

Health Psychology (Psychology 307)

Syllabus for Spring Semester, 2011

Professor: Dr. Melissa Himelein
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Class time: M & W, 2:45-4:00 p.m.
Class room: CH 232

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Course page (Moodle): <http://learnonline.unca.edu>

Course Description and Objectives

This class will provide an introduction to the field of health psychology, a discipline of psychology focused on how biological, social, and psychological factors affect health and illness. We will begin with an overview of health and health care in the United States, focusing in particular on disparities in health status across different racial, ethnic, and economic groups. We will then examine research methods in health psychology and prominent behavior change theories, followed by an exploration of stress and pain (causes, consequences, and coping strategies). In later sections of the course we will focus on behavioral health topics, considering the contributions of psychology to health promotion, and behavioral medicine, focusing on behavioral interventions in illness and disease.

As a 300-level course, Health Psychology fulfills one of the three elective classes required of psychology majors. Prerequisites include Introductory Psychology (100) and Research Methods (201); junior- or senior-level standing is preferred. In addition to the relevant student learning outcomes present in the Psychology Department curriculum (see "Psych SLOs" handout in Moodle), I hope that this course will help you to:

- view health and illness through a biopsychosocial lens, i.e., understand that physical well-being is the result of complex biological, social, and psychological factors,
- develop the research skills and confidence necessary to critically examine advice about health you are given, and
- learn about behavioral interventions you could apply in your own life, either with others or yourself: modifying health behaviors, coping with stress or pain, or dealing with illnesses

Office Hours

I know that email and telephones are handy for quick questions, but please don't hesitate to come see me *in person*! I enjoy getting to know my students.

- Drop-in hours (no appointment necessary - I will be in my office during this time unless I announce otherwise in class): Monday & Wednesday, 4:15-5:00 p.m.; Tuesday & Thursday, 2:00-3:00 p.m.
- Appointments (schedule in advance so I'll be sure to be in my office): Best times this semester will likely be Tuesday and Thursday mornings, but other times can be arranged as well.

Other Means of Communication

The best way to get in touch with me quickly is through email (address above). I check email frequently on weekdays and at least once on weekends. I check voice mail less often.

If I need to relay a message to the entire class, I will use Moodle, which directs email to your official email address (your unca.edu address). If you do not check your unca.edu email, please be sure that you forward email from this address to your preferred email address.

Readings

We will be using a textbook (Brannon & Feist, *Health Psychology*, 6th ed.) in combination with several supplementary readings. Instructions for ordering the textbook are provided in a separate handout (“Reading List”), posted on Moodle. All supplementary readings – a combination of book chapters, empirical journal articles, and popular press articles - are also available on Moodle. See the reading list handout for complete bibliographic references for all readings.

Course Requirements

1. Exams. There will be three non-cumulative exams over the course of the semester. Exams will be based on all course materials (readings, lectures, discussion, class activities, and films) and will likely include a combination of objective and essay questions. If you miss an exam, you will need to schedule a makeup during final exams week.

2. Systems of the Body Study Guide. A full understanding of stress requires a reasonable comfort level with its physiological underpinnings. To help you master this material, you will be randomly assigned one system of the body that you will study in depth. Then, during one class period (see course calendar), you will be assigned to a small group, where you will tutor the other members of your group in the anatomy and physiology of your system. To do this effectively, you will need to write a study guide (outline or bullet form) describing your system; you may find that other teaching tools will also be helpful to include as well (e.g., sample test questions, diagrams, mnemonic devices – creativity encouraged!). You will give copies of your study guide (maximum of 2 pages) to the classmates in your small group and to me.

3. Behavioral Medicine Project. This assignment is your chance to delve deeply into a specific physical illness in which you have particular interest. You will be investigating a behavioral medicine intervention with proven effectiveness as it relates to the disease you select. To get started in choosing your focus, peruse Chapters 9-11 in the text. You are not limited to diseases discussed in the reading, but for any illness selected, you must be able to find research evidence showing that it can be mitigated by a behavioral treatment. Final reports will be written for a lay audience (i.e., imagine that you are writing your report for a friend or family member who has the disease in question) and will not be long (4-6 pages, not including references or appendices). *The primary challenge of this project will be in uncovering the research on which your conclusions will be based.*

An alternative project option is available: assisting with or conducting community-based empirical health psychology research. Should you desire to be involved in undergraduate research in a future semester, this option might be ideal for you; see me for further information.

The behavioral medicine assignment is intended to be a pairs project (2-person groups), an approach I encourage for many reasons: the nature of this project lends itself to teamwork, you will be able to do a more comprehensive project with another person than alone, you will benefit from the intellectual stimulation provided by talking with someone else about your progress and ideas, and when pairs mesh well, they are fun! I recognize that group dynamics can be challenging, but learning to collaborate effectively with another person is in itself important learning. Final reports will be graded by the same criteria regardless of the number of people who produced them; however, in the effort to discourage “slacking,” group members will be graded individually on their contributions. Should you have a compelling reason for working alone, solo projects are allowed.

