

PSY420: Social Psychology Seminar: Social Psychology and the Media Winter 2025 LEC0101

Contact Info

Instructor: Dr. Patricia Y. Sanchez (she/her)

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Office Info: Room 4051 in Sid Smith

Office Hours (online or in person): By appointment

See Quercus page for Zoom Room info.

Course Info

Classes Meet: Mondays, 2pm-4pm	Room: UC 148 (University College)
Course Website: https://q.utoronto.ca/courses/382500	
Reading(s): All assigned material will be made available to you on Quercus.	

Course Overview & Goals

Media surround our everyday lives, from the movies and TV shows we watch to the apps we use to stay in touch with friends and family. Despite how pervasive media is in our lives, psychologists have only been able to scratch the surface in understanding the specific ways media impacts, and exists alongside, human psychology. This course focuses on the intersection of social psychology and media studies, and addresses some contemporary issues in applying social psychology to understanding media. Topics include media influences on social behaviour (e.g., aggression, pro-sociality) and the self-concept (e.g., social identity, self-esteem), pre-trial publicity and legal decision-making, media

literacy, audience theory, and social media. Successful completion of PSY220H1 is required.

Intended Learning Outcomes

1. To increase your understanding of research related to the intersection of social psychology and media studies
2. To enhance your ability to think critically about research and social psychological theory as it applies to media
3. To apply key principles to “real world” situations to help understand our relationship with media
4. To develop your ability to communicate about psychological science and be a critical consumer of science communication and improve media literacy

Prerequisites

PSY202H1/ ECO220Y1/ SOC252H1/ STA221H1/ ECO220Y5/ PSY202H5/ STA221H5/ PSYC08H3/ STAB27H3/ STAC32H3, **and** PSY220H1/ PSY220H5/ PSYB10H3/ SOC213H1

Exclusions: PSY420H5/ PSYD15H3/ PSYD16H3

Breadth Requirements: Thought, Belief and Behaviour (2)

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have met all prerequisites listed in the Psychology section of the A&S Calendar for this course. If you lack any prerequisites, you will be removed. No waivers will be granted.

Course Structure & Requirements

Course Communication

- *General inquiries related to course content, policies, or assessments* should first be posted to the relevant Quercus Discussion Board. I will be monitoring the board, but you are welcome to respond to and support your peers as well.
- *Scheduling appointments to review content, get discussion advice, or to discuss grades* should be done by emailing me directly (see email above).
- *Personal questions related to illness, accessibility, accommodations, or other class concerns* should also be addressed directly to me. Please get in touch with me with any of these concerns as soon as possible so I can properly accommodate your situation.

- **FOR ALL EMAILS:** Please include a descriptive subject line, a greeting, complete sentences, and a signature with your full name. Please also include “**PSY420**” in the subject line with the topic of your email! Make sure though that your subject is still descriptive (i.e., “PSY420 discussion question” is not descriptive enough). I’ll try my best to respond to emails within 2 business days. Emails received after 5pm or on the weekends will not be seen until the next business day.

Course Webpage: Quercus

This course will use the University’s learning management system, Quercus, to post course information including readings, assignments, grades, and important announcements. You will also be submitting assignments on Quercus. I will rely on this resource heavily throughout the semester so make sure you check it regularly and/or your email is set up correctly. Unless other arrangements are made, submitting an assignment via email will not count as an official submission. All assignments must be submitted to Quercus in order to be considered for grading.

Structure of Weekly Meetings

Starting at Week 3, our class meetings will follow the general structure below:

5 minutes: Announcements, admin check ins

60-75 minutes: Individual article presentations (3 students, ~20-25 mins each)

10 minutes: Break

30-45 minutes: General topic discussion, led by 3 presenters and facilitated by discussion questions from response papers

Engagement and Participation

This is an advanced undergraduate psychology course, and we will not have weekly lectures. You will be responsible for leading and participating in discussion each week. Your active engagement with the course material by participating in discussions and activities, taking notes, and thinking deeply about the questions that are posed helps us build a positive learning environment and enhances your understanding of the course concepts. Your participation and engagement will be evaluated for effort (i.e., reading material before class, contributing to discussions) and quality (i.e., insightfulness, respectfulness).

I highly encourage you all to ask questions **during** the class period. This class is an opportunity for you to get comfortable speaking up when something is unclear or if you have any questions about the material we are covering.

