



# ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY

## PSYCHOLOGY - 214

### COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

This course is a survey of the field of adult psychopathology. We will consider the clinical characteristics of the major mental disorders, the leading theories advanced to account for these conditions, and some of the empirical research that has shaped our current understanding of them. Our approach to the subject matter will be scientific and heavily influenced by neuroscience, but we will also encounter some of the clinical, philosophical, and ethical controversies that pervade this field of study. My primary goals are: a) to increase your knowledge about mental disorders; b) to increase your understanding of the scientific method as it relates to the study of abnormal behavior; and c) to foster in you an appreciation of the complexity of human behavior and of the challenges we face in attempting to understand it. I hope that the course meets these goals and stimulates your interest in this area.

### AL PORTERFIELD

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### REQUIRED MATERIALS

**Textbook.** Oltmanns, T. & Emery, R. *Abnormal Psychology (7/e)*. Boston MA: Pearson, 2012.

**Blackboard course website.** This site contains, among other things, a short list of required readings, along with PDFs of the readings themselves; and a day-by-day course calendar. This calendar is subject to change, but I will do my best to keep it up-to-date. Please familiarize yourself with the *Blackboard* site and monitor it closely.

### COURSE CONTENT

**Sources of information.** You will be exposed to three sources of information: a) lectures; b) textbook; and, c) a small amount of supplemental required reading. Although these information sources overlap, they are substantially distinct. Mastery of the content of this course requires that you master all three sources. I do not believe that Oberlin students need to have reading assignments spoon-fed to them in wholly-redundant lectures. Accordingly, I will rarely duplicate in lectures the material that is in your text. Likewise, I may not discuss this or that supplementary reading in class. I recognize, however, that reading assignments sometimes require clarification or elaboration, and I hope that you will seek me out when you require such assistance. I am *always* willing to speak with you outside the classroom about *any* aspect of the course content.

**What won't be covered.** The field of psychopathology is vast; and it is undergoing explosive growth, especially in the domain of biological psychiatry. It is impossible to cover everything in a one-semester course, and I always struggle with the tradeoff between depth and breadth of coverage. There are several important respects in which my efforts to increase depth will reduce breadth.

First, I will focus primarily on adult psychopathology. You will do some reading on child psychopathology, and from time to time I will discuss childhood antecedents of adult conditions. But that's it. Interested students might wish to take *Developmental Psychology* (PSYC-216), which includes a section on childhood psychopathology or pursue an independent study to learn more about childhood disorders.

Second, I will limit my lectures to what traditionally were referred to as *functional* (as opposed to *organic*) mental disorders. The contemporary recognition that there are biological contributions to *all* mental disorders renders the functional-organic distinction anachronistic—but we can still draw a fuzzy distinction between mental disorders that arise from patent central nervous system insult, substance-induced intoxication, or disease, and those for which the pathophysiology is less distinct, less specific, or even wholly unknown. Accordingly, I will have little to say about Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, mental retardation, and so forth, although you will gain some familiarity with these conditions from your textbook.

Third, I will not discuss psychotherapy to any significant degree. This is not because I think psychotherapy is unhelpful or unimportant (which I do not), but because I don't think that the study of psychotherapeutic techniques has done much to advance our scientific understanding of the disorders to which they are applied (with a few noteworthy exceptions). I *will* devote a fair amount of time to drug therapy for the converse reason: The mechanisms by which drugs exert their effects are often understood in considerable detail, and that understanding has contributed crucially to many of our current models of mental disorders. I recommend taking *Seminar in Psychotherapy* (PSYC-470) to gain a deeper appreciation of the primary theories and approaches in this domain.

Finally, there are many other worthy topics within the domain of psychopathology that I simply will not have time to cover in lecture. These included sexual dysfunctions and disorders, substance use disorders, eating disorders, and most of the personality disorders. If I cover all of those areas, I can guarantee a course that is topically a mile wide and conceptually an inch deep. I don't see the point. Again, the textbook will familiarize you with the disorders I don't cover, and I would be

happy to discuss them with you outside of class. I regret having to omit anything of importance; but omit them I must in order to present core topics—in particular, the anxiety, mood, and psychotic disorders—in something closer to the depth that they deserve.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Textbook quizzes.** You will complete five open-book, online quizzes, each consisting of multiple-choice questions drawn exclusively from your textbook. Each of these quizzes will cover 3-4 textbook chapters and will expire at 10 PM local time on the dates indicated in the table on the right. Quizzes will be posted on our *Blackboard* site in the *Exams & Quizzes* section and will be available for at least 14 days before their designated due dates, at which time they will be removed. Note that you will be quizzed on every textbook chapter except 17, which means that you will be responsible for a number of topics that will not be covered explicitly in lecture.

