

Social Cognition
Psychology 353
Spring 2007

Class Time and Location: Monday & Wednesday, 2:30 to 3:50 p.m., Room HH 280

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Course Description and Objectives

Social cognition is a prominent area of research in social psychology today. Some of the major questions addressed by this field can be stated as follows: How do we perceive, represent, interpret, and remember information about ourselves and other individuals and groups? How do we utilize our social knowledge? How does our social knowledge determine our social judgments, including stereotypes? To what extent can we control the thought processes that influence our judgments about ourselves and others? Are our social judgments influenced by our motivations, feelings and desires? How do cultural factors affect our thoughts and perceptions of ourselves and others? What do we know about the brain that can inform our understanding of social cognitive processes?

You will learn about all of the above themes in this course. Although social cognition uses both cognitive and social psychological theories and methodologies, we will predominantly focus on social psychological aspects of social cognition.

In addition to learning about the basic concepts and theory in social cognition, the course is designed to refine your ability to apply principles from the class to experiences in your life and that you see in the media. You will also learn the basics of research methodology as you will learn about numerous well-designed studies, and participate in a few experiments.

You are expected to attend the lectures as they will cover materials not covered in the textbook. There will be two tests of your knowledge of the content of readings and lectures. However, an equal portion of your grade will be determined by your writing assignments (see section of requirements and grading for further details). Your writing will show the extent to which you have actively thought about the course material. Therefore, throughout the course, it is important for you to evaluate research and theories critically and draw connections between topics and issues that you learn about in the lectures and in the readings.

Required Readings

1. Text: Kunda, Z. (1999) *Social Cognition: Making Sense of People*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

UW-ACE: Course Website

<https://uwangel.uwaterloo.ca/uwangel/home.asp?sid=&redir>

Check the course website regularly. Important announcements, as well as slides from lectures, will be posted there. Information about the papers will also be posted on the course website throughout the term.

Course Requirements and Grading

Tests (2 tests worth 25% each for a total of 50% of your grade)

There will be two tests in the course: Test 1 on June 18th will cover material up to and including June 11th, and Test 2 on July 25th will cover material up to July 23rd. Both exams will be part multiple choice and part short answer. You should note that doing the readings will be crucial for success on the tests. Neither test will be cumulative. In cases of severe illness or other extenuating circumstances a make-up test will be offered. If you feel you will require a make-up test, please contact one of the course instructors for permission and be prepared to provide documentation.

Assignments / Papers (3 assignments worth 15% for a total of 45% of your grade)

You will be required to do three (out of a list of four) assignments throughout the term. You can choose whichever of the three assignments described below that you want. If you choose to do all four assignments only the highest three will count towards your grade. Late assignments will not be accepted except in exceptional circumstances.

The purpose of the assignments is to deepen your knowledge of the concepts from the course and practice applying them. Each assignment can be a maximum of five pages long (but may be shorter), double-spaced with at least 12-point font and one-inch margins.

The marking scheme will take into account:

- The clarity of writing
- The choice of appropriate concepts from the course or other concepts in social cognition
- Clear and correct explanation of the concepts
- Application of the concepts to the topic of the assignment
- Depth of thought and understanding in addressing the implications

Assignment #1: Social Cognition in Everyday Life

For this assignment, you will be asked to manipulate some social psychological principle in the “real world” and write about your experience. Closer to the date of the assignment, we will provide you with a list of activities to perform in the world.

Begin your write up by describing what you did. Give enough detail so that we have a very good idea what you did, when, how, etceteras (but remember your page limit). Then describe the concept that this demonstrates. Remember to describe not just the behavior of people around you, but also describe what you and the other people were thinking and feeling. This is a social cognition course, as such, you need to describe not only how you and the other people behaved, but also what you or other people were thinking and feeling, and describe why you were thinking that way. Your description of the social cognition in the situation will make up the bulk of your grade.

