
PSYCHOLOGY/LINGUISTICS U466: COGNITION

Instructor: Dr. Melanie Soderstrom
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Office: 219 NI
Office Hours: Thursdays 10:30-12:30

Spring 2008
MWT 9:15-10:20

Textbook: Galotti, K. (2007). *Cognitive Psychology: In and out of the laboratory* (4th edition). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

How do we process the world around us? What does it mean to “see” something? How do we make decisions and take action? Can we think without language? These and other questions are fundamental to our ability to understand and interact with the world, yet we rarely stop to think about them. Cognitive Psychology, the study of “cognition”, seeks to answer these questions. Throughout the semester, we will cover a broad range of topics, including perception, attention, language, development, memory and decision-making, among others. During the course, you should gain a better understanding of the research methods and findings that we use to study cognition, and a greater appreciation for our everyday cognitive abilities. We will examine the important theories that have informed our understanding of mental processes, and explore a number of fascinating properties of our minds.

COURSE DETAILS

Evaluation: You will be evaluated based on your performance on four exams, as listed in the schedule. The first three exams are worth 20% each. The fourth exam, during finals week, is worth 40%. This final exam will be half on the final section of the semester and half a review of the entire semester. All four exams will be partly multiple choice, partly short answer. The final letter grade will be determined based on overall class performance on the exams. I will provide the mean grade for the class after each exam. Please note that a typical mean score on an exam is 70%. I will probably center the exam within the B range – however I reserve the right to change this if the class as a whole performs much worse or better than should be expected. I also reserve the right to raise an individual’s final grade for exceptional class participation or lower it in the case of poor behavior.

Class Participation: You are expected to come to class having read the relevant chapters for that section. Although class participation is not explicitly graded in this class, you will learn better (and therefore, do better on the exams) if you participate, and the course will be more fun for all of us. Questions from students allow me to judge whether the material is being understood, and what students find most interesting. There are no stupid questions, if honestly asked.

Attendance and Absences: I will not be taking attendance. However, you will not perform well on the exams if you miss the lectures. We will be covering topics not covered in the textbook. If you need to miss a class, I highly recommend that you obtain a copy of a fellow student’s notes for that day. Make-up exams will only be given for excused and documented absences (e.g., a note from a doctor). Where possible, you should give me at least 1 week’s notice if you will be missing an exam. Missed exams for religious reasons can be made up, but only with notice.

Question box: In order to encourage questions, I will be providing a “question box”, where students can leave informal notes to me before/after class. You can sign or not sign these notes as you wish. Appropriate questions for the question box range from clarification questions you are too shy to ask in front of the class (e.g. “I don’t understand the difference between serial and parallel processing”), to questions of curiosity sparked by the day’s topic (e.g. “Do infants think the way we do? What about dogs?”). I will do my best to address all of the questions that appear in the question box.

Office hours: I plan to be present at my office hours every week as noted at the beginning of this syllabus. Please note that I have a research position in Providence, RI, so I am not always on campus. It is always best to email me at least 24 hours in advance if you plan to attend office hours, so I know to expect you. I am also happy to arrange alternative meeting times if my scheduled office hours are inconvenient.

Additional readings: Aside from the text book, I may periodically assign additional readings. These readings will be fair game for the exam.

Blackboard: I will post an outline of my powerpoint slides on blackboard for you to use as a study guide. These slides should not be used as a replacement for coming to class and taking notes. However, they should decrease the amount of note-taking you need to take during class, so that you can pay attention to the content of the lecture. These files may or may not be posted before the class in question. You should also periodically check blackboard, as I may occasionally post important notices, changes, or clarifications. I will also make midterm grades available using the blackboard system. Please note that the means calculated by blackboard do *not* reflect the actual means used for calculating the letter grades, since they include the scores of students who have dropped the class and/or have not taken the exams.

Challenging an exam or final grade: Students sometimes feel they have been unfairly graded, and mistakes do happen. If you wish to challenge my grading, you should come to me after class (preferably during office hours) and present your case. If it is a simple matter of miscalculating a score, I will make the change immediately. If you feel that my answer key is in error, or you have an alternative correct response, I may take your exam with me to consider the matter. Please keep in mind that I may choose to re-grade your entire exam, and not just the answer in question. This is to cut down on frivolous challenges. Honest questions to clarify why an answer was judged to be incorrect are of course always welcome.

Appropriate behavior: Students attending class are expected to treat their fellow students and myself with respect. This means no chit-chat, no instant-messaging, and no cell phones (please turn your cell phone OFF during class time). Disruptive behavior that prevents the lecture from proceeding or makes other students uncomfortable will not be tolerated, and may result in being expelled from class.

Honesty: Students are expected to comply with the Student Handbook's policy on ethical behavior at all times. Cheating in any form (or helping someone to cheat) on the exams will result in an immediate failing grade for the class.

Schedule

DATE	NOTES	TOPIC	READINGS
Monday, Jan. 7		Administrivia	
Wednesday, Jan. 9	Guest lecturer: Feldman	History	Chapter 1
Thursday, Jan. 10	Guest lecturer: Feldman	Methods	
Monday, Jan. 14		Perception/Recognition	Chapter 3
Wednesday, Jan. 16			
Thursday, Jan. 17			
Monday, Jan. 21	MLK Day, no class		
Wednesday, Jan. 23	Guest lecturer: Conwell	The Mind/Brain	Chapter 2
Thursday, Jan. 24		Spatial Cognition	Chapter 9 (p.300-328)
Monday, Jan. 28			
Wednesday, Jan. 30		Catch-up/Review	
Thursday, Jan. 31	Exam I		
Monday, Feb. 4		Attention	Chapter 4
Wednesday, Feb. 6			
Thursday, Feb.7			
Monday, Feb. 11		Representation	Chapters 7 & 8
Wednesday, Feb. 13			
Thursday, Feb. 14			
Monday, Feb. 18	Pres Day, no class		
Wednesday, Feb. 20			
Thursday, Feb. 21		Memory I	Chapter 5
Monday, Feb. 25			
Wednesday, Feb. 27		Catch-up/Review	
Thursday, Feb. 28	Exam II		
	Spring Break – March 3-7		
Monday, Mar. 10		Memory II	Chapter 6, 9(p.297-300)
Wednesday, Mar. 12			
Thursday, Mar. 13		Reasoning	Chapter 11-12
Monday, Mar. 17			
Wednesday, Mar. 18			
Thursday, Mar. 19		Decision-Making	Chapter 13
Monday, Mar. 24			
Wednesday, Mar. 26		Catch-up/Review	
Thursday, Mar. 27	Exam III		
Monday, March. 31		Language	Chapter 10

Wednesday, Apr. 2			
Thursday, Apr. 3			
Monday, Apr. 7		Lang. Development	
Wednesday, Apr. 9		Cog. Development	Chapter 14
Thursday, Apr. 10			
Monday, April 14		Individual Differences	Chapter 15, 16
Wednesday, April 16	Last day of class		
Finals Week	Final Exam		