



PSYC/SOC 360 Social Psychology: Observational Research in Italy

Course Syllabus

Fall Semester 2026

Instructor: Eyal Rosenstreich, PhD

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: None

Class Meeting Days & Time: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:45 am - 12:15 pm

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Type: Standard Course

Course Fee: None

Course Description

Why do we do what we do? What social factors play a role in shaping our behavior? What biological, psychological and social elements help to configure a person's psychological, emotional, and moral character? What can we do about them? In this course, we examine landmark studies that shook standard beliefs about human nature. By analyzing these studies in their contexts, we explore their influence on contemporary views about humans and society. In addition to shaping our views about the human mind and behavior, many of these studies also had an impact on the epistemological and ethical criteria used by the scientific community and broader society to decide what counts as good science. Thus, we will also examine evolving views about scientific inquiry: How have ideas about what counts as good science changed? And why have they changed?

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- *Identify* some of the main approaches used in social psychology;
- *Recognize* methodologies employed by social scientists;
- *Use* research and AI tools for carrying out a literature analysis, particularly PsycNet;
- *Carry out* a small-scale social research project using observation techniques;
- *Integrate* psychological concepts and empirical findings into a coherent argument about human social behavior.

Course Materials

Book chapters and articles.

Assessment

10%	Attendance
10%	Course Journal
5%	One on one meeting
10%	Flipped Classroom assignment 1
10%	Flipped Classroom assignment 2
20%	Midterm assignment
15%	Observation task
20%	Final (take home) assignment

Grading

Students are reminded that it is their responsibility to note the dates of exams and other assignments. No alternative exam dates will be offered and professors are not required to give partial credit for any late work (they do so at their discretion: the Institute's default policy is no extensions and a zero for any work turned in late). Students who book travel when they have an exam or other assessment will have to change their plans or accept a zero. Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

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

Please note: decimal numerals between 1-4 are rounded down while 5-9 are rounded up: e.g., expect 89.4 to be 89.0 while 89.5 to round up to 90.

Course Requirements

Assignments will follow an incremental approach simulating a scientific investigation. Using research platforms and scientific papers, you will play the role of a social scientist. Once you have identified a topic interest, you will learn how to conduct a literature review, how to examine peer-review publications, and to critically evaluate their differences and similarities. Grades are based on the following criteria.

Attendance (10%)

Attendance is an important part of this course. You have two "sick days," per Institute policy. As long as you are at all the other meetings, you will receive the full 10% for this part of your grade. There are no make-ups offered for attendance.

Journal reflections (10%)

Each topic will conclude with a reflection prompt that invites students to reflect on the study material. Students will submit their reflections online. The reflection prompts will help students zoom in on the most important ideas of the topic.

One-On-One Professor Meeting (5%)

Getting to know your professor makes you more comfortable with that person and therefore more likely to ask for help. It also might help for you to ask questions about the various assignments or discuss a paper idea. In this course, you get 5% of your grade for coming one time before Week 9 to office hours.

Flipped Classroom assignments (10% each)

Twice during the course, students will work in teams to prepare and lead a flipped classroom session on an assigned topic in social psychology. Each team will research the relevant concept and present the topic to the class in a clear, engaging, and interactive manner. Presentations should go beyond summarizing the material by

incorporating discussion questions, activities, or demonstrations that encourage active participation and critical thinking.

Midterm Assignment (25%)

The midterm will be held in class and will consist of a combination of open- and closed-ended questions. Students may use their notes and course materials during the assignment. The midterm is an individual assignment, and the use of AI tools or any form of collaboration is strictly prohibited. The assignment is designed to assess students' understanding of key concepts covered in the first half of the course and their ability to integrate and apply this knowledge accurately and independently.

Observation task (15%)

Due by the end of week 12. Having selected a research topic, performed a literature review, and applied their method, students will finally produce a paper summarizing their conclusions. This paper should resemble a research article as closely as possible, including introduction, literature analysis, method, results, discussions, and limitations. A detailed prompt will be available on Moodle.

Final Assignment (20%)

The final assignment is a take-home assignment composed of several open-ended questions. Students will be expected to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the course material, including both lectures and assigned readings. In their answers, students should show the ability to analyze, synthesize, and apply psychological principles to real-world situations. Independent work is required, and the use of AI tools or external assistance is not permitted.

Extension & Submitting Late Work

Work submitted after the deadline will receive a grade of zero, not partial credit. Each student is allowed one extension of 24 hours over the entire semester. This can be used for any assignment but the final project. Students need to email the instructor before the deadline and inform the instructor of their use of the extension. Any work submitted after the 24-hour extension will be marked zero.

