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Classroom: Olin/Rice 349

Course Description

This course is designed to give you the opportunity to conduct an original psychological study from start to finish. Research in psychology involves many decisions, trade-offs, and responsibilities that often are not apparent when simply reading or hearing about studies. You will encounter these factors and, with determination and luck, the enjoyment and satisfaction that comes with the systematic investigation of an issue of interest. The course will be successful if by the end of the semester you have developed a greater

- ▶ understanding of decisions and responsibilities associated with psychological research;
- ▶ proficiency required to assess empirical research;
- ▶ ability to communicate in the language of the discipline of psychology;
- ▶ appreciation for psychological research.

Grading

This is a writing-intensive course that seeks to improve your proficiency at conducting and communicating about psychology research. I will use the “Contract for a B”¹² approach to optimize your learning by minimizing the stress of grades. The philosophy underlying “Contract for a B” is that grades can interfere with the developmental process of improving your writing, either by discouraging you when an assignment receives a lower-than-hoped-for grade or, less obviously, when a high grade inadvertently signals that there is no room for improvement. All writing is improved by an iterative process of revision and feedback. Removing grades from the equation allows us to focus exclusively on improving the quality of your work.

“Contract for a B” works as follows: Throughout the term, I will assess your work and give you extensive feedback. However, I will not *grade* anything until the final portfolio (i.e., the final draft of your paper). This will allow me to be your mentor without grades getting in the way. I do not expect your work to be perfect, but I do expect you to meet the basic requirements of each assignment and to work to improve your knowledge and skills. Staying on contract requires all of the following:

1. Attendance: You will be present (and on time) for all class sessions and individual meetings.
2. Preparation and engagement: You will be fully prepared for all class sessions and meetings, and you will be actively and appropriately engaged. In general, you will be a productive member of our community.
3. Completing work: You will meet all criteria for each assignment and you will submit the assignment on time. Even first drafts of assignments should be carefully edited and free from

¹ Thanks to all my department colleagues, especially Cari Gillen-O’Neel, for providing help and insight into the “Contract for a B” approach to grading. Much of the material here is copied verbatim from their handouts.

² Hafer, G. R. (2014). *Embracing writing: Ways to teach reluctant writers in any college course*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

mistakes and typos. I recommend you seek assistance from other students and from the MAX center to ensure your drafts meet this standard.

4. **Thoughtful design:** Just as writing is improved by revision, so, too, is research design. You will work to your utmost to design a project that builds on past scholarship and that has the potential to shed light on an important psychological phenomenon. Your design will test a theory (or, perhaps, contrast two theories). You will receive feedback from me, from your classmates, and from the reviewers of your proposal. Thoughtful integration of this feedback is required to stay on contract.
5. **Implementation:** You will carry out your study to its fullest by preparing your stimuli meticulously, recruiting the appropriate number of participants, running participants in accordance with the strictest ethical guidelines and with close attention to potential confounds, and analyzing your data appropriately and fully.
6. **APA Style:** In this course, we will be using APA's *Publication Manual* (7thEd.). All papers should adhere to APA guidelines unless the instructions explicitly state otherwise.
7. **Rewriting:** Good writing requires substantial rewriting and reorganizing. Each draft of your writing should show progress toward improving the quality of your narrative style and your content. I should see clear evidence that you've incorporated my feedback, although I warmly welcome discussions with you about that feedback.
8. **Peer review of research proposals:** You will carefully read, and offer in class feedback on, the research proposals submitted to our class for review from the other sections.
9. **Present your work:** You will attend and present your poster at our department's poster session (and at MUPC in the spring).
10. **Final Portfolio:** At the end of the semester, you will submit your final manuscript along with your final poster. We will have a meeting about your final manuscript and poster at the end of the semester (see below).
11. **Awareness:** Keep track of your progress in the course and whether you are staying on contract for B. If you are unsure of your progress, please discuss this with me as soon as possible.

