

# COU 655 Social and Cultural Context and Systems

(3 Hours)

Professor: Gerry Allen

**Course Description.** This is an applied course in the theoretical perspectives of social psychology especially geared to graduate counseling majors. *Social Psychology* can be defined as a discipline that uses scientific methods to "understand and explain how the thought, feeling, and behavior of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others" (Allport, 1985: 3). This course examines the effect of social influence on the development of human behavior. Attitude formation, group behavior, cultural subgroups, and general systems theory are addressed. Additional topics include studies in the relationships between individual and social spheres with attention to such issues as conformity, role patterning, leadership, persuasion, self-justification, aggression, prejudice, intimacy and attraction, and the influence of social and cultural systems and context on patterns of relationship development. Course study concerns social interaction in situations of (1) social influences on individuals, (2) dyads or face-to-face groups, and (3) larger social systems. Special attention is given to the manner in which social roles and system expectations are relevant to counseling practice. Concepts, theories, data, research methods, and applications of varied substantive topics are examined. Critical thinking, writing, and the sharing of experiential knowledge by students are stressed.

This course is a refreshingly different approach to the traditional study of social psychology. The goal is for the course to be a highly engaging experience connecting course material to students' everyday lives and to their practice of counseling. The course integrates material showing the field's relevance to human problems and incorporates motivation, social evolution, and culture, not as after-thoughts, but as intrinsic features of the human condition. The course focuses on five core social motives: Belonging, Understanding, Controlling, Enhancing Self, and Trusting. We look at the concept of adaptation from a social and cultural context approach that is progressive, responsible, and complete. Within this framework, we integrate culture throughout, providing a realistic sense of how social psychology operates in an increasingly multi-cultural world, weaving issues of gender and ethnicity into the understanding of human behavior in most contexts and systems.

As a requirement of the course, students will make presentations on several reading selections of enduring intellectual value--classic articles, book excerpts, and research studies--that have shaped the study of social psychology and our contemporary understanding of it. These selections, written by some of the greatest thinkers in social psychology, are organized topically around major areas of study within social psychology: the social psychological approach; social cognitive processes; attitudes; social interaction and relationships; social influence and group processes; helping and aggression; and applications of social psychology. Students will critique the presentations and note their reflections in a journal each class session. This is to promote an understanding of social psychology and help the class think about how context, social and cultural, and systems may affect human behavior. Students will additionally prepare a term paper that applies social psychological theory and concepts to real life phenomena.

**Course Goals.** This course is designed to be a challenging academic experience. The goal is for the course participant to grow as a result of this scholarly pursuit by gaining a better understanding of "self" and the others in one's life. In this regard, the course can help the participant obtain an understanding of the concepts of social psychology and be able to relate this understanding to real life situations, social interactions, and counseling practice. Also important is for participants to become more proficient

communicators, both in verbal and written communicative skills, and to gain confidence as a leader/facilitator working in a multifaceted, diverse group environment.

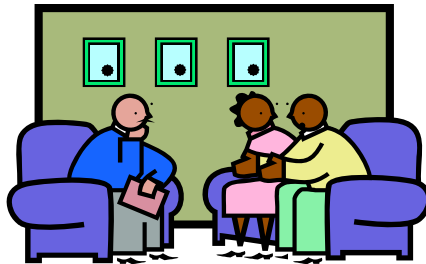
**Evaluation of Learning Objectives.** Course participants will be evaluated to determine whether or not the learning objectives are achieved. Grading will encompass class attendance; the oral presentations; participation in class discussion, critiques, the degree of preparedness for each class session; quality and depth of the course journal in terms of content, concept or theory development, insights and reflections, and the application of theory and concepts (learning objectives) in a term paper. In total, these means of evaluations address all stated course learning objectives. Preparation for each class session is essential if these objectives are to be met. In this regard, staying current in the assigned readings is very important.

