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Office: Department of Psychology  
Class Days: Mondays and Wednesdays: 9 am -10:20 am  
Location: Education Building 313  
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1:30 pm-3:30 pm (to make an appointment, email me please.)

Course Description and Objectives

This course orbits one of the most original and exciting fields of the science of psychology: cognitive psychology. The course takes students on an enjoyable journey to a learning destination with many stops. The first stop energizes them with a sweet treat: how we sense and perceive the world. The second stop teaches them a lot about attention: how and why we, knowingly and unknowingly, take notice of things, events, and people. The third stop sees students off with a big portmanteau of knowledge on how we draw in, hold and keep, and remember information; it’s about human memory.

Another stop of this journey is festooned with many beautiful linguistic portraits showing us, say, why we become speechless upon facing this sentence: “The school is near the bike.”, but fully digest its upturned mate; that is: “The bike is near the school.” Or what is the mystery behind the following sentence? “Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.” This stop is called “Language.” There is also a stop spotted from far away by this four-word sign: Decisions, Judgments, and Reasoning. It is really an eye-opener: most of our daily judgments and decisions are on the wrong track -- and most of the time we fail to get them back on track. More stops? Yes, students will get through many other stops, but the destination is close at hand.

The main objective of the course is to help students come away from the above-mentioned journey with such self-generated gifts in hand: understanding the book content and hopefully starting to use their newly-attained knowledge in daily life; taking part in and enjoying an array of in-and-out-of-class activities – both individually and in groups; and finally coming up with a research idea on a cognitive psychological topic, conducting a small-scale study to test the idea, and writing a paper on the whole endeavor.

Course Text


Course Format

Mondays: lectures and student participation

Wednesdays: lectures and student participation

Course Assignments

1) Cognitive Interview Exercise

An interesting question in cognitive psychology -- discussed in the course textbook Chapter 10 -- pertains to how readers comprehend written material. There are a number of models and theories which try to explain textual comprehension. One is “embodied cognition”; the idea that the physical world, your body, and the interaction between the physical world and your body determine the way you think. This is a good place to take a deep look at this idea by conducting a “cognitive interview” and writing a short paper on it. Here I suggest a detailed plan:

Three comprehension passages (adapted from Thomas and Turner, 2011) appear below. Copy and paste the passages onto a Microsoft Word blank document and print it out. Ask an individual (let’s call him or her an interviewee) with at least some college background to join you in this effort. Tell him or her to carefully read the three passages (appearing below) for at least nine minutes. Next, ask him or her the subsequent questions (see below). Then, create two (or more than two) relevant questions and insert all the answers (the transcript) into your to-be-submitted paper (in a Microsoft Word document).

In the next step, write your own reaction to the answers in a few paragraphs consisting of at least 500 words. In this reaction section, you will analyze the interviewee’s responses and include your own evaluation and interpretation of the responses. You can use the following link to direct and enrich your analysis, evaluation, and interpretation:

http://classicprose.com/csguide.html

Please note that according to an “embodied cognition” perspective, Passage B (see below) is supposed to be the most comprehensible one -- which should logically be the favorite one as well. Passage B seems to be the best answer, because it brings to mind a familiar image schema: ignoring or rejecting several secondary things in order to get to a desired primary one. For example, imagine you want to pick the biggest orange from a bag of 10 oranges. What would you do? You put your hand in the bag and start to ignore or reject the smaller oranges -- one by one -- until your hand grabs the biggest one. Similarly, according to Passage B, if we want to understand a science, we should, at first, ignore its theories, findings, and apologists and only look at what the practitioners of science do.

You’re free to write in any style you like. The finished paper is expected to be uploaded onto Blackboard before or on May 4th, 2016.
The passages:

Passage A:
“If you want to understand what a science is, you should look in the first instance not at its theories but you should instead, putting aside its findings, concentrate your attention on its practice entirely, taking care not to be distracted by anything its apologists might say about that.”

Passage B:
“If you want to understand what a science is, you should look in the first instance not at its theories or its findings, and certainly not at what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners of it do.”

Passage C:
“If you want to understand what a science is, and you look at its theories and its findings and its representations by apologists, you will find that you must set all this aside to look at what its practitioners do, which is where you should have directed your attention in the first place.”

Note. Your interviewee may need to be told what the plural word “apologists” means. Two synonyms of the word are “supporters” and “advocates.”

The Interview questions:
1) To you, which passage is easier to understand?
2) Which passage is your favorite?
3) Why did you select this specific passage? (Encourage the interviewee to give at least three reasons.)
4) How much do you like your selected passage? (Encourage the interviewee to give a long answer.)
5) Will you please try to rewrite your selected passage? (For this, give the interviewee a pen and a sheet of paper.)
6) …………………………………………………………………………….? (to be created by you)
7) …………………………………………………………………………….? (to be created by you)

Reference:
2) Small-scale research project

One of the goals of this course is to give you a first serious opportunity to discover your ability to investigate and write about a research question in such areas as perception, attention, memory, learning, language, reasoning, judgment, decision making, and problem solving. Everyone has the capacity to give life to new research questions: Why do children often attend to bright colors? How do our grandmas and grandpas remember their teen age years? What drives us to make regrettable decisions? Ideas abound here.

