

## PSY428: Critical Psychology (Fall 2023)

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*Lectures:* Wednesday 1-4 pm

*Location:* SS1084

*Course Prerequisites:* PSY201 (or equivalent), PSY220

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### *Instructor*

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### *Teaching Assistant*

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### **Overview**

In his 2001 book *Return to Reason*, the philosopher Stephen Toulmin pointed to the intellectual cost of institutionalized or “disciplinary” training: “Problems begin when people forget what limits they accepted in mastering the systematic procedures of their disciplines. Once forgetfulness sets in, the ground is prepared for misunderstandings and cross-purposes: the selective attention called for in a disciplined activity is elevated to the status of being ‘the one and only right way’ of performing the tasks in question, and the possibility of approaching them from a different standpoint, or with different priorities, is ignored or, as we may say, ‘bracketed off.’” Indeed, the education/training of psychology undergraduate and graduate students increasingly emphasizes formal research methods without promoting the critical reflexivity needed to understand the assumptions, implications, and limitations of those methods. Students trained in this manner become adept at *doing* something called research, but ill-equipped or even motivated to understand the justification for, and broader significance of, what they are doing and, as it happens, not doing. The intention for this course is to help undergraduates develop a deeper understanding of psychological science and their participation in it.

Critical psychology begins with the recognition that taking responsibility for our science and what it becomes over time requires continuous interrogation of ourselves and our practices. This involves reflecting not only on our individual actions but also the institutional significance of psychology for our society and culture. Through select readings, lecture content, and class discussion, this course aims to bring the background and context of psychological research into view so that we better understand the choices implicit in our work. Only then can these choices be subject to critical questioning in relation to real or imagined alternatives. The goal is not to

steer students toward prescribed questions, sanctioned answers, or favoured ideological positions, but to help them develop the confidence, vision, and conceptual ability to ask penetrating questions that they never thought to ask before. How they then pursue those questions is up to them.

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## Lectures

**Students are expected to attend lectures in person and participate in class discussion**, which is a vital part of the social learning experience in this course. Lectures will **not** be recorded by the instructor. PowerPoint slides used in lectures will be posted on Quercus within a day following each lecture.

Please note that there are no prepared lecture notes for this course. **It is strongly recommended that you arrange a notes partnership with a fellow student as soon as possible.** You and your partner should turn to each other for notes from any missed lectures. As the overlap of lectures with readings will vary considerably across topics, you must complete all required readings **and** attend lectures to perform well in this course.

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## Evaluation

Evaluation is based on:

- **Two in-class tests (October 18 and December 6 from 1:10-3:50 pm).**
  - **The first test accounts for 32% of the course mark**
  - **The second test accounts for 24%. Note that the second test will address only those topics covered since the first test.**
- **A group in-class presentation (November 1).** The project accounts for 16% of the course mark.
- **A formal term paper (due by 1:10 pm on November 29).** The paper accounts for 28% of the grade.

## Tests

Both tests will be hand-written in class in standard U of T test booklets. Access to notes, readings, and electronic devices is **not** permitted during the tests. Both tests will consist of three questions requiring students to reflect on concepts covered in class prior to the test.

Students are given the fullest latitude to bring together, interpret, and integrate content from the readings and lectures in responding to each of the test questions. Course content should be used to justify and support the position taken on the issue and the claims made in that regard. Students will not be evaluated on their positions and claims per se, but on how effectively they support them. The focus of evaluation is on quality of argument, not on the presence or absence of a target piece of course material. Students are expected to “make a case” in answering each question and will be judged on how convincingly they do so.

Each test response will be evaluated holistically, as a unified argument. Quality will be assessed according to three equally weighted criteria. These are:

1. comprehensive inclusion of relevant content from readings and lectures
2. sound interpretation and effective integration of that content
3. clear articulation of a summary position based on (1) and (2)

According to this scheme, there are no categorically “right” or “wrong” responses, only better and worse arguments for various positions that might be taken. Few important and enduring questions in the study of mind, society, and culture can be approached otherwise.

The tests will be marked by the TA, who will provide brief evaluative comments on each test response. Any concerns or questions about individual marks should be taken up with the TA **within two weeks** after the marks are posted. Only if there is a well-founded allegation of bias/prejudice or obvious error of judgment should the instructor be approached about a specific mark assigned by the TA. In such cases, the instructor will evaluate the test response independently and decide on a final mark. This final mark may be lower than, higher than, or the same as the original mark and is not open to further appeals to the instructor.

