Psychology 610: Social Neuroscience Seminar
Fall 2012, Straub 143, M 9:00 – 11:50

Instructor Information

Professor: Elliot Berkman
Office hours: Tuesdays, 12-2pm, 381 Straub Hall, or by appointment
Contact info: berkman@uoregon.edu

Course overview

Social neuroscience is the scientific discipline at the intersection of social-personality psychology and cognitive neuroscience. The overarching goals of the field are numerous, but all revolve around understanding the neural bases of social behavior, affect, and social cognition and using that knowledge to inform psychological theory. The primary aim of this course is to survey key research and methods in social neuroscience in sufficient detail for you to have a sense of the scope of the field and where your own work might fit into it in the future.

The secondary aim of this course is to sharpen your critical skills as a consumer of social neuroscience and psychological science more broadly. To achieve this aim, the format of this course will be entirely structured discussion with no formal lectures. The amount that you learn from this course will be entirely dependent on your own and your classmates’ ability to thoughtfully discourse on the assigned readings.

Course Organization and Requirements

Meetings and Trial Structure

Each week we will discuss 4-6 articles organized around a sub-topic within social neuroscience. Two or three articles will be background pieces, and two or three are target articles for discussion. Following an initial discussion of the background articles, the target articles will be put on trial. One student will act as the prosecutor and one as the defense of each article. Each will have up to 5 minutes to present his or her case, followed by a 1-minute rebuttal to the opponent. After the initial arguments, the floor opens for jury deliberations. The jury is to decide whether the article makes a meaningful contribution to science beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Readings

I have chosen approximately 50 readings that are representative of the field’s history and current directions, mostly empirical reports from top-tier journals. The background readings are reviews, meta-analyses, or foundational empirical findings on the topic of the week. I chose them because they are classics in the field. The target readings are generally more recent empirical findings that make bold claims and are worthy of careful evaluation. The target articles are posted on Blackboard (http://blackboard.uoregon.edu), and may change in light of new research results.

All students are responsible for all readings. Of course, you are encouraged to scour every detail of the paper when you act as a prosecutor or defense. But jury members need to read the papers to adequately judge them; don’t count on the attorneys to give you the complete picture.

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Being able to develop an innovative study design and communicate that design in a clear and concise way is a critical skill in your development as an academic. To help you develop that skill, your requirement for the final paper is to compose an NIH-style grant proposal on a topic within social neuroscience. Think about your own research and how it might be adapted to fit into the field, and generate a novel research idea. The paper should be 10 pages (double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-pt), and must contain the following sections:

Specific Aims (2 pages max). This section should provide the motivation for your research question. What is known, what are the gaps in knowledge, why are these gaps important to close, and how will your project close them? This section should end with 2-3 Specific Aims that are the concrete objectives of your proposed project.

Significance. This section is about why your proposed research is important or valuable. Suppose you perfectly achieve all of your Specific Aims; what is the return on investment from NIH for that accomplishment? What knowledge will be obtained, and how might that knowledge be valuable immediately or in the future?

Innovation. What is new about your research in terms of theory or methods? Is there something special about your design or about the theories you’re testing? What does this add above and beyond what is already out there?

Approach. This is where you detail what you’re going to do. This should include everything that a “Methods” section from a paper has, and perhaps a timeline of the project.

I will give you more details about the particulars of the paper later in the quarter. For now, suffice to say that the paper is due Tuesday, December 4th at 5pm with no exceptions.

Grading

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation: Prosecution</th>
<th>20%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation: Defense</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation: Jury duty</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
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Your scores will be combined and weighted to yield one score out of 100%. I will average the top 10 scores from class, and use that number to determine the cutoff for letter grades. To get an A- you will need to get 90% of the average top score, to get a B- you will need to get 80% of the top score, and so on. If everyone does poorly on the paper nobody suffers, and it is also possible for every single person to get an A (since you could all do as well as 90% of the average of the top 10 students).

Policies

Late/missed assignments. The final paper is due on December 4th at 5pm. Your prosecution or defense date will be assigned on Week 1. Late assignments will not be accepted.

Plagiarism/Cheating. Always unacceptable and defeats the purpose of graduate school.

Students with special needs. The UO works to create inclusive learning environments. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation, please notify me as soon as possible. You may also wish to contact Disability Services in 164 Oregon Hall at 346-1155 or disabsrv@uoregon.edu.

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Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1 (Sept 24): Background and Methods


Week 2 (Oct 1): Self-processes

Background


Target


Week 3 (Oct 8): Person perception

Background


Target


**Week 4 (Oct 15): Culture and intergroup relations**  
*Note: Class ends at 11am*

**Background**

**Target**

**Week 5 (Oct 22): Neuroeconomics**

**Background**

**Target**

**Week 6 (Oct 29): Self-regulation**

**Background**
Target

Week 7 (Nov 5): Reward, punishment, and fairness

Background

Target

Week 8 (Nov 12): Emotion

Background

Target
Week 9 (Nov 19): Health

Background

Target

Week 10 (Nov 26): Future directions

Background

Target

Finals Week (Tues, Dec 4): FINAL PAPER DUE VIA EMAIL AT 5PM