

PSYCHOLOGY 3301:1 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY
SPRING - 2026

INSTRUCTOR:

Dr. James W. Downing
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Office Hours are by appointment.

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PREREQUISITE:

Enrollment in this course requires successful completion of Introduction to Psychology or consent of the instructor.

CLASS MEETINGS:

T, 6:00 p.m.-8:50 p.m.
LH 200

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Aronson, E. & Aronson, J. (2018). The social animal (12th ed.). New York: Worth Publishers/W.H. Freeman.

Memo to: Students in PSY 3301:1, Sul Ross State University

From: Jay Downing

This class has a simple title, “Social Psychology.” What a sparse title for such a potentially interesting course. Here is a concise definition of social psychology as given by Shaver (1987), “**Social psychology is the scientific study of the personal and situational factors that affect individual social behavior.**” This definition is helpful to me (and I hope to you too) because we are focusing on more than mere everyday attempts at understanding human social behavior. We are going to be using the scientific method to study social phenomena. This might sound unimportant, maybe even boring or a bit frightening at first glance, but it is critical to help us distinguish reality from mere wishful thinking and speculation. We can also learn that the scientific method is much more than seemingly artificial laboratory observation.

Fortunately, the title of the course and the definition of social psychology used above imply a chance to do anything we wish that will add significantly to our own learning about social psychology. It gives an opportunity for each of us to read about and think about such things as: defining social psychology, conformity, propaganda and persuasion, social cognition, self-justification, aggression, prejudice, liking and loving others, communicating effectively, social psychology as a science, and the like. This is only a partial list based on the primary text for the course, but it gives a notion of the broad range in which each can develop her or his own curriculum.

Here are some of my own thoughts about the course thus far. All my plans are subject to

change if you wish, within the limits of my own schedule and yours.

The First Meeting, Tuesday 1/20, 6:00 p.m. - 8:50 p.m.

You will meet the BASS academic assistant at this meeting and get the written materials for the course. Be sure to check the Blackboard site for the course to get some work to complete before our first meeting on 2/2. There is a link to the first two chapters of the text on the BB site.

The Group Experience, Tuesday 1/27, 6:00 pm – 8:50 p.m.

During this session we will participate in an encounter group experience in which, among other goals, we will each have the opportunity to grow in the understanding and acceptance of ourselves, self-worth, and sensitivity in relationship to others. This group will be a place for us to be ourselves, to express our immediate feelings about ourselves and others.

Reading List

The Aronson text is an enjoyable examination of many of the different areas of study that make up social psychology. Each chapter introduces you to the state of the research in the different fields that constitute social psychology. It is a good place to begin examining the heart of social psychology. This will be the base text for the course and I imagine the basis for your questions and our discussion and activities each time we meet in class.

Each of the chapters in our main text is further illustrated by actual articles that take findings to a new level of detail. I hope you will use the text and reading list I describe below to gain a new appreciation for the way to generate the knowledge that lets us make statements about the social phenomena that impact our daily lives. It is critical in my view that you begin to think about psychology more deeply in this course. Instead of merely reading paragraph summaries of important findings you will gain skills in reading the actual nuts and bolts work that makes up research in social psychology. I think you will find it very useful to develop these skills as they will transfer to other sub-fields of psychology as well. Given the importance of knowing where and how social psychologists know what they know, we will read and discuss many of these articles, as indicated in your schedule for the course.

I have tried to prepare a broad-gauge reading list of topics in social psychology. The list includes a wide range of writings from different theoretical perspectives---social-personality psychology, consistency theories, and social-cognitive theories. Because of my own interests, I am sure the list is slanted in a social-cognitive direction, but I would be happy to have suggestions which would give it wider range.

The list represents a rich storehouse from which you may draw the kinds of information that has the most meaning to you. You may also want to go well beyond this list into other areas of social psychology that have special interest to you. If you have questions on where to start investigating your area of interest in social psychology, I will be glad to help you get started.

I will comment in our first course meetings on each reference on the list about which I have personal knowledge. This should help you choose the points where you want to start your own reading and learning. It is important that you develop the ability to plan your course of

study by identifying areas of social psychology of interest to you.

Requirements

I want each of you to know that I have set up requirements for myself that I see as being associated with your learning of the academic material and that also allows individual personal development to occur. I have several goals for myself as the professor of this course.

First, I will strive to give the students access to myself as a person, to my expertise in the field, and to my experience as a social psychologist.

Second, I will be as prepared as I can be to suggest experiences (reading materials, research projects, films to observe and study, demonstrations to attempt, practices to apply, etc.) that students might not otherwise think of or be aware of, with the goal of increasing the learning options available to them.

Third, I will be prepared to accept each student's autonomy and freedom, which includes the freedom to succeed and to fail. Fourth, I will be prepared to give each learner honest feedback, to the best of my ability as a professor and a person, on each of the following dimensions:

1. ability to conceptualize theories and hypotheses in social psychology,
2. demonstrated skill in understanding research in social psychology,
3. effective oral and written communication abilities,
4. innovation in thinking about topics in social psychology,
5. insight in terms of self-understanding,
6. ability to engage in functional and self-empowering interpersonal communication, and
7. my personal judgment as to your progress and growth, both intellectually and interpersonally.

