies in social priming research:

- Researchers have difficulty replicating earlier findings (e.g., those of Bargh and Dijksterhuis)
- The overall effects may be small (e.g., meta-analysis), and sometimes non-significant effects are obtained
- Most social priming research has been based on fraudulent data
- Participants were deceived
- a and b

4. A researcher tests to see whether he can replicate priming rude behaviour as discussed by Bargh (1996). The best way to do this would be to:

- follow procedures exactly as in the original study; this may mean getting the exact protocols from the researcher
- change the procedures to make the study more interesting to readers



- c. Try to utilize similar demographics as in the original sample and make sure your sample size is large enough for statistical power
- d. a and c
- e. All of the above

5. What may fuel the ‘replication crisis’ in psychology? (e.g., failures to reproduce findings in social priming literatures). Give two reasons (max. 25 words):
