

Psychology W4275y
Contemporary Topics in Language and Communication

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The focus of this seminar will be human gestural behavior, and its relation to language, communication and cognition. Topics to be covered include: Gestural Typologies, Communicative Function of Gestures, Gesture and Speech Production, Cognitive Functions of Gesture, The Neuropsychology of Gesture, The Developmental Significance of Gesture, and Gesture and Aphasia. Readings will consist of journal articles and book chapters, and will include both empirical studies and theoretical essays. There is no course textbook.

Most of the Seminar meetings will be led by Seminar members, who will assign readings, circulate discussion questions, and structure and lead the discussions. At least two weeks before the meeting, Seminar leaders will meet with the instructor to discuss readings for assignment. Following the Seminar meeting, they also will write a paper that summarizes the points raised in the discussion and the issues they present. These Summary Papers must be turned in no later than Friday, May 8th.

Ideally, a seminar should resemble a conversation among a group of knowledgeable (although not necessarily equally knowledgeable) people on a topic of mutual interest. In order for this to happen, the Seminar leader must select interesting and substantial readings, provide thought-provoking discussion questions and lead the discussion adroitly. Members of the Seminar must do the readings, spend some time thinking about the discussion questions, and come prepared to participate in the discussion. A seminar has dual goals. The first, and most obvious, is to explore the material that is the seminar's substantive focus. But beyond that, a seminar should provide participants with an opportunity to develop their own ideas and insights, and to reconcile them with the ideas and insights of others. Ideally a deeper understanding emerges from participants' attempts to reconcile divergent perspectives through constructive dialog. Arguably, the first goal can be achieved in a lecture format. But it is difficult, when one is the more-or-less passive recipient of the lecturer's "received wisdom," to develop an individual perspective on the topic or for a deeper understanding to emerge. Joining the Seminar carries with it a commitment to accept these responsibilities. More specifically, Seminar member are expected to attend all meetings of the Seminar and to come to class prepared to participate in the discussion. Students who have commitments that will prevent them from attending all Seminar meetings, should inform the instructor at the first meeting.

The Seminar will meet on Thursdays, from 12:10-2 pm in room 200C Schermerhorn. There will be no class meeting on April 9th. The first meeting (January 22nd) will be

organizational. Attendance is required; students who do not attend this class meeting will not be permitted to continue in the Seminar. The following two meetings (January 29th and February 5th) will be coordinated by the instructor.

Grading for the Seminar will be based on the following: Quality of participation in Seminar discussion: 40%; Performance as Seminar leader: 40%; paper: 20%.