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PSYX 270.01: Fundamental Psychology of Learning

Allen Szalda-Petree

University of Montana - Missoula, allen.szalda-petree@umontana.edu

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Syllabus: PSYX 270 – Fundamentals of Learning

Instructor information

- Instructor: Allen Szalda-Petree
- Office: Skaggs Building 201
- Email: allen.szalda-petree@umontana.edu
- Phone: 406.243.2091
- Office hours: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 11 – 12 and by appointment

Required textbooks

- **Introduction to Learning & Behavior** (4th edition) – Powell, Honey, & Symbaluk

Course description and objectives

There are three primary goals of this course: 1) familiarize students with current knowledge and theory regarding learning processes, both elementary and complex, 2) provide simulations of classic learning processes, and 3) expose students to the types of research methods used to investigate learning phenomena.

The major topics to be covered include habituation, sensitization, classical conditioning, instrumental & operant conditioning, vicarious learning, stimulus control, schedules of reinforcement, limits of learning, and basic animal cognition.

The course emphasizes current theoretical and experimental investigations of learning processes as well as some exposure to current theories in animal cognition. While much of the research presented is based on non-human animals, this is not to suggest the application of these processes will not extend to humans. In fact, many of the basic learning processes extend throughout the animal kingdom, with differences being due to the interaction of the animal's evolutionary history, nervous system architecture, and ecology.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, students will be able to

1. Describe typical research methods used to study learning
2. Describe Classical conditioning and important phenomena related to Classical conditioning
3. Describe Instrumental conditioning and important phenomena related to Instrumental conditioning
4. Describe current theories used to explain Classical and Instrumental conditioning processes
5. Apply Classical and Instrumental conditioning in “real world” examples
6. Explain the adaptive value of learning

Exams

There will be 3 midterm exams and a comprehensive final. Each exam, including the final, will be worth 50 points and will consist of 30 multiple choice items (1 pt each) and 1 short answer essay question (20 pts). You will be allowed to drop the lowest exam score of the four exams (including the final) and use the three highest exam scores for the calculation of your final grade. See the tentative reading schedule for exam dates.

Both lecture and book material will be covered on each exam in approximately equal proportions. As a general rule the multiple choice items will be drawn primarily from the text while the essay questions will be taken mostly from the lecture materials. **Critical Note:** You will be expected to read and study the assigned textbook chapters. My lectures will not cover all the material in the readings that will be used to create the exams.

Requests for reevaluation/re-scoring of test items (essays in particular) will be accepted until the date of the next exam.

Makeup exams will NOT be given except under unusual circumstances. This issue always becomes particularly sticky regarding the time and date for the final exam. Please note that we will adhere to the date published in the course schedule for the final exam. I will not give early finals except for **very** unusual circumstances.

Course guidelines and policies

General behavior

As a university student, certain behavior is expected of you. Most importantly, it is your responsibility to meet the requirements of this course.

You may expect me to be in the classroom on time, prepared & organized, and open to discussion/questions pertaining to the day's subject material. I will expect you to be in the classroom on time, to be awake and attentive, to participate in demonstrations/discussions, and to be respectful toward the instructor and other students.

I understand there will be circumstances beyond your control that, on occasion, will require you to leave class early. Please plan accordingly by notifying me at the beginning of class and choose seating that will result in minimal disruption.

You should feel free to ask any questions in class. Also, please feel free to see the instructor about any classroom issue during office hours.

Electronic devices (cell phones/tablets/laptops)

Please feel free to use your electronic devices in class for activities directly related to this class – e.g., taking notes, viewing textbook/supplements, etc.

For what should be blatantly obvious reasons, the use of electronic devices for purposes other than those directly related to this class is prohibited. This specifically includes such activities as 1) placing or receiving phone calls, 2) sending or receiving text messages, and 3) internet searching, checking email, game playing, watching movies, homework for other classes, etc.

If you are an emergency professional (physician/nurse, counselor/therapist, EMT, etc) or you are expecting an EMERGENCY communication please set your wireless device to silent alarm mode and quietly exit the classroom to respond.

Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at [Student Conduct Code](#).

The Student Conduct Code discusses plagiarism. However, it is a serious offense worth re-mentioning. This course requires students to adhere to APA format when citing, paraphrasing, or referencing sources. If you have plagiarized, either intentionally or accidentally, you will receive a zero on the entire assignment. If you plagiarize a second time, you will fail the course.

Attendance

While attendance is not required it is HIGHLY recommended. Note that any changes in the reading or exam schedule will be announced in class and all students, attending or otherwise, will be required to conform to any modifications in the schedule.

Dropping/Adding/Changing grade option

Please refer to the Registrar's [Drop/Add Policy](#) and the [Official Dates & Deadlines Calendar](#) for all questions related to dropping or adding or changing grade option for a course.

Disability modifications

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and [Disability Services for Students](#). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with Disability Services, please contact Disability Services in Lommasson Center 154 or call 406.243.2243. I will work with you and Disability Services to provide an appropriate modification.

Grading

Grades will be assigned using the adjacent performance criteria for all exams and final course grade. I will NOT be using the “+/-“ grading system. All grades of “Incomplete” will adhere strictly to university [Academic Policies and Procedures](#).

Grade scale

Grade	Percentage Correct
A	90 – 100%
B	80 – 89%
C	70 – 79%
D	60 – 69%
F	0 – 59%

Tentative reading schedule

Dates	Topic
Aug 25, 27, & 29	Chapter 1: Introduction
Sept 1	Labor Day Holiday (No class)
Sept 3 & 5	Chapter 2: Research Methods
Sept 8, 10, & 12	Chapter 3: Elicited Behaviors and Classical Conditioning
Sept 15, 17, & 19	Chapter 4: Classical Conditioning – Basic phenomena
Sept 22, 24, & 26	Chapter 5: Classical Conditioning – Underlying processes
Sept 29	Exam 1 - Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Oct 1 & 3	Chapter 6: Operant Conditioning - Introduction
Oct 6, 8, & 10	Chapter 7: Schedules and Theories of Reinforcement
Oct 13, 15, & 17	Chapter 8: Extinction and Stimulus Control
Oct 20, 22, 24, & 27	Chapter 9: Escape, Avoidance, and Punishment
Oct 29	Exam 2 - Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9
Oct 31, Nov 3, 5, 7, & 10	Chapter 10: Choice, Matching, and Self-control
Nov 12, 14, & 17	Chapter 12: Biological Dispositions in Learning
Nov 19, 21, & 24	Chapter 13: Comparative Cognition
Nov 26 & 28	Thanksgiving Holiday (No class)
Dec 1	Comparative Cognition continued
Dec 3	Exam 3 - Chapters 10, 12, 13
Dec 5	Course wrap-up
8 - 10 am Wednesday, Dec 10	Final - Chapters 1-10, 12, 13