A detailed handout describing the project will be provided in class at a later date. It will involve an initial project proposal, the final written report, and a presentation of your findings to be given during the last week of classes or in the final exam period.

4. Behavioral Medicine Intervention Presentation. Each pair will give a 15-20 minute oral presentation based on their project during the final week(s) of class or during our final exam period. Presentations will focus only on behavioral interventions, ideally incorporating some sort of mini-demonstration or role play of the technique involved.

5. Class Attendance and Participation. Regular attendance is essential. I will use a variety of teaching techniques in this class (lectures, discussion, small group activities, films, applications exercises), most of which cannot be duplicated by borrowing a classmate's notes. I also view classes as a type of community, and communities coalesce most effectively when all members are present. Attendance will be noted, with exceptionally good (0-1 absences) or poor (4 or more) attendance, as well as participation, figuring into a nominal portion of your final grade. In addition, I will consider attendance in the calculation of borderline final grades, and I reserve the right to make a 10% grade deduction in final grades for 6 or more absences (i.e., missing 20% or more of the class).

Evaluation

Assignment	Points*	<i>Final grades are determined by your cumulative point total, with the percentage earned equivalent to a specific grade category:</i>		
Exams (3 x 60 points each)	180	Grade	% of Points	Points
Systems of the Body Study Guide	20	A	93+	279-300
Project Proposal	10	A-	90-92	270-278
Project	50	B+	87-89	261-269
Project Presentation	25	B	83-86	249-260
Attendance and Participation	15	B-	80-82	240-248
Total points possible	300	C+	77-79	231-239
*Any late assignment will be penalized 1 pt. per day late		C	73-76	219-230
		C-	70-72	210-218
		D	60-69	180-209
		F	<60	<180

Academic Dishonesty

Any instance of academic dishonesty (cheating, conspiring, or plagiarizing) will result in a failing grade on the relevant assignment. A second instance of academic dishonesty will result in failure of the course. Please ask me if you have any questions about the nature of dishonest academic behavior.

Course Schedule, Psychology 307 (Spring, 2011)

Dates subject to revision! Please be flexible about possible changes, given that snow days may well disrupt our schedule. Should class be canceled for any reason, scheduled assignments will be due at the next class period (and I will email you a reminder of this). All updates will be posted on Moodle.

Dates	Reading & Assignments	Class Topic
Jan 10 (M) Jan 12 (W) No class Jan 17 (MLKing Day)	Johnson & Radcliffe, Increasing role Belar, Clinical health psychology	Foundations Overview of health psychology & health psychologists
Jan 19 (W) Jan 24 (M)	RWJ Foundation, Overcoming obstacles Bezruchka, Health equity	Health disparities
Jan 26 (W) Jan 31 (M)	Begley, Wanted: BS detectors Brannon & Feist, Chap. 2 Begley, Hooked on a feeling	Health psychology research
Feb 2 (W) Feb 7 (M)	Brannon & Feist, Chap. 3 (skip pp. 49-54) & Chap. 4 (skip p. 75)	Seeking health care Adhering to medical advice
Feb 9 (W)	Exam 1	
Feb 14 (M) Feb 16 (W)	Brannon & Feist, Chap. 5 APA, Stress in America (pp. 3-32)	Stress & Pain Defining & measuring stress
Feb 21 (M) Feb 23 (W)	Brannon & Feist, Chap. 6 Segerstrom, Stress, energy, & immunity Due: Systems of the Body Study Guide	Stress and disease: Psychoneuroimmunology
Feb 28 (M)	Brannon & Feist, Chap. 7 Due: Project topic selections	Defining & measuring pain
March 2 (W) No class March 7 & 9 (Spring Bk) Mar 14 (M)	Brannon & Feist, Chap. 8 Bower, Moskowitz, & Epel, Benefit finding	Managing stress & pain
Mar 16 (W)	Exam 2	
Mar 21 (M) Mar 23 (W)	Murphy, Promoting healthy behavior Brannon & Feist, Chap. 13 Due: Project proposals	Behavioral Health Health behavior change theories Substance use: Smoking
Mar 28 (M)	Brannon & Feist, Chap. 14	Substance use: Alcohol
Mar 30 (W) Apr 4 (M)	Brannon & Feist, Chap. 15 Himelein, Passman, & Phillips, College teaching	Weight and obesity
Apr 6 (W) Apr 11 (M)	Brannon & Feist, Chap. 16 Ratey, Welcome to the revolution	Exercise
Apr 13 (W) or Apr 18 (M)	Exam 3	
Possibly Apr 18 (M) Apr 20 (W) Apr 25 (M)	Due: Presentations (dates to be assigned) Due: Project reports	Behavioral Medicine & Illness
April 27 (W): 3:00 – 5:30 p.m.	<i>(Final Exam Period)</i> Presentations (cont.)	

