



PSY 620: Cognitive Psychology (Fall 2012)
COURSE SYLLABUS (subject to change until first class day)

Instructor: Dr. Curt A. Carlson

Office Location: Binnion 208

Office Hours: Just after class, or Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00 – 3:00pm

University Email Address: curt.carlson@tamuc.edu

Class meets: Wednesdays 4:30-7pm, in SS150

COURSE INFORMATION

Materials – Textbooks, Readings, Supplementary Readings:

Textbook: *Cognitive Psychology* (2012, 3rd edition) by Robinson-Riegler & Robinson-Riegler

Readings: I will provide research articles by cognitive psychologists, and chapters from additional cognitive psychology books.

Course Description:

This course provides an overview of cognitive psychology, which is a laboratory-based science investigating the mental processes that allow us to perceive the world around us, attend to certain parts of it, store information for later retrieval, interact with other human beings through the use of language, and make decisions prior to performing actions. Of course, these processes are not perfect, but rather are quite error-prone. Cognitive psychology has uncovered some of the reasons behind these errors, and has even suggested many solutions and/or shortcuts that can help us avoid some of them.

Although most of what we know about cognitive psychology has arisen from controlled laboratory experiments, it impacts your everyday life in many ways. For example, many airplane crashes are due to cognitive errors on the part of the pilot or air traffic controller. Car accidents are often due to distracted drivers talking or texting on their smart phones or interacting with their GPS systems. Kirk Bloodsworth was positively identified by five eyewitnesses and sentenced to death, but eventually exonerated by DNA evidence. As of mid-July, 2012, 294 individuals in the U.S. have been exonerated based on DNA evidence, and approximately 75% of these were due, at least in part, to mistaken eyewitness identification. We will learn about the cognitive errors that can drive these mistakes leading to miscarriages of justice.

My goals in this course are to present the laboratory-based foundation on which cognitive psychology is built and to make that information relevant to you through examples. To help you develop an appreciation of the laboratory-based approach, you will read some journal articles that describe experiments. You will leave this class with a good grounding in cognitive psychology, its methods and theoretical outlook, and an ability to capitalize on this knowledge to improve the quality of your mental life (e.g., improved study habits, enhanced memory, the knowledge to make better decisions) as well as understand the cognitive principles that underlie these improvements.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your developing knowledge of the above topics will be assessed in three ways: 1) quizzes and exams, 2) discussion of readings, and 3) presentation of literature review.

Quizzes

After completion of each topic, you will be quizzed over that material. There are two reasons for these quizzes. First, they should encourage you to keep on top of the reading, in order to ensure that you do not fall behind in the course. Second, research has shown that repeated testing enhances retention of material. We will make use of this finding in order to increase your performance on exams and to help you remember the topics we cover after the course has been completed.

Exams

There will be two exams, each essay-based. You will be provided with several questions in advance for which to prepare answers, then on the day of the exam, you will receive a subset of these that I will choose. You will just need to re-write your answers to these questions during the exam in class.

Discussion of Readings

Each week there will be empirical research articles and/or sections from Pinker's *How the Mind Works* (or chapters from books by other cognitive psychologists) to read and discuss. I will provide these readings. Your responsibility will be to read all of these so that you can actively take part in discussion every week. Also, you will **lead discussion** for some of these readings, to be determined early in the term.

Literature Review Presentation

By **October 17th**, you need to choose an area of cognitive psychology on which to focus your attention for a literature review. You should shoot for at least 10 empirical articles or reviews of empirical research from the literature. Your 10-15 minute presentation should be in the form of PowerPoint or another presentation program.

Grading

- **20%**: You will earn credit for every quiz on which you score a 60% or better (i.e., they are treated as pass/fail). There will be 10 quizzes, and each is worth 2% of your overall grade.
- **20%**: Active participation in discussions every week, and good organization and leading of readings of which you are in charge, will result in 20% of your overall grade.
- **40%**: Each of the two exams is worth 20%.
- **20%**: Literature Review Presentation.

You need 90% or better for an 'A', 80% or better for a 'B', 70% or better for a 'C', and 60% or better for a 'D'. Below 60% results in an 'F'.

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

You can communicate with me via email or by speaking with me after class or during my office hours. I will respond to emails within 36 hours on weekdays.

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Course Specific Procedures:

Academic Honesty Policy: Texas A&M University-Commerce does not tolerate plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Conduct that violates generally accepted standards of academic honesty is defined as academic dishonesty. "Academic dishonesty" includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism (the appropriation or stealing of the ideas or words of another and passing them off as one's own), cheating on exams or other course assignments, collusion (the unauthorized collaboration with others in preparing course assignments), and abuse (destruction, defacing, or removal) of resource material.

Examination Policy: All quizzes and exams are to be taken closed-book. **You are not allowed to take any quiz or exam after its respective deadline, unless you notify me of extenuating circumstances and I give permission in advance.**

Dropping the Course: A student may drop this course by logging into their myLEO account and clicking on the hyperlink labeled 'Drop a class' from among the choices found under the myLEO section of the Web page.

Incompletes: The policy for this course is not to allow incompletes. If you cannot complete the course with a grade that you find satisfactory, it is your responsibility to drop it.

University Specific Procedures:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services
Texas A&M University-Commerce
Gee Library 132
Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835
Fax (903) 468-8148
StudentDisabilityServices@tamu-commerce.edu
[Student Disability Resources & Services](#)

Student Conduct:

All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. (See *Code of Student Conduct from Student Guide Handbook*).

COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR

This schedule is to be used as a guide. It is possible that it will change.

Wednesday	Topic
8/29	Syllabus, Readings Selection, Intro to Cog Psych, Pinker: <i>The Blank Slate</i>
9/5	Perception (Chs. 1 & 2); Quiz 1 ; readings from <i>How the Mind Works</i>
9/12	Attention (Ch. 3); Quiz 2 ; Proffitt et al. (2003), Strayer & Drews (2007)
9/19	Immediate Memory (Ch. 4); Quiz 3 ; McAfoose&Baune(2009)WM review
9/26	Objects & Concepts (Ch. 5); Quiz 4 ; chapters from Face Processing book
10/3	MIDTERM
10/10	LTM (Ch. 6); Quiz 5 ; Roediger&Karpicke (2006), Nairne et al. (2008)
10/17	Presentation Approval . Autobiographical Memory (Ch. 7); Quiz 6 ; Talarico&Rubin (2003), Gronlund et al. (2007)
10/24	Memory Malleability & Eyewitness Memory (Ch. 8); Quiz 7 ; Loftus (2004), Schacter (1999), Eyewitness Memory Readings
10/31	Language (Chs. 9-10); Quiz 8 ; Pinker lecture: <i>The Stuff of Thought</i>
11/7	Judgment & Decision-Making (Ch. 11); Quiz 9 ; Gigerenzer et al. (2008)
11/14	Problem Solving (Ch. 12); Quiz 10 ; Ericsson&Charness (1994)
11/21	Presentations
11/28	Presentations, review for final exam
12/5	FINAL EXAM