Contemporary Issues in Psychology

1st Year: C8846
15 Credits
Spring Term 2014

Module Convenor: Dr. David A. Leavens

NOTE: Most of the questions you need answers to about this module are in this document. Please read it fully and carefully before your first lecture.

NOTE: This document concerns the structure and content of the module. If you have questions about procedures, please consult the Department of Psychology Administration Office in Pev1 2A13 or via psychology@sussex.ac.uk
Module Structure, Aims and Objectives

Contemporary Issues in Psychology will introduce both psychology students and non-psychology majors to a variety of contemporary topics in psychology. Topics can vary from year to year, but might typically include, for example, modules on Environmental Psychology, Evolutionary Psychology, Comparative Psychology, Polylingualism, Brain Imaging, Animal Vocal Communication and Gender Differences, and Hypnosis. The module does not require any prior knowledge of psychology.

Module Learning Outcomes.

By the end of the module, a successful student should be able to:

1. Succinctly summarise published research in psychology,
2. Describe core theoretical and methodological concepts in the topics covered,
3. Apply existing knowledge to new problems.

Module Contact Information

Convenor: David A. Leavens, PhD
Location: Pevensey 2, Room 4B3
Telephone: 01273-678526
E-mail: davidl@sussex.ac.uk

Teaching and Learning

- **Lectures** There will be two lectures per week.
  To avoid disruption to the majority, please try to arrive at least 5 minutes before the start time of the lecture.

It is **CRUCIAL** for you to understand that formal examination on this module will be based on material covered in the lectures, seminars and your 'essential reading' for each week. It is also important for you to understand that lectures will **NOT** attempt to ‘cover’ all such material. That is, lectures are not intended to provide an alternative to you learning the material in your essential reading. Any attempt to rely solely on learning material presented in lectures will severely restrict your ability to do well during formal assessment of this module. Lectures are intended to fulfil functions other than repeating or précising material covered in the essential readings.

Lectures on this module are intended to perform several functions. First, they will provide another ‘channel’ of communication, allowing you to hear as well as read about (selected) material relevant to the module.
A second function of the lectures is to allow you to review material you have learned so far. If you have already done the essential reading associated with the lecture, ask yourself how well the lecturer has covered that material.

A third function of the lectures is to illustrate the nature of a critical approach to students. The lecturer will sometimes simply explain material. At other times, however, the lecturer will criticise the material in some way. University education is about learning how to constructively criticise as well as simply absorb information. Evaluate your lecturer’s criticisms. Are they simply personal prejudices (e.g., “I don’t like this”) and, if so, are they presented as such? Or are reasons given for criticisms made (e.g., “I don’t like this because…”)?

You should note that all the study skills advice in existence suggests that straightforward ‘absorption’ of material (i.e., reading, listening, rote-learning and memorising) should take up about 20% of learning time. The other 80% should come from ‘interrogating’ that information (e.g., looking for links, attempting to summarise and synthesise, looking for strengths and weaknesses and possible improvements, applying to different areas, etc.).

**Seminars.** This elective has no scheduled seminars.

- **Independent study** The difference between studying at university and study you may have done previously is that at university the emphasis is on you finding out things for yourself. Just as fitness clubs attempt to foster and facilitate (but cannot impose) fitness, universities attempt to foster and facilitate (but cannot impose) academic excellence. Results will (and can only) come as a direct result of you making appropriate use of the facilities at your disposal. Lectures, seminars and the like are there to support and guide your independent learning – they are not there to “pass information from tutors’ heads to students’ notebooks without passing through the brains of either.” Not everything you will need or want to know will be covered in the lectures, seminars or essential readings. You need to become familiar with the material you are guided towards, but you also need to learn to ‘manipulate’ that material: apply it to new domains, compare and contrast across topics, synthesise it, evaluate it, consider its relevance to issues of interest to you, supplement it, etc. This can only be done by being interested and working hard because you want to. As we shall learn below, an exclusive focus on passing exams can undermine that motivation and will make you perform less well as a result. Thus, study because you want to learn and stop when you have answers to your own satisfaction for the questions you care about. Finally, note that independent study is study you engage in outside of formal contact hours with faculty – it does not have to be solitary.