**Course Learning Objectives.** Through intellectual dialogue and critical evaluation of course materials and other sources of information, at the course conclusion, each participant should:

1. understand the definition of social psychology, and comprehend how social psychology bridges the gap between sociology and psychology;
2. understand the core concerns and important theoretical perspectives in social psychology;
3. comprehend social psychology as a science, major research methods used by social psychologists and associated ethical issues;
4. understand and be able to apply the critical thinking perspective to the evaluation of social psychological concepts and theory;
5. understand the social psychological concept of socialization and related components and issues; such as self, self-schema, self-image, self-concept, self-esteem, and social identity;
6. understand the social psychological concepts of social perception, social construct or *lifeworld*, impression formation, and attribution;
7. understand the social psychological concept of attitude, to include development, maintenance, and change relating to attitudes, and the various methods used to measure attitudes;
8. comprehend symbolic communication and language from a social psychological perspective;
9. understand the social psychological concepts of social influence and persuasion;
10. understand the social psychological concepts of self-presentation and impression management;
11. comprehend the social psychological concepts of helping and altruism, aggression, and interpersonal attraction;
12. comprehend the social psychological concepts of group cohesion and conformity, group structure and interaction, group performance, and intergroup conflict;
13. understand the concept of adaptation from a social and cultural context approach;
14. understand the social psychological concepts of social structure and personality;
15. comprehend the social psychological concepts of deviant behavior and social reaction;
16. comprehend the social psychological concepts of collective behavior and social movements;
17. understand the five core social motives: Belonging, Understanding, Controlling, Enhancing Self, and Trusting; and
18. master the practical application of social psychological theory and concepts to everyday, real life counseling situations.

**Required Text:**

Fiske, Susan T. [Social Beings: A Core Motives Approach to Social Psychology](#). First Edition, Wiley, 2004.



**Course Outline:**

Reading Assignment: Chapter 1 Introduction: Situations, Motives, Adaptation, and Culture  
(Read prior to class) Chapter 2 Scientific Methods for Studying People in Interaction

**Session One.**

1. Introduction and explanation of the course and learning expectations.
  2. Discussion of course requirements and assignments.
  3. Introduction of course participants.
- LECTURE: Social Psychology Defined: Seeking a Better Understanding of Individual and Group Behavior Using Scientific Methods.

Topics Include: Definition of Social Psychology Four Core Concerns of Social Psychology  
 Five Social Motives: Belonging, Understanding, Controlling, Enhancing Self, and Trusting.  
 Theoretical Perspectives of Social Psychology  
 Allen Model of Social Psychology (Handout)  
 Basis of Social Psychology as a Science  
 Characteristics of Empirical Research  
 Research Methods  
 Ethics in Social Psychological Research

5. VIDEO: "The Killing Fields of America." Excerpt, CBS News, 1995.
6. Discussion concerning video.
7. Overview of oral presentations.
8. LEARNING OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED: 1, 2, 3, 4 and 17.

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Reading Assignment: Chapter 3 Ordinary Personology: Figuring Out Why People Do What They Do  
(Read prior to class) Chapter 4 Social Cognition: Making Sense of Others  
**Within the Individual**

**Session Two.**

1. Discuss role theory, reinforcement theory, cognitive theory, and symbolic interaction theory from a critical thinking perspective.
2. Discuss term paper requirements. (View example papers)(Handout)
3. LECTURE: Who are you and of what worth?

Topics Include: Socialization Agents Processes Outcomes  
 Secondary Socialization  
 Impression Formation  
 Attribution Theory  
 Bias and Error in Attribution

4. VIDEO: "The Power of the Situation." *Discovering Psychology* Series, Annenberg Foundation
5. Discussion of video (Self-image, self-worth, self-concept, reference groups)
6. ORAL PRESENTATIONS:

a. Role Theory

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Cognitive Theory

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

7. LEARNING OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED: 2, 3, 5, 17, and 18.

Reading Assignment: Chapter 5 The Self: Social to the Core  
(Read prior to class) Chapter 6 Attitudes and Persuasion: Changing Minds

**Session Three.**

1. LECTURE: The Social Self in the Everyday World ~ Understanding Attitude Change.

- Topics Include:
- Schemas
  - Attitude Formation
  - Cognitive Dissonance
  - Balance Theory
  - Emergence and Source of Self
  - Self-Schema, Self-Image, Self-Concept, Self-Worth, and Self-Esteem (Handout)
  - Attitude Change Through Methods of Persuasion
  - Threats and Promises
  - Obedience to Authority
  - Social Power    Compliance    Obedience
  - Conformity Language and Verbal Communication
  - Nonverbal Communication
  - Social Structure and Communication
  - Self-Presentation
  - Impression Management
  - Socialization    Cultural Message    Peer Pressure
  - Gender Stereotypes
  - Gender-Based Evaluation Bias

