

**Renison University College**  
**Psychology 312**  
**Learning Disabilities**  
**Fall 2009**

Instructor: Virginia Nusca, Ph.D., C.Psych.  
Renison College, Room 0101G

Contact: Email through UW-ACE course site or by appointment

Course Time: Thursdays 2:30 p.m. – 5:20 p.m.

Course Location: REN 0201

Text: Lerner, Janet & Johns, Beverley (2009). *Learning Disabilities and Related Mild Disabilities: Characteristics, Teaching Strategies, and New Directions – Eleventh Edition*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.

### **Course Description**

The field of learning disabilities is multi-faceted, ranging from theoretical and philosophical debates as to the nature of learning disabilities to practical issues of assessing individuals to determine whether they have a learning disability or devising appropriate interventions to ameliorate learning difficulties. This course will discuss a variety of theoretical, research, assessment and intervention topics important to understanding and treating learning disabilities.

Each class will contain a mixture of lecture, discussion, applied learning activities, and/or group activities or presentations. Class members are encouraged to actively explore the issues and topics by generating discussion questions/topics, participating in learning activities and contributing to a case study group project.

The Lerner text is an authoritative survey of many of the important issues which will be discussed in class. It is an excellent reference and provides both background information and a framework that students can use as a starting point for each class. In addition, recommended readings may be assigned for a particular class. Any assigned readings will be announced at least one week prior to the class where they will be discussed.

## UW-ACE

The ACE site for PSYCH 31R will be used to post the following important information:

- ❑ a calendar of important dates
- ❑ power-point lecture notes
- ❑ recommended readings for each class
- ❑ links to interesting resources, websites, articles, etc.,
- ❑ instructions for assignments, projects, essay
- ❑ drop box for assignments and essays
- ❑ mailbox for contacting Dr. Nusca

It is important to check the UW-ACE site regularly for course announcements and information.

### Evaluation for PSYCH 312 students

Students will complete THREE assignments and a case study. A brief description is provided here but further information will be provided in class and on the UW-ACE course site.

1. Case study (35%). Students will choose **1** case study from a selection of case studies involving children or adolescents with a variety of academic and/or behavioural problems. Students will complete a report where they identify the problems presented in the case, generate hypotheses to explain or understand the problems identified, and articulate interventions to address identified problems. In addition to completing a report, students will work with other students studying the same case to prepare a presentation for the class.
2. Assignment One: Critical review of the concept of LD (25%). Students will critically evaluate the LDAO definition of LD. Papers should be 4-5 pages in length.
3. Assignment Two: Research article review (25%). Students will select a current research article which explores a theoretical, assessment or intervention issue related to LD. This is an opportunity to develop skills in assessing research literature as well as to consider how research informs the practice of understanding and working with students with LD. Papers should be 4-5 pages in length.
4. Assignment Three: Developing practical skills in working with students with LD (10%). Students will choose to complete **1** of the following:
  - ❑ Use an informal assessment measure or instructional strategy with a volunteer and write a 2-3 page report describing rationale for use of the measure or strategy,

a description of how it was employed, findings and observations, and recommendations on next steps as well as the utility of the measure or strategy.

- Develop and make a 15-20 minute presentation to the class on an assessment measure or instructional strategy.
5. Class participation (5%). Student engagement and active involvement is important to the success of this course as well as to the quality of learning for all class members. Regular attendance is expected and students will receive credit for attendance and participation.

Evaluation for 4<sup>th</sup> year Honours SDS students:

Students taking this course as part of their 4<sup>th</sup> year SDS requirements will complete a literature review, case study and ONE assignment. A brief description is provided here but further information will be provided in class and on the UW-ACE course site.