This suggested small-scale research endeavor invites you to get on board and create your own new idea and do a study or experiment on it. You can conduct an experiment in a single one-hour session with a few participants -- and equipped with only one or two simple questions! That’s it. After doing your study, you will write your masterpiece up and submit it onto Blackboard. The paper is expected to contain at least 1500 words, excluding the references. The report will consist of five main parts including a) Abstract and Introduction, b) Method, c) Results, d) Discussion, and e) References and Appendices. Each part will be assigned 2 points. So this assignment counts 10 points (10%) towards the final grade. The deadline for submitting the paper to Blackboard will be May 2, 2016. During the first weeks of the semester, I will talk about the assignment at length. You are also welcome to come see me and/or email me for consultation and discussion.

Quizzes and Exams

You will take two random unannounced quizzes, a midterm exam, and a final exam throughout the semester (see Course Assessment below). The quizzes and exams consist of multiple-choice items. The exams dates are specified in the course timetable (see below). Each quiz begins at 9 am and takes 15-20 minutes to finish. Note that each question on the quizzes and exams counts one percent towards the final grade. Also, please keep in mind that the possibility of a quiz or exam makeup is zero. If you, for some reason, couldn’t attend a quiz or exam, let me know to deal with it.

Course Assessment

1. Quiz 1 10%
2. Quiz 2 10%
3. Midterm exam 20%
4. Final exam 20%
5. Cognitive Interview 10%
6. Small-scale project paper 10%
7. In-class activities 20%
Grading Scale

90% - 100% = A  
80% - 89.9% = B  
70% - 79.9% = C  
60% - 69.9% = D  
00% - 59.9% = F

Class Attendance and Participation

Class attendance is expected because you can learn better when you are physically present. Also, there will be two random unannounced quizzes throughout the semester. Missing a quiz means losing an influential portion of the final grade.

Class participation is important and has its own points as shown below. Class participation involves two parts: Part 1) Showing such behaviors and attitudes as active listening to the lectures and to other students, making comments during class discussions, asking questions, and being respectful to others and Part 2) Taking part in an activity I call “In a Cool Huddle”. In this activity, students are expected to discuss some topics in groups of 4 and report the results of their discussions at the end of the class sessions.

Classroom Behavior

Please turn off your cell phone on arrival. Don’t talk when others are talking. If you want to ask a question or make a comment, raise your hand and try not to interrupt others as they speak. Don’t use your computer for irrelevant activities such as emailing, visiting a social network profile, playing games, watching videos, listening to music and so on. These activities prevent you from focusing on lectures and other class engagements and may distract other students.

Disability

If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at 747-5148, or by email to cass@utep.edu, or visit their office located in UTEP Union East, Room 106. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at www.sa.utep.edu/cass.

Academic Conduct, Discipline, and Integrity

It is assumed that students are implicitly aware of the principles of academic conduct, discipline, and integrity. But having an explicit knowledge of the principles will be highly beneficial for anybody working within the realm of academia. The following link provides a wide-range information about academic conduct and discipline at UTEP. Please read the file carefully and enthusiastically:

http://admin.utep.edu/LinkClick.aspx?link=HOOP-Section+II.pdf&tabid=30181&mid=63285
Course Timetable and Lecture Topic

Week 1

January 18: No classes
January 20: Chapter 1: Cognitive Psychology: An Introduction

Week 2

January 25: Chapter 1: Cognitive Psychology: An Introduction
January 27: Chapter 2: Cognitive Neuroscience and Cognitive Science

Week 3

February 1: Chapter 2: Cognitive Neuroscience and Cognitive Science
February 3: Chapter 3: Sensation and Perception

Week 4

February 8: Chapter 3: Sensation and Perception
February 10: Chapter 4: Attention

Week 5

February 15: Chapter 4: Attention

Week 6

February 22: Chapter 5: Short-Term Working Memory
February 24: Chapter 5: Short-Term Working Memory

Week 7

February 29: Midterm Exam

March 2: Chapter 6: Learning and Remembering
March 7: Spring Break
March 9: Spring Break

Week 8
March 14: Chapter 6: Learning and Remembering
March 16: Chapter 7: Knowing

Week 9
March 21: Chapter 7: Knowing
March 23: Chapter 8: Using Knowledge in the Real World

Week 10
March 28 Chapter 8: Using Knowledge in the Real World
March 30: Chapter 9: Language

Week 11
April 4: Chapter 9: Language
April 6: Chapter 10 Comprehension: Written and Spoken Language

Week 12
April 11: Chapter 10 Comprehension: Written and Spoken Language
April 13: Chapter 11: Decisions, Judgments, and Reasoning

Week 13
April 18: Chapter 11: Decisions, Judgments, and Reasoning
April 20: Chapter 12: Problem Solving

Week 14
April 25: Chapter 12: Problem Solving
April 27: Chapter 13: Cognition and Emotion
Week 15

May 2: Chapter 13: Cognition and Emotion

May 4: Review

May 13: Final Exam at 1 pm – 3:45 pm

This syllabus is subject to change.