

**Controversial Issues in Psychology: PSY311\_05, Fall 2024 (33837)**  
**Instructor: Robert Deaner, Ph.D., Professor**

**Instructor's Office:** 1315 Au Sable Hall

**Instructor's Office Hours:** Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays 11:00 – 11:30; and by appointment. "Walk-ins" are welcome, but students with appointments have priority. It is strongly recommended that you email the instructor for an appointment.

Meetings may occur in the instructor's office or via Zoom. Please check with the instructor to find a mutually agreeable format and time.

I am also available at other times besides listed office hours, especially Mon and Wed afternoons (on campus or zoom) and Tues and Thursday afternoons (zoom only).

**If meeting by Zoom, use this link:**

<https://gvsu-edu.zoom.us/j/94416373802?pwd=WMT6SDeDjrPgUsnlfTd18IDKN5M4Pb.1>

Meeting ID: 944 1637 3802 (that you probably won't need)

Passcode: 892282 883510 (that you probably won't need)

**Instructor's Email:** robert.deaner@gmail.com (recommended and preferred to deanerr@gvsu.edu); always type "PSY11" in the subject line and **include your full name in the message**. Please email me directly, not through Bb; I often don't see those messages and it's a hassle to respond to them.

**Instructor's Phone:** 331-2423 (definitely not recommended; I don't check phone messages.)

**Course time:** M, W, & F; 12:00 - 12:50

**Course Location:** 261 Padnos Hall

**Prerequisites (passed already):** There's no prerequisite for earning general course credit. However, earning SWS credit requires that you have already completed WRT 150 with a grade of C or better (not C-).

**Required texts:**

Haidt, J. The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness (2024). ISBN-13: 978-0593655030.

Schrier, A. Bad Therapy: Why the Kids Aren't Growing Up (2024). ISBN-13: 978-0593542927.

These books are available at the bookstore and online. I purchased them from Amazon for \$20 each. We will be using both books frequently, so you should definitely get them.

**Course Description (from Syllabus of Record):** Develops the skills of critical thinking (analyzing the arguments of other people and forming one's own reasoned judgments) about controversial issues.

This course is designated SWS. SWS courses adhere to certain guidelines. Students turn in a total of at least 3000 words of writing. Part of that total may be essay exams, but a substantial amount of it is made up of essays, reports, or research papers. The instructor works with the students on revising drafts of papers, rather than simply grading the finished piece of writing. At least four hours of class time will be devoted to writing instruction. At least one third of the final grade in the course is based on the writing assignments. **Students must complete the course with a grade of "C" or better in order to receive SWS credit for taking the course.**

### **Objectives (from Syllabus of Record):**

Every course at Grand Valley State University has certain core learning objectives, described in the “Syllabus of Record.” Every topic covered in this course will include elements directly relevant to meeting these objectives.

This class does not merely address specific controversial issues, but is also designed to teach critical thinking on a broader level. The course is also an SWS course. Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to:

- Objective 1: Identify areas of psychological controversy and evaluate supporting arguments based on empirical findings.
- Objective 2: Demonstrate critical thinking skills (analyzing the arguments of other people and forming one’s own reasoned judgment).
- Objective 3: Research and explain ideas clearly in a written format.
- Objective 4: Present ideas clearly in oral format.

### **Course Format:**

**We will be using an in-person, technology-free, discussion-based format.** This means:

- Class meetings will occur in the classroom, not on Zoom.
- Students will often take notes, complete quizzes, and do other work in the classroom with pen (or pencil) and paper. **No smartphones or laptops will be permitted** except in very rare circumstances and after individual consultation with the instructor. However, there may be a few days when students are encouraged to use laptops so that they can do internet based activities (e.g., investigating research claims).
- At roughly one third of class meetings, students will take an extra credit quiz at the beginning of the meeting. The quiz format may include multiple choice, short answers and essays.
- At most class meetings, we will discuss assigned readings and do related, interactive activities. The instructor will occasionally do brief lectures to review key concepts.
- Many discussions and activities will occur in groups. Working with your classmates will be an enjoyable and valuable aspect of this course. However, there are no assignments for points that will require working in groups.
- Attendance and participation is required. If you anticipate missing many class meetings, you should not remain in this section of PSY311.
- This is an SWS course, and several meetings will focus on scientific writing.