- **Office Hours** Your module convenor will hold two office hours each week. Please see the Psychology Department notice board for when and where this will be held. Students may use these office hours (without appointment when demand does not exceed supply) to discuss or ask about anything module-related.

**Books and Reading**

- Due to the changing and varied content of this module, no single text can provide a thorough overview. However, for students desiring an excellent, topically broad introduction to psychology, the following text is recommended, although any introductory textbook will be helpful for non-psychology students (look for these around shelfmarks BF 121 and QZ 120, for example):

WEEK 1 (TUES.): INTRODUCTION TO MODULE (DR. LEAVENS)

Required reading: Module Handbook

WEEK 1 (THURS.): (OPTIONAL) WRITING SURGERY (DR. LEAVENS)

See Study Direct for Recommended Readings

WEEK 2 (TUES.): ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY (DR. SPARKS)

Introduction: This part of the module addresses some core contemporary issues in Environmental Psychology. Emphasis will be placed on a consideration of how psychology can help us understand (and perhaps influence) environment-related behaviour and on what psychology might contribute to the promotion of sustainability.

Lecture 1: People and planet: what’s at stake?

Required reading


Additional reading


WEEK 2 (THURS.): ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY (DR. SPARKS)

Lecture 2: The psychology of environmental attitudes

Required reading


Additional reading


**WEEK 3 (TUES.): ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY (DR. SPARKS)**

**Lecture 3: Understanding inertia and other barriers to action**

**Required reading**


**Additional reading**


WWF (2008). *Weathercocks and Signposts: The environmental movement at the crossroads*. Available at wwf.org.uk/strategiesforchange

**WEEK 3 (THURS.): ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY (DR. SPARKS)**

**Lecture 4: Promoting pro-environmental behaviour**

**Required reading**


**Additional reading**


**WEEK 4 (TUES.): PLAYBACK AS A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING ANIMAL COMMUNICATION AND ANIMAL MINDS (PROF. MCCOMB)**

This block of lectures will examine the powerful tool that audio playback provides for exploring animal communication and the nature of animal minds.

**Lecture 1: Outline of playback methodology & scope**

*Suggested reading*

*Case study papers:*


*Dip into books by Cheney D.L. & Seyfarth R.M.;*
How monkeys see the world: inside the mind of another species (1990, University of Chicago Press)


**WEEK 4 (THURS.): PLAYBACK AS A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING ANIMAL COMMUNICATION AND ANIMAL MINDS (PROF. MCCOMB)**

**Lecture 2: Playback & insights into sexual behaviour**

*Suggested reading*


**WEEK 5 (TUES.): PLAYBACK AS A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING ANIMAL COMMUNICATION AND ANIMAL MINDS (PROF. MCCOMB)**
Lecture 3: Playback & insights into social behaviour

Suggested reading

WEEK 5 (THURS.): PLAYBACK AS A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING ANIMAL COMMUNICATION AND ANIMAL MINDS (PROF. MCCOMB)

Lecture 4: Playback as a tool for exploring language-like abilities in animals

Suggested reading

Case study papers:

*Dip into books by Cheney D.L. & Seyfarth R.M.*
*How monkeys see the world: inside the mind of another species* (1990, University of Chicago Press)

WEEK 6 (TUES.) DRUGS (DR. MORGAN)

Lecture 1: Principles of psychopharmacology

The topic of this section of the module is the neuropharmacology of recreational drugs, with particular focus on cannabis, heroin, cocaine, and MDMA (ecstasy).

Required reading (for all four lectures)

(Please note that the library is well-stocked with other relevant textbooks, such as Toates, F. M. (2007). *Biological psychology: An integrative approach*, 2nd ed. Harlow: Pearson Prentice-Hall, as well as earlier editions)

For specific drugs, the U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) provides informative and up-to-date information on many recreational drugs (located at: http://www.drugabuse.gov/). Specific web pages are listed below—for each drug, first look for the NIDA Infofacts. If you want more in-depth information, look for the research reports.

