

# Psy 360: Theories of Learning and Cognition

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## Course Syllabus, Winter 2010

PSY 360, Section 201, Course #25896

**Course location:** Online. The course Blackboard site is linked from my home page:

<http://www.depaul.edu/~dallbrit>

**Meeting time:** This is a fully online course. There are no classroom meetings for this class. Our class “meeting” time is Monday at noon. All assignments for the week are due at noon Monday, except as noted (some assignments have components that are due earlier in the week). Most assignments will require that you start early in the week in order to complete them successfully, however, and last-second posts will not earn high marks for “timeliness” in the discussion grading system used for this course.

### **Textbooks:**

(1) Goldstein, *Cognitive Psychology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.

(2) Coglab student license (<http://coglab.wadsworth.com/>)

You can get the textbook at the bookstore, or anywhere you like. You may be able to get by with an earlier edition, but the quizzes will come from the edition listed here, and new texts should come bundled with a Coglab licence. A separate Coglab license can also be purchased over the web.

**Course Description:** Psychology is a survey course covering primarily cognitive psychology. The course will begin with a brief review of associationist (behaviorist) theories of learning, noting both the strengths of such theories (e.g., parsimony, methodological rigor, generalizability, practical applicability) and their weaknesses (e.g., inability to adequately explain rule-based and symbolic systems such as language, ignoring internal mental processes and representations). Most of the rest of the course will then be devoted to the Information Processing approach to the study of learning and behavior, in which theories attempt to specify the mental processes and mental representations involved in cognition. We will examine key theories in perception, memory, language, decision-making, and other domains from an information processing perspective.

**Course Learning Goals:** In this course, students will learn to:

- Use critical thinking and scientific reasoning to evaluate psychological claims, both in research and in everyday life
- Distinguish scientific reasoning from ideas that are based on anecdotal evidence, intuition, personal biases, or pseudo-scientific reasoning.
- Identify and explain important concepts, theories, and empirical findings in the field of cognitive psychology and learning
- Apply the information processing approach to understand how humans think and learn
- Interpret and describe experimental data from cognitive psychological research
- Apply theories and principles of cognitive psychology to practical issues and problems

**Grading:** Your grade in the course will be determined as follows:

40 pts	Course pre-test ( <i>all-or-none; not based on test score</i> )
420 pts	Weekly discussion board and group discussions
220 pts	Weekly quizzes on textbook readings
120 pts	Weekly Coglab experiments
60 pts	Coglab lab report
100 pts	Final project
40 pts	Course post-test ( <i>all-or-none; not based on test score</i> )

There will be 1000 points possible for the course. Letter grades will be based on the percentage of the total possible points earned. The cutoffs for letter grades are 93.33% for A, 90% for A-, 86.66% for B+, 83.33% for B, etc. Grading will be based strictly on the points earned rather than on a “curve.”

**Late assignments** will not be accepted, and missed assignments can not be made up. This is both a course policy and a simple practical reality: Because many of the assignments for this course involve collaboration and online dialog, they can only be completed while the collaboration or conversation is actually taking place, not after the fact. Failing to complete an assignment by the stated deadline will result in a grade of zero for that item. Exceptions will only be considered when verifiable documentation is presented for a valid excuse, and in the case of a prolonged excused absence withdrawal from the course may be recommended.

### **Assignment Details:**

- 1) **Pre-test.** Full credit will be awarded for completing the pretest on time and *making an honest attempt to answer the questions*. Your pretest score will not play any role in your course grade; it is just to help assess the effectiveness of the course. I will compare the overall class pretest and post-test scores to see how much people are learning from the class, and where improvements can be made in the future. Please try to answer the questions as best you can, but do NOT use your textbook or any other resource (Google, Wikipedia, etc.) while taking the test. The whole point is to accurately assess what you know before and after the course, so that I can tell whether the course is effective.
- 2) **Weekly general discussion board assignment: “Your turn to teach.”** Each week you will find (or create) a resource that teaches us something about the week’s topic or a related issue. It can be a news item, a web site with useful demonstrations or tutorials, a relevant video, or any other web-based resource. You should not only post a link to the resource, but also provide a bit of discussion to tell us what it is, how it relates to what we are learning that week, etc. – like an annotated bibliography. You must post your contribution by Thursday (8 pts), and comment on at least two other students’ posts by Monday (4 pts). Extra credit is possible if you create something yourself that is particularly useful, entertaining, or well-done.
- 3) **Weekly group discussion board questions.** Each week there will be three questions that you will answer in the Group Discussion Board in collaboration with the other members of your group. All grading of the group discussions is individual: You will be evaluated for the originality, relevance, and timeliness of your own contributions to the discussion. There is no “group” grade. In general, I will evaluate your discussion contributions using something like the following rubric:

Category	1 point	3 points	5 points	6 points
<b>Promptness and Initiative</b>	Does not respond to most postings; rarely participates freely	Responds to most postings several days after initial discussion; limited initiative	Responds to most postings within a 24 hour period; requires occasional prompting to post	Consistently responds to postings in less than 24 hours; demonstrates good self-initiative
Delivery of Post	Utilizes poor spelling and grammar in most posts; posts appear "hasty"	Errors in spelling and grammar evidenced in several posts	Few grammatical or spelling errors are noted in posts	Consistently uses grammatically correct posts with rare misspellings
Relevance of Post	Posts topics which do not relate to the discussion content; makes short or irrelevant remarks	Occasionally posts off topic; most posts are short in length and offer no further insight into the topic	Frequently posts topics that are related to discussion content; prompts further discussion of topic	Consistently posts topics related to discussion topic; cites additional references related to topic
Expression Within the Post	Does not express opinions or ideas clearly; no connection to topic	Unclear connection to topic evidenced in minimal expression of opinions or ideas	Opinions and ideas are stated clearly with occasional lack of connection to topic	Expresses opinions and ideas in a clear and concise manner with obvious connection to topic
Contribution to the Learning Community	Does not make effort to participate in learning community as it develops; seems indifferent	Occasionally makes meaningful reflection on group's efforts; marginal effort to become involved with group	Frequently attempts to direct the discussion and to present relevant viewpoints for consideration by group; interacts freely	Aware of needs of community; frequently attempts to motivate the group discussion; presents creative approaches to topic

There will be a total of 30 points possible for the three group discussion questions each week. In general, only substantive posts will receive credit for participation. A substantive post is one that is relevant to the topic, course materials, and previous posts, provides reasons (or evidence) to support or oppose a position, and advances the conversation in meaningful ways. "I agree!" or "Good idea, I couldn't have said it better," or "I think the answer lies somewhere in the middle" would not, for example, be considered substantive comments. One or two sentences are seldom a very substantive post. A substantive post is more likely to consist of one or more paragraphs, in which an idea is coherently stated and logically supported. Although the exact number and frequency of posts will vary depending on the questions and the nature of the conversation, on average you should be making several substantive posts each week.

A further word or two on the "timeliness" component of the discussion grades: When discussion assignments require that you respond to posts from other students, your initial posting must be made

several days BEFORE the final deadline so that others have time to reply to it. If you wait and do all your posts the day of the deadline, you will be marked down significantly for not posting in a timely fashion. Occasionally (rarely, one hopes) you may find the other members of your discussion group have not heeded this warning. If, 24 hours before the final due date, there are no other posts for you to make your required replies to, post a reply to your own message noting that it is less than a day before the deadline and there was nothing to reply to. If you do, you will not be penalized for other people's procrastination. They, however, will be.

- 4) **Weekly quizzes on textbook readings.** The quiz covers the textbook readings and the explanatory material that accompanies the assigned Coglab experiments for the week. The quizzes may be taken multiple times up until the deadline. Only your highest score of all your attempts each week will count. Each time you take the quiz you will get a different set of randomly chosen questions from a large test bank of questions.
- 5) **Weekly Coglab experiments.** Each week two experiments are to be completed on the Coglab web site (<http://coglab.wadsworth.com/>). You will need to purchase a Coglab license if one was not included with your textbook. When you set up your account at the Coglab web site, be sure to use your name as it appears in the Blackboard gradebook – otherwise I will not be able to verify your completion of the experiments and give you credit for them.
- 6) **Coglab lab report.** You will select one of the Coglab experiments to write up an APA-style paper as a “lab report.” You and the other members of your group will provide one another with peer review of a first draft, and you will do peer grading of the other group members' finished papers. You can select any Coglab experiment you wish for this report, but each group member must do a different one. Selections will be made via the group discussion board, and it is first-post first-served – once someone posts their choice it is final and no one else may select it. This assignment has multiple due dates:
  - Week 3 – post your choice of Coglab experiments
  - Week 4 – post a first draft of your lab report for peer review
  - Week 6 – post comments on other group members' first drafts
  - Week 8 – final version of your lab report posted
  - Week 10 – finish your peer grading of group members' lab reports
- 7) **Final Project.** A four to seven page paper in which you propose an experiment to test an idea related to one of the topics of the course is due during final exam week. The paper should be in APA format, with an introduction that reviews relevant information on the topic and states the hypothesis your experiment would test; a Method section that details how the experiment would be conducted; a Results section that tells what data would be analyzed and what results would confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis; and a Discussion section that discusses what the implications would be if you did (or did not) get the expected results, and discusses the feasibility of actually doing the experiment. In your introduction you must refer to (a) one of the Coglab demos, (b) specific content from at least 1 lecture, (c) specific comments in at least one discussion forum, (d) specific pages in the text, and (e) at least 3 journal articles (1 of which must be published in the past year).
- 8) **Course Post-test.** This test and the PreTest will be used to assess how much the class as a whole has learned in the course. Your score on the PostTest will NOT count towards your course grade! If you complete the PostTest by the deadline *and make a good-faith effort* to answer the questions, you will receive full credit (40 points). The 40 points should appear in the gradebook within a few days - as soon as I can verify your PostTest completion. If it does not appear within a few days, email me.