Please note that I am prepared to give feedback in these areas if a student desires it. During the first class days we can discuss these issues with the goal that it will lead to greater understanding on your part of what you wish to accomplish in the course.

A passing grade in the course will not be turned in until all of the following requirements have been fulfilled.

There are several aspects of the course which will be required for you as the student. These are as follows:

First, I wish to have a list of the readings you have done for the course turned in at the beginning of class on Tuesday, February 10. I will have the updated reading list turned in a second time at the end of the course.

I want to have the updated list turned in again at the end of the course. In the lists you will write entries that indicate the way you have read the selection. For example, you might list a book and state "Chapters 3 and 6 were read thoroughly." You might list another book and state "Skimmed the book and found it was over my head." You might list another book and say, "I got so much out of this book that I read it twice and made careful notes on Chapters 5 through

12." You might state, "I was repelled by the whole point of view and only read enough to become convinced that I was disgusted with the author." In other words, **what is wanted is an honest account of what you have read and the depth to which you have read the material you covered.** The books and articles do not necessarily have to be on the reading list or from either of the required texts. **I do expect you to comment on each of the chapters in the base text by Aronson. Any other things we read as a class or that you read as an individual should be included in your reading log.** If you find texts or articles that apply to social psychology please let me know about them so I can include them on the reading list. I hope you will feel engaged with the field and read a great deal for the course.

The second requirement is that you complete a research proposal that will investigate an original question related to the area of social attitudes of interest to you. This proposal should be a study you could reasonably conduct as a student here at Sul Ross if you had the time. In fact, those of you who want to go to graduate school may choose to use this project as a means to get working on some research. I will give you a copy of a research proposal. This will give you a template to follow as you design your own project.

A third requirement is that you write one reaction report every other week based on any readings, any experience, or any discussion you may have had. This report can be as long or as short as you desire. It should, however, be limited to your reactions, by this I mean your feelings. I want you to feel as free as possible in these reports in expressing your feelings about anything you want to write about, whether or not it has anything to do with the course. These reaction reports will be submitted via Blackboard. Your first reaction report should be submitted by the beginning of class on Tuesday, February 3rd. Subsequent reaction reports are due at the beginning of class on February 17, March 3, 17 & 31, & April 14.

The fourth requirement is to be your personal reaction to the course as a whole. I would like this turned in to me via a Blackboard portal for the course. You are at liberty, however, to put in the summary line, "Please do not open until the final grades have been turned in." If you mark the submission in this fashion, I assure you I will honor your request.

In this reaction I would like you to state very honestly what the course has meant to you, both positively and negatively. I would like any criticisms you have to make of the course and suggestions of ways in which it might be improved. This in short is your opportunity to evaluate the course, the instructor, and the manner in which the course has been carried out. It will in no case have any influence on your final grade but if you are fearful that it might have such an influence please mark your submission as suggested, and I will not open it until all the grades have been turned in.

The fifth requirement is that you attend every class session fully prepared to participate in the course as it progresses.

The sixth requirement I have is your attendance and participation in class on a daily basis. I often find that people miss class when they are feeling bad about what happens in class on a day-to-day basis. Please feel free to express both your joys and frustrations to me as the class progresses. If you merely stop coming to class, you have missed a chance to learn and denied me a chance to hear your concerns about the direction of the course. We are all

participants in this course and if you fail to come to class, your voice will not be heard as we discuss and learn from one another. I want you to feel welcome and to realize I want to hear your ideas about the things you read and learn about in the course. All that being said, attendance is very important in this class. I reserve the right to drop a student from the class with a failing grade if he or she misses six class days.

Additional requirements will on occasion come up during the class. These requirements will be described as we encounter them, given our development as a class and as individuals.

Finally, failure to fully complete any of the requirements will result in a failing grade being assigned for the course.

Please note: Every member of the class is assured of a passing grade if the basic requirements listed here are completed fully and on time. Whether the student obtains a "C," "B," or "A" depends upon his or her achievement on an objective examination which will be based on the academic material covered in the course. This exam may consist of questions in a multiple choice, true-false, short answer, essay or alternate format and will be given on Monday, May 4, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. in LH 200.

The final letter grade assigned in the course does not represent a measure of achievement in the realization of any personal values other than knowledge of specific factual information. The most important self-evaluations will have to be made by you some time in the future, perhaps months from the end of the class.

I have made it a point to emphasize one rule concerning personal communication technology. Here it is:

Turn off all electronic equipment before you enter the classroom.
This means cell phones, Ipads, etc. I want to be able to count on your full attention during our time together as much as I hope you count on mine.

