

# PSCH 4303: Abnormal Psychology

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## **I. Basic Course Information**

### I-A. Course Description

This course is an introduction to the study of psychological disorders. The classification and treatment of mental disorders, and descriptions of the major types and sub-types of mental disorders, is the prime focus.

### I-B. Course Learning Objectives

- examine some of the most important concepts in the field of psychopathology.
- develop an awareness of the major categories of mental illness, and the defining characteristics of each.
- develop an understanding of how mental illnesses can affect the health, family, work life, and other relationships of those who suffer from them.
- demonstrate the knowledge learned by successfully completing assignments and by actively participating in the course.

### I-C. Psychology Program Student Learning Outcomes

This course is an element of the RGC psychology program. It is expected that the graduating student in this program will demonstrate the capacity to:

- Recognize the central concepts in the department's main areas of focus: abnormal psychology; social & personality psychology, and developmental psychology.
- Recognize and apply basic psychological research methods.
- Communicate effectively in written assignments and oral presentations concerning psychological subject matter.
- Demonstrate insight into the behavior and psychological processes of oneself and others.

### I-D. Instructor

The instructor for this course is Dr. Tiffany Culver.

Email (preferred method of contact for a quick response): [tculver@sulross.edu](mailto:tculver@sulross.edu)

Phone (excellent for calling, less so for getting calls returned): 830-279-3022

Office: A107 Uvalde

Student Availability Hours:

MW 10:15- 11 a.m. and 1:45-3:30

TTH 12-3 p.m.

Appointments may also be made for other days and times.

### I-E. Course Materials

#### Required Texts

-Sue, Sue, & Sue (2013). Understanding abnormal behavior, 11th edition.  
Cengage Learning.

-*Darkness Visible*, by William Styron. ISBN-13: 978-0679643524

-*Girl, Interrupted*, by Susana Kaysen. ISBN-13: 978-0679746041

-*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, (Sixth Edition). ISBN-13: 978-1433805622

#### Recommended Text

- *Writing: Grammar, Usage, and Style*, by Eggenschwiler & Biggs. [ISBN13: 978-0764563935.] This is an effective, brief guide to writing in English. All psychology students should own a copy.

By law, Sul Ross is required to tell you the following: "*A student of this institution is not under any obligation to purchase a textbook from a university-affiliated bookstore. The same textbook may also be available from an independent retailer, including an online retailer.*" In fact, bargains on textbooks are often found on the websites of many Internet booksellers. Major online vendors typically accept major credit cards, checks, and money orders.

● Illegal copies of textbooks are prohibited at all times in classrooms and labs.

## II. Assignments

### II-A. Exams

Four exams will cover material from the textbook chapters, as well as material from any additional lectures, readings and discussions. Dates of the exams are given below. Exams will be administered through Blackboard. One exam grade will be dropped. A limited amount of time will be allowed for test completion. **Penalties will be assessed for going overtime on Blackboard exams (the value of 1 item per minute or fraction of a minute). If you go over your time by five minutes, you will automatically receive a "0." There will be NO resets on exams.** If you experience a blackboard issue, you will need to consider this exam your one drop grade. Do not purposely skip an exam and assume you will use it as your drop grade. It is likely that you will need that drop grade if you experience blackboard problems. All exams are mandatory and will be worth 100 points.

### II-B. Supplemental Text Exam

This exam will test your understanding of *Girl, Interrupted* and *Darkness Visible*. If this date and time conflicts with other responsibilities, appointments, travel arrangements, etc., then you should take steps immediately to eliminate the conflict from the other end or withdraw from this course. Alternative arrangements will not be made for you.

### II-D. Paper

You will choose an individual whose behavior has been portrayed as "abnormal" in our society. After gaining my approval, you will begin to research this individual in terms of acts of violence, childhood background, situational factors, etc. You will begin to collect evidence that possibly supports one or more disorders presented in your textbook. You will also consider how childhood factors and situational factors may have influenced the particular "abnormal" behavior you are researching. For example, your book focuses on Seung Hui Cho (the college student who was responsible for the shooting at Virginia Tech) and Andrea Yates (the mother who drowned her five children). You may pick one of these individuals or choose another individual such as Jeffrey Dahmer, Manson, the Unibomber, McVeigh, Koresh, Kat Von D or any other individual that I have approved. You might consider reading a short biography or newspaper articles in order to gain more information.