2. VIDEO: "Consuming Images." PBS, Bill Moyers, 1990.  
"The Gender Gap."

3. Discussion of video.

4. Discuss social influence and persuasion.  
a. Communication-Persuasion Paradigm  
b. Obedience to authority

5. ORAL PRESENTATIONS:

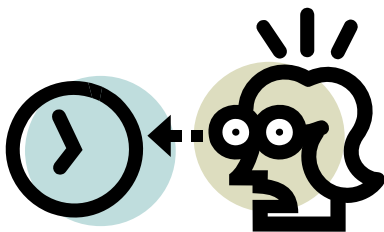
a. Reinforcement Theory

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Symbolic Interaction Theory

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

6. LEARNING OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 17.



Reading Assignment:  
(Read prior to class)

Chapter 7. Attraction: Initiating Romance, Friendship, and Other Relationships  
Chapter 8. Close Relationships: Passion, Interdependence, Commitment, and Intimacy  
**Between People: Dyads**

**Session Four.**

1. LECTURE: Relax and Meet Shirley Valentine.

Topics Include: Interpersonal Attraction, Love, and Intimacy  
Physical Attraction  
Matching Hypotheses  
Homogeneity of Norms  
Proximity  
Same Sex Attraction  
Components of the Life Course  
Influences on Life Progression  
Stages in the Life Course: Age and Sex Roles  
“The Natural Order”  
Historical Variations  
Socialization Cultural Message Peer Pressure  
Gender Stereotypes  
Gender-Based Evaluation Bias

2. Discuss symbolic communication and language.

3. VIDEO: "Shirley Valentine."

4. Discuss video.

5. ORAL PRESENTATIONS:

a. Comparison of Perspectives

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Comparison of Perspectives

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

6. LEARNING OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 17 and 18.



Reading Assignment: Chapter 9. Helping: Prosocial Behavior  
(Read prior to class)

**Session Five.**

1. LECTURE: Going my way?  
Topics Include: Motivation to Help Others  
Other Factors in Helping Others  
Status Attainment Individual Values Alienation Role Theory  
Social Influences on Health Symbolic Interaction Theory  
Alienation
2. VIDEO:
3. Discussion of video (e.g., Social Psychological theory, impression management, interpersonal attraction and relationships, attitudes [prejudice], self-esteem, and social perception and attribution, etc.).
4. ORAL PRESENTATIONS:
  - a. Article \_\_\_\_\_  
  
Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Article \_\_\_\_\_  
  
Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_
5. LEARNING OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, and 18.

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Reading Assignment: Chapter 10. Aggression: Antisocial Behavior  
(Read prior to class)

**Session Six.**

1. LECTURE: Having a hard time getting along.  
Topics Include: Aggression and the Motivation to Harm  
Other Aspects of Aggression  
Status Attainment Individual Values Alienation Role Theory  
Alienation
2. ORAL PRESENTATIONS:
  - a. Article \_\_\_\_\_  
  
Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Article \_\_\_\_\_  
  
Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_
3. VIDEO: "American Hollow." HBO, 2001.
4. Discussion of the video ~ aggression.
5. LEARNING OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED: 1 - 18.

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Reading Assignment: Chapter 11. Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination: Social Biases  
(Read prior to class) Chapter 12. Small Groups: Ongoing Interactions  
**Groups**

**Session Seven.**

1. LECTURE: Applying Social Psychological Concepts to the Real World.  
Topics Include: Development of Intergroup Conflict  
Persistence – Effects -- Resolution  
Group Cohesion            Group Goals            Group Norms  
Minority/Majority Influence  
Role Differentiation in Newly Formed Groups  
Status Characteristics and Social Interaction  
Equity and Reward Distribution  
Stability and Change in Authority  
Group Performance            Group Tasks            Leadership            Groupthink
2. Discussion relative to lecture and contemporary events.
3. VIDEO: "Stranger with a Camera." Appalshop, 2002.
4. Discussion --- Bringing the course together --- How many Soc Psy concepts are identified in the video?
5. ORAL PRESENTATIONS:

a. Article \_\_\_\_\_

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Article \_\_\_\_\_

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

6. LEARNING OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED: 1 - 18.

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Reading Assignment: Chapter 13. Conformity and Obedience: Doing What Others Do and Say  
(Read prior to class)