Nobody in the class is going to ridicule you or make you feel silly for asking a question. If they do, I will personally have a discussion with them about the importance of building a safe and constructive learning environment.

Although attendance does not *directly* contribute to your grade (you don't necessarily get participation points just for showing up), you will miss out on important class discussions if you do not attend class. If you miss a week of class, you will not be able to participate in discussion that week. Please let me know if you will be unable to participate in class discussions for any reason as this will seriously impact your ability to succeed in this class.

Preparation (Readings)

This is a discussion-based course. You will not passively receive information from a lecture in this course. Therefore, it is crucial that you keep up with the weekly readings and ready to discuss them during each class period. I am expecting each and every student to meaningfully participate in class at least once a week. If you come to class unprepared to discuss the readings or not having done the readings at all, you will not be able to meaningfully engage in discussion that week. I may turn to any student who has contributed much that day to ask their opinion on the papers. If you are unprepared to engage in discussion, your overall mark will be negatively impacted. See below.

Assessment & Evaluation

Weekly Participation and Discussion (11%)

As this is a seminar, the course will heavily focus on discussion, engagement, and participation (11 weeks total, 1% each). You will be active participants in your own learning in this course. That means you should come to class every week ready to discuss ***all*** the weekly readings. Good classroom participation consists of reading all the assigned articles, sharing your opinions and comments, being attentive to other students' presentations, coming up with insightful discussions questions or observations, and making connections between different readings. For presentation weeks, good participation includes taking detailed notes of the main ideas of your peers' presentations, asking good questions, and being respectful to your peers' ideas. To facilitate your participation, you will submit weekly response papers for all the assigned readings. See below.

Importantly, good participation also means allows others to contribute their thoughts as well. It's great to be an active participant in each class, but I want to hear from all 20 of you so it's important to let others be involved in the discussion. If you have not been contributing much on a given day, I may directly ask for your opinion on the readings or discussion. A general rule of thumb: aim to meaningfully contribute to discussion at least once a week, and allow everyone to contribute at least once as well.

Response Papers (24%)

To keep you engaged with the assigned reading material, you will submit response papers about the readings for each week (8 weeks total, 3% each). These are due before each class meeting (Mondays at 12pm). In these response papers, you will reflect on the main ideas of the readings for the week and aim to make connections that bridge these readings together. A strong response paper will discuss the main ideas of the week deeply, propose potential mechanisms or moderators for a specific effect or phenomenon, explore the implications of cultural context, and consider how the readings relate to other ideas covered in the course. Since this is a discussion-based course, these response papers should prepare you to engage in meaningful discussion each week. Thus, each response paper will include at least one original question for discussion. More info about expectations and marking is available on Quercus.

Discussion Leader/Article Presentation (10%)

In Week 2, you will volunteer to lead discussion for one article for one of the weekly topics in the course calendar (starting at Week 3). There are seven topics to choose from and three students will lead discussion for each of these weeks. As an individual presenter, you will review your selected reading by summarizing the main points and findings and will then lead discussion (20-25 mins). Then, as a group of 3, you will formulate 3-4 discussion questions that synthesize all the readings (e.g., what are some common issues, how do findings relate to one another, how do these findings connect to other weeks) to discuss the week's topic more generally (30-35 mins). More info about what you'll need to prepare to lead discussion, what you'll submit, and how this will be marked will be available to you on Quercus.

Research Proposal Final Paper (40%)

You will write a formal research proposal where you propose an original empirical study based on any topic related to social psychology and the media. You will first submit your topic idea (5%) and get approval from me before you begin the final paper. The final paper (35%) will include: an introduction and

literature review of the relevant background research, proposed methodology, hypothesized results, a brief discussion and conclusion, and a references page. More details about this assignment including the grading rubric will be available on Quercus.

Research Proposal Presentation (15%)

During the last three weeks of class, you will present your research proposal to the class. Each student will share their proposed research question, proposed methodology, and proposed results from their research proposal paper. Importantly, you will engage your peers in a critical discussion of their research. You will submit your slides in either PowerPoint or PDF format on Quercus by noon of your scheduled presentation day. Due to difficulty in rescheduling presentations, failure to present on your presentation day will result in a penalty. If you anticipate missing your presentation, please email as soon as possible.

In addition to the presentation, all students will be required to actively participate in their peers' presentations. This includes asking thoughtful questions during the Q&A period of the presentations and submitting a response for each presentation during the last three weeks. More info will be discussed in class about expectations and requirements.