Remember that the paper should NOT be a summary of your chosen individual's life. It should be a critical analysis of this individual's life in which you use evidence to support your possible diagnosis. **Please keep in mind that we are not actually diagnosing individuals; we are simply using our knowledge of abnormal psychology to better understand the behavior of others.**

Your paper should have at least eight paragraphs. Paragraph one should be an introduction, paragraph 2 examines your chosen individual's early experiences (trauma at birth, child abuse, etc.). Paragraph 3 examines your individual in terms of acute symptoms that need immediate treatment (major depressive episode, panic attack, etc.). Paragraph 4 examines personality disorders and Paragraph 5 examines any medical conditions that may exist (migraines, diabetes, cancer, etc.). Paragraph 6 examines the environmental aspects that influenced the abnormal behavior (loss of a job, divorce, etc.). Paragraph 7 looks at your chosen individual's Global Assessment of Functioning. Your 8<sup>th</sup> paragraph is the closing paragraph. The grading rubric

that will be used to assess your paper can be found at the end of this syllabus.

This paper MUST be in APA style 6<sup>th</sup> edition and include a cover page, in text citations and a reference page. Your paper should be at least 4 pages (not including your title page and reference page). There will be significant deductions for problems with APA and grammatical issues. You will need at least 3 references.

#### II-E. The Final Exam

The final exam will cover all of the material in the course. The final exam will be given on **May 12<sup>th</sup> at 11 a.m.** **The final exam is mandatory and must be taken by all students at a designated RGC computer lab at one of the three RGC campuses** (not at the Alpine campus), or at a suitable alternative location selected and approved by the professor.

If the date or time conflicts with other non-academic responsibilities, appointments, travel arrangements, etc., then you should take steps immediately to eliminate the conflict from the other end or, if necessary, withdraw from this course.

☛ All assignments *must be completed and submitted in order to pass any course taught by Dr. Culver*, regardless of a student's overall grades on other assignments. Students who do not complete all assignments will receive an F as a final grade for this course. (In courses with discussion forums or weekly quizzes, up to three discussion forums and three quizzes may be missed without risking this penalty.)

#### II-F. APA Document

Students will attend an APA workshop on Friday, January 29<sup>th</sup> from 12-1 p.m. (UV B113, EP B113, DR 101). After completing the workshop, students will transform an ordinary paper into APA style using their notes, book, and online references.

Students who do NOT attend the APA Workshop should make arrangements to meet with me prior to the due date of the document.

**II-E. Topic and Assignment Schedule**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Assignment and Lecture Topics</u>
January 20	Read Syllabus, Explore bboard, and post Intro in bboard
January 21-Feb 16	Read the following chapters: 1, 2
February 2	APA Document Due
February 17	<b>Exam I</b>
February 18-March 6	Read and study the following chapters: 3, 5
March 7	<b>Exam II</b>
March 8-March 27	Read and study the following chapters: 8, 12
March 28	<b>Exam III</b>
March 29-April 21	Read and study the following chapters: 14, 16
April 14	<b>Paper Due</b>
April 22	<b>Exam IV</b>
April 28	<b>Revisions on Paper Due</b>
May 10 (11 a.m.)	<b>Final Exam and Supplemental Exam</b>

**III. Grading****III-A. The Calculation of Grades**

Grades for each assignment, and for the course itself, are calculated as follows:  
A: 90% or above; B: 80%-89%; C: 70%-79%; D: 60%-69%; F: 0%-59%.

The times and dates when assignments are due and when evaluations are given will not be altered to fit your schedule. You will be expected to alter your schedule to fit class responsibilities.

In the interest of more thorough coverage of certain topics, the professor may decide to omit some of the assigned material from coverage on any particular exam. You are responsible to learn of any announced omissions.

