UMBRA INSTITUTE
PERUGIA, ITALY

PSYC 450: Science of Behavioral Change: A Community-Based Approach

Course Syllabus

Instructor: John L. Dennis, Ph.D.
Credits: 3
Contact Hours: 45
Prerequisites: None
Class Hours: TBA
Office Hours: TBA

Course Type: Community-Based Course
Lab/Site-Visits Fee: 30 €

"Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known."
– Carl Sagan

"When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."
Victor Frankl

"Those who think money can buy happiness just don't know where to shop …"
Jonathan Haidt

"We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories."
Jonathan Gottschall

Course Description
Psychologists and economists have joined forces in the last three to four decades to find a 'new' field with the name 'behavioral economics' or 'behavioral science.' This field has provided an understanding of how people's behaviors, thoughts, and feelings deviate from the "optimal" and the consequences of such deviations. This course is devoted to understanding the nature, causes, implications, and applications of these deviations and how they can inform the design and development of interventions to help people do, think, and feel better.

Two research projects will be pursued throughout the semester. All projects are continuations of those from previous semesters and were created, hosted, and advanced by Umbra Institute professors, students, and staff.

One project is internal and includes Umbra faculty, staff, and students:

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1) SoloItaliano - Umbra students will communicate only in Italian for 48 hours. The goal of this project is to understand the experience of non-native Italian speakers before, during, and after their participation in SoloItaliano.

One project is external:
1) CIDIS - a local non-profit that works with political refugees. The goal of this project is to understand better the narrative of asylum seekers and political refugees.

In order to help create a positive impact, students will use field research methods to understand and evaluate an area in need of improvement and test possible solutions for that area. Field research projects involve actively going out into the community and requires: *talking with partners* to identify an area in need of improvement; *coming up with a method* to understand and evaluate an area in need of improvement (or test possible solutions); *collecting* and *analyzing data* (with the professor's help); *interpreting the results;* and *presenting the results* to the community partner, collaborators, and the science community at large. Research projects are collaborative; students are responsible for their contribution, which culminates in original findings that are explained in a group research *presentation*, one is given to our external partner and the other is part of the Special Academic events week.

Course Objectives
This course helps students broaden their cultural perspectives by seeing what is/is not universal across cultures in a concrete way. In this process, students will understand that research can be of value to academics as well as non-academics.

The central course objective is for students to improve their ability to help design interventions that create positive impact – by improving individual and societal well-being. It accomplishes this by focusing on how to leverage insights about human decision-making to develop interventions.

There are two secondary objectives for this class. First, this course will help students better understand the science of how humans make judgments and decisions. The class will review research on human thinking from social psychology, cognitive psychology, political science, organizational behavior, decision science, and economics. Students will learn how randomized experiments work and why they are critical for making inferences about causal relationships. Second, this course will improve the quality of students' own judgments and decisions. People typically "just think" about situations for which some data or casual observations exist. They tend to make serious inferential errors, and, in turn, these lead to systematically biased decisions. The class will study some errors that are particularly important for real world problems and look for easy-to-implement solutions.

By the end of the course, students will have:
- a heightened awareness of cultural differences;
- gained new knowledge of aligned fields like behavioral sciences, psychology, philosophy, decision-making, marketing, etc.;
- taken initiative to develop a set of collaborative research projects with a community partner;
- integrated theory with practice, appreciating how research can help us understand and influence people's lives; and
- expanded their career-relevant experiences in research, collaborative work, and community engagement.

Course Materials
Required Readings
Miller, D. (1985). *A million miles in a thousand years: What I learned while editing my life.* Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Storr. W. (2012). *The science of storytelling.* William Collins

Haidt, J. (2006). *The happiness hypothesis: Finding modern truth in ancient wisdom.* Basic Books.

Assessment

Community-Based Project	30%
Tickets	25%
Blog	10%
Peer Reviews	10%
Presentations	15%
Participation	10%

Grading

Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% -89%	
B	83% - 86%	Superior
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	
C	73% - 76%	Satisfactory
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	
D	63% - 66%	Low Pass
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Instruction Methods

This class uses a method where students gain a significant amount of knowledge before each class begins. Once each class starts, students actively and interactively clarify and apply their new knowledge; the professor help guide students through this process as a facilitator. This is referred in pedagogy as a flipped instruction method (to view The University of Texas at Austin's discussion about this method, visit http://vimeo.com/70893101).

