I. Bulletin description

II. Full course description

III. Rationale for offering this course

IV. Weekly topics and reading list

V. Course requirements and grading

VI. Course policies

I. Bulletin description

Prerequisites: Science of Psychology (W1001) or Mind, Brain and Behavior (W1010) or the equivalent, plus the instructor's permission.

This course centers on understanding the self embedded in the social context. We will integrate knowledge from various areas of psychology (developmental, cognitive, social cognition) with a main focus in social psychology. This course will provide the opportunity to gain an understanding of research in the following areas: the development of self in a social context, the relationship between the self and the broader socio-cultural context, the impact of self-involvement on social/cognitive processes, and contemporary research on individual differences.

II. Full course description

Course Mission Statement:

The aim of “The self in social context” is not only to understand your personal concept of self, but in fact to allow you to discover what the concept of self is, how it develops and what cognitive and emotional consequences are associated with the idea of self. The course will provide surprising insights about basic psychological phenomena centering on the topic of self.

This course provides a review of the central concept in the lives of even the most altruistic of us: the self. We begin the course by considering the definition of self and review a set of select
topics on its ontogenetic development. As a second topic, we address the ways in which the self is affected by being embedded in a hierarchical social context where resources are shared with other people. In this section we examine the dynamics and cues of social dominance and perceived control. Further, we address the ways in which making free choices, and thus exercising one’s control, affects future preferences and well being. Finally, we will learn about the interpersonal socio-cognitive theory of the self. In the third topic of the course, we will focus on the biases that self-involvement creates, for better or for worse. Specifically, we examine the effects of self-involvement on value, memory, and predictions about the future (optimism bias). In the fourth and final topic of the course, we explore the concept of personality as it is studied using modern approaches to individual differences. In explaining individual differences in behavior, these approaches incorporate the influence and characteristics of a situation the person is in as well as the characteristics of the person involved. As examples of modern individual differences research, we will discuss self-discrepancy theory, its applications, and the concept of resilience.

III. RATIONALE FOR OFFERING THIS COURSE

The notion of self in the social context is so ubiquitous and implicit in everyday activities that people rarely give it deliberate and analytical consideration in day-to-day life. In contrast to the folk-psychological intuitive sense of self of healthy adults, psychological science, through its many subdisciplines, applies rigorous experimental methods in order to analyze numerous phenomena centering on the issue of self. The course provides an interdisciplinary overview of topic-centered research, which in this course places most emphasis on social psychology research. This advanced seminar also adds to the offerings in social development and the social/personality/abnormal area group, allowing students to complete psychology program requirements while gaining a broad base of knowledge in psychology.

DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

• For the Psychology major or concentration in the College and in G. S., for the Psychology minor in Engineering, and for the Psychology Postbac Certificate, PSYC W3690 meets the Group III (Social, Personality, and Abnormal) distribution requirement.

• For the School of General Studies, PSYC W3690 will meet the social science requirement, provided that students obtain the necessary permissions and have taken the prerequisite psychology courses.

• For the Psychology Postbac Certificate, PSYC W3690 will fulfill the advanced seminar requirement.

• For the Barnard Psychology major, PSYC W3690 will fulfill the senior seminar requirement.
Course goals

What are we trying to achieve?

Successful participation in this course will advance many of the program goals set out by the Columbia University Psychology Department (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/psychology/dept/ugrad/goals.html).

Completing readings and activities throughout this course will expand your knowledge in psychology and allow you to appropriately apply that knowledge to a real world problem. Through participation in class discussions, discussion moderation, and written assignments you will have the opportunity to develop your ability to think critically about research and make conclusions from results of empirical studies. You will also be able to summarize literature on a topic that interests you and identify unanswered research questions.

Having successfully completed this course, you will be better able to write about research in psychology in a concise way while following appropriate APA guidelines. In addition, you will learn to skillfully use appropriate sources and media for literature searches.

The course aims to improve your understanding of research methods and quantitative literacy by assigning discussion moderators the explication of an empirical finding. Discussion moderation is also a great way to enhance communication skills as they pertain to psychological research and theories.

Who should take this course?

Am I ready for an advanced seminar?

