

SPM 499: Senior Research Seminar

Fall 2021: Fridays, 1:30–4:20pm

LSP 130

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Office Hours: Wednesdays from 2:00–4:00 & Fridays from 10:00–11:00 (or by appointment)

Course Objectives

This class does not focus on imparting existing information. Instead, you will be generating new knowledge or new ways of thinking about the mind and/or morality. Instead of *learning* cognitive science and/or moral psychology, you will be *doing* cognitive science and/or moral psychology. This is similar to an apprenticeship, in which you are acquiring the requisite tools of the researcher's trade. You will spend the semester either (a) proposing a novel empirical hypothesis that is informed by the philosophical literature and creatively designing a research methodology to test your hypothesis, or (b) formulating a novel philosophical argument that is informed by the psychological literature. This will culminate in an oral presentation and a polished manuscript. Throughout this process, you will build new skills in critical thinking and confidently communicating arguments orally and in writing.

By the end of the semester (provided regular attendance, active participation in class discussions, assiduous completion of all assignments, and adherence to all other class policies), you will attain and cultivate the skills needed to achieve the following objectives:

- Deepen your ability to identify and apply connections between psychology and philosophy.
- Learn to identify gaps in the current state of knowledge and formulate a novel research question.
- Formulate an argument that uses deductive or inductive logic and appropriate empirical evidence.
- Gain proficiency in writing – and *revising!* – a substantial interdisciplinary research paper.

Course Requirements and Grading

You will be assessed by your performance on the following assignments (1,000 points total):

Engagement/ participation	Progress log	Paper outline	Paper draft	Oral presentation	Peer reviews	Final paper	Oral exam
100 pts.	50 pts.	50 pts.	150 pts.	100 pts.	100 pts.	400 pts.	50 pts.

Letter grades will be assigned as follows (decimals will be rounded to the nearest whole number):

A 93–100	A- 90–92	B+ 87–89	B 83–86	B- 80–82	C+ 77–79
C 73–76	C- 70–72	D+ 67–69	D 63–66	D- 60–62	F 0–59

Please note: You are not your grade. Your grade is an assessment of your mastery of course material; it is not an assessment of your worth as a human being.

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Course Material

There are no assigned readings for this course. Instead, you are expected to seek out articles and books (via Google Scholar, PhilPapers, PsycINFO, etc.) that are relevant to your specific research question. You should aim to read an average of 50–100 pages per week.

Although no readings will be required, there are a number of recommended resources that will be generally applicable to all of you, some of which I will post as PDF files on the Canvas course website. Books that cannot be uploaded, but which could serve as useful guides, include the following:

- American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). Washington, D.C.: APA.
- Papineau, D. (2012). *Philosophical devices: Proofs, probabilities, possibilities, and sets*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Pelham, B. W., & Blanton, H. (2013). *Conducting research in psychology: Measuring the weight of smoke* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

In lieu of in-class lectures, a series of prerecorded video conversations will be posted on Canvas to provide insights into various components of the research process. In addition, an FAQ page will be posted on Canvas to answer common questions about assignments and other aspects of the course.

Engagement/Participation

This class requires active involvement and consistently contributing to the success of your peers. Therefore, attendance is mandatory, and it is absolutely crucial that you come to every class prepared to make progress on your research project and to help your peers to make progress on research of their own. You are expected to be punctual and to remain engaged for the duration of the class period. If you have a valid reason for being absent or late, it is your responsibility to immediately notify me.

The hands-on, product-driven nature of this course necessitates that class meetings are structured somewhat differently than what you have become accustomed to in other courses. Even though you will be working on an independent project throughout the semester, you will work in collaboration with your classmates to improve the quality of your project and the quality of theirs. *You are responsible not only for your own learning, but for facilitating the learning of your classmates.* For this course to be most productive, many class meetings will involve working through specific issues tailored to each student's research project. In some cases, you will be helping other students, and in other cases you will be benefitting from others in brainstorming, troubleshooting, and moving forward in achieving goals at each step of the research process. Please respect a diversity of opinions and questions, and remain constructive and considerate in your interactions.