Make-up tests will not be offered, with the exception noted at the end of the syllabus. Students who miss a test due to illness or other adversity beyond their control are advised to refer to the 'Specific Medical Circumstances' section of this syllabus, under Course Policies. Please get in touch with me and provide documentation outlined in the Specific Medical Circumstances section within one week of missing the test. Claims that illness or adversity prevented adequate preparation for the test will not suffice in most cases. Late petitions will not be considered.

In the case of exemption from the first test, the second test will be re-weighted to 56% of the course mark to maintain the contribution of testing to the overall grade. Similarly, in the case of exemption from the second test, the first test will be re-weighted to 56%. Unsuccessful petitions will result in a test mark of zero.

In the unlikely event that a student is granted exemption from **both** tests, an in-person make-up test worth 56% will be written so that the course mark does not depend only on the term paper and in-class presentation. This make-up test will be cumulative, addressing topics covered before **and** after the first test. The test will be scheduled to take place within **one week** of the date of the second test in a reserved seminar room in the Department of Psychology. Failure to write the cumulative make-up test will result in a mark of zero for the test component of the course.

### **Term paper**

A similar frame of evaluation applies to the term paper, which is to be a critical examination, or "critique," of any single, full-length article published in *American Psychologist*, *Psychological Review*, or *Psychological Bulletin* since 2013. Your critique will be judged holistically on its merit

as a carefully researched, well-conceived, and clearly presented argument. The extent to which empirical findings (the results of scientific studies) are cited should depend entirely on the kind of critique you decide to write. **Students are encouraged to seek approval of their initial plans for a critique from either the instructor or the TA through email or during office hours. Please do so by November 3rd to give yourself enough time to research and develop your ideas.** Although this approval is not a credited requirement, it is recommended.

A few additional pointers on writing a good term paper:

- begin reading and organizing information early; this is a *long-term* project, and the quality of your argument will reflect the time you devote to conceiving and developing it
- feel free to approach the TA or instructor if you need advice in developing your ideas
- outline your argument in capsulized form near the beginning of the paper so the reader has a map of where you intend to go
- state and defend any debatable assumptions that are crucial to your argument
- do not include material that is not directly pertinent to your central argument/do not digress
- present your argument as a logical and well-ordered progression of ideas
- argue in as clear and convincing a manner as possible
- avoid circular argument and other forms of bad reasoning

The term paper must conform to APA format (refer to *Publication Manual of the APA*, 7th ed.) and consist of 2,500-3,500 words of text excluding the title page, references, and any tables/figures/appendices. Do *not* include an abstract. We won't be counting your references. The number of works cited in this type of paper is not in itself an indicator of quality. Some arguments demand more extensive citation than others. If you spend sufficient time seriously researching the topic of your critique, you should have no reason to worry about how many references end up in your paper as you will be able to successfully lay out your argument regardless.

Term papers must be submitted before the deadline through Quercus. E-mailed papers will not be accepted. **Papers submitted late will be accepted with a 5%-per-day penalty.**

Unlike the tests, the paper is a long-term project requiring sustained effort over many weeks. Therefore, requests to submit late papers without penalty will in most cases be denied (note: this does not apply to students with accessibility accommodations). Please plan and work accordingly. Any concerns or questions about individual marks should be taken up with the TA **within two weeks** after the marks are posted.

## **Presentation**

The presentations will be prepared in groups of ~5 (depending on class size) and they will be 15 minutes long. In your presentations, you will be asked to do the following:

- Choose a topic in psychology

- Provide a general theoretical overview of your topic (ie. the way it is understood within the scientific community/by researchers and academics in psychology).
- Find an example of this topic being covered in popular discussion / on social media (eg. TikTok, Instagram, Twitter etc). This can be in the form of educational content (but do not use educational content by researchers or clinicians in psychology!), personal experience, or entertainment.
- Discuss the relation between the pop content and the conceptualization of the concept/topic in psychology. Do the understandings match? Are there differences? How are psychological concepts understood and applied by wider audiences? What are the assumptions? Are they shared by experts and lay audiences?