Staying on Contract and Flexibility Tokens: In order to stay on the Contract for B, you must: work hard, be prepared, incorporate feedback to improve the quality of your work, and be an active member of our class community. Staying on contract also requires punctual attendance and meeting deadlines (if you have accommodations through Disability Services, we will work together to negotiate a contract that is responsive to your accommodations). Because I recognize that life sometimes interferes with attendance and deadlines, I offer three "flexibility tokens" that allow you to stay on contract despite small infractions. *One token may be redeemed for:* one class or individual meeting absence or one 24-hour extension on written work. Your three tokens may be used in any combination. For example, you may miss three classes OR you may miss two classes and submit one assignment 24-hours late. In both of these examples, your three tokens would cover the needed flexibility, and you would still be on contract. Once your three tokens are depleted, additional absences or extensions will be granted only under extraordinary circumstances. If you have one additional small infraction beyond your three tokens, we may be able to work on a plan to get you back on contract. If this is your situation, please schedule a meeting with me immediately. Additional

small infractions or a major infraction (e.g., plagiarism or failure to revise between drafts) will take you off contract. Although I will keep a record of your flexibility tokens, keeping track of your own status vis-à-vis tokens is your responsibility.

Final Grade: Although I will give you *feedback* throughout the term, your final portfolio is the only thing that I will *grade*. If you stayed on contract during the semester, the lowest grade you can receive in the course is a B. In other words, the contract provides you with a grade safety net; even if the quality of your final portfolio is below a B, your behavior in the course (e.g., punctuality, hard work, and improvement) would be enough to warrant a B in the course. Grades above B require excellence in writing, analysis, and research. Throughout the semester, I will give you a lot of feedback.

If you are off-contract, a more traditional grading scheme will be applied where your final grade will be a function of your attendance, contribution to class, quality of your first drafts, poster, and final paper.

Course Policies

Class Time. We will use class time in one of three ways: 1) as a group; 2) in individual meetings with me); and 3) working on your projects individually. In general, group meetings are an efficient way to discuss content that pertains to everyone (e.g., going over course policies; how to write a good APA style introduction). Individual meetings with me will focus on your specific project, and are usually the most productive use of our time. If there's nothing for us to discuss individually or as a group, you will use class time to make progress on your projects. In theory, the typical week will consist of one group meeting, one individual meeting, and one flex day (i.e., you decide how best to use your time). However, we will often not need to meet as a group and will have two or even three individual meetings each week. This will be especially true early in the semester when you are developing your research question.

Poster presentations. Students will present their final posters at the Minnesota Undergraduate Psychology Conference (MUPC) on April 25th. In addition to being a Contract for B requirement, presenting research publicly is an essential component of the psychology major and required for graduation from Macalester.

Academic Integrity. Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty in their college work; violations of academic integrity are serious offenses. Students found guilty of any form of academic dishonesty — including, for instance, forgery, cheating, and plagiarism — are subject to disciplinary action. Examples of behavior that violates this policy, as well as the process and sanctions involved, can be found on the Academic Programs website, <https://www.macalester.edu/academic-programs/academicpolicies/academicintegrity/>.

Accommodations. I am committed to ensuring access to course content for all students, including those with disabilities. If you have a disability, please meet with me early in the semester to discuss your accommodation plan. If you have not yet obtained a plan or are unsure if you have a disability that requires accommodation, please contact Disability Resources: disabilityresources@macalester.edu, or call 651-696-6275.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Policy. Using AI can impede your learning. The assignments in this class challenge you to develop creativity, critical-thinking, and problem-solving skills that AI does not have. Using AI technology could limit your capacity to do this type of work, and as the instructor, I urge you not to miss out on the educational opportunities that this course will provide. As is the case for all courses at Macalester College, work submitted by you for this class should reflect both your own *ideas* and your own *language* and you should properly cite any resources you have consulted. If you have any questions about citation or about what constitutes academic honesty in this course or at Macalester College in general, please feel free to raise these questions in class and/or contact me to discuss your concerns.