### **Course Themes and Content:**

- The overarching theme for this course is critical thinking. Critical thinking means seeking the truth by evaluating information, ideas, and arguments. There are many critical thinking tools (or concepts) worth learning, including biases and heuristics, rhetoric and persuasion, logic, and probability. We will address several of these tools, but we will particularly focus on learning and applying the critical thinking tools that comprise the scientific method. These include evaluating empirical (testable) claims by considering the measurement of variables, the strength, reliability, and nature of variables’ relationships, and the generalizability of the findings. We will learn critical thinking tools throughout the semester as we engage with controversial issues and claims. This will sometimes occur through readings and sometimes via brief lectures by the instructor.
- Another major theme for the course is evolutionary mismatch. An evolutionary mismatch occurs when our evolved psychology does not function well in our current environment. For example, we will begin the course by reading *The Anxious Generation*, a book that argues that the contemporary technological social environment, including smartphones, Tiktok and Instagram, is so different from the social environment under which humans evolved that this environment is causing mental illness. Another apparent mismatch is that most humans have a sweet tooth, a strong liking of sweet foods; this preference served us well during most of human evolution, but it causes problems in modern environments where sweets are abundant.

- We will engage with a blend of popular and scholarly materials. Popular materials will include the two required books, book reviews, essays, and possibly videos. Scholarly materials will be peer-reviewed research articles, including reports, meta-analyses, and reviews. We will usually read popular materials and then “dig in” to a specific claim by examining the peer-reviewed research.
- We will address a range of controversial issues and claims this semester (see below). Some issues—and the conversations we have about them—will provoke strong feelings and challenge your customary ways of thinking. These provocations are desirable, perhaps even necessary, when pursuing the truth. In fact, one of the main goals of this course is providing an opportunity for respectful and productive disagreement. We will discuss approaches for doing this.

### **Basis for Grading:**

- About one-third of course points will come from exams, about one-third will come from the research proposal, and about one-third will come from homework and attendance.

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Points</b>
Course Connection	10 (1.5%)
Homework (15 assignments, 10 pts each)	150 (23%)
Attendance and Participation	80 (12%)
Annotated Bibliography	30 (5%)
First Draft Introduction Proposal	40 (6%)
First Draft Intro & Methods Proposal	20 (3%)
Peer Feedback on Research Proposal	20 (3%)
Final Draft Research Proposal	90 (14%)
Oral Presentation of Research Proposal	20 (3%)
Exams (2 exams, 100 pts each)	200 (30%)
Extra Credit Quizzes (12 quizzes, 3 pts each)	
Number Grade = Earned points/660 x 100 (no rounding up)	660

### **Grading Scale**

<b>94 &amp; above</b>	A
90 - 93.99	A-
87 - 89.99	B+
83 - 86.99	B
80 - 82.99	B-
77 - 79.99	C+
73 - 76.99	C
70 - 72.99	C-
67 - 69.99	D+
60 - 66.99	D
59.99 & below	F

### **Course Connection (10 pts)**

- Your first assignment is to consider your personal connection to this course. To earn all 10 points, you must complete this assignment by **Friday August 30 at midnight**. In 80 – 150 words, please tell me:
  - Your year and major(s)
  - Two personal things that you feel comfortable sharing with the instructor (not necessarily peers), such as a job, hobby, pet, unusual talent, religion, disability, living situation or family situation.

- Two controversial issues you hope we will address in this course. These issues don't need to be on the list of possible issues listed below.
- Upload a photo that clearly shows your face.