Ecstasy: http://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/mdma-ecstasymolly
Cocaine: http://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/cocaine
Heroin: http://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/heroin
Cannabis: http://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/marijuana
WEEK 6 (THURS.): DRUGS (DR. MORGAN)

Lecture 2: Psychostimulants

WEEK 7 (TUES.): DRUGS (DR. MORGAN)

Lecture 3: The opiates

WEEK 7 (THURS.): DRUGS (DR. MORGAN)

Lecture 4: Marijuana

WEEK 8 (TUES.): HYPNOSIS (PROF. DIENES)

All articles are available electronically on Study Direct. These are original research articles: Do not worry if aspects of them are difficult, like the results sections. Take what you can from the articles and, if you are on a psychology degree, you will eventually be able to evaluate results sections properly.


Overview of hypnosis:

Are hypnotized subjects lying?

Stage Hypnosis:

Hypnosis and antisocial acts:

WEEK 8 (THURS.): HYPNOSIS (PROF. DIENES)

Lecture 2: Hypnosis as an altered state.
Overview


Effect of hypnotic inductions


Subjective markers of an altered state

WEEK 9 (TUES.): HYPNOSIS (PROF. DIENES)

Lecture 3: Hypnosis in an historical and clinical context

**Historical background:**
Perry, C. http://www.fmsfonline.org/hypnosis.html#watmheoh

**Hypnotic analgesia**

**Hypnosis and therapy**

WEEK 9 (THURS.): HYPNOSIS (PROF. DIENES)

Lecture 4: Hypnosis and memory; hypnotisability

Can memory be hypnotically enhanced?

**Implanting pseudo-memories**


**Age regression**


**Hypnotisability**

http://www.hypnosisandsuggestion.org/measurement.html


**WEEK 10 (TUES.): GENDER DIFFERENCES (PROF. CLIFTON)**

**Lecture 1: Biological bases of sex differences**

This lecture will provide a basic perspective on sex differences from a biological perspective and you should look at one of the following textbooks:


If you are interested in why sex evolved, then try


**WEEK 10 (THURS.): GENDER DIFFERENCES (DR. LONG)**

**Lecture 2: Developmental perspectives on gender differences**

This lecture will introduce you to two theoretical accounts of the processes by which gender develops in childhood. The two textbooks (Brannon, Durkin) listed below cover these theories comprehensively, but any developmental psychology textbook will provide a basic introduction.


**WEEK 11 (TUES.): GENDER DIFFERENCES (DR. LONG)**

**Lecture 3: Sex, gender and the meaning of difference**

In this lecture we will explore the meaning of gender differences from a number of perspectives, including the argument that the genders are more similar than different. We will also consider potential sources of bias in the process of researching gender differences.


**WEEK 11 (THURS.): GENDER DIFFERENCES (DR. LONG)**

**Lecture 4: Considering the role social influences on specific gender differences**

In the final lecture of this section we will look in detail at competing explanations of gender differences in two areas: cognitive abilities and interpersonal aggression.


**WEEK 12 (TUES. & THURS.): READING WEEK-NO CLASS**
Please note that additional recommended readings may be posted on Study Direct, for all weeks, so remember to check Study Direct regularly.

You will need to go beyond these readings in preparing for your essays. Use it as a starting point to orient yourself to particular fields of interest, and then pursue other material which appears to you to be relevant.

Assessment

Formal assessment for Contemporary Issues in Psychology comprises two short coursework essays, comprising 1,500 words each. Each of these essays is weighted 50.00% over the entire module. Details of these assessed essays are shown on your syllabus in Sussex Direct. Submission deadlines are shown on your timetable. The set essay titles will be posted on Study Direct. Essay titles for the Spring term will cover material from Weeks 1-5 of the Spring Term (two topical areas) and Weeks 6-12 (three topical areas).

The assessment criteria for assessed essays are displayed on the Psychology School web pages. http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/internal/students/examinationsandassessment

In line with University regulations, every effort will be made to ensure that one marked copy of each essay is returned with feedback within 15 term-time weekdays of the relevant submission deadline.

Submission deadlines and late penalties

One copy of your essay must be submitted to the Psychology Departmental office, Pevensey 1 1B2 before the deadline. Students must ensure they complete a cover sheet. If your essay is submitted up to 24 hours late, there will be a penalty of 5%. If submitted more than 24 hours and up to one week late there will be a penalty of 10%.