**Session Eight.**

1. LECTURE: Follow me...  
Topics Include: Obedience to Authority  
Social Power    Compliance    Obedience  
Conformity Language and Verbal Communication  
Nonverbal Communication  
Social Structure and Communication  
Self-Presentation  
Impression Management
2. VIDEO:
3. Discussion about video.
4. ORAL PRESENTATIONS:

a. Article \_\_\_\_\_

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Article \_\_\_\_\_

Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_

5. LEARNING OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED: 1 - 18.



Reading Assignment: Chapter 14. Conclusion  
(Read prior to class)

**Session Nine.**

1. LECTURE: Bringing It All Together.  
Topics Include: Norms Violations Reactions to Norms Violations Formal Social Controls  
Labeling and Secondary Deviance Crowds Collective Behavior Underlying Causes  
Precipitating Events to Collective Behavior Social Movement Development  
Social Movement Organizations The Consequences of Social Movements
2. Another look at “The Killing Fields of America.” Excerpt, CBS News, 1995.
3. Discussion on the application of Social Psychological theories and concepts to real situations, as reflected in the video. Does this knowledge help us to better understand and explain human behavior in everyday life? How can this be beneficial to you and to society in general, and what are some ethical considerations?
4. ORAL PRESENTATIONS:
  - a. Article \_\_\_\_\_  
  
Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Article \_\_\_\_\_  
  
Presenter: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Questions...answers?
6. Course evaluations.
7. LEARNING OBJECTIVES ADDRESSED: 1 through 18.

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All work (examinations and term paper) is due one week after the final class session.  
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**Course Requirements and Evaluations (Grading):**

1. Attendance and participation in classroom discussions. This includes being prepared to discuss assigned readings, handouts, films and videos, etc. Twenty-five points toward the final grade will be based on participation and attendance. After reading the syllabus, you can understand that attendance is important to take full advantage of all the learning opportunities of this course. If you know in advance that you must miss a class, speak to me so that I can give you assignments to make-up the absence. One absence can be made-up. Two absences will result in the loss of 10 points, plus will require make-up work. If you anticipate more than two absences, please enroll for the course at a time more convenient to your schedule.
2. Oral Presentation in class on the assigned theoretical perspective. The presentation is worth 15 points.
3. Journal. Students will maintain a course journal in which they will enter insights and reflections about readings from the text, presentations by other students, and class discussions. The journal should be integrative in that insights and reflections are tied together and relate to one’s counseling practice. For each Fiske chapter, generate brief questions or comments (maybe an insight or two), highlighting what’s interesting, convincing, unconvincing, confusing, or pointless, and what makes sense, and briefly why. For presentations, summarize what was presented in a few sentences and provide the same analysis as for the text chapters. In class, use your comments, summaries, and objections as a basis for your contributions (participation). The journal is worth 30 points and is due one week after the final class session.

4. Term Paper. A 10-12 page (excluding cover/title and reference pages), double-spaced term paper of acceptable college-level work. The paper will apply a social psychological theory or concept, or combination thereof, to a real world situation, helping to explain some aspect of human behavior. A handout will be distributed the second class session, which will serve as a sample paper. Other example papers will additionally be made available. The term paper is worth 30 points and is due one week after the final class session.

**Grading Scale:**

100-97=A+  
96-94=A  
93-90=A-  
89-87=B+  
86-84=B  
83-80=B-  
79-77=C+  
76-74=C  
73-70=C-  
60-67=D

**Possible Points:**

Journal	30 points
Oral Presentation	15 points
Term Paper	30 points
Attendance/ Participation	<u>25 points</u>
Total Possible Points	100

5. Academic Integrity Policy. The Doane College Academic Integrity Policy will be adhered to in this class. All projects and written materials will represent your own work. The use of other's ideas and words shall be properly cited. Please ask if you are unsure as to how or what a proper citation of a source is.
6. Critical Thinking. Remember, in seeking the elusive truth, we have two basic questions to ask:

*How do you know?...What does it mean?*

I hope that you will enjoy this learning journey.