Exams (100 pts each):	300 (with drop grade)
Paper:	200
Participation:	10
APA document:	30
Supplemental Exam:	100
Final Exam:	100

Total:	740 points
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To calculate your grade, add up all your points and divide by 710. Then multiply by 100.

### III-B. The Interpretation of Final Grades

The rigor of grading varies somewhat from course to course, from instructor to instructor, from discipline to discipline, and from school to school. It is important to understand that the level of effort needed to achieve a particular grade in another course, under another instructor, in another discipline, or at another institution, might not be an accurate gauge of the amount of effort needed to achieve the same grade in this course.

The following is a general description of grades:

The grade of A is awarded for performance that is excellent to some degree – anywhere from very good to brilliant. It indicates a masterful level of performance which is far above the average. It is the grade representing a level of performance usually attained by only the top ten or fifteen percent of a typical class.

The grade of B indicates superior performance. B work is by definition better than most. It is good performance, but not outstanding. Consistent B-level performance is something to take a measure of pride in, especially if it the best one can do.

The grade of C represents adequate performance, enough to get by with, but little more. The grade of C is the grade achieved by most people; hence, it is the embodiment of mediocrity. Unless it is the consequence of one's genuine best effort, it should seldom be regarded as a satisfactory grade for persons with ambition or conscientiousness about their work in the endeavor being graded. It is the grade that pleases individuals who are content with being third-rate in their academic efforts.

The grade of D means that there are serious deficiencies in performance that makes the work product less than adequate, a marginal failure. Repeatedly earning Ds, unless they are balanced by As and Bs, is an indication of failure. Being able generally to attain only Ds is an indication that further education in the field of performance being graded may hold no value for you.

An F means that the deficiencies in performance are so serious that the resulting work product is completely unacceptable. A 59 and below means that failure has occurred, yet there are degrees of failure. A grade in the 50s indicates some likelihood that adequate performance could have been achieved under different circumstances, but typically a grade of below 50 means that the student was so lacking in effort, understanding or competence that failure was almost a foregone conclusion without major behavioral changes or remediation of some kind.

### III-C. The Basis of Final Grades

Grades in this course are based on performance alone. They will not be rounded upwards. It is important for every student to understand that evaluation is not based ultimately on how hard someone has worked to earn a particular grade, or whether someone needs this course to graduate. Nor are grades based on personal & family needs, or on personal conceptions about what seems to be fair. All grades, including your final course grade, will be based *solely* on your academic work in this course, according to the criteria described in this syllabus.

### III-D. The Reporting of Final Grades

For non-graduating students, final course grades will be posted on Banner at noon on the Monday after commencement (and for graduating seniors, at noon on the Friday before commencement). Final exams is a hectic time for students and the faculty alike, so please respect the privacy of all your professors during and after this period. Please do not initiate contact with me concerning grades between the start of the final exams period and when grades are reported. If I need information from you during this time, I will be the one to initiate contact.

Unsolicited voicemails and emails from any student during this period are liable to be ignored. This policy is based on years of experience: most communications from students during final exams and the grading period are based on needless anxiety rather than reasonable concerns. Please understand that any issues of grading that truly must be resolved may still be resolved *after* final grades are reported. Access to assignment grades and other course content will also be available to you on Blackboard until the week after commencement.

### III-E. Late Work

There will be NO late work accepted. If you have an emergency and miss turning in an assignment, you must bring a valid excuse (some form of documentation) within **five business days** in order to turn in your work or make up an excuse. If you do not have documentation, you will not be allowed to make up the work you missed. If you turn in your excuse after the fifth working day after your absence, you will not be allowed to make up the work.

What to do in order to obtain an excused make-up for a missed exam/not turning in a paper/not presenting:

1. Make every effort to notify the instructor ahead of time. Send a message to [tculver@sulross.edu](mailto:tculver@sulross.edu) as soon as possible, and absolutely no later than the day you first return to class.
2. In the message, fully explain the nature of the emergency and why it prevented you from taking the exam/turning in work/presenting
3. Provide a source or sources that will allow the professor to verify your story. This MUST be done within five days of your absence
4. Expect further questioning from the professor before an excuse is granted.