TENTATIVE TOPIC SCHEDULE FOR PSYCHOLOGY 3301

<u>DATE</u>	<u>WEEK</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>BASE TEXT READINGS</u>
1/20	1	First Meeting	
1/27	2	Encounter Group	The Social Animal, Chp. 1 & Chp. 9 & Readings 1 & 2 from RATSA (Readings About the Social Animal)
2/3	3	What is Social Psychology?	The Social Animal, Chp. 1 & Chp. 9 & Readings 1 & 2 from RATSA (Readings About the Social Animal)
2/10	4	Social Cognition	The Social Animal, Chp. 2
2/17	5	Self-Justification	The Social Animal, Chp. 3
2/24	6	Self-Justification	The Social Animal, Chp. 3
3/3	7	Conformity	The Social Animal, Chp. 4
3/10	8	A WELL-DESERVED VACATION FOR ALL	
3/17	9	Conformity	The Social Animal, Chp. 4
3/24	10	Mass Communication, Propaganda, and Persuasion	The Social Animal, Chp. 5
3/31	11	Mass Communication, Propaganda, and Persuasion	The Social Animal, Chp. 5
4/7	12	Human Aggression	The Social Animal, Chp. 6
4/14	13	Prejudice	The Social Animal, Chp. 7
4/21	14	Prejudice	The Social Animal, Chp. 7
4/28	15	Liking, Loving, and Interpersonal Sensitivity	The Social Animal, Chp. 8
5/4	16	FINAL EXAM, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM, LH 200 MONDAY!	

Below you will find the Student Learning Objectives (SLO) dealt with in this course. The student learning objectives follow and relate, to a greater or lesser extent, to each SLO dealt with in the course.

Program Learning Objective (SLO #1)

1. The students will be able to demonstrate competency in the biopsychosocial approach.

Program Learning Objective (SLO #2)

2. The students will be able to demonstrate their critical thinking skills via tasks related to student thought, complexity, and originality.

Required Task-Reaction Reports:

Goal One: The student will demonstrate the ability to engage in the self-expression of emotions by writing bi-weekly reaction reports. (Affective Domain: Respond)

Goal Two: The student will demonstrate value development by reporting an emotion they experienced in the reaction reports. (Affective Domain: Value Development)

Required Task-Reading Log:

Goal Three: The student will write an evaluation of the readings they complete for the course that will be examined at two points during the semester. (Cognitive Domain: Evaluation)

Goal Four: The student will demonstrate an awareness of their responsibility for their development as a life-long learner by taking personal responsibility for the volume of readings they complete. (Affective Domain: Value Development)

Required Task-Research Proposal:

Goal Five: The student will create an original testable hypothesis or research question as the basis for their research proposal. (Psychomotor Domain: Creation)

Goal Six: The student will write an original research proposal within the area of social psychological research. (Cognitive Domain: Synthesis)

Marketable Skills Assessed by the Tasks Completed in this Course.

1. Speaking Effectively: Students will demonstrate competency in public speaking and communicating scientific information to diverse audiences.
2. Describing Feelings: Students will demonstrate empathic or active listening and conversational skills, and/or write clearly about their affective stance, respectfully attuned to the needs of their audiences.
3. Identifying Resources: Students will demonstrate the aptitude to locate, organize and evaluate the credibility of information from multiple sources.
4. Analyzing: Students will demonstrate ability to examine the underlying issues of scientific problems, attending to the pertinent details and creating action plans, recognizing ambiguity and complexity as essential components. Students will communicate effectively in writing.

SPECIAL NOTATION FOR EDUCATION STUDENTS:

I know that some education students may take this course. This course addresses some of the objectives of the TExES Exam for the subject area of social science, which includes a psychology portion. Specifically, this course may address the following objectives, among others.

Domain III

Geography, Culture, and the Behavioral and Social Sciences

Competency 13 (Social, Anthropological, and Psychological Concepts and Processes)

The teacher applies sociological, anthropological, and psychological concepts and processes to understand cultural formation and change, intergroup relations, and individual development.

- Demonstrates knowledge of the history and theoretical foundations of psychology.
- Demonstrates knowledge of the behavioral, social, cognitive, and personality perspectives of human learning.
- Understands basic psychological principles including those related to motivation, sensation and perception, personality, relationships between biology and behavior, and relationships between the self and others.

The interested student is informed that for full information concerning the TExES exam in education concerning psychology as a part of the social sciences, they should contact the SRSU Education Department for materials concerning test preparation and administration. It is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor of this course if he or she is a candidate for the exam. If so, the instructor can guide them to resources that will assist with their exam preparation.

Psychology Program Marketable Skills:

1. **Speaking Effectively:** Students will demonstrate competency in public speaking and communicating scientific information to diverse audiences.
2. **Describing Feelings:** Students will demonstrate empathic or active listening and conversational skills, and/or write clearly about their affective stance, respectfully attuned to the needs of their audiences.
3. **Identifying Resources:** Students will demonstrate the aptitude to locate, organize and evaluate the credibility of information from multiple sources.
4. **Analyzing:** Students will demonstrate ability to examine the underlying issues of scientific problems, attending to the pertinent details and creating action plans, recognizing ambiguity and complexity as essential components.