

Psychology Capstone (PSY492)

Fall 2024

Section 04: T/Th, 1-2:15pm, 1204 ASH

Section 03: T/Th, 2:30-3:45pm, 1210 Haas PAC

Instructor

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Office Hours

In-person office hours: T/Th 4-5:30pm (2218 ASH)

Other meetings (virtual and in-person) by appointment

Course Overview

Welcome to Advanced General Psychology (Capstone), a culminating course for senior psychology and BNS majors. Capstone offers a survey of important research findings and theoretical perspectives in psychological science and fosters critical discussion of methodological and conceptual issues. It provides an opportunity to collectively consider the implications of psychological theory and research for public discourse, policy, and programs benefitting ourselves and the broader society. Finally, the course is designed to help students recognize the unique understanding and skills acquired through the psychology and liberal arts curriculum and to collectively consider the ways this unique perspective can help you navigate through your continued studies and professional lives. You have learned much as psychology students (perhaps more than you realize!) and you have much to offer.

The course will be taught using a **seminar, discussion-based format**, which is more collaborative and participatory than a traditional lecture approach. You will do a significant amount of reading and thoughtful reflection about the readings, and most class periods will include a facilitated student-centered discussion about the readings. Participation of everyone is important for meaningful discussion, so **please plan on attending every class session and be prepared to discuss the course materials**.

Course Content

Although we'll pull material from a number of disciplines, the course is primarily grounded in social psychology. Our overarching theme is the **application of psychological science**, with a specific focus on four areas: **wisdom & decision-making, well-being, social connections**, and the **public good**. We will examine the literature through different lenses and at different levels of analysis and revisit several topics throughout the semester, including identity, biased thought processes, the usefulness of multiple perspectives, and the interplay between individual and system-level factors. Throughout the course you will also be pushed to think critically about your own assumptions and beliefs, and about claims made by others in the academic and popular literature.

We will discuss many theories, and our discussion of research and theory will be infused with a discussion of the "So what?" -- applications and implications beyond the classroom. This emphasis on theory and application has a long tradition in social psychology. Indeed, founder Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) is famously quoted as saying "there's nothing so practical as a good theory" and "no research without action, no action without research." Our focus on application is also consistent with the [APA's mission](#) of promoting "the advancement, communication, and application of psychological science and knowledge to benefit society and improve lives."

We'll spend several weeks discussing social connection and discord, including group-based identity, conflict, and polarization. These specific topics are well-suited for the capstone course in that they are

1) informed by a substantial theoretical and empirical literature; 2) complex and interdisciplinary; and 3) highly relevant in our current social landscape. However, they can also be difficult to read about and discuss, particularly in a contentious election year. Please know that my intent in covering the content is not to make you feel targeted or to invite conflict, but to seriously grapple with the issues so we can make informed judgements and effectively and ethically apply psychological research, theory, and tools.

I will do my best to make the classroom a space for everyone to engage with the material in a safe and intellectually challenging way. That being said, I know we all have different limits and triggers. If you know of particular course material that may be upsetting for you, I'd be happy to discuss any concerns you have before the topic comes up in class. If at any time you find yourself nearing your limit with a topic or assignment please let me know, so we can discuss strategies for minimizing your discomfort while still meeting the course requirements.

Learning Objectives

Before graduating, students majoring in psychology should be able to engage in deep reading and reflection; think critically about claims and assumptions; make evidence-based decisions; write well-developed, clear papers; plan and facilitate group discussion; and prepare and deliver presentations based on the psychological literature. The course objectives listed below reflect this mission and our goals for psychology majors.