As for all policies, exceptions can be made by the Director for students with special accommodations or in case of medical emergencies, etc.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected and mandatory for classroom times and co-curricular activities. The first two absences per course due to illness will be considered excused "sick days" and do not require medical documentation. To receive additional excused absences due to illness, students are required to see a local physician or request a letter from an Institute-approved doctor documenting they should be excused from class for illness.

Unexcused absences will adversely affect a student's academic performance and will result in a reduction of the student's final course grade by 2% per absence up to a maximum of 10%. Excessive unexcused absences may result in a failing grade or disciplinary action. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the number of absences or late arrivals for each course, and to ask the instructor when in doubt.

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. Any work missed in class because of an excused absence may be made up within one week of the return to the class. Any work missed that was a quiz or other test must be made up outside of class time and will, in the interest of intellectual honesty, be a slightly different test than the one given in class.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important. Missing a mandatory field trip for a course, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to Umbra staff in a timely manner, will lower the students' grade by half a letter grade (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Legitimate reasons for an excused absence or tardiness include death in the immediate family, religious observances, illness or injury, local inclement weather, and medical appointments that cannot be rescheduled.

Absences relating to illness may be excused by the Director, but only if a medical certification is provided.

Students who request an approved absence to observe a religious holiday must submit a formal request to the Institute's Director within one week after the add/drop period when course schedules, including any field trips, are finalized. No exceptions will be made after this deadline.

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.

Tardiness Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes punctually. Any student arriving up to 15 minutes late or leaving up to 15 minutes earlier than the scheduled class end time will be marked as tardy. Each incident of tardiness (late arrivals to or early departures from class) is 0.5% off the final grade. However, should a student arrive more than 15 minutes late or depart more than 15 minutes before the conclusion of the class, it will be recorded as an absence.

Students are also expected to remain in class during the time of instruction except for a reasonable amount of time to use the restroom. Students who leave class and do not return during the class session will receive an unexcused absence or late penalty.

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 set on silent mode before the beginning of each class. Computers and other electronic devices (for example, ear buds) cannot be used during class lectures and discussions for anything other than note-taking, unless there has been a specific academic accommodation.

Laptop/Smartphone Policy

I as an instructor and as a person am dependent on both my computer and my telephone. That said: An ever-increasing body of research shows that open laptops and telephones in the classroom create distraction (both visual and auditory) for those using them and those around them. You can type faster than you can write, and as a result you end up processing less when you're simply typing notes. For this reason, I have a physical notebook policy: I ask you to leave your computers in your bags and phones in your pockets and use a regular notebook. There are three exceptions: 1) if you have an accommodation related to your vision; 2) if you make an office hours appointment with me to discuss the use of a computer; 3) during the flipped classroom assignments you will need your computer, both for research and for presentation..

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 1

Introduction

Meeting 1 *Introduction to Science, Humans, and Society*

Meeting 2 *Research methods in social psychology*

Readings:

Hewstone, M., Stroebe, W., & Jonas, K. (Eds.). (2008). *Introduction to Social Psychology* (4th ed.). Blackwell Publishing. *Chapter 1*, pp. 2-22.

WEEK 2

Interpersonal Attraction: The psychology of beauty and desire

Meeting 1 *The social psychology of beauty perception*

Meeting 2: *Attractive? Depends when and where*

Readings for the week:

Hong, X., Xiang, Y., Wang, Z., Li, J., Zou, R., & Gao, P. (2024). Contextual modulation of the red-attractiveness effect: Differences in affiliation and competitive settings. *Acta Psychologica*, 243, 104171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104171>

Messner, C., Carnelli, M., & Höhener, P. S. (2021). Change in evaluation mode can cause a cheerleader effect. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 607448. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.607448>

WEEK 3

Social Thinking: Stereotypes and Prejudice

Meeting 1 *Stereotypes, Priming, and Behavior*

Readings:

M. Konnikova, “Revisiting Robbers cave: The early spontaneity of intergroup conflict.” Blogs. *Scientific American*. September 5, 2012.

Bargh, J. A., Chen, M., & Burrows, L. (1996). Automaticity of social behavior: Direct effects of trait construct and stereotype activation on action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(2), 230–244.

Meeting 2 *Prejudice*

Readings:

Macrae, C. & Bodenhausen, Galen & Milne, Alan & Jetten, Jolanda. (1994). “Out of Mind but Back in Sight: Stereotypes on The Rebound.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 67. 808-817.