### **Homework (15 Assignments x 10 pts = 150 pts)**

- You'll have 15 homework assignments this semester, and each is worth up to 10 points.
- You'll find the assignments in the Homework folder, and you'll submit them there.
- Homework due dates will be communicated by an emailed course announcement at least one week prior to the due date. Each assignment will always be due at noon, before the beginning of the class meeting when we will discuss it.
- Late homework assignments will generally not be accepted. However, each student will be permitted to submit two homeworks up to 1 week late with no penalty ("freebies). If you submit an assignment even 1 minute late, it will count as one of your freebies. Sometimes Bb or your internet connection may be problematic, and the instructor won't be sympathetic; therefore it's wise to try submitting your assignment at least an hour before it is due.
- Homework assignments will usually require that you answer questions about the reading we will discuss in class that day. Some homework assignments may involve doing research on the internet, informally interviewing friends or family, or doing other activities. Most assignments should take less than two hours, although the ones based on required readings will take longer when the reading time is included.
- Material from the homework assignments will be a large component of the quizzes and exams.

### **Attendance and Participation (80 pts)**

- Your attendance will be recorded, and— along with your in-class participation—is worth 80 points, roughly 2 pts per class meeting.
- Each unexcused absence will be a 2 pt deduction. Attending a class but not actively participating will be a 1 pt deduction.
- Using technology without permission or otherwise disrupting class will be a 2 pt deduction
- GVSU's attendance policy, including what counts as an excused absence, can be found here: <https://www.gvsu.edu/catalog/2021-2022/navigation/academic-policies-and-regulations.htm#anchor-44>

### **Exams (2 Exams x 100 pts each = 200 pts)**

- There will be two exams, one about halfway through the semester and one during the final exam period.
- Exams will consist of multiple-choice questions, short answers, and essays.
- Material from the homework and quizzes will be a large component of the exams.
- Students will take their exams in our classroom (or a DSR space) during regular class time.  
**Exams cannot be taken online.**

### **Extra Credit Quizzes (12 Quizzes x 3 pts each = 36 pts)**

- There will be 12 quizzes (and possibly more), all for extra credit. Quizzes will be the only opportunity for earning extra credit this semester. The quizzes will address readings, especially issues addressed in recent homework assignments. The quizzes will also address topics and concepts covered in recent class meetings.
- Quizzes will be given in class and will be taken with pen and paper. They will usually be given at the beginning of class, will only take a few minutes, and we will review the answers immediately afterwards. The instructor will keep the quizzes, but students will be encouraged to take notes, with pen and paper, on the questions and the answers.
- If you're late to class, you'll have less time to take the quiz or won't have a chance to take it at all.

- If you miss class, even if your absence from class is officially excused (so you don't lose attendance points), you still cannot make up a quiz. You don't need to bother asking the instructor for an exception; the answer will definitely be "no, you cannot make up a quiz."
- Each quiz will have a maximum score of 3 points and, with 12 quizzes, there will be a total of 36 quiz points available during the semester. This is enough to boost your overall course grade. For example, a student who earns an average of 2 pts on 11 quizzes will earn 22 points, which would raise their overall course average by 3.3 points; this would be enough to raise a B average to a B+.

### **Research Proposal (6 parts; see Basis for Grading: 240 pts total)**

- Each student will complete a Research Proposal during the semester. The goals of this project are to identify a crucial claim relevant to a controversial issue, explain why previous research does not allow a confident conclusion about that claim's validity (i.e., truth) and propose a new research study that might help resolve the claim. Students will choose their issue and claim in consultation with the instructor.
- The Research Proposal will have a traditional scientific organization but will not have an Abstract, Results or Discussion section. It will have an Introduction, Methods, and References. It will be written in APA style.
- The project will occur in several steps and students will receive feedback from the instructor.
- Students will also provide feedback to their classmates about their proposals.
- Students will present the highlights of their proposal to their classmates in an oral presentation in class (about 5 minutes per presentation).
- More details, including rubrics, will be provided later in the semester.

### **Controversial claims we will address this semester:**

- Social media harms mental health.
- Smartphones alter cognition.
- Overparenting harms children.
- Therapy culture harms mental health.
- Formal schooling causes ADHD.
- Depression is often a normal response to life events.
- We will almost certainly address these claims (or very similar ones) because they are all discussed in our two required books.