The presentations will be assigned a grade from 0-15 based on the following three equally weighted criteria:

1. Clear explanation of psychological concept and its relation to the chosen online content
2. Comprehensive discussion, including relevant course concepts
3. Organization and presentation

You are free to divide up the workload as preferred by you and your fellow group members. It is understood that not everyone is equally comfortable with public speaking, and you will not lose any marks if only some of your group members talk during the presentation (however, presentations where all members are actively involved in the speaking portion are also welcome).

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## Readings

**All readings can be easily accessed through the course modules.** Some of the readings may be challenging and require thoughtful consideration. Allow yourself sufficient time to read and think about the material. Reading should be done not to memorize incidental details or references, but to understand the main arguments, positions, and/or frameworks presented by the authors. Make notes accordingly. As you read, you should be asking yourself the following questions:

- What major questions, concerns, or issues are being addressed in this reading?
- What are the authors claiming about these?
- What is the logical, conceptual, or empirical basis of these claims?
- Do I agree or disagree with these claims? Why?
- How would I express my position in dialogue with others?

**The required readings must be completed *before* each lecture, which will be difficult to follow and participate in otherwise.** There are *two* required readings to be completed before each substantive lecture except the last on March 30. At times, an additional, *optional* reading is assigned as well. This reading is intended for those students who are especially interested in the topic and would like to explore it further, as well as those who want to excel in the course and prefer more content to draw from in supporting their positions on the term tests.

A helpful online resource for clarifying many of the concepts and ideas mentioned in the readings and elsewhere in the course is the [Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology](#).

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## Timeline

Date	Topic	Required readings
September 13	Introduction	
September 20	Foundations	Yanchar, S. C., Slife, B. D., & Warne, R. (2008). Critical thinking as disciplinary practice. <i>Review of General Psychology, 12</i> , 265-281. Teo, T. (2015). Critical psychology: A geography of intellectual engagement and resistance. <i>American Psychologist, 70</i> , 243-254.
September 27	Rhetoric of Psychology	Smyth, M. M. (2001). Fact making in psychology: The voice of the introductory textbook. <i>Theory &amp; Psychology, 11</i> , 609-636. Billig, M., & Marinho, C. (2015). Rhetoric and psychology: Ending the dominance of nouns. In J. Martin, J. Sugarman, & K. L. Slaney (Eds.), <i>The Wiley handbook of theoretical and philosophical psychology: Methods, approaches, and new directions for social sciences</i> (pp. 117-132). John Wiley & Sons. Optional video: David Huron's (2014) <i>The Rhetoric of Science</i>

October 4	Psychological Knowledge & Assumptions	Williams, R. N. (2005). The language and methods of science: Common assumptions and uncommon conclusions. In Life, B. D., Reber, J. S. & Richardson, F. C. (Eds), <i>Critical thinking about psychology: Hidden assumptions and possible alternatives</i> (pp. 235-250). American Psychological Association. Sugarman, J. (2009). Historical ontology and psychological description. <i>Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology</i> , 29, 5-15.
October 11	Crises, Past and Present	Wieser, M. (2020). The concept of crisis in the history of Western psychology. <i>Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology</i> . Wiggins, B. J., & Chrisopherson, C. D. (2019). The replication crisis in psychology: An overview for theoretical and philosophical psychology. <i>Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology</i> , 39, 202-217.
October 18	<b>TEST 1 (no lecture)</b>	
October 25	Whose Psychology?	Bizumic, B. (2018). <i>Ethnocentrism in Psychology</i> . In <i>Ethnocentrism: Integrated perspectives</i> . Routledge. (pp. 137-149) Jamieson, M. K., Govaart, G. H., & Pownall, M. (2023). Reflexivity in quantitative research: A rationale and beginner's guide. <i>Social and Personality Psychology Compass</i> , e12735.
November 1	<b>PRESENTATIONS</b>	
November 8	<i>Reading week (no lecture)</i>	