In addition to our plenary meetings on Fridays, we will schedule biweekly one-on-one meetings, during which you will receive individualized feedback and recommendations on your current progress and/or struggles. It is your responsibility to make these meetings as productive as possible. The more you prepare for them, including sending me material in advance, the more fruitful they will be.

Progress Log

You are required to keep a running log of decisions you make with respect to your research project. This should take the form of a Google Doc or Sheet that you will share with me so that I can provide continual feedback throughout the course. Be sure to update your progress log at least 24 hours in advance of each of our biweekly meetings, and flag issues that you would like to discuss when we meet. You are encouraged to use this log in whatever way is most productive and helpful to you.

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Primary Assignments

Paper Outline

This initial outline of your research paper, due on 10/7, should include a thesis statement and bullet points describing the relevant background literature. If you are proposing an empirical research project, you should additionally include some ideas about the methodology. If you are proposing a theoretical research project, you should instead include a first pass of your criticisms of the target work. You must include a reference list with 12 or more papers that have served as inspiration for your research. The full outline should be at least 1,000 words (not including references).

Research Paper

Your primary assignment in this course is to produce a substantial research paper that presents a novel argument or describes a study to test a novel hypothesis. This paper should take the form of a philosophical critique of research in psychological science, a philosophically motivated empirical research proposal, or any other interdisciplinary combination of philosophy and psychology. The structure and format of your paper should mimic published journal articles. There is no required length, but a thorough paper will likely require a minimum of at least 4,000 words (not including references). You will submit a complete draft on 10/28, for which you should aspire toward a finalized paper. You will then be expected to heavily revise and polish your draft based on the feedback you will receive from myself and two of your classmates. The final submission, due on 12/20, must be accompanied by a response letter detailing how you have addressed the comments you received.

Peer Review

A major component of the research process involves submitting one's work to be assessed by colleagues. Nearly all articles that are published in reputable academic journals undergo a rigorous process of peer review. Reviewers are expected to evaluate manuscripts at multiple levels, from basic mechanics (e.g., grammar, clarity) to more essential points (e.g., interpretation of data, novelty of hypotheses, exhaustiveness of literature review). To practice this aspect of research and to provide helpful feedback to your peers, you will review two classmates' drafts between 10/29 and 11/11.

Oral Presentation

Presenting work orally is a crucial element of disseminating research to broad audiences. This also allows for rapid feedback that can be incorporated into a final manuscript. To provide you with practice with this component of the research process, you will orally present your findings in a 15-minute talk at the SPM Research Symposium, which will take place during class time on 12/3.

Oral Exam

During our final one-on-one meeting, you and I will have a conversation about your final paper. This will involve a question-and-answer session in which you will be asked various clarification questions, questions about follow-up research, and other questions about various aspects of your research project. You will be evaluated on your ability to think deeply about your chosen topic, to respond to possible critiques, and to make broader connections to cognitive science and/or moral psychology.

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Course Policies

Grading Policy

The objective of this course is to train you as an interdisciplinary researcher, not to constantly put you to the test. Thus, the bulk of your grade will involve an evaluation of the successful completion of your research paper. In order to ensure that you have every opportunity to earn a high grade while acquiring the requisite skills of a cognitive scientist or moral psychologist, you will have multiple opportunities to submit various components of your paper for feedback. You may also submit a draft of any assignment one week in advance to receive comments and a preliminary grade.

If you receive a grade that is inconsistent with what you believe you should have earned, you have a week to set up an appointment to appeal your grade. When scheduling this appointment, you must submit (via email) a written statement explaining your case. All grades will be considered final after a week has passed.

