Advanced Seminar – Research/Theory Focused on Self-Control
Instructor: Walter Mischel
G4630, Fall 2009
Hours: Monday 4:10 - 6:00pm
Room: 405 Schermerhorn Hall

Prerequisite

Open to graduate students and advanced undergraduates with the instructor's permission. Introduction to Personality, W2610, or equivalent is a prerequisite unless specifically waived.

Brief Description

This is an advanced seminar on current research and theory in personality/social psychology, focusing on research and theory in the self-regulation of goal-directed behavior and the phenomena of “willpower.”

Course Description

This seminar will explore selected developments in theory and research within psychological science (broadly defined, regardless of sub-discipline boundaries), focusing on self-control and “willpower.” We will consider the cognitive, emotional, neural, and social processes that enable the ability to delay gratification and to exert future-oriented impulse control. Readings will provide the background for these developments within psychological science and give an overview of major research areas and theoretical challenges in the field. The seminar will critically review the nature and utility of global traits and states (as conceptualized both by trait and psychodynamic theories) and examine the theoretical and methodological alternatives provided by competing approaches that seek new units for the analysis of self-control and for understanding important individual differences in social behavior. Special attention will be given to the CAPS (Cognitive Affective Processing System) as a model for integrating and understanding the mechanisms underlying self-control abilities and their expressions in the individual’s behavior across diverse situations and over time (see Mischel & Shoda 1995, Psychological Review; Mischel & Shoda, 1998, Annual Review of Psychology; and Mischel, prefatory chapter, 2004, Annual Review of Psychology).

This framework will be used to analyze the nature of the cognitive and self-regulatory competencies that underlie the developing child’s ability to defer immediate gratification for larger delayed consequences and to exert effective self-control and "willpower." In related direction we will consider alternative models in the psychological literature for understanding the phenomena of self-control from diverse other perspectives and sub-disciplines, and for harnessing what is known about self-control for clinical and educational interventions.

Meetings will be devoted to identifying topics and critically reviewing and analyzing the most interesting problems that require attention from the framework indicated above. Promising hypotheses and methods for new research and for alternative conceptualizations will be explored. Special attention will be given to combining experimental and observational strategies in research, and to the clinical-practical implications of research findings particularly for prevention and therapeutic-educational intervention applications.
Requirements

Students will be expected to present in oral and written form a major review-research paper and a short, focused written report on a topic to be determined that is at the vanguard of the field. Specifics, dates, possible topics, etc. will be discussed in class. The development of this written work, and the oral presentation, at a professional level of quality is a major goal in the course and the main task for participants.

Required Texts  (essential for background to the Seminar and the field)


Required Articles


Recommended

These references are listed to help students get started in thinking/planning the paper/project they want to work on. They provide a sample of suggestions and NOT a listing of what needs to be covered on various topics.


**General Recommended Background Readings**