### **Controversial claims we might address:**

- Hormonal birth control has substantial negative effects.
- Bottle feeding (compared to breastfeeding) has negative effects.
- Single parenting is less effective than dual parenting.
- Pornography harms romantic relationships and mental health.
- Video games cause aggression
- Online dating has, overall, negative effects.
- Semaglutide (Ozempic, Wegovy) has substantial negative effects.
- Alcohol has, overall, negative effects.
- Marijuana has, overall, negative effects.
- The Blank Slate myth (nurture over nature) has negative side effects.
- Talent doesn't exist; training and opportunity fully determine achievement.
- Standardized testing is biased against some racial/ethnic groups.

- Non-heterosexual orientation is partly caused by the environment.
- Women in combat roles reduce military effectiveness.
- Antidepressants are, overall, effective.
- Implicit association tests do not predict behavior.
- Growth mindset interventions improve academic achievement.
- Mindfulness interventions are ineffective.
- Puberty blockers cause harm.
- Religion improves mental health.
- Transgender identity is never the product of social influence.
- Demographic diversity (race, gender) in the workplace often leads to worse performance.
- The social sciences (in the United States) discriminate against liberals (e.g., in hiring, promotion, grants, invitations to participate in colloquia/symposia).
- **We will address a few, not all, of these claims.** We may also address claims that are not listed here. The instructor will decide which claims to cover based on his ability to find good materials and student input.

### **Blackboard:**

Almost all aspects of this course will require that students have access to Blackboard. If you have questions about your access, contact information technology staff: <https://www.gvsu.edu/it/>

### **Communication**

The instructor will communicate all class announcements in class and via Blackboard email. You are expected to check your email regularly. Announcements will generally remain on Bb throughout the semester. They should be considered as official amendments to the syllabus. Please read the relevant announcement before emailing a question to the instructor.

Below is a **Provisional Schedule**, meaning dates will change based on time constraints, unanticipated events, and the instructor's discretion. However, every effort will be made to make sure there will be no changes to the exam dates or the grading scheme. When the instructor makes changes, he will communicate them in class and via announcements on Bb.

DATE	READING DUE AND/OR ACTIVITY	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
Aug 26 - M	Discussion of marijuan legalization	
Aug 28 - W	Discussion of evolution, mismatch and eyeglasses	
Aug 30 - F	TBA; last day to register; <b>100% Refund deadline</b>	Course Connection
Sep 2 - M	<b>Labor Day - No Class</b>	
Sep 4 - W	Haidt Introduction, Chpt 1	Homework #1
Sep 6 - F	Haidt Chpts 2 & 3	Homework #2
Sep 9 - M	Haidt Chpts 4 & 5	Homework #3
Sep 11 - W	TBA	
Sep 13 - F	Haidt Chpt 6 & 7	Homework #4
Sep 16 - M	Haidt Chpt 8	
Sep 18 - W	TBA	
Sep 20 - F	Research & Writing; <b>75% Refund deadline</b>	
Sep 23 - M	TBA	
Sep 25 - W	TBA	
Sep 27 - F	TBA	
Sep 30 - M	Research & Writing	
Oct 2 - W	TBA	
Oct 4 - F	TBA	
Oct 7 - M	TBA	
Oct 9 - W	Exam Review	
Oct 11 - F	<b>Midterm Exam</b>	
Oct 14 - M	TBA	
Oct 16 - W	TBA	
Oct 18 - F	Research & Writing	
Oct 21 - M	<b>Fall Break</b>	
Oct 23 - W	Schrier Introduction, Chpts 1 - 3	
Oct 25 - F	Schrier Chpts 4 - 6; <b>Drop with "W" deadline</b>	Annotated Bibliography
Oct 28 - M	Schrier Chpts 7 - 8	
Oct 30 - W	TBA	
Nov 1 - F	Schrier Chpts 9 - 10	
Nov 4 - M	Schrier Chpts 11 - 12	1rst Draft Introduction Proposal
Nov 6 - W	Meetings with Instructor	
Nov 8 - F	Research & Writing	
Nov 11 - M	TBA	
Nov 13 - W	TBA	
Nov 15 - F	Research & Writing	
Nov 18 - M	TBA	1rst Draft Intro & Methods Proposal
Nov 20 - W	TBA	Peer Feedback on Proposal
Nov 22 - F	Meetings with Instructor	
Nov 25 - M	TBA	
Nov 27 - W	<b>Thanksgiving Break</b>	
Nov 29 - F	<b>Thanksgiving Break</b>	
Dec 2 - M	Oral presentations	
Dec 4 - W	Oral presentations	
Dec 6 - F	Exam Review	
<b>Final Exam Week</b>	Final Draft of Research Proposal is due at 11:59 PM on Thur Dec 12 Final Exam is on Wed Dec 11 from 12:00 to 1:50.	