Grading/Marking Scheme

Your final grade in this course will be calculated based on the breakdown below:

	Weight (%)
Weekly Participation and Discussion	11%
Response Papers	24%
Discussion Leader/Article Presentation	10%
Research Proposal Idea	5%
Research Proposal Final Paper	35%
Research Proposal Presentation	15%

Note: Any grades posted in the Quercus gradebook are posted for your information only, so you can view and track your progress through the course. No grades are considered official, included any posted in Quercus at any point in the term, until they have been formally approved at the end of the course.

Course Policies

Late Assignments & Extensions

Late assignments (those turned in after the due date without prior discussion with me) will incur a 5% penalty for each day it is late up to 25% (5 days after the due date). Late work will not be accepted more than 5 days after the due date unless you have formal accommodations, have provided legitimate documentation, or prior arrangements have been made.

Extensions will not be granted for response papers as these assignments are meant to prepare you for each discussion during our weekly meetings. Response papers are due on Mondays at 12pm noon. You can submit these response papers by 1pm for a 5% late penalty. No response papers will be accepted after 1pm. If you know you're going to miss a class, I highly recommend you still submit your response paper for that day to ensure you don't lose too many marks for your absence. You cannot earn Discussion Participation credit for days you are absent. **Extensions will also not be granted for your Discussion Leader/Article Presentation assignments.** If you will miss the class you were scheduled to present your article, please let me and your topic group know as soon as possible so we can come up with a plan.

For the topic idea and final paper components of the research proposal assignment, I will grant a two-day extension only if you request the extension 2 days **before** the due date. You do not have to give me any justification or explanation for your request; however, I **MUST** receive this request 48 hours before the due date. Extension requests received after this will not be granted unless you have formal accommodations or documentation that legitimizes the delay. **No extensions will be granted on the research proposal class presentation.** If you are unable to present your presentation at the end of the class, please email me as soon as possible so we can figure out a plan.

Missed Term Work Policy

If you miss class for *any* reason, you are responsible for catching up with the missed material and you should not expect the instructor to review the material from the class you missed. There will be no chances to make up missed in-class assignments like group discussions and presentations. If you miss a class where you were scheduled to present, you must submit documentation to Dr. Sanchez that demonstrates your inability to be present for that class (i.e., the ACORN illness self-declaration tool, UofT Verification of Illness or Injury form (VOI), a letter from your College Registrar or Accessibility Counselor).

Documentation must be submitted within 7 calendar days of the missed assignment. If you do not provide appropriate documentation, you will receive a 0 for the missed assignments. **Make up assignments will not be issued.**

University's Plagiarism Detection Tool

Normally, students will be required to submit their course work to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation website (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

Online Communication Policy

Some questions are best answered in person or in an online meeting and some are best answered via email. If you have a complex question (i.e., you want to further discuss an idea from the course), I will be happy to meet with you to discuss it (see *Course Communication* above). Having face-to-face discussions, whether in person or online, about complex questions or issues is generally more effective. If you have a short/simple question, email might be the most efficient way to ask it. If you don't know, send an email with your question and I'll let you know if a meeting would be more appropriate.

When communicating via email please adhere to the following:

- Emails received after 5pm will count as being received the following business day. Do not email the day of the due date with a question about the assignment, I might not see your email in time to send a helpful reply.
- Please consult the course syllabus, schedule, discussion board, other handouts, and announcements on Quercus before submitting inquiries by email. There's a chance there is an answer to your question somewhere in these materials.
- In the subject line indicate the course code and the topic of your email (e.g., PSY420 Chamberlain & Hodgetts reading question).
- Begin your emails by greeting the person you are writing to (e.g., "Hello Dr. Sanchez", "Dear Prof. Sanchez,"). Make sure to address the person you are emailing in your greeting.
- Emails should come from your utoronto email account to communicate with the professor and TA (otherwise they may get marked as spam).

- All communications (verbal, email) should be respectful in language and tone and constructive in nature. This includes communications with me and your fellow students.

Grade Dispute Policy

If you believe an assignment has been incorrectly or unfairly marked, you can request a re-evaluation from the grader. You must wait 24 hours after the feedback is returned to bring up a grade concern. Grade concerns received within 24 hours of receiving the feedback will not be considered. Additionally, grade concerns must be brought to my attention within 14 days of the return of the assignment or they won't be considered.