## IV. Student Confidentiality

Because of privacy laws, all school-related issues -- academic, disciplinary, and personal -- must be handled between the university and the student directly. A student's parent, spouse, boyfriend, best friend, case worker, parole officer, et cetera has absolutely no standing to intervene for a student or inquire concerning grades, disciplinary matters, or any other issues. Do not ask such persons to contact university faculty and staff to serve as a liaison, make inquiries, or settle disputes on your behalf.

## V. Academic Integrity

### V-A. The Honor Code

As members of the academic community, no student should tolerate cheating. According to the honor code, it is the responsibility of each and every student to report obvious cheating or any suspicious behavior that may compromise the integrity of the grading process. The confidentiality and anonymity of students who report such incidents will be respected.

☛ *To report cheating, call **830-279-3022**. If there is no answer, leave a detailed description of what you witnessed.*

### V-B. Policy on Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty and the penalties pertaining to it are described in the SRSU student handbook. In this course, all communication among students while taking exams is prohibited.

- Communicating material included on an exam with or in the presence of someone who has not yet taken that exam is also prohibited.

- No student may print, photograph, copy, or in any other way reproduce material from any exam. The consequence of violating this directive will be immediate dismissal from the course with a grade of F.

- Students may not share books, notes, or any other form of communication during exams. Do NOT sit next to another student who is taking the same test in the lab unless no other seats are available. No student taking an exam should have open any website other than the Blackboard site. Close all other windows. Failure to follow these instructions may, at a minimum, result in a zero for the exam and might result in an F for the course.

- The possession of any course-related material in an exam room during an exam period in which the material in question is forbidden is *ipso facto* evidence of scholastic dishonesty. In plain language, if you bring material, such as a textbook, into a testing situation where you are not supposed to have that material with you, you are thereby committing a violation, even if you were not referring to the material or intending to use the material to cheat.

- Plagiarism, as every student should know, involves taking the work of others and claiming it as your own. It will not be tolerated. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism, excellent guidelines can be found online at [www.plagiarism.org](http://www.plagiarism.org).

Using an illegal copy of textbook materials constitutes academic dishonesty. If a student is found to be using illegally copied textbook material during an open-book exam, the penalty will be failure of the exam. In addition, the student will have the choice of immediately surrendering the illegal copy to SRSU faculty/staff or receiving a failing grade for the course.

The penalty for serious academic dishonesty is severe: a student who turns in a plagiarized paper or cheats on an exam may receive an F for the entire course. A plagiarized paper will be given a zero on academic grounds alone, yet the student may face the additional disciplinary penalties for academic dishonesty. You and you alone are responsible for understanding and avoiding academic dishonesty in all your work.

## **VI. Policy Concerning Problems with Blackboard during Exams and While Submitting Assignments**

### **VII-A. Blackboard Exams**

Blackboard is seldom to blame for problems during exams. When genuine problems occur with Blackboard technology, the problem affects multiple people at the same time. Yet some students frequently report that Blackboard has “frozen up” or will not let them proceed with a test. So far I have identified the following reasons for this problem:

- Students will use the Google Chrome browser when taking a quiz. If you do not use Google Chrome, you will have problems.
- Students try to go back and change the answers to test items that they have already answered. You cannot do this. Trying to do so by hitting the



back button on your browser, or by other methods, will cause you to forfeit a test grade.

- Students misinterpret the following statement that appears at the start of each quiz: "This Test can be saved and resumed later." Yes, if later means in five minutes. But you will have only twenty-five minutes from the time you log on to the time you log out. Taking longer than that will result in a zero for the quiz.
- Students try to cheat by first previewing a quiz, then logging out and claiming that they were frozen out of the quiz. They do this in the hope of getting the chance to then retake the quiz and earning a higher score. That will not happen.
- Students misuse the mouse by repeatedly clicking on a browser button to move to the next test item, or hold down the mouse button for an extended period of time. These behaviors may cause you to forfeit a test grade.