Have fun with this assignment. It is designed to get you to think about and understand how social cognitive principles apply in our life. It is supposed to be interesting and interactive. Also note that this

assignment is due on the date of our class discussion period, so come to class ready to tell people about your experiences.

You are welcome to come up with your own activity so long as one of the instructors approves it **BEFORE** you do it. We need to screen them to make sure that whatever you decide to do is relevant and ethical. **If you perform an activity that has not been approved by one of your instructors your assignment will not be graded.**

Assignment #2: Write an Editorial Piece

Imagine you are called by a newspaper to write an editorial commenting on a current event for the benefit of their readers. Your job as a social psychology expert is to apply your knowledge of social cognition to shed light on some important aspect of the event.

Begin your write-up by describing the event. This should be a real news event that has taken place in the last year or so. Please attach a printout of a media article about this event. Describe a concept from the course (either material we have already covered or in any part of the textbook) **If you would like to use a social cognitive construct from outside of class, you may want to clear it with one of the instructors before you begin.** Describe how research on this concept (include study descriptions) can help viewers understand or reinterpret the event or people's reactions to it.

This assignment is designed to get you to think about how social cognition concepts apply outside of the lab.

Assignment #3: Social Cognition in the Workplace

For this assignment, you will be asked to write a five-page policy proposal for a workplace in which you describe how principles learned in class can diminish or improve the performance of a business. For example, if you are in Human Resources, you could write about how some principle described in class could bias people's hiring decisions if not accounted for, or could improve people's hiring decisions if they were accounted for. Or, you could write about the function of heuristics for a marketing company. Write the assignment as if the person grading it is a manager of a firm, and you are trying to convince them how the operation of this principle is hurting their organization (or how applying it could help their organization). Try to think about the objections that person might have, and try to show how these objections are not relevant.

Please try to use concepts from class. **If you would like to use a social cognitive construct from outside of class, you may want to clear it with one of the instructors before you begin.** Also, please do not apply a concept to an academic setting by designing a research project, or writing an academic essay. That is the purpose of Assignment #4.

Assignment #4: Grant Proposal

If you are considering applying to graduate school for psychology, we recommend you complete this as one of your three assignments – it will be good practice.

For this assignment, imagine you are a graduate student applying for funding for your research. Pick a topic from the course and design a study that goes beyond existing research to address unanswered questions in the literature. Begin by reviewing, briefly, research that has been done on this topic. Use the textbook as a resource but also check PsychInfo for new research that has been done since the textbook was published (stick to well-respected journals such as Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,

Psychological Science, and Social Cognition.) Explain what unanswered question or issue your study is meant to address. Lay out your predictions and your study design at both a conceptual and operational level. Discuss the implications if your hypothesis is supported, and how this research will contribute to understanding of social cognition as well as, somewhere downstream, to society as a whole.

You are welcome to consult with the instructors during office hours for guidance on selecting a topic and finding current research.

Class Participation (5% of your grade)

There will be one class discussion section in which you will be asked to read and discuss three journal articles. One paper will be from each instructor, and one will be a classic reading in psychology. Try to critique how the papers explain the phenomenon the researchers were interested in, and think about how one might go about testing this.

Bonus Marks (up to an extra 5% of your grade)

You can earn bonus points of up to 5% of your grade by participating in studies or by providing the instructor with examples of phenomena described in class from the media. You may only earn a maximum of 5 bonus points. You are more than welcome to participate in 13 studies and / or provide 15 examples, but you will only receive 5 bonus points if you do.

Research Participation (1% per study).

Most of psychology is about research. In classes you spend a great deal of time learning about how researchers conduct research; however, it is also important to understand the perspective of those participating in that research. There is no better way to do this than to participate in experiments. You will have the option to participate in 5 social or cognition experiments through the Research Experiences Group (REG). Every experiment you complete will add 1% to your final grade.

