

# **FYSP 087: Psychological Myth busters**

Fall Semester, 2012

MW 2:30-3:45

## **Dr. Joy E. Hanna**

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### **Course Description:**

People make use of common beliefs about human nature and behavior as we go about our daily lives, in order to make decisions, form judgments, interact with others, and understand ourselves. In this seminar we will be psychological mythbusters, exploring some common beliefs and investigating which of them have scientific merit and which appear to be false (or which need more study in order to know!). We will address the bases of our beliefs, including the wide variety of information sources that contribute to them, as well as the scientific means of evaluating our beliefs, mental processes proposed to explain the human behaviors involved, and the broader implications of popular beliefs on our society.

The primary goals of this course as a first year seminar are to:

- increase your awareness of a variety of commonly held beliefs about psychology;
- increase your awareness of the extent to which our personal and social biases can perpetuate myths about human nature and behavior;
- develop your ability to discover, access, and evaluate information from popular and academic sources (that is, develop your information literacy);
- increase your understanding of the scientific method as applied within psychological science;
- develop your ability to read critically, so that you can better evaluate information that is presented and make informed decisions in the future;
- develop your ability to communicate with others in both discussion and writing, in a variety of informal and more formal ways; and
- increase your comfort expressing your thoughts in the seminar setting.

### **Class Format and Requirements:**

#### Required Textbooks:

There are two required textbooks for this course. I will also be providing you with additional readings/links to readings on Blackboard.

- Lilienfeld, S.O., Lynn, S.J., Ruscio, J., & Beyerstein, B.L. (2010). *50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Stanovich, K.E. (2010). *How to Think Straight About Psychology: Ninth Edition*. Boston, Ma: Pearson.

#### Attendance and class participation:

Given that this class is a seminar, and has a discussion format, all students are expected to come to class having thoroughly read and thought about the readings so that you can contribute to our discussions effectively. I will do my best to create a comfortable, encouraging environment in which to explore our ideas, questions, and reactions, but in order to make the most of this class, you will also need to take individual responsibility for sharing your thoughts. It will be a lot more interesting for everyone if all of us are collaborators in the content of the discussions. If you suspect that you will have trouble speaking up in class, please come see me earlier rather than later - we can work on ways to help you feel better able to contribute to the discussion. Because they are so important, contributions to in-class discussion and activities counts significantly toward your grade.

### Reading Responses (Questions and Observations):

Generally speaking, each week (consisting of two class meetings) we will cover one set of readings, often within the scope of one topic. In order to facilitate your thinking about the material, and your readiness for class discussions, you will submit a reading response each week.

The response will consist of two parts:

#### 1) Questions

The first part of the response consists of submitting at least TWO questions that relate to the week's readings and/or to the topic more generally. We will use these questions during class to help prompt our discussion. The questions can be about the details of the text (for example, about a belief that was presented, a theory that was proposed, an experiment that was conducted, etc.), or they can be more general (something that came to mind as you were reading, etc.).

You must submit questions to me by Mondays at noon (we'll talk about how in class); however, the sooner you submit questions the more likely that I'll be able to facilitate their inclusion in our discussion.

#### 2) Observations

The second part of the response consists of a single written page that relates an experience of yours to the readings. Basically, you will describe and reflect on an everyday encounter with the psychological belief(s) for that week. You can "think out loud" about your experience (either a single experience, or your experience in general), you can relate it to a theory explained in the readings, you can question whether the readings apply to your experience, you can agree or criticize, you can bring up related ideas that the readings have prompted. Observed encounters can include something that a friend said to you, something you see or hear on tv, the radio, in a chatroom, during a movie or a play or a lecture, or something that you happen to read in a book or newspaper or magazine or online; it can be something from a long time ago, or from this week; it can directly or indirectly reflect the belief - anything in your experience goes!

Observations should be printed out and brought to class on Mondays. *\*\*Late responses/observations will not be accepted.\*\** You may skip one week's Questions and Observations without penalty.

### Short writing assignments:

At various points in the semester you will complete three additional writing assignments. These will include writing that follows the library and museum visits, as well as an exercise involving journal articles and/or other information sources. More details will be provided in class.

### Papers:

You will complete two papers for this class. Each paper will involve the opportunity to get feedback and submit revisions, and the first paper will contribute to the second one. Paper I (3-5 pages) will involve an initial investigation into a belief/myth of your choosing, including popular sources of information. The Final Paper (10-12 pages) will incorporate the first one, and will expand on it to include academic sources. More details will be given in class.

*\*\*Late short writing or paper submissions will be penalized the equivalent of half of a letter grade (that is, going from an A to an A-) for each day that they are late.\*\**

### Grading:

Class participation	20%
Questions (10)	10%
Observations (10)	10%
Short writing assignments (3)	30%
Paper I	10%
Final Paper (final project)	20% (and in-class presentations)

### Class Policies:

The Oberlin Honor Code applies to all work submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of this course. All written work and observations, *\*\*except when specifically indicated\*\**, must be the result of individual effort. Please feel free to ask me if you have any questions regarding the Honor Code, or see: <http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/2011-2012/11-Policies-Honor.pdf> The members of the Psychology Department strictly adhere to the College policy regarding the due date for written material. No written material will be accepted after the last class meeting (except for the final project).

Finally, all of us encounter difficulties during the semester, and this can be particularly true in your first college semester. Sometimes these difficulties cause us, despite our best intentions, to miss a deadline, or to forget to contact the professor to talk about alternate arrangements. Because of this, I prefer to give everyone the benefit of the doubt once - a "get out of jail free card" - if appropriate. So, if this happens to you, please email or come see me as soon as possible.