If you have concerns about how an assignment or test was graded, please first meet with me to discuss your score. If, after your meeting, you still would like to submit your work for re-evaluation, please submit the request to me via email. In your request, please include a short paragraph detailing your grade concern including: 1) the question(s) to be re-evaluated, 2) why you provided the answer you did and where in the course materials you learned this content, and 3) why you think the grade is incorrect or incomplete and what in the course materials would support your request. Only reasonable and well-justified concerns will be considered, and all decisions are final.

Please consider very carefully before contesting your grade for an assignment or test. Course instructors work very hard to mark course assignments as fairly as possible. By submitting a grade dispute, you are consenting to a full re-evaluation of the assignment. This means your grade may go up, go down, or stay the same. If a re-evaluation is granted, **you must accept the resulting mark as the new mark.**

Specific Medical Circumstances

If you become ill and it affects your ability to do your academic work, consult me right away. Normally, I will ask you for documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances. This documentation can be an Absence Declaration (via ACORN) or the University's Verification of Student Illness or Injury (VOI) form. The VOI indicates the impact and severity of the illness, while protecting your privacy about the details of the nature of the illness. You can submit a different form (like a letter from a doctor), as long as it is an original document, and it contains the same information as the VOI. For more information on the VOI, please see www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca. For information on Absence Declaration Tool for A&S students, please see www.artsci.utoronto.ca/absence. If you get a concussion, break your hand, or

suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

Religious Accommodation

As a student at the University of Toronto, you are part of a diverse community that welcomes and includes students and faculty from a wide range of backgrounds, cultural traditions, and spiritual beliefs. I will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling assessments or other compulsory activities on religious holy days not captured by statutory holidays. Further to University Policy, if you anticipate being absent from class or missing a major course activity (such as a presentation) due to a religious observance, please let me know as early in the course as possible, and with sufficient notice (at least two to three weeks), so that we can work together to make alternate arrangements.

Accommodation for Personal Reasons

There may be times when you are unable to complete course work on time due to non-medical or non-religious reasons. If you have concerns about your ability to complete an assignment, please speak to me or to an advisor in your College Registrar's office; they can help you to decide if you want to request an extension or accommodation. They may be able to provide you with a College Registrar's letter of support to give to your instructors, and importantly, connect you with other resources on campus for help with your situation. Regardless of the situation, it is always best to reach out about the issue as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

All students, faculty, and staff are expected to follow the University's guidelines and policies on academic integrity. For students, this means following the standards of academic honesty with writing assignments and collaborating with fellow students. Ensure that the work you submit for grading represents your own honest efforts. Plagiarism—representing someone else's work as your own or submitting work that you have previously submitted for marks in another class or program—is a serious offence that can result in sanctions. Speak to me or your TA for advice on anything that you find unclear. To learn more about how to cite and use source material appropriately and for other writing support, see the U of T writing support website at <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca>. Consult the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters for a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations. For more information, please see <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/student-academic-integrity> and <http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca>.

Use of Generative AI Tools

The use of generative artificial intelligence tools or apps for assignments in this course, including tools like ChatGPT and other AI writing or coding assistants, is allowed in this course only for very specific purposes. Students may not use these tools to write or complete course assignments (e.g., Research Proposal Paper or Presentation, Discussion Leader/Article Presentation). However, these tools may be useful when gathering information across sources and assimilating it for understanding. Some assignments may require an AI use declaration which would include what tool(s) were used, how they were used, and how results from the AI were incorporated into your submitted work. If an assignment requires an AI use declaration, **you must complete it and submit it** by the assignment due date. Failure to submit the AI Use declaration with your assignment may result in a 5% penalty on the assignment.

Students may not copy or paraphrase from any generative AI applications for the purpose of completing assignments in this course. Representing as one's own idea, or expression of an idea, that was AI-generated may be considered an academic offense in this course. This course policy is designed to promote your learning and intellectual development and to help you reach course learning outcomes.

Use of Course Material

Keep in mind that lectures and lecture materials are the intellectual property of the instructor, and any slides and related materials should be respected thus. Students are free to use all course material for their own use, but are not permitted to share materials with others not enrolled in this course without my approval. Uploading course materials to the Internet or shared server is expressly prohibited. I do not want to discover that a student has put any of my materials into the public domain, has sold my materials, or has given my materials to a person or company that is using them to earn money. The University will support me in asserting and pursuing my rights, and my copyrights, in such matters.

