



PSYC/AI 305: It's All in Your Head: The Cognition of Everyday Life

Course Syllabus

Spring Semester 2026

Instructor: Eyal Rosenstreich, PhD

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: None

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Type: Standard Course

Course Fee: None

Course Description

Why do we sometimes fail to notice what is right in front of us, remember events that never happened, or feel attracted to someone without an apparent reason? This course explores the quirks, biases, and hidden processes of the human mind as they happen in everyday life. We will look at how perception, attention, memory, language, and decision-making are shaped and often distorted by culture and environment, through examples such as optical illusions, false memories, the psychology of attraction, the cognitive toll of loneliness, stress and poverty, and the biases that guide our choices.

Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures

Below are the course's learning outcomes, followed by the methods that will be used to assess students' achievement for each learning outcome. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- *Identify* common cognitive biases and mental experiences in perception, attention, memory, language, and decision-making (Weekly Online Quiz);
- *Summarize* connections between classic psychological experiments and everyday experiences (Weekly Online Quiz, Intermediate Essay);
- *Analyze and Distinguish* personal, social, cultural, and contextual factors that affect cognition (Final Assignment);
- *Integrate* psychological concepts and empirical findings into a coherent argument about the limits of human cognition (Final Assignment).

Course Materials

Readings

A course reader, including all the indicated readings, will be available. The course's Moodle site is the primary location for readings and assignments.

Assessment

Attendance	10%
Weekly online quizzes	5%
In-class assignments	10%
One on one meeting	5%
Midterm	30%
Intermediate Essay	15%

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	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
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

Grades are based on the following criteria.

Attendance (10%)

Attendance is an essential part of this course. If you attend all the meetings, you will receive 10% for this part of your grade. There are no make-ups offered for attendance..

Weekly Online Quizzes (5%)

Students will be assigned a quiz (almost) every week, which will be due before class time and will not be reopened. The quiz will be on Moodle and it is not timed. Students can take the quiz as many times as they like, with the recorded grade being the highest grade they receive. There will be a combination of *technical*, *methodological*, and *content questions*. The content questions will help students zoom in on the most important ideas of the readings. The technical questions will help students learn the class' policies and administrative procedures. The methodological questions will test on skills that will pop up every week, like finding an author's argument and assessing sources.

In class assignments (10%)

During two class meetings across the semester, students will complete short written assignments consisting of two open-ended questions based on material from previous weeks. These assignments are designed to assess both comprehension of key concepts and the ability to apply them to new, real-world scenarios. Students will be expected to demonstrate clear understanding, critical thinking, and creative application of psychological principles discussed in class.

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.

Midterm Assignment (30%)

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. See the full prompt in Moodle.

Intermediate Essay (15%)

The intermediate essay is a short take-home assignment in which students review, summarize, and draw connections between selected concepts introduced during the course.

Final Assignment (25%)

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 (no more than five minutes) 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.

Utilizing ChatGPT or other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for the generation of content submitted by a student as their own as part of any assignment for academic credit at the Institute constitutes a form of plagiarism. Should the Institute become aware of a student's use of such platforms and services, the student will be subject to the same consequences and judicial proceedings as are in place for plagiarism (defined above).

Laptop & 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. As a general rule, the consumption of food in the classroom is not permitted. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of the professor for specific cases, such as food tastings integral to the course content. Please note that cell phones must be set on silent mode before the beginning of each class. Computers and other electronic devices (e.g., ear buds, smart watches, etc.) cannot be used during class lectures and discussions, unless there has been a specific academic accommodation. This policy also applies to earbuds and headsets.

As an instructor and as a person, I 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 four exceptions: 1) if you have an accommodation; 2) if you're using a tablet to take notes, 3) if you make an office hours appointment with me to discuss the use of a computer; or 4) if we have an in-class tutorial about online research tools.

While food and drink are sometimes part of Umbra classes, your grade is never dependent on consuming anything.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 1

Introduction: It is all in our heads

Meeting 1 *Introduction and a group discussion: The role of cognition in our lives*

Meeting 2: *The mother of all illusions*

Readings for the week:

Eben, C., Chen, Z., Billieux, J., & Verbruggen, F. (2022). Outcome sequences and illusion of control - Part I: An online replication of Langer & Roth (1975). *International Gambling Studies*, 23(2), 257-268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14459795.2022.2133906>

WEEK 2

Language: The sensual world

Meeting 1 *Words shape what we feel, and vice versa*

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 3

Perception: What is real?

Meeting 1 *When we see things that aren't there*

Meeting 2: *How culture shapes what we perceive*

Readings for the week:

Amir, D., & Firestone, C. (2025). Is visual perception WEIRD? The Müller-Lyer illusion and the cultural byproduct hypothesis. *Psychological Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rev0000549>

Kitayama, S., Duffy, S., Kawamura, T., & Larsen, J. T. (2003). Perceiving an object and its context in different cultures: A cultural look at new look. *Psychological science*, 14(3), 201-206. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.02432>

WEEK 4

Assignment 1

Meeting 1 *Review for assignment 1*

Meeting 2: *Assignment 1 (in class)*

WEEK 5

Attention: How focus reveals (and conceals) the world

Meeting 1 *When we miss what's right in front of us*

Meeting 2: *How to focus your attention without focusing it*

Readings for the week:

Hood, M., & Baumann, O. (2024). Could nature contribute to the management of ADHD in children? A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 21(6), 736. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21060736>

WEEK 6

Midterm assignment/exam

Meeting 1 *Review for midterm*

Meeting 2: *Midterm (in class)*

Semester Break

WEEK 7

Memory: Keep, Lose, Invent

Meeting 1 *When we remember things that never happened*

Meeting 2: *When we forget unforgettable things*

Readings for the week:

Frenda, S. J., Knowles, E. D., Saletan, W., & Loftus, E. F. (2013). False memories of fabricated political events. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49(2), 280-286. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.10.013>

Reeck, C. & LaBar, K. S. (2024) Retrieval-induced forgetting of emotional memories, *Cognition and Emotion*, 38(1), 131-147, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2023.2279156>

WEEK 8

Interpersonal Attraction: The psychology of beauty and desire

Meeting 1 *Beauty is not in the eye of the beholder*

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 9

Cognitive Fatigue: When the mind gets tired

Meeting 1 *When our minds feel alone and tired*

Meeting 2: *The psychology of scarcity*

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/0.1037/0022-3514.88.4.589>

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 10

Assignment 2

Meeting 1 *Review for assignment 2*

Meeting 2: *Assignment 2 (in class)*

WEEK 11

Mindset: How belief changes reality

Meeting 1: Easter Monday - No class

Meeting 2: *The healing power of mindset*

Readings for the week:

Crum, A. J., & Langer, E. J. (2007). Mind-set matters: Exercise and the placebo effect. *Psychological science*, 18(2), 165-171. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.01867.x>

WEEK 12

Decision making: The logic of irrational minds

Meeting 1 *Thinking fast and slow*

Meeting 2: *Wise interventions*

Readings for the week:

Berthet, V. & de Gardelle, V. (2023). The heuristics-and-biases inventory: An open-source tool to explore individual differences in rationality. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 14:1145246.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1145246>

Walton, G. M., & Wilson, T. D. (2018). Wise interventions: Psychological remedies for social and personal problems. *Psychological Review*, 125(5), 617–655.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/rev0000115>

WEEK 13

Final Classes, Exams, & Special Academic Events

Meeting 1: *Review for Final assignment*