### **About the Instructor, Robert Deaner:**

- I've been teaching at GVSU since the fall of 2006. I teach PSY300 (Research Methods in Psychology), PSY315 (Psychology of Sex Differences) and PSY375 (Comparative Psychology). I'm an active researcher. You can see a list of my publications here:  
[https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=en&user=m2FMSIwAAAAJ&view\\_op=list\\_works&sortby=pubdate](https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=en&user=m2FMSIwAAAAJ&view_op=list_works&sortby=pubdate)
- Undergrads contribute to or lead many of these projects. I hope a few of you will work with me on research in the future.
- I'm very interested in teaching and improving my teaching.
- Students usually call me "Dr. Deaner," although you are welcome to use something less formal such as "Professor."

### **Office hours and meeting with the Instructor**

- I'm required to list office hours on my syllabus, and they are MWF 11:00 – 11:30. However, that is only the beginning of my availability. I will work with you to make sure we find a time to chat that is convenient for both of us.
- Each of you will meet with me individually several times this semester; 6 - 10 minutes is typical, but some meetings will be longer and some will be shorter. Meeting for a minute or two at the beginning or end of a class usually works well too.

### **Falling Behind**

- Don't fall behind!
- If you do fall behind, contact the instructor as soon as possible and develop a plan to get back on track.
- Dr. Deaner is generous with students who fall behind, especially for students who have been showing up and participating throughout the semester.

### **Course Connection**

- Easy 10 points, and you don't want to miss them. It's not extra credit; it's required. It's due by Friday Aug 30 at midnight.
- Try to do it early so the instructor can begin getting to know you!



### **Policies, The Student Code, Academic Dishonesty, and Plagiarism:**

This course is subject to all GVSU policies: [www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies](http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies).

Students are responsible for upholding ALL aspects of the Student Code:

<https://www.gvsu.edu/studentcode/>

For example, **lying to a professor is a violation of the Code**. Here are some more details:

As described by the GVSU Student Code, “Academic dishonesty is defined as actions or behaviors that misrepresent one’s contributions to or the results of any scholarly product submitted for credit, evaluation, or dissemination.”

As described by the GVSU Student Code, “Offering the work of someone else as one’s own is plagiarism...” “Any ideas or material taken from another source for either written or oral presentation must be fully acknowledged.” “Depending on the instructor’s judgment of the particular case, he/she may...give a failing grade for the ... entire course.”

Simply rearranging the words or substituting synonyms in the original source is still plagiarism.

### **AI**

- We treat AI-based assistance, such as ChatGPT and Copilot, the same way we treat collaboration with other people: you are welcome to talk about your ideas and work with other people, both inside and outside the class, as well as with AI-based assistants.
- However, all work you submit must be your own. You should never include in your assignment anything that was not written directly by you without proper citation (including quotation marks and in-line citation for direct quotes).
- Including anything you did not write in your assignment without proper citation will be treated as an academic misconduct case. If you are unsure where the line is between collaborating with AI and copying from AI, we recommend the following:
  1. Never hit “Copy” within your conversation with an AI assistant. You can copy your own work into your conversation, but do not copy anything from the conversation back into your assignment. Instead, use your interaction with the AI assistant as a learning experience, then let your assignment reflect your improved understanding.
  2. Do not have your assignment and the AI agent open at the same time. Similar to above, use your conversation with the AI as a learning experience, then close the interaction down, open your assignment, and let your assignment reflect your revised knowledge. This includes avoiding using AI directly integrated into your composition environment: just as you should not let a classmate write content directly into your submission, so also avoid using tools that directly add content to your submission.