Health and Wellness at Macalester

I strongly encourage you to make your well-being a priority. Investing time in thinking well about yourself will help you engage more fully in your academic experience. Remember that beyond being a student, you are a human being with your own experiences, thoughts, emotions, and identities. It is important to acknowledge any stressors you may be facing; these can be emotional, physical, cultural, financial, etc., and can affect your academic experience. I encourage you to remember that you have a body with needs. It is important to eat when you are hungry, drink water, use the restroom, and step out of (or away from) class if you are upset or need some air. Please do what is necessary so long as it does not interfere with your or others' ability to be present in the course. Outside of the classroom, strategies to support your well-being include eating and sleeping well, moving your body, and connecting with others. If you are having difficulties, please don't hesitate to contact me and/or find support from other resources, including those offered by the [Hamre Center](#).

Disabilities

I recognize that course design may pose barriers to a student's ability to access or demonstrate mastery of course content. I honor academic accommodations as outlined via Disability Services, and in discussion regarding what is reasonable for this course. Students with long or short term disabilities should schedule an appointment by emailing disabilityservices@macalester.edu, or calling the Disability Services Office, 651-696-6275.

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Macalester College works hard to ensure that all facilities and programs are accessible to all students. Accommodations are based on individual need substantiated by the appropriate process. What is reasonable is also determined by what is essential to this course. Any students who believe that they may need accommodations due to disability impacts should contact the Disability Services office by emailing disabilityservices@macalester.edu, or by calling 651-696-6974 to schedule an appointment to discuss your individual needs. Students should then follow up with me directly to discuss accommodations for this course.

Course Outline

1st Week (1/23): Introduction to the course

2nd Week (1/26 - 1/30): Discussion of research topics. Set individual meeting times. Bring a list of annotated references (between 6-12) in your general topic area to our meetings [on Friday](#).

3rd Week (2/2 - 2/6): ***Conceptual Outline and 12 relevant references*** due on Monday³. Work on literature review. You need to have identified 7-12 articles that are directly relevant to your topic and have an ***outline of the literature review*** [by week's end](#).

4th Week (2/9 – 2/13): Work on literature review and on developing your methods. Show me an ***outline of your Methods section*** [on Monday](#). ***1st Draft of the introduction/literature review*** is due [on Friday](#).

5th Week (2/16 - 2/20): ***1st Draft of Method Section*** is due [on Wednesday](#). We will meet individually to go over your methods outline; Work on assembling the materials for your study.

6th Week (2/23 - 2/27): ***Participants Protocol*** (IRB form) is due [on Wednesday](#); continue work on assembling the materials for your study. [On Friday \(2/27\)](#) there will be a Qualtrics training session for all students planning to use it during class time in the computer lab.

7th Week (3/2 - 3/6): We'll meet as a class to review the other sections' IRB forms.

8th Week (3/9- 3/13): Pilot each other and friends on your study. Data collection can begin as soon as your study is PRB-approved

Spring Break!

9th Week (3/23 - 3/27): Data collection begins.

10th Week (3/30 – 4/3): ***Outline of Results*** due [on Friday](#).

11th Week (4/6 - 4/10): ***Final Draft of Introduction and Methods*** is due [on Monday](#); Complete data analyses;

12th Week (4/13-4/17): ***1st Draft of Results*** due [on Monday](#); ***1st Draft of Discussion*** due ([on Friday](#))

13th Week (4/20-4/24): Prepare and Practice Presentations [Send your poster to be printed by Wednesday 4/22](#)

MUPC Saturday, 4/25 at Augsburg University

14th Week (4/27 - 5/1): Finalize papers; [Macalester Poster Session on Thursday, April 30 at 4:30](#).

15th Week (5/4): Finalize papers

Final Papers due on Monday, May 11th

³ In the Conceptual Outline, you will sketch your plans for your project and the research on which it draws. To help you with this assignment — and with your project more generally — you must meet with one of our Psychology Reference Librarians, Talia Nadir and Shannon Merillat. They will help in narrowing your research question and finding relevant literature. [You must meet with one of the librarians by Fri. 2/13](#), but you can have the meeting as soon as you'd like.