

**PSYC 680/PSYC 504: Social Stigma**

**Spring 2009  
W 1:00-3:30pm**

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## **COURSE OVERVIEW**

This course is designed to be an intensive study in the psychology of social stigma. Stigma occurs when a person is labeled, devalued, and treated negatively because of the label. In the present course, we will primarily focus on the experience of stigma from the perspective of those who are stigmatized. We will cover such topics as the dimensions of stigma, factors that influence the perception of discrimination, and the consequences of stigma for self-esteem, health, academics, and interpersonal interactions.

Each week you will be assigned 4 readings, most of which will be scientific papers that are published in academic journals. Each week I will expect you to come to class prepared to discuss the week's readings.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- Define social stigma.
- Identify important dimensions of stigma.
- Understand the impact of stigma on outcomes such as self-esteem, health, and academic performance.
- Understand the consequences of confronting and failing to confront prejudice and discrimination.
- Identify when stigma will lead to over-compensation and when it will lead to disengagement.
- Develop an understanding of how stigma influences social interactions.

## **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

- Students will demonstrate familiarity with the major psychological concepts in the social stigma literature.
- Students will demonstrate familiarity with empirical findings such as the relationship between social stigma and self-esteem and the consequences of stigma for physical health.
- Students will understand basic research methods in the social stigma literature including an understanding of research design issues, and interpretation of findings.
- Students will use critical thinking to evaluate the merits of stigma research. Critical thinking includes evaluation of credible sources, developing arguments based upon empirical research and theory, evaluating and proposing improvements to research, and recognizing cultural bias.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION**

You need to come to each class period prepared to discuss the day's readings. Most of the course readings are available on PsycInfo. You are responsible for downloading and printing your own

copies of the readings. Because the course is a seminar format, I expect each student to contribute to our weekly discussions. Also, it is really important that you show up to class on time. If you are late to class (even a couple minutes) you will not receive participation points for the day.

*Article Critiques.* At the beginning of each class period, you will be expected to turn in an article critique. This paper should analyze and critique the week's reading assignments. Being able to critically review research is an important aspect of scientific enterprise. Students who pursue careers in psychology and allied fields ultimately will be reviewing works-in-progress (e.g., manuscript submissions; conference proposals), but practicing on published work is a good starting point insofar as published pieces are not perfect. In addition, article critiques ideally facilitate appreciation for how empirical research is conducted, and encourage careful consideration of how theory informs methods of data collection and analysis. Article critiques also are intended to enhance discussion quality, by encouraging critical thinking about readings prior to class. Given that article critiques contribute significantly to the organization of the discussion, **late reviews will not be accepted whether or not you attend the class meeting.** The best 12 of 13 possible article critiques will be used to compute your grade, so you can afford to miss writing one critique.

Here are a few points to think about when writing your critiques:

1. Focus on theory. Draw upon your experience in social psychology and related fields to consider the theoretical rationale for the papers. Consider the following types of questions: Are the theories outlined well? Do they contradict or support theoretical work that is not cited? Are the articles old wine in new skins? Are they a minor test of a theory, or are they an important new contribution? Do the methods provide a compelling test of the theory? Are there artifacts and fatal flaws that slipped through the cracks, and how well do these features interfere with valid conclusions about the theories? Are the chosen analyses the best or most appropriate way to test the theory? What specifically is praiseworthy or problematic about the articles, and **why**?
2. A mere summary of the articles is not a critique. You may include a 2 sentence summary to demonstrate that you understand the thrust of each paper, but that is not a critique.
3. A thorough review typically requires at least 1 page single-spaced commentary. Please do not make your article critiques longer than 2 pages single-spaced. Learning to be concise is an important skill to develop.

*Class participation.* Class meetings will focus primarily upon discussion of the empirical articles. In order to start of the discussion of each of the articles, each week there will be four people assigned to be the "summarizer" for the four articles (i.e., one summarizer for each article). The summarizer's job will be to get the discussion going by describe the theory and hypotheses for their assigned paper to the class. The summarizer will also give a brief overview of the methods and key findings. In addition, there will also be four people each week that are assigned to be the "evaluator" for each of the four articles (i.e., one evaluator for each of the articles). The evaluator's job will be to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the article. Students will be assigned to be a "summarizer" or an "evaluator" on a rotating basis. Students who are not assigned to be a summarizer or an evaluator will still be expected to make