November 15	The Neuroscientific Turn	Schwartz, S. J., Lilienfeld, S. O., Meca, A., & Sauvigné, K. C. (2016). The role of neuroscience within psychology: A call for inclusiveness over exclusiveness. <i>American Psychologist</i> , 71, 52-70. Farah, M. J. (2018). Socioeconomic status and the brain: Prospects for neuroscience-informed policy. <i>Nature Reviews Neuroscience</i> , 19(June), 428-438.
November 22	Diagnosing Mental Illness	Graham, G. (2021). <i>The disordered mind</i> (3rd ed.). Routledge. (pp. 35-62) Roy, M., Rivest, M.-P., Namian, D., & Moreau, N. (2019). The critical reception of the <i>DSM-5</i> : Towards a typology of audiences. <i>Public Understanding of Science</i> , 28, 932-948.
November 29	From Psychology to Self-help <b>TERM PAPER DUE</b>	Nehring, D., Hendriks, E. C., Kerrigan, D., & Alvarado, E. (2016). <i>Self-help and society</i> . In: <i>Transnational popular psychology and the global self-help industry: The politics of social change</i> . Palgrave Macmillan. (pp. 17-29) Cabanas, E., & Illouz, E. (2019). <i>Happy selves on the market's shelves</i> . In: <i>Manufacturing happy citizens</i> . Polity Press. (pp. 111-145)
December 6	<b>TEST 2</b>	

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## Course Policies

**Plagiarism Detection.** Normally, students will be required to submit their papers 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 papers 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](#).

**Use of generative AI in course assignments.** The use of generative AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT, etc.) is permitted in this course for the following activities:

- Cutting down word count;



- Checking grammar and style; and
- Getting feedback on writing clarity.

The use of generative AI tools is **not** permitted in this course for the following activities:

- Writing a draft of a writing assignment;
- Writing entire sentences, paragraphs or papers to complete class assignments; or
- Crafting arguments for the final paper (trust me, you do not want to be using generative AI for this anyway as they tend to do a poor job).

You are responsible for the information you submit based on an AI query (for instance, that it does not violate intellectual property laws, or contain misinformation or unethical content). Your use of AI tools must be properly documented. If you do use AI tools at any point in the course (eg. to get feedback on writing style), please include a separate AI use statement along with your assignment where you go over what you used the tool for and what prompts you used.

**Writing.** To find resources aimed at helping you develop your writing skills, start by visiting [Writing at the University of Toronto](#). As mentioned in the previous section, you may also use generative AI for general style and grammar queries.

**Grading Policy.** Please note that all course marks are tentative until approved by the Department Chair and the Dean's office, and recorded by the Office of the Faculty Registrar. For more information on what grades mean at U of T, please see <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/general/grading-policy>.

**Penalties for Lateness.** Late thought papers will not be accepted unless otherwise arranged with the instructor due to justifying circumstances. Late term papers will be accepted with a 5%-per-day penalty.

**Email Policy.** Feel free to email the instructor or TA with questions or concerns. However, please check the syllabus before emailing, as you will find answers to many of your questions there. Please wait 48 hours before sending follow-up emails.

**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 cultural and religious traditions. For my part, I will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, examinations, 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 test) 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.

**Students with Disabilities or Accommodation Requirements.** Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have an acute or ongoing disability issue or accommodation need, please register with Accessibility Services (AS) at the beginning of the

academic year by visiting <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as/new-registration>. Without registration, your instructors will not be advised about your accommodation needs. AS will assess your 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 needs or condition with any instructor, and your instructors will not reveal that you are registered with AS.

**Academic Integrity.** 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 when writing assignments, collaborating with fellow students, and writing tests and exams. 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 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 [Writing at the University of Toronto](http://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>.

**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 <http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca>. For information on Absence Declaration Tool for A&S students, please see <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/absence>. Please note you may only submit the Absence Declaration form once per term. If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

**Digital Devices in Class.** Technology can support student learning, but it can also become a distraction. Research indicates that multi-tasking (texting or going online) during class time can have a negative impact on learning. Out of respect for your classmates, please refrain from displaying any material on a device which may be distracting or offensive to your fellow students. At the same time, I understand that there may be times when you need to monitor your phone/email or even just take a minute to check out during class. I trust you to make the right decisions for your learning and mental health.

I also believe that laptops/tablets are a resource with an important place in the modern university environment. The use of technological devices is allowed (and encouraged) for legitimate classroom purposes, such as taking notes, downloading

course information from Quercus, participating in interactive lecture components, looking up relevant information, or working on an assigned in-class exercise.

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## **Academic Resources**

**English Language Learners (ELL) Program:** <http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/advising/ell>

ELL offers a range of programs/workshops/resources to assist all Arts & Science students who wish to improve their English language skills (including reading, listening, speaking, and writing). Please visit their website for more information about these resources.

## **Other Resources**

Student Life Programs and Services (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/>)

Academic Success Services (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/asc>)

Counselling and Psychological Services (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc>)