Assignments will be done with the help of several cooperative tools that are consistent with the flipped instruction method outlined above:

1) Students will submit short reactions (250-500 words) to those readings 24 hours before class on Google Drive.
2) Students will review materials submitted by fellow students.
3) Students will guide a part of classroom discussion with mini-presentations based on readings, exercises, cases, and individual/team assignments.

NOTE: All written material submitted for this class must be written in 12-point Garamond font, single spaced, and justified. All files submitted should have written in the top left part of the page the following:

First Name, Last Name

File type (e.g., Ticket #1, Blog)
Book section name, article title or Blog Title

Course Requirements
Community-Based Project (30%)
Students will work as a team with local community partners using field research methods such as interviews, observations, and/or surveys with the goal of answering the following questions:

1) What is the nature of the area in need of improvement?
2) What concepts garnered from research read in class can be used to understand and evaluate the area in need of improvement and test possible solutions for it?
3) What specific methods learned in class can be used to help the community partner resolve the area in need of improvement set before us?
4) What suggestions can be made from our results that would help have a positive impact on the community?

Grading for the *Project* is ongoing. It is highly recommended to create Notes pages within the Google Drive that clearly indicate that students are actively gathering information to learn more about the project. These pages can include article summaries, links to videos, images, interviews, … etc. Actively engaging in answering these above questions will occur regularly during the semester.

CIDIS PROJECT:
In class meetings.
During the semester we will meet with CIDIS as a class three times, spread out through the semester. For two of these meetings light refreshments will be served. These meetings will be held during class time.

Outside class meetings.
In addition, students will, in pairs, interview refugees outside of class time twice. These meetings will occur outside of class time. Meeting locations will shared with students two weeks prior and students will be accompanied to this meeting location for the first visit. Students will have a PDF map, with directions, bus schedules, contact information, etc. for these meetings.

NOTE: Working with partners is challenging, and this means that our meetings are **subject to change**. We have three meetings scheduled with CIDIS this semester. These meetings will be confirmed the class prior.

Tickets (25%)
Students will submit one ticket (250-500 words) per reading. Every other ticket will be submitted online to Google Drive at least 24 hours before class, while the other ticket will be completed in class. See the ticket rubric to better understand what is expected of you.

1) What was the reading's main question in a single sentence?
2) What was done/discussed and what did they find?
3) How does the reading relate to other readings, in class discussion, and/or class projects?
4) Which part of the reading did you find useful/are critical of?

The first two Ws will help students remember the positive points from what they have read first while the last two Ws integrate their experiences/thoughts with what they have read.

<u>NOTE:</u> Given that fact that tickets must be between 250-500 words, students should not give a summary of the ENTIRE reading, rather they need to focus their attention on a part of it that they found to be the most interesting to you.

Blog (10%)
Students will submit one blog entry (250-500 words) to [Google Drive](#) based on classroom experiences during the semester. These blog posts can be based off tickets, the community research project, or any other exercise, discussion, etc. that happens inside the class or with classmates. Once the blog has been reviewed and approved, they will be submitted for publication on either the Umbra student or institute blog. A signup sheet for blog entries will be shared on [Google Drive](#). Follow the [blog rubric](#) to understand better what is expected of you.

Peer Reviews (10%)
Students will *Tickets* and *Blog* entries submitted by fellow students. Reviews should consist of helpful and constructive comments and provide "additive feedback"— making suggestions about what the writer might add to or develop further. Students are responsible for completing one Ticket review per class, and two Blog reviews during the semester.

Presentations (15%)
Students will lead a portion of class via short presentation of their ticket during the semester. Presentations as well as student-led discussion typically will occupy the first half of the class while the professor will guide discussion during the remaining half of the class. Presentations should include a summary of the readings, an activity for the class, and a [Google Slide](#) presentation is highly recommended (though only obligatory for the penultimate and final student lead presentation). The presentation should include a short summary of the reading - enough that anyone who has not done the reading would be able to follow what you are talking about, and then you should focus your attention on some particular part of the reading that you find most interesting. Activities for the class have included students filling out a questionnaire, watching a TED talk video, doing an improvisation game, breaking into groups to answer specific questions, etc. All presentations are co-taught with one other classmate - where one of the students will be the leader and the other the second. The leader is responsible for presenting the material, while the second is there to assist if the leader needs help.