Upon completion of this Capstone course, you should be able to:

- Identify and apply concepts associated with major theoretical perspectives and empirical findings in psychology.
- Describe and synthesize alternative theoretical perspectives within the discipline
- Recognize sources of bias in psychological research, and understand how they can affect the interpretation or usefulness of research findings
- Analyze and explain interdisciplinary approaches to psychological questions
- Identify and integrate multiple perspectives
- Recognize professional writing, and complete professional-level papers

In addition, you should have further developed the following skills and abilities:

- The ability to think critically in interpreting and applying psychological theory and research
- The ability to critically reflect on the values implicit in different perspectives and approaches to understanding social issues
- The ability to work in groups to synthesize key readings and design empirically based programs
- Skills related to the development and delivery of an engaging, evidence-based presentation
- Skills related to the application of psychological theory and research to the common good

Class Policies & Expectations

Professionalism & respect. We learn at our full potential only when we feel as if we're heard and respected in and outside of the classroom. Thus, maintaining a climate that is inclusive and respectful is not only socially responsible and ethical, it's key to a successful learning experience. We live in a time of incredible divisiveness, stress, and loss, when personal attacks and the public expression of strong emotions have become more and more commonplace. It is particularly important, therefore, that we use considerate language and behavior toward one another, and that we make a conscious effort to affirm the contributions of all.

Academic integrity and the use of AI-generated material. You are expected to do your own work in Capstone and to not engage in any form of academic dishonesty. It's important that the papers you submit are written in your own voice and reflect your own insight and analysis. While it's okay for you to use AI tools to brainstorm ideas, or for the minor editing of sentences you already wrote, your submitted written work should not include any AI-generated material. If you need additional

information about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please ask me and/or consult GVSU's academic integrity policy and guidelines ([GVSU's guidelines](#)).

Accommodations and support. If you need formal accommodations, please contact me early in the term so we can work together to make appropriate arrangements. Please let me know if you encounter any challenges or barriers in the course or classroom that interfere with your learning, and if you think you may benefit from formal accommodations, contact GVSU's Office of Student Accessibility Resources (gvsu.edu/accessibility/) at (616) 331-2490 or access@gvsu.edu. Likewise, if you would like to request accommodations so you may practice a religious holiday, please let me know.

Other university policies. In addition to the policies described above, please be aware of other important academic policies at GVSU (<http://www.gvsu.edu/coursepolicies/>).

Coursework, Activities, and Evaluation

As noted above, the course will be taught using a seminar format. Among other things, this means there will be a shift in class structure and coverage of content, with a greater emphasis on a critical examination of the theoretical and empirical literature, an integration of diverse perspectives, and a collaborative exploration of evidence-based applications. Classes will be discussion based, and you will be required to do considerable reading and reflective writing outside of class.

Reading & Notetaking

Readings and other course materials include books, scholarly articles and chapters, readings from the popular press, and podcasts (see below for a complete list). Unless otherwise noted, all course materials will be posted on our class Blackboard site. I highly recommend using hard copies of the readings to facilitate notetaking and to make it easier to find pages and excerpts referenced during our class discussion.

Please plan on spending considerable time each week reading and thoughtfully reflecting upon the readings and integrating the various perspectives they offer. This type of deep reading goes beyond an understanding of the authors' words; it's an active process of identifying inconsistencies and exploring links between the readings, and it requires frequent questioning about the claims, evidence, potential bias, interpretations, and applications. It requires more time and effort than scanning or surface reading, so you should budget your time accordingly and plan to read when you are not fatigued or distracted. I recommend taking notes or annotating the works while you read by circling key terms and phrases highlighting or underlining important theories, studies, and concepts; and/or writing brief comments and questions in the margins. This note taking will facilitate your understanding and memory of the readings and make it easier for you to complete the integrative assignments.

Similarly, I recommend that you engage in a dialogue of sorts with yourself and/or the authors. Delve into the content, critically consider claims, and push yourself to examine links to other class material, content covered in previous courses, your own life, and our current social backdrop. Some questions that will be helpful as you engage in this process are:

Questions to help you deeply and critically consider the authors' perspectives and claims:

- What claims do the authors make, and what evidence do they present to support the claims?
- What are the authors' underlying assumptions, and to what extent are they valid?
- What theoretical framework or approach do the authors use? Are there other frameworks that should be considered?
- Does the author seem to represent the ideas of others accurately? Do they seem to oversimplify complex ideas?

Questions to help you consider the readings in relation to one another, your own experiences, and other ideas you've encountered:

- What are the connections among the various readings? Do any common ideas or viewpoints run through them?