1. Literature review (50%). This is an opportunity for students to explore a topic in depth. The topic can be chosen by the student or through discussion with Dr. Nusca. However, all topics must be approved by Dr. Nusca. It is expected that essays will include a critical review of current research and will be 15-20 pages in length.
2. Case study (35%). Students will choose **1** case study from a selection of case studies involving children or adolescents with a variety of academic and/or behavioural problems. Students will complete a report where they identify the problems presented in the case, generate hypotheses to explain or understand the problems identified, and articulate interventions to address identified problems. In addition to completing a report, students will work with other students studying the same case to prepare a presentation for the class.
3. Assignment: Developing practical skills in working with students with LD (10%). Students will choose to complete **1** of the following:
  - Use an informal assessment measure or instructional strategy with a volunteer and write a 2-3 page report describing rationale for use of the measure or strategy, a description of how it was employed, findings and observations, and recommendations on next steps as well as the utility of the measure or strategy.
  - Develop and make a 15-20 minute presentation to the class on an assessment measure or instructional strategy.
4. Class participation (5%). Student engagement and active involvement is important to the success of this course as well as to the quality of learning for all class members. Regular attendance is expected and students will receive credit for attendance and participation.

## Class Schedule and Topics

The following summarizes the topics to be discussed although the dates assigned may vary:

September 17: Introduction to Learning Disabilities (Chap. 1, Chap. 2)

- ❑ Definitions of learning disabilities
- ❑ Types of learning disabilities
- ❑ Special education practices and learning disabilities
- ❑ Post-secondary education and learning disabilities

September 24: Introduction to Psychological Processes and Assessment of LD (Chap. 2, Chap. 5)

- ❑ Information Processing Model
- ❑ Psychological assessment of Learning Disabilities

October 1: Psychological Processes and Effective Instruction (Chap. 3, Chap. 5)

- ❑ Theories of learning and cognition
- ❑ Cognitive Strategy Instruction; Differentiated Instruction

October 8: Psychological Processes: Executive Functioning (Chap. 7)

- ❑ Description and development of executive functions
- ❑ Role of executive functioning deficits in LD, ADHD, ASD
- ❑ Learning Strategies

October 15: Psychological Processes: Perceptual and Motor Skills (Chap. 8). **Assignment One Due**

- ❑ Development of perceptual, gross motor, and fine motor skills

- ❑ Perceptual and motor skill deficits in nonverbal learning disabilities, speech and language delay, ADHD, ASD

October 22: Introduction to Language-Based LD (Chap. 11)

- ❑ Development of speech and language
- ❑ Impact of language development on cognitive, social, emotional, and academic development
- ❑ Semantics and knowledge-building strategies

October 29: LD in Reading: Word Reading and Decoding Skills (Chap. 12). **Assignment Two Due**

- ❑ Theory of word reading
- ❑ Development of word reading and spelling skills
- ❑ Role of phonological processing
- ❑ Remediating word reading deficits

November 5: LD in Reading: Reading Comprehension Skills (Chap. 12)

- ❑ Analyzing reading comprehension failure
- ❑ Nonverbal learning disabilities and reading comprehension
- ❑ Reading comprehension strategies

November 12: LD in Written Language: Writing Skills (Chap. 13). **Assignment Three Due**

- ❑ Development of writing skills
- ❑ Impact of psychological processing deficits on the development of writing skills
- ❑ Writing strategies

November 19: Adaptive technology + CASE STUDY PRESENTATIONS

- ❑ Description and demonstration of reading and writing assist software

November 26: LD in Math: Math Skills + CASE STUDY PRESENTATIONS (Chap. 14)

- ❑ Models of math skill development
- ❑ Impact of psychological processing deficits on the development of math skills

December 3: Social and Behavioural Consequences of LD + CASE STUDY PRESENTATIONS (Chap. 6, Chap. 5 pp. 160-163). **Literature Review Due**

- ❑ Cognitive and behaviour theories applied to social/emotional/behavioural difficulties associated with LD

**Academic Integrity:** In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

**Academic Integrity website (Arts):**

[http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic\\_responsibility.html](http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html)

**Academic Integrity Office (UW):**

<http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/>

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity [check [www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/) ] to avoid committing academic offences and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration, should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or Renison’s Administrative Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71, Student Discipline. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to this policy [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm) . For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties, [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm) .

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm)

**Appeals:** A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if grounds for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm) .

**Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:**

**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.

**Final Examination Policy**

For Fall 2009, the established examination period is December 9 - 22 2009. The schedule will be available in October. Students should be aware that student travel plans are not acceptable grounds for granting an alternative final examination time (see <http://www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/exams/finalexams.html>).