Psych 582r: The Psychology of Attitudes and Attitude Change
Course Syllabus – Fall 2009
Class Meetings: W 3:10-6:00 in Sci. 2 rm. 0115

Instructor: Kevin Blankenship
Office: Office and Lab Building Room 08
Office hours: T TH 10:00-11:00
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Overview:
Welcome to Psych 582r! This course provides students with the history and theories relevant to attitudes and attitude change. Because attitudes involve the evaluation of a particular concept, they are an integral aspect of much contemporary social psychological theory and research. Prejudice, romantic attraction, social influence, self-perception, and group dynamics—to name a few—all have important attitudinal components. Rather than focusing on these particular content areas per se, this course will focus on the general constructs of attitudes and attitude change. Students will learn about classic and contemporary techniques and theories of attitude measurement and change.

The beginning portion of the course will cover the historical background of the field, attitude theory and basic measurement issues, the cognitive structure of attitudes, and the complex relationship between attitudes, beliefs, values, and behavior. The second part of the course will focus on various social psychological theories of persuasion (e.g., message learning, consistency theories, functional approaches, dual process theories). The final portion will focus on broader topics related to attitudes (e.g., social influence) and current issues in the literature (e.g., “implicit” attitudes).

Readings:

Additional readings will be available on the course website.

Course Website:
https://webct.its.iastate.edu/webct/entryPageIns.dowebct

Assignments:
Facilitating
During the 2nd half of the semester, students will have the responsibility of leading class discussion (worth 10% of the overall grade). Facilitators will need to determine how best to accomplish this goal for the readings. As facilitators, it is not your responsibility to explain the readings to others. Instead, your role is to review the important points of each paper and provide a framework that seems sensible for discussing the topic. For example, you may want to present
an initial framework at the beginning of class (on the board or via overhead) to highlight common (or divergent) themes that run throughout the readings. There are no right or wrong ways to facilitate. The goal of facilitation is to provide structure and direction for fellow students during discussion, not be the discussion.

**Discussion questions**

Each week (starting Week 2), students will submit three questions for discussion relevant to the week’s readings. This assignment is designed to get students thinking about the readings and as a way of stimulating discussion. The format of the questions is open to interpretation. These questions may be about something you didn't understand in the reading, something you disagree with, possible connections to other phenomena, or something that might lead to interesting speculations. For example, because some students specialize in different disciplines (e.g., political science, cognitive psychology), they may want to develop some discussion questions that may be related their specific area of research. Other questions may be relevant to hypothesis generation, etc.. Although your questions will play an important role by shaping our discussion of a topic, you are not expected to have all of the answers. We are all expected to read the week’s readings and to carefully consider the questions raised. In this way, we will all be prepared to share our thoughts and insights. The goal is to make sure that students come to class not only with the readings read, but do so after putting some degree of thought into the implications of, and interconnections among, the readings. The questions for the semester contribute 15% to the overall grade. Students must submit their questions by e-mail to the instructor before 11 p.m. of the day before class (i.e., by Tuesday at 11 p.m.). Make sure you bring a copy of your questions to class. You may share them with other class members. Late questions, regardless of the circumstances, will not be accepted.

**Research critique**

One way of evaluating your understanding of the information that you have learned will be evaluated is via a critique of a recent (say, since 2000) attitudes-related empirical article from one of the primary journals in your discipline. You will need to: a) find an article, b) get it approved by me by October 7th, and c) write a 3-5 page critique using APA style for citations, references, and general formatting. The critique should contain a description of the research (hypothesis, method, results) and your evaluation of the strengths/weaknesses of the conclusions drawn. You should feel free to discuss any of the components with me before turning in the critique. The critique is due Friday, November 20. It is worth 15% of your grade in the course. The critiqued article may be used in your research proposal, but it need not be.

**Exams**

There will be two exams (a midterm and a final), each worth 30% of the total course grade (for a total of 60% of the course grade).

**Grading:** Course grades will be assigned according to the scale below.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94.0-100</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>77.0-80.9</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>60.0-63.9</td>
<td>D+</td>
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<tr>
<td>90.0-93.9</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>73.0-76.9</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>55.0-59.9</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>86.0-89.9</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>68.0-72.9</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>50.0-54.9</td>
<td>D-</td>
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<tr>
<td>81.0-85.9</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>64.0-67.9</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>0.0-49.9</td>
<td>F</td>
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# Approximate Schedule of Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic (Readings)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.26</td>
<td><strong>Attitudes: Introduction and overview.</strong> (P &amp; C, Ch. 1, pp. 3-9)</td>
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<tr>
<td>09.02</td>
<td><strong>Measuring attitudes</strong> (P &amp; C, Ch. 1, pp. 3-22)</td>
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<tr>
<td>09.09</td>
<td><strong>Attitude-Behavior consistency.</strong> (P &amp; C, Ch. 1, pp. 22-36)</td>
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<tr>
<td>09.16</td>
<td><strong>Simple affective/associative theories.</strong> (P &amp; C, Ch. 2)</td>
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09.23 Message learning/reception. (P & C, Ch. 3); Combinatorial approaches (P & C, Ch. 7).

09.30 Judgmental approaches (P & C, Ch. 4); Consistency theories -- Balance and congruity. (P & C, Ch. 5, pp. 125-136).


10.07 Cognitive dissonance and alternatives. (P & C, Ch. 5, pp. 137-160); (P & C, Ch. 6)


10. 14 Exam 1

10.21 Self-persuasion theories. (P & C, Ch. 8); The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) -- motivation and ability as moderators of effortful persuasion processes. (P & C, Ch 9)


10.28 The ELM (continued) -- Multiple roles for persuasion variables.


11.04 Attitude Strength: Persistence of attitudes over time and resistance of attitudes to counter-persuasion.


11.11 Implicit processes in attitude formation and change (student-led)


11.18 Group dynamics/social influence and persuasion (student led)


12.02 Alternative approaches (student led). Heuristic-Systematic Model, Unimodel, and “It’s all ‘cognitive’”


12.09 Attitude structure and function (student led)


TBA Final exam