Please do NOT use your textbook or any other resources while completing the PostTest . Its purpose is to see what you have learned in the course. (Remember that your *score* on the test does NOT count towards your grade.)

**What I expect from you:** In an online course, it is critical that you actively participate and complete all assignments on time. In a course where most of the grade comes from a midterm and final exam, you might be able to sometimes get away with letting your attention stray for a few weeks and then cramming for a week or so before the exams. In this class there are no exams. The work (and consequently the learning and the points for grading) are spread out over the entire quarter.

To do well in the course, you will need to actively participate and put serious work into the assignments every week. In a course that has 3 hours of classroom meetings per week, a rule of thumb is that you should expect to put in an additional 9 hours per week of work outside of the class. In an online course like this one, you should expect to put in about that much time per week also: 10 to 12 hours of reading, watching lectures and other materials, working on assignments, and discussing course content. Logging in to Blackboard once a week will NOT do the trick – you should plan on visiting the discussion boards several times per week and devoting a significant amount of time to the course each week.

The flip side of that, however, is that if you put in the time and do good work every week, you will do well in the course. Because I will be able to evaluate your effort and learning through what you produce each week, your grade in the course does not have to hinge on whether you have a bad day during final exam week, or whether you are prone to test anxiety. Steady, consistent effort and intellectual engagement throughout the quarter will result in a good outcome for you. And because this course is not graded on a “curve” there is no reason that everyone can not get some type of “A” grade if everyone chooses to do the work.

I also expect you to respond to your fellow students with courtesy and respect. Although online discussions can have the benefit of making people feel more comfortable expressing themselves than they might in person, online communication can also make it easier to be rude, condescending, and downright mean. I’m sure you’ve seen an online discussion or two that degenerated into a “flame war.” Civility and respect are just as essential in an online learning community as in a physical classroom, and I will insist that we observe the usual social norms of cooperative conversation and politeness in our online “classroom.” That does not mean we can not disagree in our discussions – just that we must not do so disagreeably.

**What you can expect from me:** Just as I expect you to be consistently engaged with the class throughout the quarter, you can expect me to respond in a timely fashion to questions, and to monitor and guide your progress throughout the quarter. I will be checking my email and the class discussion boards several times per week. In general you can expect me to respond within about 24 hours to questions posted to the “Course Q&A” forum and within about 48 hours to emails.

**Where to go for answers to questions:**

- **Course discussion board forums in Blackboard.** In the Discussion Board section of the Blackboard web site for this course there is a forum called “Course Q&A,” where you can post any question about the class or about psychology. These might include questions about the course structure, assignments, and all other details that relate to how the course is run, as well as questions about course content, careers in psychology, and so on.
- **Technology Help button in Blackboard.** This navigation button will direct you to a number of sources of help and information for using Blackboard and other technology resources in the class.
- **Student Support Services button in Blackboard.** This button will give you links and contact information for resources such as the Writing Center, advising office, etc.
- **Technology Contact Center** (312) 362-8765. The place to call with any technology problem.
- **Email me.** If you need to discuss something that you would rather not post to the discussion boards for the rest of the class to see, contact me by email.

## **Academic Dishonesty:**

Cheating or other forms of academic dishonesty will be dealt with according to university policy and may result in at a minimum a zero on the exam or assignment in question. Plagiarism (using the words or ideas of someone else as if they were your own) is also a form of academic dishonesty, and carries the same penalties as other forms of cheating. Plagiarism can occur as a blatant attempt to cheat (buying a term paper over the internet and turning it in as if you wrote it), but it can also occur through careless writing (failing to provide a reference for an idea that you found in a book or article). A good rule of thumb is to always provide a reference for any idea that came from someone else's writing, and if more than a few words in a row are repeated exactly either put it in quotes or rephrase it. It is also possible to plagiarize yourself -- by turning in a paper from a previous class as if it were original work, for example.

You should also be aware that I (and many other instructors also) now routinely use automated programs to scan submitted assignments for evidence of plagiarism. So please **DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT** cutting and pasting text from articles, old papers, or the internet into assignments you submit.

Students should consult the Academic Integrity Policy in the DePaul Student Handbook (see the "Student Support" button in Blackboard) for more information on what constitutes plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity. Contact the instructor if you have questions about how to properly acknowledge source materials and the works of others.

## **Students with disabilities:**

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential. You should also contact the PLS Program (for LD, AD/HD) at 773-325-8656 in SC 370 or the Office for Students with Disabilities (for all other disabilities) at 773-325-7290 in Student Center 307.

**Course Schedule:** See the "Course Schedule" section in Blackboard for schedule details. The topics to be covered are:

- Week 1 – Course Intro; Associative Learning
- Week 2 – Sensation and Perception
- Week 3 – Attention
- Week 4 – Memory (Part 1)
- Week 5 – Memory (Part 2)
- Week 6 – Concepts and Categories
- Week 7 – Imagery
- Week 8 – Language
- Week 9 – Reasoning, Judgment & Decision-Making
- Week 10 – Problem Solving; Intelligence, Creativity, and Expertise