

Psy 410F-B: The Social Psychology of Crises

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Hours: TBA

Class meets in 132 Benton Hall
Tuesdays and Thursdays
Meeting time: 2:00 – 3:15 p.m.

This class is CRN 62337, PSY 410F-B

Psy 410F-B on the World Wide Web: <http://www.users.muohio.edu/mconnar/psy410-crisis.html>

Required readings

- Course readings at the Oxford Copy Shop, 10 South Poplar, uptown Oxford, 523-3636.
- A book on your crisis topic.

Course overview

In the face of a crisis, everyday people are transformed... sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. An everyday person can jump into a freezing river to save a complete stranger who's drowning after an airplane crash, and that same person might, under different circumstances, shoot the same stranger because an authority figure demands it. Indeed, recent events (e.g., the terrorism attacks on September 11th, the Tsunami in Asia, the earthquake in Kashmir) and many historical crises as well (e.g., the Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima, China's Great Tangshan Earthquake) reveal an array of psychological outcomes for those in the middle of a crisis and for those watching from the outside. In this capstone seminar, we will explore many psychological issues revealed in such crises, using Hurricane Katrina as an on-going illustration. Students will pick a crisis of their own to analyze throughout the semester, exploring how social psychological processes account for extraordinary examples of human behavior. Students will be required to obtain text-based resources for their research (i.e., they cannot simply "wing it off the web"), and there will be considerable reading of research papers to learn what the scientific community has learned about the processes underlying crises. Although the focus of these events will be from a social psychological perspective, we will also derive important insights from other areas of psychology, including cognitive, personality, developmental, and clinical psychology. Hence, it is especially fitting for this course to be offered as a capstone class in psychology because although we will examine crises from a social psychological perspective, we draw upon other areas of psychology as well.

This course has several goals...

- First and foremost, students should develop an in-depth, integrative understanding of how approaching crises from a scientific perspective improves our understanding of human behavior in extraordinary situations.
- Second, students should be able to apply relevant theory and research to better understand their own behavior and those in the world around them when facing unexpected and extreme circumstances.
- Third, students will have an opportunity to develop an in-depth understanding of an important real-world event of their choosing. They should not only develop an understanding of the psychological issues involved in this event, but also acquire an appreciation of its cultural, social, political, and economic dimensions.
- Also, students should learn how theory helps to frame issues associated with crises and how research findings that examine crises speak to psychological theory, building bridges among different areas of psychology.
- Lastly, this course should help students identify and understand various psychological processes that affect human behavior in the real world that do not reach the threshold of "a crisis." That is, many of the elements of human behavior that we will see this semester play out, on a much smaller scale, in everyday life. These insights should help students better understand the events they see in the news, with their friends, in their families, and within their communities.

Selecting a crisis to analyze

Each student must select a crisis to analyze throughout the course of the semester. Each student must select a unique crisis (i.e., no duplicates among students are allowed). Once students select their crisis topic, they must stick with it for the entire semester. For an event to constitute “a crisis,” it must be an unforeseen (by most people), life-altering event that significantly disrupted everyday life physically, psychologically, and culturally for those involved. The crisis can be natural (e.g., earthquake) or human-caused (e.g., genocide), and it need not be associated with a large number of deaths or injuries (though many probably will). It may have occurred in seconds or it may have unfolded over many years. It must be a historical event that is scientifically documented, and one for which you can find adequate information (including a book or other textual treatment of the event). Students must choose their event on the second day of class. All students who come to class with a crisis in mind will get to pick first (picking order will be determined by a lottery). For those who come to class without a crisis in mind, a list will be provided of candidates from which they can choose from after the first group picks (once again, the order of choosing will be determined by a lottery). Once a crisis is picked, it is unavailable to all other students (i.e., first-come, first-served). Throughout the semester, students will author five different analyses that span the topics in the syllabus; thus, picking a crisis that reveals many themes (e.g., illusions of control, stereotyping, conformity, volunteering) will provide students with greater flexibility in completing the assignments. Because Hurricane Katrina will be used as an on-going example in class, it is an unavailable topic.