During the Special Academic Events week, the class will give a presentation to the Umbra community, sharing a few words about the course and project, leading a meaningful activity that focuses on the project, and providing a few thoughts about their experience with the project and partner. Students will receive guidelines and presentation order after the mid-semester break. Participation in this event is MANDATORY and an integral part of the community engagement grade.

Participation (10%)
Class participation entails active engagement in the course. Being consistently prepared for class, asking questions, responding to questions, attentively listening to others is essential. Successful participation has four prerequisites:

1) <u>Being there.</u> When a student is absent, the class cannot benefit from his/her comments and insights. Absences will therefore hurt his/her participation grade. If a student is absent, he/she should make arrangements with a classmate to take notes and pick up any assignments or handouts.
2) <u>Being on time.</u> If a student needs to be late for class, please notify me at least 24 hours in advance.

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3) <u>Being prepared.</u> To contribute to class discussion, students must come to class having carefully prepared all assignments (i.e., readings, tickets, cases, exercises). If students are unsure of the assignments for an upcoming class session, please ask.

4) <u>Being brave.</u> Students are expected to participate fully in all class exercises, to voice personal views during discussions, and to ask questions about things that are not understand. Asking questions might be intimidating, but doing so also helps classmates by moving the discussion forward in new directions.

5) <u>Being courteous.</u> Listening carefully to the comments and questions that classmates voice will help one another to learn something new from their perspectives. Voicing disagreement is essential as it often leads to thoughtful and informative class discussions. Disagreements should be kind and considerate.

<u>NOTE:</u> Some people are uncomfortable with presenting viewpoints in a large group setting. However, contributing to discussions is an important part of the students' career development. If there is anything that may interfere with their ability to contribute on an ongoing basis, students should discuss it with the professor sooner rather than later. The professor will work with students off-line to develop a strategy or plan to increase their comfort level and performance in class participation.

<u>Feedback and Questions</u>
This course should be a valuable learning experience for all students. Their feedback regarding the class is appreciated at any time during the semester. It is easiest to reach the professor by email or right before or after class, or an appointment can be set up. At mid-term, the professor will individually meet with students to **co-evaluate course progress** and any necessary changes will be made to keep the class on track.

<u>Broadcasting</u>
Students will significantly improve submitted materials during the course of the semester and in the process develop skills so that they are <u>so good they can't be ignored</u> (*So Good They Can't Ignore You* by Cal Newport). The result will be materials that will be so good that we will broadcast them online. For example, selected documents, videos, photos, etc., will be used as the basis for student blog posts, and, in the past have been shared on social networks such as <u>LinkedIn</u>, <u>Twitter</u>, and <u>Slideshare</u>. The goal in broadcasting is to help you develop materials that will allow you to think about your future career – to think like they are a <u>start-up</u> (*The Start-Up of You* by Reid Hoffman and Ben Casnocha). Both of these books are available in The Umbra Institute's library.

<u>Attendance Policy</u>
Class attendance is **mandatory**. Students are allowed **two "free" absences**, which do not need to be justified. **It is the students' responsibility to keep them in case of real necessity (sickness or any other unforeseen inconvenience that may prevent students from being in class)**. Each additional absence, unless for a very serious reason, will lower the students' grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. It is also the policy of the Institute that any student who has eight or more absences automatically fails the class.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. **Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason.** Even if more

sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important for student performance in class. Missing a mandatory field trip, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to the professor and Umbra Academic Director in a timely manner, will lower students' final grade by one grade level (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Academic Integrity
All forms of **cheating** (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and **plagiarism** (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Classroom Policy
Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate **respect** for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that **cell phones** must be turned off before the beginning of each class. **Computers and other electronic devices** cannot be used during class lectures and discussions.

Late assignments
Assignments need to be completed on time. Late assignments will result in a grade reduction of one point per day.

Email: Please understand that the professor responds to emails between the hours of 12:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m., Monday-Thursday.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 1

TOPIC: Beliefs

<u>*Ticket 1 - In class*</u>
A million miles – pp. 55-94.

<u>*Project*</u>
Present current projects

TOPIC: Happiness

<u>*Ticket 2*</u>
Happiness hypothesis – Changing your mind, pp. 23- 44.