Instructor Policy Statement

I intend to treat you with respect, to have empathy for your struggles (in and outside of this course), to assess your progress in a reasonable and thoughtful manner, and to offer you constructive feedback. I am available to discuss any concerns you have. I strongly encourage you to ask questions in class, book an office hour with me, and/or email me to discuss any concerns or questions. With all issues, I encourage you to contact me as early as possible so we can work together on a solution. You may email me at any time, and I will do my

best to respond within 2 business days. I will also do my best to refrain from sending out course announcements or emails on the weekends or on holidays.

Student Resources and Support

Guidance for Undergraduate Students in Psychology

The Department of Psychology recognizes that, as a student, you may experience disruptions to your learning that are out of your control, and that there may be circumstances when you need extra support. Accordingly, the Undergraduate Committee has provided a [helpful guide](#) to clarify your and your instructor's responsibilities when navigating these situations. This guide consolidates Arts & Science Policies for undergraduate students in one place for your convenience. As an instructor in the department, I will frequently consult with these recommendations when providing you with support, and I recommend that you also consult it to learn more about your rights and responsibilities before reaching out to me.

Accessibility Services (AS)

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have an ongoing disability issue or accommodation need, you should register with Accessibility Services (AS) at the beginning of the academic year by visiting <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as/new-registration>. Without registration, you will not be able to verify your situation with your instructors, and instructors will not be advised about your accommodation needs. AS will then assess your medical situation, develop an accommodation plan with you, and support you in requesting accommodation for your course work. Remember that the process of accommodation is private: AS will not share details of your condition with any instructor, and your instructors will not reveal that you are registered with AS.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

The University of Toronto is committed to equity, human rights, and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves, engaged with each other, and respect one another's differences. Cultivating such an environment is important in all courses, and especially so when discussing topics like intergroup relations, stigma, and discrimination. As your instructor, I aim to create a classroom environment that supports the learning and growth of all students. Neither I

nor the University of Toronto condones discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities.

Mental Health & Well-Being

Your mental health is important. Throughout university life, there are many experiences that can impact your mental health and well-being. As a University of Toronto student, you can access free mental health and wellbeing services at Health & Wellness (<https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/departments/health-wellness/>) such as same day counselling, brief counselling, medical care, skill-building workshops, and drop-in peer support. You can also meet with a Wellness Navigation Advisor who can connect you with other campus and community services and support.

Call the mental health clinic at 416-978-8030 ext. 5 to book an appointment or visit <https://uoft.me/mentalhealthcare> to learn about the services available to you.

You can also visit your College Registrar to learn about the resources and supports available: <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/college-registrars-offices>

If you're in distress, you can access immediate support:
<https://uoft.me/feelingdistressed>

Writing

As a student here at the University of Toronto, you are expected to write well. The university provides its students with several resources to help them achieve this. For more information on campus writing centres and writing courses, please visit <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/>.

English Language Resources

For anyone who would like to advance their understanding and command of English, there are many supports available at UofT:
<http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/advising/ell/resources-for-students>

Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change and adjustments. Students will be advised of all updates promptly on Quercus. This schedule is also posted on Quercus for your convenience. Readings will be posted on the Quercus schedule for each week. All readings are required unless otherwise indicated.

Week	Date	Topic	Assignments Due
1	1/6	Course Introduction Review syllabus, assignments, expectations	
2	1/13	History of mass media Ways of thinking about psychology and media	Response Paper #1 Sign up for Discussion Lead/Article Presentation By Tues, Jan 14
3	1/20	Media influences on behaviour	Response Paper #2
4	1/27	Message framing	Response Paper #3
5	2/3	Pre-trial publicity and legal decision-making	Response Paper #4
6	2/10	Fantasy-reality distinction	Response Paper #5
	2/17	READING WEEK – NO CLASS	
7	2/24	Celebrity, fame, and fandom	Response Paper #6 Research Proposal Topic Idea By Tues, Feb 25
8	3/3	Social identity and self-esteem	Response Paper #7
9	3/10	Social media and the internet	Response Paper #8
10	3/17	Presentations	Presentations Responses
11	3/24	Presentations	Presentations Responses
12	3/31	Presentations	Presentations Responses Final Research Proposal

All assignments are due at 11:59pm EST on their scheduled due date unless otherwise stated.