Psychology 5135: Individual Differences
Tue Thu 8:15-9:30 am, N391 Elliott Hall
3 Credits


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This syllabus is subject to changes that will be announced by the instructor. Upon hearing such an announcement, you should download a new copy of the syllabus.

Course Description

Why are some people smarter than others? Why is one person the life of the party and another person socially awkward? What is the nature of mental illness? Why are we so often bitterly divided over politics and religion? This course is intended to introduce graduate students and upper-division undergraduates to differential psychology, the scientific discipline that seeks answers to these sorts of questions regarding the diversity of our own species.

Prerequisites

Psy 3001W (Research Methods) or Psy 5862 (Psychological Measurement). Note that a prerequisite for Psy 3001W, in turn, is Psy 3801 (Introduction to Psychological Measurement and Data Analysis); the honors version of Psy 3801 is a prerequisite for Psy 5862. The prerequisites are not enforced at enrollment, so it is possible that some of you have not taken these courses. The prerequisites are important, however, because the study of individual differences is one of the more quantitative areas of psychology. If you have taken neither Psy 3001 nor Psy 5862, you might want to meet with me to discuss the adequacy of your background.

My own preference is to encourage anyone with an interest in the subject of human diversity to take
this course. I think that all students, regardless of their previous preparation, will learn something of great interest to them. However, I feel obliged to issue a warning about the prerequisites for the sake of your grades, which are probably also important to you.

**Credits**

This is a 3-unit course. A rough guideline is that you should be spending two hours per week studying outside of lecture for every credit taken, which in this course implies 6 hours of studying each week. Of course, the actual amount of studying required by any given student to do well in the course may be more or less than 6 hours per week, as a result of many different factors.

**Materials**

The textbook is *Individual Differences and Personality* by Michael C. Ashton. Make sure to get the second edition! Besides the chapters in the textbook, journal articles and other readings will be assigned throughout the semester. I recommend downloading all of these additional readings as soon as possible.

The course is aimed at upper-division undergraduates and graduate students, and the additional readings of the primary literature serve the important purpose of exposing such students to the research frontier. Do not spend too much time “bogged down” in the details of an additional reading, especially if these details are of a mathematical nature. Even working scientists do not read every word or equation of a research paper (at least not at first). Try to develop the skill of extracting the essential features of a paper: what the authors are claiming, the key figures and tables, a rough idea of the argument or methodology used to support the conclusions. All important lower-level details will be highlighted in lecture.

**Lectures**

In this course you will use an “clicker” to give your responses to in-class discussion questions. *Although not mandatory, regular lecture attendance is strongly encouraged.* The in-class discussions are an important part of the course, and your fellow students may benefit from your knowledge and insight. You will pick up a clicker from the container near the door at the beginning of each lecture and return it on your way out.

You will be responsible for all material presented in lectures, even if it is *not* covered in the textbook or additional readings. A PDF copy of the slides will be posted on the course website after each lecture, and you are advised to download this PDF as soon as you get the chance.

Please do not become overwhelmed by the text on the more technical lecture slides. Since much of the lecture material is not covered in any of the readings, the text is for you to study on your own once you have downloaded the slides. During the lecture itself, it is much more important to follow what I am saying. Whenever my speech diverges from the text on the slide, it is probably a good idea to ignore the text and concentrate on what I am saying.

If you choose to take notes on your laptop or mobile device, you must disable your wireless Internet connection. *Do not underestimate the allure of watching movies, playing games, or surfing the Web*
during the lectures or the tendency of such activity to distract students sitting behind you. Even professors succumb to this temptation when they attend research presentations!

As the lecture draws to a close, please do not pack your things until I dismiss the class. If you know that you have to leave early, please try to find an aisle seat near the back of the classroom.

**Homework**

After the second lecture of the week, I will post an assignment on the course website that must be uploaded to the course website by 11:59 pm of the following Tuesday. The assignment will consist of straightforward questions designed to test your understanding of important concepts covered that week, and you may use any standard text-editing program (e.g., Microsoft Word) to record your responses. You must work on these assignments independently! Any incident of scholastic misconduct will be reported to the CLA Scholastic Conduct Committee and the student will be given an F in the class.

Even if it is possible to give a one-word answer to a question, you should always give a brief justification of your answer. Occasionally a question will require a numerical response, and in these cases you should show your work.

**Exams**

There are three midterm exams. The second and third midterms only cover substantive material assigned since the previous midterm. Material presented earlier in the semester, however, may be presented again and become fair game for the subsequent midterm. Basic concepts of statistics, measurement, and causal inference will need to be retained throughout the semester.

Make-up exams will be given after an exam date only under certain circumstances; see CLA policy for more details. If you have a foreseeable absence, taking a make-up exam requires permission from the instructor at least 48 hours before the scheduled exam—and preferably as soon as possible.

If you have an unforeseeable absence, you must notify the instructor no later than 48 hours after the absence occurred. Before making up an exam, you must also provide written documentation corroborating your reason for missing the exam (e.g., a physician’s note that includes contact information).

**Disabilities**

The University of Minnesota is committed to providing all students equal access to learning opportunities. Disability Services (DS) is the campus office that works with students who have disabilities to arrange reasonable accommodations. You can contact DS to schedule a confidential appointment at (612) 626-1333 or ds@umn.edu.
Grading

Each exam is worth 40 points. Each homework assignment is worth 4 points, but your four worst grades are dropped from the total. This means that homework is worth 40 points, exactly as much as an exam. The total number of points is thus 160.

Graduate and undergraduate students will be evaluated separately; the graduate students will be held to a stricter standard. I have not settled on precise point cutoffs for determining letter grades. In other 5-level courses comparable to this one, historically about a third of the undergraduates have received A’s and most of the remainder B’s. In contrast, most graduate students have received A’s despite being graded more strictly (although C’s, D’s, and F’s have on occasion been given out). These percentages are not fixed, and I do not rule out the possibility that most students will receive A’s.
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<td>Review of Causal Inference</td>
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<td>General cognitive ability and the psychological refractory period:</td>
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<td>Individual differences in the mind’s bottleneck. Psychological Science, 24,</td>
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<td>Gottfredson, L. S. &amp; Deary, I. J. (2004). Intelligence predicts health and</td>
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<td>patterns predict creativity in the arts and sciences: Tracking intellectually</td>
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<td>precocious youth over 25 years. Psychological Science, 18, 948–952.</td>
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<td>talent identification and development. Personality and Individual Differences,</td>
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<td>&amp; Bouchard, T. J., Jr. (1992). Emergence: Genetic traits that may not run</td>
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<td>Apr 17 Thu</td>
<td><strong>GUEST LECTURER: LAUREN MITCHELL</strong></td>
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