Policy on Late Assignments

You will lose 10% of your grade for every day that an assignment is late (beginning seven minutes after the deadline; I allow a slight grace period to accommodate technology issues). However, you can take one free 72-hour extension on any written assignment, which is meant to accommodate for unexpected and unavoidable circumstances that prevent you from completing your work on time. In extreme cases when this free extension is not sufficient (e.g., family crises, hospitalizations), inform me as soon as possible, and I will reduce or waive the grade deduction if appropriate.

Policy on Electronic Devices

To maximize your success and minimize the possibility for distractions, you should only use electronic devices during times when they are necessary (e.g., working on manuscripts or conducting literature searches). Exceptions will be granted for students with compelling reasons for using a laptop (if this is the case, please speak with me privately).

Academic Integrity

I take academic honesty **very** seriously. You risk severe consequences by committing acts of plagiarism (i.e., representing someone else's work as your own), cheating, falsification, impersonating, or other similar offenses, including facilitating another student in committing an act of academic dishonesty. Penalties for these offenses will be carefully assessed on a case-by-case basis, and may include receiving a failing grade or expulsion from the College.

Academic Accommodations

I strive to provide an environment that is equitable and conducive to achievement and learning for all students. As such, I invite you to speak with me about your individual learning needs so that we can discuss how this course can best accommodate them. In addition, formal academic accommodations are available for students who require them. Please speak with me as soon as possible about any accommodations that have been supported by appropriate documentation and approved by the Office of Student Accessibility Services. All information will be kept confidential.

Other Tips

This class will be intensive. You will be expected to consistently keep up with the assigned work, which may require extensive outside time during certain points in the semester. However, I am here to help you succeed, and I strive to make myself highly available to meet or respond to emails. If you have any concerns or confusions regarding the course material and assignments, or if issues arise that have the potential to interfere with your success in the course, please be in touch as soon as possible. Your fellow students can also be great resources; reaching out to them can be a fun and collaborative way to learn. In particular, swapping paper drafts with your classmates to receive informal peer evaluations is an acceptable and encouraged practice to improve your writing. Additionally, please feel free to take advantage of the many resources that Franklin & Marshall has to offer! For example, the Writing Center can assist you with writing and other academic skills. Librarians will also be a crucial resource for this course. Finally, a number of resources are available to support your wellbeing, including Counseling Services, DipCares, and the House Deans.

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Semester Schedule

Components of this schedule are subject to change; check your email frequently for announcements.

Date of Friday class	Class Topic	Assignment Due (by 9:00 pm on Thursday)
Week 1 (9/3)	Formulating an interdisciplinary research topic and conducting literature searches	None
Week 2 (9/10)	Deciding on a research topic	Brainstorm of ten possible research questions (<i>ungraded</i>)
Week 3 (9/17)	Narrowing down a preliminary thesis	Drafted thesis statement and bibliography of ten relevant papers (<i>ungraded</i>)
Week 4 (9/24)	Conceptual analysis, operationalization, and measurement	Refined thesis statement (<i>ungraded</i>)
Week 5 (10/1)	Developing arguments and empirical research methods	Initial draft of paper outline (<i>ungraded</i>)
Week 6 (10/8)	Tips and techniques for scientific and philosophical writing	Revised paper outline (<i>graded</i>)
Week 7 (10/15)	Refining your argument and/or study design	Demonstration of substantial progress on paper (<i>ungraded</i>)
Week 8 (10/22)	Offering constructive feedback through peer review	Demonstration of substantial progress on paper (<i>ungraded</i>)
Week 9 (10/29)	Revision	Full draft of paper (<i>graded</i>)
Week 10 (11/5)	Orally presenting original research	Demonstration of substantial progress on presentation (<i>ungraded</i>)
Week 11 (11/12)	Processing feedback	Peer reviews (<i>graded</i>)
Week 12 (11/19)	Practice run of oral presentations	Draft of presentation slideshow (<i>ungraded</i>)
Week 13 (12/3)	SPM RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM	Presentation slideshow
Week 14 (12/10)	Celebrating scholarship	Draft of response letter (<i>ungraded</i>)

The final version of your paper is due at 11:59pm on Monday, December 20.