### **Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors:**

Web: [gvsu.edu/wc](http://gvsu.edu/wc)

Contact: [virtualwc@mail.gvsu.edu](mailto:virtualwc@mail.gvsu.edu) (616-331-2922)

Location: Lake Ontario Hall, Room 120 (Allendale)

Online: Virtual writing support is available during all hours of operation for both drop-ins or scheduled appointments. Email support is also available (provided within 72 hours of submission).

The Fred Meijer Center for Writing provides writing assistance to all GVSU students, on any type of project and at any stage of the process. The Writing Center employs both undergraduate and graduate writing consultants from across majors and disciplines. Consultants are trained to help writers brainstorm, organize, or develop their ideas; and they can help writers edit their own work and document sources correctly. The Center’s services are free and students can work with an idea, assignment prompt, or draft of their paper. Students can virtually drop in or schedule an appointment; both appointments and drop-ins are available during all service hours: (Mon-Thurs 9am-11pm, Friday 9am-3pm, Sunday 2pm-11pm).

Due to COVID-19, all writing center services are available online. Limited in-person consulting may be available; please check the Writing Center’s website for up-to-date information. All service options

(drop-ins, appointments, email support) can be accessed via the Writing Center's online scheduling system - Book It. We look forward to working with you!

**Knowledge Market:**

“Our highly trained student consultants work one-on-one or in small groups to help with your library research, digital skills, writing, or oral presentations. We now offer online support in two ways: online peer consultations during open hours and a database of browsable resources that are available 24/7. For information about the Knowledge Market or to make a virtual appointment, visit [www.gvsu.edu/library/km](http://www.gvsu.edu/library/km).”

**Library Liason:**

“Each department has a designated librarian to support your research needs. Christy Malmsen is our liaison librarian for Psychology. Her email is [malmstec@gvsu.edu](mailto:malmstec@gvsu.edu) and she is available for online consultations via Zoom or email. You can also check out the Psychology Subject Guide, which is a great place to start your library research.”

**Psych Friends Peer-to-Peer Mentors:**

“Psych Friends mentors are upper-level psychology and behavioral neuroscience students who provide guidance and support in many areas, such as: effective studying and time management techniques, understanding the PSY and BNS major requirements, careers in the field, and the process of applying for graduate school. Visit <https://www.gvsu.edu/navigate> to schedule an online or in-person meeting today!”

**Student Accessibility Resources:**

“Grand Valley State University strives to provide an inclusive environment across campus that is accessible to all individuals with a diverse range of abilities. As your instructor, it is my objective to facilitate opportunities within all class activities and programs because your success is important to me. If you are encountering difficulties that are interrupting your learning experience please feel free to make those known to me as soon as possible, as early planning is essential. If you feel that you need accommodations in this course, you must present a memo to me from Accessibility Resources, indicating the existence of a disability and the approved accommodations. If the class meets in person, you should schedule a meeting with me during office hours to discuss your accommodations. If your class is online or hybrid, please forward your memo to me in an email and schedule a virtual or phone appointment with me to discuss your accommodations. Accommodations are not retroactive. If you have not already done so, please contact the Accessibility Resources office (215 CON) by calling (616) 331-2490 or by email to [access@gvsu.edu](mailto:access@gvsu.edu). Please note that I cannot provide accommodations based upon disability until I have received a copy of the Accessibility Resources issued memo. Furthermore, if you have a disability and think you will need assistance evacuating this classroom and/or building in an emergency, please make me aware so that the university and I can develop a plan to assist you. All discussions will remain confidential.”