- In what ways are the authors' claims related to other sources you have read or theories and research you have studied?
- How does this perspective relate to previous texts and discussions we have had, as well as concepts you've encountered outside of this course?
- How does the reading "land on" you? What thoughts and emotional reactions do you have when you read it?
- Does the reading challenge your own values, beliefs, and/or assumptions?

Questions to help you examine possible implications, extensions, and applications of concepts discussed:

- What questions does the reading raise, and how could they be addressed?
- Are there additional research questions or hypotheses that could be addressed? If so, what type of study could be designed to test these hypotheses?
- What are the implications of concepts and findings discussed?
- How might the ideas or findings discussed in the reading be applicable to other contexts or subjects?

Reflection & Engagement

Because Capstone uses a seminar format, many class sessions will be centered around reflection and a discussion of course readings. This reflection and class discussion are key to our ability to make connections, communicate an understanding, and learn from one another. Thus, **active engagement and participation in the class discussions and activities** is very important. In addition to completing the assigned readings before class, you should prepare for the discussion by critically and thoughtfully considering answers to questions that can be brought into the discussion (such as the questions listed above). If you find it difficult to speak in front of a group, you might consider preparing a written list of points related to each reading and bring them to the relevant class period.

For most class sessions you'll be asked to provide a [brief written reflection](#) on a specific activity or reading or on your engagement and participation in class. These will be worth up to **2 points** each. While class attendance and engagement are important, I also recognize that life is full of unexpected challenges and that there are days when we all need a break. So that you'll have an extra breather when you need it, I'll allow you two "freebie" mental health days that can be taken at any time, without notice. If you do not take the mental health days, your two lowest grades will be dropped. Absences that are due to illnesses, family crises, accidents, and other emergencies will be excused and will not be counted as mental health days.

Writing

Because the ability to articulate an understanding and analysis of evidence and ideas is essential to a liberal arts education, you will be asked to do a considerable amount of writing in Capstone.

Thought questions. About every other week you'll be asked to submit written or videotaped ([Panopto](#)) responses to thought questions related to the assigned readings. The assignments will be evaluated based on relevance and accuracy, depth and thoughtfulness of your responses, and coherence and clarity of your written or verbal responses. They will be worth **5-8 points** each.

Identity and values self-narrative assignment. Early in the semester you will be asked to write a paper in which you reflect on your identity and values, based on a set of prompts. This self-narrative assignment will be worth **10 points** and will be graded based on content, depth, evidence of thoughtful reflection, and quality of writing.

Integrative paper. Near the midpoint of the semester, you will be asked to write a paper in which you summarize, analyze, and/or synthesize course readings, and critically discuss the readings in the context of your own experiences and belief systems. While this paper will be similar in some ways to the thought question assignments, it will be longer and require more breadth and depth of discussion.

The paper will be worth 30 points and will be evaluated based on the quality of writing, and the depth, thoughtfulness, relevance, and accuracy of the content.

Project: Program or Initiative Design

During the second half of the semester, you will work in a small group to complete a project in which you develop an idea for and design a specific program or initiative. Although you will be given some leeway in the choice of topic, the program or initiative must clearly represent the application of psychological science and be grounded in theoretical and empirical literature. Together with your group, you will select a topic, become familiar with the relevant theoretical and empirical literature, and develop a concrete idea for applying the literature to meet a specific need, in a specific context and/or with a specific population. There will be both group-based and individual requirements for the project. Group-based requirements include a brief project proposal, 2 meetings with Prof. Shupe, a 60-min presentation, and a copy of presentation materials. Individual requirements include a written report of the project and completion of a peer contribution evaluation form. The entire project will be worth a total of 42 points toward your final grade.

Quizzes

Finally, during the semester you will have several 3-point quizzes over the assigned course readings. In some cases you'll be able to use hard copies of the readings and your notes during the quizzes. Note, however, that you'll likely find the questions difficult to address if you haven't done the readings before class.

Course grades

As noted above, your final grade will be based on an identity & values paper; thought question assignments; an integrative paper; in-class engagement & reflection; quizzes; and group and individual portions of a project. Approximate weightings and the grading scale used to determine final grades are given below.