This course is recommended for advanced undergraduate psychology majors or minors as well as neuroscience majors. Every effort will be made to accommodate all interested students, but more senior students will be given preference if the class is full. We require that you have taken an introductory course so that you understand the basic concepts in psychology and we recommend that you have a working understanding of research methods, which will make the readings a lot easier to understand. However, your most important qualification is interest in psychology and the topic of this course, so don’t hesitate to apply to be in the seminar.

Resources for readings and assignments

Throughout the course we will be reading actual scientific papers that can sometimes seem difficult and jargon-filled. This kind of text is often dense and written with an expert audience in mind. Therefore, it may take several hours to read and comprehend an empirical paper of only 10 pages.

In order to help you develop your skill in reading scientific empirical papers and reviews, I will provide you with several kinds of help throughout the course. The resources page on courseworks will give you links and advice that will help you with your readings and assignments. The introduction to the course will also include a brief tutorial on reading empirical papers in social psychology. In addition, feel free to email me with any questions related to the course or come to office hours. If you cannot make office hours due to scheduling conflicts, you can make an appointment via email for a different time. Finally, the extra credit project is designed to help the entire class with the readings by defining some of the scientific jargon found in the readings.
IV. WEEKLY TOPICS AND READING LIST

Week 1

Introduction
- Welcome! The road ahead...

- Introduction to the course, student introduction.
- Overview of class topics, readings, assignments and policies.
- “How to read scientific papers in psychology” tutorial given by the instructor.

Week 2

Defining the self
- Is “Know thyself” mission impossible?

Readings:

Recommended reading:
**Week 3**

Perceiving one’s own and others’ actions

- Who is in charge of your actions and how do we figure that out? The question of who dunnit

**Readings:**


**Recommended readings:**


**Week 4**

Dialectic of self and other mind perception

- The inextricable bond of “self” and “other”

**Readings:**


**Recommended reading:**
II THE SELF IN SOCIAL CONTEXT

Week 5 Social cues to personal agency – power and control

- The story of the powerful and the powerless

Readings:

Recommended reading:

Week 6 The origin and perpetuation of personal preferences

- You are what you choose.

Readings:
Recommended readings:

**Week 7**
Making choices – health benefits of being in control
- The rewards of being the king of your castle.

Readings:

Recommended reading:

**Week 8**
Relational self within and across cultures
- What do significant others say about you?

Readings:
Recommended reading:

**III  THE NON CONSCIOUS BIASES OF SELF-INVolVEMENT**

**Week 9** The self and memory (self-reference and implicit self-esteem)

- *Why are some things more memorable than others?*

Readings:

Recommended reading:

**Week 10** Self and value (ownership and free choice)

- *The Midas’ touch of self: When ”it” becomes “mine”*

Readings:


**Recommended reading:**

**Week 11** Optimism Bias  
*La self en rose: Is it right to be optimistically wrong?*

**Readings:**

**Recommended reading:**
IV MODERN APPROACHES TO PERSONALITY

Week 12  Personality in context
- *Personality mythbuster 101*

Readings:

Recommended reading:

Week 13  Self-discrepancy theory: ideals and oughts
- *Ideally I'd like to be a ......, but my duty is to be a ......*

Readings:

Recommended reading:

1 Read the two reviews first and then apply them to the finding described in the third reading (Friedman & Pollak, 2004).
**Week 14**  
The self resisting adversity  
- *What doesn’t kill you will make you stronger.*  
- *Nieche*

**Readings:**


V. COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

1. In class discussion participation  
   Quality of discussion contributions is important for your learning and that of your classmates. At the beginning of class each student will have the chance to tell the class what they think about the readings assigned. Your comments should be based on the content of the readings, but may relate that content to broader issues. Particularly useful comments will address questions like the following:
   a. Are the conclusions justified by the methods and results used in the various experiments? What are the salient methodological issues?
   b. How do the findings you read about relate to other research in psychology?
   c. Are the results and conclusions discussed in the papers generalizable to all situations they purport to explain?
   d. How do the conclusions of the readings assigned for this discussion relate to what we have learned in other sessions in the course?
   Meaningful examples of concepts discussed in class can include personal experiences that illustrate the research we read. If you’d like to offer such examples to class, make sure you connect the concept or finding in question with the example before doing so.