WEEK 2

TOPIC: Stories

<u>*Ticket 3 - In class*</u>
The science of storytelling

TOPIC: Beliefs

<u>*Ticket 4*</u>
A million miles – pp. 95-168.

WEEK 3

TOPIC: Happiness

<u>*Ticket 5 - In class*</u>
Easterlin, R. A. (2003). Explaining happiness. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *100*(19), 11176-11183.

TOPIC: Stories

<u>*Ticket 6*</u>
The science of storytelling

WEEK 4

TOPIC: Beliefs

<u>*Ticket 7 - In class*</u>
Preston, J., & Epley, N. (2005). Explanations versus applications: The explanatory power of valuable beliefs. *Psychological Science*, *16*(10), 826-832.

TOPIC: Happiness

<u>*Ticket 8*</u>
Happiness hypothesis – Love & attachments, pp. 107-134.

<u>*Blog*</u>
Concepts discussed and initial notes due on GoogleDrive

WEEK 5

TOPIC: Project

<u>*Project*</u>
1st meeting at CIDIS.

TOPIC: Stories

<u>*Ticket 9*</u>
The science of storytelling

<u>*Project*</u>
Debrief CIDIS

WEEK 6

TOPIC: Beliefs

<u>*Ticket 10- In class*</u>
A million miles – pp. 169-214.

TOPIC: Happiness

<u>*Ticket 11*</u>
Happiness hypothesis - The uses of adversity, pp. 135-154.

WEEK 7

TOPIC: Stories

<u>*Ticket 12 - In class*</u>
Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *79*(5), 701-721.

TOPIC: Beliefs

<u>*Ticket 13*</u>
A million miles – pp.215-248.

<u>*Project*</u>
Umbra staff comes in to talk about Solo Italiano

SPRING BREAK

WEEK 8

TOPIC: Project

<u>*Blog*</u>
First draft of Blog is due

<u>*Project*</u>
2nd meeting at CIDIS.

TOPIC: Happiness

<u>*Ticket 14 - In class*</u>
Weiss, A., Bates, T. C., & Luciano, M. (2008). Happiness is a personal (ity) thing: The genetics of personality and well-being in a representative sample. *Psychological science*, *19*(3), 205-210.

<u>*Project*</u>
Debrief CIDIS

WEEK 9

TOPIC: Stories

<u>*Ticket 15*</u>
The science of storytelling

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Project
SoloItaliano Collect data (possibly before and after)

TOPIC: Beliefs

Ticket 16- In class
Alter, A. L., & Hershfield, H. E. (2014). People search for meaning when they approach a new decade in chronological age. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *111*(48), 17066-17070.

WEEK 10

TOPIC: Project

Project
Analyze project results & set up preliminary presentation

TOPIC: Happiness

Ticket 17
Happiness hypothesis – Happiness comes from between, pp. 213-240.

WEEK 11

TOPIC: Stories

Ticket 18-- In class
Smith, D., Schlaepfer, P., Major, K., Dyble, M., Page, A. E., Thompson, J., ... & Ngales, M. (2017). Cooperation and the evolution of hunter-gatherer storytelling. *Nature communications*, *8*(1), 1853, 1-8.

TOPIC: Project

Project
Analyze project results & set up preliminary CIDIS presentation

Project
Community EngageGAMES Presentation overview with Umbra Staff.

WEEK 12

HOLIDAY

11

TOPIC: Project

<u>*Project*</u>
Analyze SOLOITALIANO project results and revise CIDIS presentation

<u>*Blog*</u>
Revisions due

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WEEK 13

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TOPIC: Project

<u>*Project*</u>
3rd and final meeting at CIDIS.

<u>*Ticket*</u>
Final versions with all revisions due

<u>*Blog*</u>
Final version due

TOPIC: Project

<u>*Presentation*</u>
Final in-class Special Events presentation.

<u>*Participation*</u>
Final grade delivered

<u>*Peer Review*</u>
Final grade delivered

<u>*Ticket*</u>
Final grade delivered

<u>*Blog*</u>
Final grade delivered

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WEEK OF FINAL EXAMS AND SPECIAL ACADEMIC EVENTS

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The Final Exam and Special Academic Events Calendar will be provided later in the semester.