	Approximate # of points	Approximate Weight
Identity & values assignment	10 pts	6%
Integrative paper	30 pts	16%
Thought questions	45 pts	25%
Quizzes	12 pts	7%
Project: Group portion	20 pts	11%
Project: Individual portion	22 pts	12%
In-class engagement/reflection	40 pts	22%

Grade	Percent	Grade	Percent	Grade	Percent	Grade	Percent
A	92.5-100%	B+	87.5-89.5%	C+	77.5-79.5%	D+	67.5-69.5%
A-	90-92%	B	82.5-87%	C	72.5-77%	D	60-67%
		B-	80-82%	C-	70-72%	F	0-59.5%

Tentative Class Schedule

Week 1: Introduction & Foundations		
8/27 (T)	Topic	Introduction to Capstone; Overview of course themes
8/29 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Theories and applications of psychological science 1) Read Jason et al. (2016), pp. 3-7 only (<i>Defining and using theory</i> section) 2) Read Eaton et al. (2021), pp. 1209-1212 only
Week 2: Wisdom, Reasoning, & Decisions		
9/3 (T)	Topic Preparation	Reflection; identity Assignment: Identity and Values Reflection
9/5 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Wisdom; Wise reasoning (Quiz) Read Grossmann & Dorfman (2019)
Week 3: Wisdom, Reasoning, & Decisions; Well-being		
9/10 (T)	Topic Preparation	Misinformation, biases, & motivated reasoning (Quiz) 1) Read APA Executive Summary & APA Resolution on misinformation 2) Read Rauch Constitution of Knowledge article
9/12 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Well-being: Stress & coping; Loneliness Listen to On Being interview with Vivek Murthy
Week 4: Well-being		
9/17 (T)	Topic Preparation	Well-being: Subjective well-being (SWB); PERMA 1) Read Diener, Lucas, & Oishi (2018), pp. 1-3, 8-13, 17-22 only 2) Read Seligman (2011), Ch. 1 3) Assignment: Thought Questions (submit before class)
9/19 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Well-being: Self-determination and growth (Quiz) Read Ryan & Deci (2022)
Week 5: Well-being; Social connections		
9/24 (T)	Topic Preparation	Well-being: Evidence-based interventions 1) Read Dahl, Wilson-Mendenhall, & Davidson (2020) 2) Assignment: Thought Questions Panopto Assign. (submit before class)
9/26 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Social connections: Our need to belong 1) Read <i>Belonging</i> (Cohen, 2022), Introduction & Chs. 1 & 2 2) Read Baumeister & Leary (1995), pp. 499-501 only
Week 6: Social connections		
10/1 (T)	Topic Preparation	Social connections: Misperception & misattribution (Quiz) Read <i>Belonging</i> (Cohen, 2022), Ch. 5
10/3 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Social connections: Listening and empathy 1) Read Weinstein, Itzchakov, & Legate (2022) 2) Watch J. Zaki “ How to escape the cynicism trap ” Tedtalk 3) Assignment: Thought Questions (submit before class)
Week 7: Social Connections		
10/8 (T)	Topic Preparation	Social connections: Communication Read <i>Belonging</i> (Cohen, 2022), Ch. 8
10/10 (Th)	Topics Preparation	Social connections: Intragroup communication; Group-based identity Read <i>Belonging</i> (Cohen, 2022), Ch. 3 Assignment: Thought Questions