WEEK 4

Social Behavior: Conformity and Obedience

Meeting 1 *Social Pressure and Influence*

Readings:

S. E. Asch, "Opinions and social pressure," *Scientific American* 193 (1955), 31-35.

Franzen A, Mader S (2023) The power of social influence: A replication and extension of the Asch experiment. *PLoS ONE* 18(11). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0294325>

Meeting 2 *Stanley Milgram's Study on Authority*

Readings:

L. T. Benjamin Jr. & J. A. Simpson, "The power of the situation: the impact of Milgram's studies on personality and social psychology," *American Psychologist* 64 (2009), 12-19.

WEEK 5

Social Behavior: Authority

Meeting 1 *Philip Zimbardo and the Study of Situational Factors*

Readings:

S. Drury, S. A. Hutchens, D. E. Shuttlesworth & C. L. White, "Philip G. Zimbardo on his career and the Stanford prison experiment's 40th birthday," *History of Psychology* 15 (2012), 161-170.

Le Texier T. (2019). Debunking the Stanford Prison Experiment. *The American Psychologist*, 74(7), 823–839

Meeting 2 *The Stanford Prison Experiment*

Readings:

P. G. Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*, 2007, chapter 10, pp. 323-335.

WEEK 6

Midterm assignment/exam

Meeting 1 *Review for midterm*

Meeting 2: *Midterm (in class)*

WEEK 7

Social Thinking: Social Learning Theory

Meeting 1 *Albert Bandura and Social Learning Theory*

Readings:

Bandura, A. (2006). Autobiography. M. G. Lindzey & W. M. Runyan (Eds.), *A History of Psychology in Autobiography* (Vol. IX). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Meeting 2 *Flipped classroom assignment 1*

Readings:

Bandura, A., Ross, D., & Ross, S. A. (1961). Transmission of aggression through imitation of aggressive models. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 63(3), 575–582.

Bandura, A. (1965). Influence of models' reinforcement contingencies on the acquisition of imitative responses. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1(6), 589–595.

APA (2013). Violence in the media: Psychologists study potential harmful effects. Accessed December 20th, 2022. [Link](#)

WEEK 8

Social Behavior: Altruism

Meeting 1 *Darley and Latané's Study on Altruism*

Readings:

J. M. Darley & B. Latane, "Bystander intervention in emergencies: diffusion of responsibility," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 8 (1968), 377-383.

Hortensius, R., & de Gelder, B. (2018). From Empathy to Apathy: The Bystander Effect Revisited. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 27(4), 249–256.

Meeting 2 *Flipped classroom assignment 2*

WEEK 9

Review for observational study

Meeting 1 *What to observe, and how?*

Readings:

Shenk, J. W. (2009). What makes us happy? *The Atlantic*.

Vaillant, G. E. (1979). Natural History of Male Psychologic Health. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 301(23), 1249–1254.

Raff, J. (2014, June 18). How to Read and Understand a Scientific Paper. Retrieved December 22, 2022, from [Huffington Post](#) website.

Pain, E. (2016). How to (seriously) read a scientific paper. Retrieved December 22, 2022, from [Science](#) website.

Meeting 2 *Observing human behavior - practical assignment*

WEEK 10

Language, Culture, and Emotions

Meeting 1 *Words shape our social behavior*

Meeting 2: *Words that make sense*

Readings for the week:

Ogata, K., Gakumi, R., Hashimoto, A., Ushiku, Y., & Yoshida, S. (2023). The influence of Bouba- and Kiki-like shape on perceived taste of chocolate pieces. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1170674. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1170674>

Zhao, X., He, X., & Zhang, W. (2016). A heavy heart: The association between weight and emotional words. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 920. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00920>

WEEK 11

The psychology of scarcity

Meeting 1 *When our minds feel alone and tired*

Meeting 2: *Poverty: stereotypes and psychological mechanisms*

Readings for the week:

Baumeister, R. F., DeWall, C. N., Ciarocco, N. J., & Twenge, J. M. (2005). Social exclusion impairs self-regulation. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 88(4), 589-604. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.4.589>

Mani, A., Mullainathan, S., Shafir, E., & Zhao, J. (2013). Poverty impedes cognitive function. *Science*, 341(6149), 976-980. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1238041>

WEEK 12

Social Emotions: Staying Positive

Meeting 1 *Positive Psychology*

Readings:

E. Diener & M. E. P. Seligman, "Very happy people," *Psychological Science* 13 (2002), 81-84.

K. Dahlsgaard, C. Peterson, C., & M. E. P. Seligman, "Shared virtue: The convergence of valued human strengths across culture and history," *Review of General Psychology* 9 (2005), 203-213.

J. W. Shenk, "What Makes Us Happy?" *The Atlantic* (2009)

Meeting 2 *Review for Final Assignment*