Grades

Qty.	Item	Points each	Total Points	Percent
2	Exams	200	400	33%
5	Analysis reports on your crisis topic	50	250	21%
1	Final oral presentation on your topic	100	100	8%
1	Show your book	50	50	4%
10	Reading quizzes	20	200	17%
20	Class participation and attendance	10	200	17%
Totals			1200	100%

Final grades will be determined by your total points accumulated during the semester:

Points	Percent	Grade
1110 - 1200	93% - 100%	A
1074 - 1109	90% - 92%	A-
1038 - 1073	87% - 89%	B+
990 - 1037	83% - 86%	B
954 - 989	80% - 82%	B-
918 - 953	77% - 79%	C+
870 - 917	73% - 76%	C
834 - 869	70% - 72%	C-
798 - 833	67% - 69%	D+
750 - 797	63% - 66%	D
714 - 749	60% - 62%	D-
0 - 713	0% - 59%	F

Final grades

The instructor reserves the right to adjust the grading scale. If modifications occur, such changes will only make it easier for you to get a better grade (i.e., the scale will never be adjusted against you). However, it would be extremely unwise to anticipate that an adjustment will occur. Final grades will be based on the final number of points earned as applied to the above grading scale, no exceptions. There is no end-of-semester negotiation period where students plea and barter for a better grade in the class. If students are dissatisfied with their performance in the class, they should discuss their situation with the instructor early in the term — don't wait until it's too late.

Exams

Two exams (essay and short answer) will be administered during the semester. Each exam will only cover the material presented since the previous exam (i.e., they are not cumulative). Also, there is no final exam. The exams will focus primarily on the readings, course discussions, and course lectures. Although the exam material will primarily reflect what is covered in class, material that is assigned but not discussed in class is fair game. However, exams will never assess trivial aspects of the readings. The primary purpose of the exams is to assess how well students are learning and integrating the readings and class discussions. Their focus is on research findings and theories more so than on applications or crisis topics.

Analyzing your own crisis

During the semester, each student will maintain an on-going analysis of a crisis. These projects are individual projects (i.e., they are not group projects), and they must be conducted individually. Each student will select a crisis topic and consider the implications of course-related materials (e.g., readings, lectures) for understanding its psychological dimensions throughout the semester. At five different points during the semester, students will author an analysis report (that does not exceed a single side of a regular sheet of paper) to explain how material from the current unit explains important elements of their crisis topic. The purpose of these analysis reports is to provide students with an opportunity to apply theory and findings from the course to a meaningful and important topic. The instructor must approve the analysis topic by the end of class on Thursday, January 12, and the instructor reserves the right to determine that a particular topic is unsuitable for the class.

Each analysis report will integrate material from the current unit of study to explain important aspects of the crisis topic. The format for the report will be a single-sided, regular sheet of paper. Two copies will be submitted by the student: one to the instructor for grading and a second to the class bulletin board, located outside 104 Benton Hall. During the last week of the semester, each student will present a short (approximately 6-8 minute) oral presentation about their crisis topic, how class material related to it, and explain what central aspects of their crisis were not captured by class content. Finally, to ensure that students acquire "more than the web" knowledge of their crisis topic, they will need to bring one book on their topic to class (by February 2). More details regarding the analysis reports and the oral presentations will be provided later in the semester.

Quizzes

During the course of the semester, short pop quizzes (10 total) on assigned readings will be administered to reward students for keeping up with their readings. They will not be difficult. If students do their reading, this will be the easiest 17% of the grade. They will be administered at the very beginning of class. If students are late to class or are sick, they cannot make them up (even with a documented excuse).

Class participation

Class participation and attendance will be assessed for each class. Missing class will cost students 10 points per day (even if the absence is excused). Students who habitually say nothing will lose points even if they attend class (they will receive a warning from the instructor to speak up). Because much of this class is discussion oriented, participating is essential.

Class policies

Academic integrity: Any act of academic dishonesty (including, but not limited to, lying, cheating, plagiarism) will not be tolerated and will be punished to the fullest extent in accordance with Miami University policy on academic misconduct (see Sections 01.501-01.507 of Undergraduate Academic Regulations, 2005-2006 Student Handbook). Any evidence of academic misconduct by a group of students will be considered academic misconduct by all parties involved.

Assignments: Assignment due dates are posted in the syllabus, and they are due at the end of the regularly-scheduled class period (i.e., an assignment is late if handed in later in the day after class). In essence, this syllabus serves as a contract between the instructor and students. The instructor reserves the right to alter the syllabus at any time as warranted. However, the instructor will make such revisions at least one week ahead of a particular due date if it entails making assignments due at an earlier date. Any alterations will be announced in class. Although such arrangements will be communicated in advance, it is the student's responsibility to attend to these announcements. Students who do not attend class assume the responsibility for missing alterations to the course.

Special considerations: In situations where special and documented circumstances require that a student not take an exam during a scheduled time (e.g., arrangements for disabled students, being a member of an athletic team that has an official obligation during class time, religious observance), special arrangements can be made to accommodate such needs. However, students in these situations must make these arrangements with the instructor at the beginning of the semester and provide official documentation regarding these circumstances.