Information on late submissions and submitting mitigating evidence can be found on the Student Life Centre website: http://www.sussex.ac.uk/studentlifecentre/mitigation

Very Important Note: Appropriately completing and submitting formally assessed work is your responsibility. Definitive guidelines on this are provided in the 'Handbook for Candidates' available on the web or via departmental offices. If you are in any doubt about the rules concerning submissions check with the departmental office.

Examination

Please note that there are no assessed examinations for this module.

Student Evaluation

All modules at Sussex are fully audited. You will be asked to complete an anonymous student evaluation form near the end of each term, allowing you to comment on and criticise all aspects of the module. You may also comment on the module at any time and you may do this directly or via some intermediary (e.g., a student representative). Feedback received in this way will be collated and shown to all tutors and module convenors for the module. It will also be reported to all relevant psychology teaching group meetings. Reactions and responses to such student feedback will be reported back to students via student representatives (who attend departmental meetings). We want the module be as good as it possibly can be so all and any feedback is gratefully received.
### Lecture Overview

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<tr>
<th>Week 1: Introduction/Reading Surgery 21 &amp; 23 January</th>
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<tr>
<td>First lecture: Introduction to module (Dr. Leavens)</td>
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<td>Second lecture (Optional): Surgery on essays &amp; written communication (Dr. Leavens)</td>
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<th>Week 2: Environmental Psychology 28 &amp; 30 January</th>
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<tr>
<td>First lecture: People and planet: what’s at stake? (Dr. Sparks)</td>
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<td>Second lecture: The psychology of environmental attitudes (Dr. Sparks)</td>
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<th>Week 3: Environmental Psychology/Writing Surgery 4 &amp; 6 February</th>
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<tr>
<td>Third lecture: Understanding inertia and other barriers to action (Dr. Sparks)</td>
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<td>Fourth lecture: Promoting pro-environmental behaviour (Dr. Sparks)</td>
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<th>Week 4: Playback Studies 11 &amp; 13 February</th>
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<tr>
<td>First lecture: Outline of playback methodology and scope (Prof. McComb)</td>
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<td>Second lecture: Playback and insights into sexual behaviour (Prof. McComb)</td>
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<th>Week 5: Environmental Psychology/Writing Surgery 4 &amp; 6 February</th>
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<tr>
<td>Third lecture: Playback and insights into social behaviour (Prof. McComb)</td>
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<th>Week 6: Drugs 25 &amp; 27 February</th>
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<tr>
<td>First lecture: Introduction/Cocaine (Dr. Morgan)</td>
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<td>Second lecture: Ecstasy (Dr. Morgan)</td>
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<th>Week 7: Drugs 4 &amp; 6 March</th>
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<tr>
<td>Third lecture: Heroin (Dr. Morgan)</td>
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<td>Fourth lecture: Cannabis (Dr. Morgan)</td>
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<th>Week 8: Hypnosis 11 &amp; 13 March</th>
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<tr>
<td>First lecture: Hypnosis: Basic facts (Prof. Dienes)</td>
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<td>Second lecture: Hypnosis as an altered state (Prof. Dienes)</td>
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<th>Week 9: Hypnosis 18 &amp; 20 March</th>
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<tr>
<td>Third lecture: Hypnosis in an historical and clinical context (Prof. Dienes)</td>
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<td>Fourth lecture: Hypnosis and memory; hypnotisability (Prof. Dienes)</td>
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<th>Week 10: Gender Differences 25 &amp; 27 March</th>
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<tr>
<td>First lecture: Biological bases of sex differences (Prof. Clifton)</td>
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<td>Second lecture: Developmental perspectives on gender differences (Dr. Long)</td>
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<th>Week 11: Gender Differences 1 &amp; 3 April</th>
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<td>Third lecture: Sex, gender and the meaning of difference (Dr. Long)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fourth lecture: Considering the role of ‘nurture’ in specific gender differences (or similarities) (Dr. Long)</td>
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<th>Week 12: NO CLASS: Reading Week 8 &amp; 10 April</th>
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