Media examples (1% per example)

You can also earn bonus points by providing the instructors with examples from popular culture (TV, movies, newspapers, joke emails, sports) of phenomena described in class. To earn this point, you will need to provide the instructor with the example in hard copy (on paper) or on a DVD or working internet link, and write a paragraph describing how this illustrates a point you learned in lecture, or from class readings or an upcoming lecture topic. Every example you provide that one of your instructors deems a good example of a phenomenon will add 1% to your final grade.

Grading Distribution

The distribution of marks for the various aspects of the course is as follows:

- Tests (2 x 25%) 50%
- Assignments 45%
- Class Participation 5%
- Up to 5% bonus points.

Late Assignment Policy

The assignments must be submitted on time. Keeping up with assignments is essential for getting the most out of this course as a student, and keeping track of late assignments is very time consuming for the instructor and TAs. Therefore, to encourage timely submission of assignments, late assignments

will NOT be accepted except for under extreme circumstances. If you turn in an assignment late without a legitimate and documented reason, you will not receive credit for it. Remember that you only have to complete three of the four assignments. So, if you miss one, this will simply count as the one assignment you do not have to write.

Avoiding Academic Offenses (e.g., plagiarism, cheating)

It is assumed by the instructor that all the work that you submit will be your own work. No plagiarism or cheating will be tolerated. As you probably know, the Undergraduate catalog defines plagiarism as “the act of presenting the ideas, words or other intellectual property of another as one’s own.” This means among other things that you will not submit someone else work, copy someone else’s work, or cheat in any other way. It means positively that you will cite work properly.

For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students are directed to consult the summary of Policy #71 which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (section 1; at <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm>).

Special Needs

Note for students with disabilities: The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term. Please provide us with necessary documentation as soon as possible.

Peace and Conflict Studies

This course is recognized as a PACS Content Course that fulfills requirements in the interdisciplinary Peace and Conflict Studies plan. For information about doing a PACS concentration (Major, Minor or Option) visit: <http://grebel.uwaterloo.ca/academic/undergrad/pacs/plans.shtml>

Course Schedule

The following is the schedule of topics to be covered in this course. For most lectures there is assigned reading. Lectures will tend to build on basic topics in the reading.

Day	Date	Topic	Reading	
Wednesday	5/2	Introduction	Chapter 1	BOTH
Monday	5/7	Concepts	Chapter 2	BLATZ
Wednesday	5/9	Concepts (cont.)		BLATZ
Monday	5/14	Memory	Chapter 5	BLATZ
Wednesday	5/16	Memory (cont.)		BLATZ
Monday	5/21	NO CLASS	VICTORIA DAY	
Wednesday	5/23	Heuristics	Chapter 3	LOGEL

Monday	5/28	Heuristics (cont.)		LOGEL
Wednesday	5/30	Hypothesis Testing	Chapter 4	LOGEL
Monday	6/4	Hypothesis Testing (cont.)		LOGEL
Wednesday	6/6	Hot Cognition	Chapter 6	LOGEL
Monday	6/11	Hot Cognition (cont.)		LOGEL
Wednesday	6/13	Automatic Processes	Chapter 7	BLATZ
Note: Automatic Processes not on Test #1				
Monday	6/18	Test #1		
Wednesday	6/20	Automatic Processes (cont.)		BLATZ
Monday	6/25	Stereotypes	Chapter 8	LOGEL
Assignment #1 due – Social Cognition in Everyday Life				
Wednesday	6/27	DISCUSSION		BOTH
Monday	7/2	NO CLASS	CANADA DAY	
Wednesday	7/4	Stereotypes (cont.)		GUEST
Assignment #2 due – Write an Editorial Piece				
Monday	7/9	Person Perception	Chapter 9	BLATZ
Wednesday	7/11	Person Perception (cont.)		BLATZ
Monday	7/16	Social Cognitive Neuroscience		BLATZ
Assignment #3 due – Social Cognition in the Workplace				
Wednesday	7/18	The Self (cont.)	Chapter 10	LOGEL
Monday	7/23	The Self		LOGEL
Wednesday	7/25	Test #2		
Assignment #4 due – Grant Proposal				