Week 8: Contribute to the public good		
10/15 (T)	Topic Preparation	Contribute to the public good: Group-based polarization Read Jost, Baldassarri, & Druckman (2022)
10/17 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Contribute to the public good: Group-based interventions 1) Watch K. Payne “ Psychology of inequality & political division ” Tedtalk 2) Read Cohen (2022), Ch. 9, 10, 11, 12, or 13 (your choice) & pp. 319-328 4) Assignment: Thought Questions (submit before class)
Week 9: Fall break; Integrative paper		
10/22 (T)		No Class - Fall break
10/24 (Th)		No Class (Release time to work on integrative paper)
10/25 (F)		Assignment: Integrative Paper (submit by end of day)
Week 10: Contribute to the public good		
10/29 (T)	Topic Preparation	Contribute to the public good: Theory-based program evaluation 1) Read Rossi (2019), pp. 3-6 & pp. 16-23 2) Read Yates (2023), pp. 725-732 & pp. 739-741)
10/31 (Th)	Topic Preparation	Contribute to the public good: Behavior change theories & interventions 1) Read Wood & Neal (2016) 2) Read TBA
Week 11		
11/5 (T)	Topic Preparation	Contribute to the public good: Persuasion, policy, & social mobilization 1) Read Rogers et al. (2018) 2) Assignment: Thought Questions Panopto Assign. (submit before class)
11/7 (Th)	Topic	Work on group projects (in class; meet with Prof. Shupe)
Week 12		
11/12 (T)	Topic	Work on group projects (no class)
11/14 (Th)	Topic	Work on group projects (in class; meet with Prof. Shupe)
Week 13		
11/19 (T)	Topic	Group-led class
11/21 (Th)	Topic	Group-led class
Week 14		
11/26 (T)	Topic	Group-led class
11/28 (Th)	Topic	No Class – Thanksgiving break
Week 15		
12/3 (T)	Topic	Group-led class
12/5 (Th)	Topic	Group-led class
Finals Week		
Topic:	Recap and final discussion	
Preparation	Project final report (submit before class)	
Sect. 03:	12/12 (Th), 2-3:30pm	
Sect. 04:	12/10 (T), 12-1:30pm	

Readings

- American Psychological Association (2023). Using psychological science to understand and fight health misinformation: An APA consensus statement. {Access [here](#)}
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
- Cohen, G.L. (2022). *Belonging: The science of creating connections and bridging divides*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Dahl, C. J., Wilson-Mendenhall, C. D., & Davidson, R. J. (2020). The plasticity of well-being: A training-based framework for the cultivation of human flourishing. *PNAS Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 117(51), 32197–32206. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2014859117>
- Diener, E., Lucas, R.E., & Oishi, S. (2018). Advances and open questions in the science of subjective well-being. *Collabra: Psychology*, 4(1). DOI: 10.1525/Collabra.115
- Eaton, A.A., Grzanka, P.R., Schlehofer, M.M., & Silka, L. (2021). Public psychology: Introduction to special issue. *American Psychologist*, 76, 1209-1216. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000933>
- Grossmann, I. & Dorfman, A. (2019). Wise reasoning in an uncertain world. In: R. Sternberg, H. Nusbaum, & J. Glück (Eds) *Applying Wisdom to Contemporary World Problems*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://rdcu.be/dkNgm>
- Jason, L.A., Stevens, E., Ram, D. Miller, S.A., Beasley, C.R., Gleason, K., (2016). Theories in the field of community psychology. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 7(2), pp. 1-27. Retrieved from (<http://www.gjcpp.org/>).
- Jost, J.T., Baldassarri, D.S. & Druckman, J.N. (2022). Cognitive–motivational mechanisms of political polarization in social-communicative contexts. *National Review of Psychology*, 1, 560–576. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-022-00093-5>
- Rauch, J. (June, 2021). The constitution of knowledge: Defending the truth against its many attackers is not easy. We need shared values and rules and institutions. *Persuasion*. {Access article [here](#).}
- Rogers T., Goldstein N.J., & Fox, C.R. (2018). Social mobilization. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 69, 357-381. doi: 10.1146/annurev-psych-122414-033718.
- Rossi, P.H. (2019). What is program evaluation and why is it needed? In P.H. Rossi, M.W. Lipsey, & G.T. Henry (Eds), *Evaluation: A systematic approach* (pp. 1-30). Sage.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2022). [Self-determination theory](#). In F. Maggino (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*, pp. 1-7. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69909-7_2630-2
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Free Press.
- Weinstein, N., Itzhakov, G., & Legate, N. (2022). The motivational value of listening during intimate and difficult conversations. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12651>
- Wood, W., & Neal, D. T. (2016). Healthy through habit: Interventions for initiating and maintaining health behavior change. *Behavioral Science & Policy*, 2, 71-83. {[access paper](#)}
- Yates, B. T. (2023). Program evaluation: Outcomes and costs of putting psychology to work. In H. Cooper, M. N. Coutanche, L. M. McMullen, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 725–743). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000319-032>