Course notes: Attending class and taking notes are each student's responsibility. The instructor will lend out notes under any circumstances. If students miss a class, they should ask classmates to borrow their notes.

Classroom conduct: While in the classroom, people are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful and civil manner. It is quite all right (and downright encouraged) for people to express their opinions and beliefs in an impassioned fashion. It is quite another thing, however, to be disrespectful or rude to students or to the instructor. It is fine to disagree with others, and it is okay to express non-PC (politically correct) views. However, bigotry will not go unchallenged and disrespect will not be accepted. In class, listen to others, participate, and be involved. If you want to read the paper, talk to friends, or sleep — stay at home. In the same vein, turn off your cell phone, silence your pager, and leave your toys in your bookbag.

Make-ups: There are no make-ups if you miss an exam or a report due date because of an unexcused absence. An unexcused absence occurs when a student (1) did not obtain prior permission from the instructor concerning the absence or (2) did not provide documented evidence justifying the absence. Documented evidence can be one of three things: (1) a signed note from a physician stating that you were sick and unable to attend class, (2) a letter from a funeral home or clergy on their letterhead indicating that you attended a memorial service, or (3) a letter from the Dean. There are no exceptions to this policy. There are absolutely no make-ups for the following assignments: quizzes, class participation, oral presentations. If students miss these assignments, they will receive a zero (regardless of the circumstances, even if they have an excuse).

Incompletes: Except for cases of documented medical or family emergencies, incompletes will not be given. There is no need for you to do badly in this class: the instructor will be available for meetings and will answer e-mail questions promptly, and points are earned in small chunks rather than a couple of monstrous exams. If students feel compelled to drop the class, please note that the last day to drop the course without a grade being posted is January 30. The deadline for withdrawal from the course with a W is March 10. Please see the academic calendar information published by the Office of the Registrar for more, and official, details regarding these dates and university policies.

Semester breakdown

This is the breakdown of the semester day by day. *Assignments are due on the day listed.* In other words, the date associated with assignments reflects the due date, not the assignment date. Reading assignments are from the reading packet (listed by authors).

		Topic		Assignment
Week 1	Tu	1/10	Introduction and overview of the class	
	Th	1/12	More introduction	Choose crisis topic
Week 2	Tu	1/17	Illusions of control	Langer (1975)
	Th	1/19	Positive illusions	Taylor & Brown (1988)
Week 3	Tu	1/24	Biased reasoning	Lord et al. (1979)
	Th	1/26	No class — Work on Unit 1 analysis	
Week 4	Tu	1/31	Self-awareness	Diener & Wallbom (1976); Analysis 1 due
	Th	2/2	Self-fulfilling prophecy	Snyder et al. (1977); Last day to show your book
Week 5	Tu	2/7	Stereotyping and stigma	Macrae et al. (1994)
	Th	2/9	No class — Work on Unit 2 analysis	
Week 6	Tu	2/14	Deindividuation	Postmes & Spears (1998); Analysis 2 due
	Th	2/16	Ingroups and outgroups	Correll & Park (2005)
Week 7	Tu	2/21	Monday-Tuesday Switch Day — No class	
	Th	2/23	Exam 1	
Week 8	Tu	2/28	Aggression	Anderson & Bushman (2002)
	Th	3/2	Mere presence of others	
Week 9	Tu	3/7	Conformity and obedience	Milgram (1977)
	Th	3/9	No class — Work on Unit 3 analysis	
Spring Break	Tu	3/14	Spring Break — No class	
	Th	3/16	Spring Break — No class	
Week 11	Tu	3/21	Helping others	Darley & Latane (1968); Analysis 3 due
	Th	3/23	Norms	Cialdini et al. (1990)
Week 12	Tu	3/28	Volunteering	Snyder et al. (2004)
	Th	3/30	No class — Work on Unit 4 analysis	
Week 13	Tu	4/4	Social dilemmas and groups	Komorita & Parks (1995); Analysis 4 due
	Th	4/6	Dealing with negative emotions	Gilbert et al. (1998)
Week 14	Tu	4/11	Social comparisons	Roese (1994)
	Th	4/13	No class — Work on Unit 5 analysis	
Week 15	Tu	4/18	Exam 2	Analysis 5 due
	Th	4/20	No class — Work on oral presentations	
Week 16	Tu	4/25	Project Day 1 — Oral presentations	
	Th	4/27	Project Day 2 — Oral presentations	

* No final exam in this course