### Class Schedule:

This schedule is a first version, and is subject to change as we proceed. The dates for the library and museum visits will not change. The topics for the first half of the course are relatively set, but the second half of the course is more tentative. I will post updates to the syllabus on Blackboard, in particular to specify readings. Before each week/class I'll also post any additional readings (in .pdf format), as well as reading tips and questions to research or think about.

<b>Week 1 – 9/5</b> Introduction
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<b>Week 2 – 9/10</b> Memory & Learning: learning styles <b>9/12</b>
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Readings for Monday:

50 Great Myths: Introduction, Chapter 4  
How to Think Straight: Chapter 1

Due Monday: Questions & Observations #1

<b>Week 3 - 9/17</b> <b>Library visit</b> - Meet in the lobby of Mudd Library <b>9/19</b> Information Literacy; Memory & Learning continued
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Readings for Wednesday:

Marcus, G. (Ed.). (2006). *The Norton Psychology Reader*. New York, NY: Norton.  
\*pages 18-26: Chapter 2: Methods, and Huff, D., From *How to Lie with Statistics*.

Due Wednesday: Short writing assignment #1

<b>Week 4 - 9/24</b> Memory & The Law: false memories, false confessions, and polygraphs <b>9/26 NO CLASS</b>
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Readings for Monday:

50 Great Myths: Chapter 3, Chapter 6 #23, Chapter 10 #46  
How to Think Straight: Chapter 12  
Frenda, S.J., Nichols, R.M., & Loftus, E.F. (2011). Current issues and advances in misinformation research. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(1), 20-23.  
Iacono, W.G. (2008). Effective policing. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 35(10), 1295-1308.

Due Monday: Questions & Observations #2

**Week 5 - 10/1** Attention: multitasking, driving and talking on a cell phone/texting  
**10/3**

Readings for Monday:

How to Think Straight: Chapters 2 & 3

Strayer, D.L. & Drews, F.A. (2007). Cell-phone induced driver distraction. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16(3), 128-131.

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/persuade-me/201003/why-cell-phones-and-driving-arent-dangerous>

<http://www.iihs.org/news/rss/pr012910.html>

[http://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/cell\\_hands\\_free.html](http://www.consumeraffairs.com/news04/cell_hands_free.html)

Due Monday: Questions & Observations #3

**Week 6 - 10/8** Development: Einstein babies, violent kids, and emo teens  
**10/10**

Readings for Monday:

50 Great Myths: Chapter 2

How to Think Straight: Chapters 4 & 5

Bangerter, A. & Heath, C. (2004). The Mozart effect: Tracking the evolution of a scientific legend. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 43, 605-623.

Bushman, B.J. & Anderson, C.A. (2001). Media violence and the American public: Scientific fact versus media misinformation. *American Psychologist*, 56(6-7), 477-489.

Steinberg, L. (2007). Risk taking in adolescence: New perspectives from brain and behavioral science. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16(2), 55-59.

Due Monday: Questions & Observations #4

**Week 7 - 10/15** Mental Health: anger, stress, and happiness  
**10/17**

Readings for Monday:

50 Great Myths: Chapter 6 #24-26, Chapter 7 #30

How to Think Straight: Chapter 6

Bushman, B.J. (2002). Does venting anger feed or extinguish the flame? Catharsis, rumination, distraction, anger, and aggressive responding. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(6), 724-731.

Diener, E. & Seligman, M.E.P. (2002). Very happy people. *Psychological Science*, 13(1), 81-84.

Marcus, G. (Ed.). (2006). *The Norton Psychology Reader*. New York, NY: Norton.

\*pages 223-231: Sapolsky, R.M., From *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*.

Due Monday: Questions & Observations #5

Due Friday 10/19, 5pm: Paper 1, version 1.0

**NO CLASS - 10/22 October Break**  
**10/24**

**Week 8 - 10/29** Perception: beauty is in the eye of the beholder; construction/discovery of knowledge  
**10/31 Museum visit** - Meet at the Allen Memorial Art Museum

Readings for Monday:

How to Think Straight: Chapter 7

Beauty is in the Mind of the Beholder. *Observer*, 24(4), April 2011.

Eco, U. (Ed.); Translator: McEwen, A. (2004). *History of Beauty*. Rizzoli: New York. Pages 61-97.

Fink, B. & Penton-Voak, I. (2002). Evolutionary psychology of facial attractiveness. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 11(5), 154-158.

*Reading to be added.*

Due Monday: Questions & Observations #6

**Week 9 - 11/5** Perception: beauty & knowledge;  
**11/7** Perception: subliminal perception and heightened senses

Due Monday: Short Writing Assignment #2; Questions & Observations #7

**Week 10 - 11/12** Personality/Individual Differences: opposites attract; men from mars/women from venus  
**11/14**

Due Monday: Questions & Observations #8

**Week 11 - 11/19 Paper appointments**  
**11/21 Paper appointments**

**Week 12 - 11/26** Neuroscience: using 10% of our brains, right/left brained, images of brain activity  
**11/28**

Due Monday: Questions & Observations #9

**Week 13 - 12/3** Language and Thought: Linguistic determinism, and the decline of English  
**12/5**

Due Monday: Questions & Observations #10

**Week 14 - 12/10** Final Discussion/Presentations/Wrap-up  
**12/12** Final Discussion/Presentations/Wrap-up

DUE Friday, 12/21, 4:00 pm (end of final exam period): Final Project, final version