Text Quiz	Chapters covered	Due by 10 PM on
1	1 - 4	18-Sep
2	6 - 8	9-Oct
3	5, 9 - 11	30-Oct
4	12 - 14	20-Nov
5	15, 16, 18	11-Dec

Although these quizzes will be open-book, they must be taken without any other sources of help (e.g., classmates, Google, etc.) They will also be strictly timed, and you will lose 1 point for each minute you exceed the time limit. I do not advise taking these quizzes without having studied the designated chapters first.

**Exams.** You will complete three in-class unit examinations which will cover only lecture material and any associated supplemental readings (indicated on the *Blackboard* site). The topics covered and probable dates for each of the exams are listed in the table on the right. The third exam will be administered during our designated final exam period. Although none of these exams will be explicitly cumulative, I may ask you to relate previously-covered material to current concepts in an exam question.

EXAMS: TOPICS and ANTICIPATED DATES		
1	What is Mental Disorder through Etiological Concepts	Sep 24th
2	Anxiety Disorders through Dissociative Disorders	Nov 5th
3	Depressive Disorders through Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders	Dec 19th (9-11 AM)

## GRADING

For each exam, the top score in the class will become the “100% mark” against which all other scores will be scaled. So, if the class leader on a 100-point exam obtains a raw score of 91, 91 will become 100% and all other exams will be converted to adjusted percentages relative to that mark (e.g., a score of 85 will be recorded as 93.4%). Together, the three exams will make up 72% of your final grade, and the five quizzes will make up the remaining 28%. I will assign course grades according to the cutoffs shown in the table below. Note that for the P/NP grading option, a final tally of at least 65% (C-) is necessary to pass the course.

98 = A+	88 = B+	75 = C+	55 = D / NP
95 = A	84 = B	70 = C	< 55 = F / NP
92 = A-	80 = B-	65 = C-	

## HONOR CODE POLICY

The *Oberlin Honor Code* will apply to all examinations and quizzes taken in this course. In addition to the *Honor Code's* basic assumption that all work submitted is the sole and original product of the individual student, a special stipulation for this course is that you may not use old *Abnormal Psychology* exams as study aids, nor may you make your own exams or quizzes available to students who might take this course in the future. Should you violate the *Honor Code* for this course, you will fail (i.e., F or NP, as appropriate) the course—retroactively, if necessary—in addition to suffering whatever penalty the Student Honor Committee deems appropriate. If you have any questions about the *Oberlin Honor Code* as it pertains to this course, I'd be happy to answer them. Further information about Oberlin's Honor System can be found under *Course Documents* on our *Blackboard* site.

## MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

1. It is your responsibility to monitor *Blackboard* for developments relevant to this course.
2. If I need to get in touch with you, I will do so through the email address listed on *Blackboard*, which is, by default, your *oberlin.edu* address. If you rely on another email account, set your OC Mail to forward incoming messages to that account.
3. Quiz due dates will be extended only for personal emergencies or significant illnesses.
4. Our final exam time is established by the Registrar and cannot be rescheduled without written approval from the Dean of Studies, Kathryn Stuart.
5. Students with special needs (e.g., learning disabilities, vision or hearing problems, etc.) should introduce themselves to me immediately so that we can discuss any special arrangements that might be necessary for lectures, quizzes, and examinations. I will accommodate any reasonable request.
6. While I hope to adhere to the course plan described herein, I reserve the right to make changes (e.g., changing exam dates, reading assignments, etc.) as the semester progresses. If and when I make a change, I will do my best to minimize any adverse impact on you.
7. If you are having trouble with any aspect of the class, please come see me—sooner, rather than later. I may not be able to help, but you never know; and I am certainly willing to try.