2. Reaction papers
   After you have completed the assigned readings, you should write a concise reaction paper analyzing the readings. The format should be approximately two pages, double-spaced, 12pt font. Include your name and the week that the paper is written for in the paper and preferably in the file name (ex. Ljubica_Chatman_week1).
   Good reaction papers will analyze the concepts brought up in the papers. Characteristics of quality content will include some of the following elements: What was
found/theorized, how was it interpreted, how else could it be interpreted, and what are the implications of the finding/theory? The best papers will also integrate comments/topics across readings.

Reaction papers will be graded with a check minus, check or check plus and samples of good reaction papers will be made available on courseworks.

Reaction papers should be posted in the dropbox by 10 AM of the Tuesday before the class they refer to.

3. Discussion moderation

Each student will be assigned one class that they will be responsible for moderating, likely with a classmate. You will be assigned to a particular class session/week according to your preferences and availability.

As a discussion moderator you will:
- Read the recommended reading and summarize it for the class during the first 10 minutes of the class. If the recommended reading is an empirical article, you will present the results and conclusions of the paper. What methods were used in the studies reported, what analyses were employed, what were the results, and what conclusions were made based on the findings? In the case that the recommended reading is a review paper, your presentation should include a discussion of what the argument of the review is and what are the unresolved issues where the research is inconclusive.
- Based on assigned readings, you will prepare five discussion questions, perhaps in collaboration with another discussion moderator if there are two moderators that week.

Due to the number of sessions and students, some sessions are likely to have two discussion moderators. In those cases, moderators will collaborate regarding discussion questions with the help of the instructor. Two discussion moderators will both present within the 10 minute time at the beginning of class and specific assignments will be worked out when we meet before your discussion moderation. You will be given specific readings and assignments of approximately equal difficulty based on your topic preference.

You are required to meet with me before discussion moderation. When there are two presenters for that week, we will meet together. We will meet during the week before your discussion moderation. Please bring a draft of your presentation of the recommended reading and a list of five or more discussion questions to be used to stimulate discussion in class.

4. Final paper

The first half of the final paper consists of a literature review in an area of interest with a specific question in mind. In order to refine your idea and find the appropriate literature, the instructor will be available to meet with you to help develop the idea and get you started with literature review. In the second half of the paper your assignment is to a)
identify questions that have not been answered in the literature you reviewed and b) apply the findings you reviewed appropriately to address a real world issue.

The main part of the paper will be a review of the scientific literature on a topic of your choosing approved by the instructor. The review should summarize the current research, synthesize and analyze existing research in order to suggest a new research question that remains unresolved. Finally, you should explain what the implications are of the topic you reviewed for important everyday issues. In other words, apply the knowledge gained in this review to resolve a real or hypothetical issue encountered in everyday life.

Format: 14-16 pages double-spaced, 12pt Times New Roman (not including references)
Important dates:
- meet with instructor by (week 5 class date)
- create outline and seed references and turn in to instructor by (week 7 class date)
- turn in paper into electronic dropbox by (time date exact folder)

Extra credit project:
Using [Google docs or discussion board on Courseworks TBD] this class will create a common resource: A list of explanations and psychological jargon found in the readings assigned for this course. Each explanation will be about a paragraph long and examples will be posted online. The extra credit assignment will be used during the process of letter grade assignment and will potentially help those students whose grades are close to the next highest letter grade.

VI. CLASS POLICIES

Absenteeism policy:
We hope that you will look forward to class and never want to miss it. However, if you have two or more unexcused absences this may decrease your letter grade. For each class missed, you should contact me as soon as possible so that we can make arrangements for you to make up the material that you missed.

Academic honesty policy:
It’s likely that you will have so many ideas inspired by readings that cheating will never cross your mind. However, you should know that plagiarism will not be tolerated and is easily detectable. Please read the Columbia University Faculty Statement on Academic Integrity at www.college.columbia.edu/faculty/resourcesforinstructors/academicintegrity/statement and the Columbia University Undergraduate Guide to Academic Integrity which starts at https://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/integrity

2 If you miss class due to medical or family emergencies, you will need to provide a dean's or doctor's note and these absences will not affect your grade. Please be sure to contact me as soon as possible in such cases.
Technology usage:
Technology usage for the purpose of improving the class and furthering our learning goals is allowed.

Assignment submission:
If you are unable to complete an assignment on time, please email me to request an extension, explaining your circumstances. For the final paper, half a letter grade will be deducted for each day after the submission date that I have not approved.

This syllabus is subject to revision and all revisions will be posted on courseworks in a timely manner.