Tests will not be reset for individual students in the great majority of circumstances. Therefore, please avoid the behaviors listed above in order to successfully use Blackboard for taking tests.

#### VII. Using the Blackboard Dropbox

The Blackboard Dropbox feature is a reliable way for students to submit papers electronically. However, it is critical for students to know the difference between uploading (adding) a paper to the Dropbox and actually submitting (sending) a paper to a professor using the Dropbox. Until you see a confirmation message announcing "*Receipt: Success: The file has been sent to selected users with role of Instructor*" you have not successfully submitted your file.

#### **VIII. Statement on Intellectual Tolerance and Academic Freedom**

Psychology is a field of inquiry that touches upon many controversial issues, including sexuality, evolution, gender, race, ethnicity, individual differences, parenting, divorce, crime and public policy, drug use, religion, and multicultural issues, among others. Professors and students often have strong opinions and make forceful arguments concerning these phenomena. It is often educationally productive to address and debate these matters in the context of classroom instruction and course assignments. Social taboos discouraging open discussion are inappropriate in this context and must be laid aside in the interest of intellectual inquiry.

Your grade will not be influenced in any way by expressing points of view that are in disagreement with the professor's. If time permits, students are encouraged to express their opinions and arguments whenever relevant to the subject material. The professor is free to do likewise.

Students who experience excessive anxiety or discomfort during the discussion of a sensitive topic (e.g., domestic abuse) should not hesitate to leave the classroom for a time if necessary and should never feel embarrassed for doing so. This can be an adaptive response to an emotionally difficult situation.

In contrast, other individuals are offended in principle by the mere exposure to concepts, opinions and arguments with which they disagree. The response of such persons is sometimes to try and close off discussion or to become hostile or vindictive toward others. Such persons are not encouraged to take psychology courses at Rio Grande College until they have resolved the personal issues preventing them from engaging in serious intellectual discourse.

## **IX. Teaching Philosophy**

A college degree signifies accomplishment; it will increase a person's prestige and can help its holder acquire a job. However, once the job is taken, success depends on what has been learned—a college degree by itself is merely a sheet of paper. If a student takes full advantage of the opportunity of education, the sheet of paper signifies skills and knowledge that will magnify one's competence as a professional and value as a member of the community. If not, the student might find himself or herself with a sheet of paper only, without additional skills, useful knowledge, or value to employers and clients. RGC psychology courses are designed to provide students with knowledge and skills that will help them in their careers, in their relationships, and in their capacity to be responsible members of a community.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American writer Albert Jay Nock had this to say about his college experience:

We were made to understand that the burden of education was on us and no one else, least of all our instructors; they were not there to help us carry it or to praise our efforts, but to see that we shouldered it in proper style and got on with it.

I believe that through encouragement and deserved praise, college professors can and should ease the burden of education for their students. Yet students who enroll at SRSU-Rio Grande College must remember they are expected to perform upper-division college-level work. No course in the psychology curriculum is remedial. As Albert Jay Nock understood, a professor's responsibility is to lead students to knowledge; it is, however, each student's responsibility to learn.

## **XI. Contacting Technical Support**

Most technical problems that students experience using Blackboard can be avoided by using *Firefox* as your web browser rather than *Internet Explorer*. Firefox may be downloaded for free at [www.mozilla.com/firefox](http://www.mozilla.com/firefox).

If you have a problem with technical issues such as downloading a file or taking an exam, contact an Office of Information Technology (OIT) staffer for assistance or call the OIT Helpdesk. The Helpdesk is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days of the week.

- From on-campus, call 8765.
- From off-campus, call (888) 691-5071.

If you are downloading syllabi and other documents, you should update your computer for compatibility with Microsoft Office 2007. The free update is available at: <http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?FamilyId=941B3470-3AE9-4AEE-8F43-C6BB74CD1466&displaylang=en>

## **XII. Special Accommodations**

Our institution complies with state and federal laws concerning people with disabilities. If a student needs accessibility services, it is the student's responsibility to initiate a request. This may be done by contacting Ms. Kathy Biddick at 830-279-3003.

