

**Psychology 136A Fall 2009**  
**Social Psychology Laboratory: Experimental Research Methods**

Mondays & Wednesdays, 10:00-12:20 PM  
Franz A279

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**Text:** *Conducting Research in Psychology: Measuring the Weight of Smoke*, by Brett Pelham and Hart Blanton, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Available at the ASUCLA bookstore, and on reserve at the College Library.

**Goals of this Course:** *In this course, you will learn to conduct experimental and quasi-experimental research in psychology.* I realize that most of you are not planning to make a career in psychology research. However, all of you, psychologists or not, are going to be bombarded with research claims, and are going to seek out answers to questions that can be answered with research, for the rest of your life. Some of those claims may not matter much to you (e.g., if your initials spell something negative, you will live a shorter life than if your initials spell something positive). Others will matter to you a little bit (e.g., which of these vacuums is best?). Others will matter to you a lot (e.g., if my child is missing, will putting his or her face on a milk carton help?). Therefore, an important goal of this course will be to teach you to how to *critically evaluate research claims*. This will be a skill that I hope will serve you well no matter what field you decide to enter after graduation.

*As a secondary goal of this course, we will discuss how to convey your ideas and research findings in clear, straightforward, and interesting ways.* One of the most important goals of research and science is to gain new information and convey that information to others. Although it may not always seem like research is supposed to be interesting or easy to understand (since it can often seem dull or complex), it is important for researchers to be able to explain their findings in straightforward ways that make sense to people and that, hopefully, interest them and teach them something new. If one cannot convey research in a way that is clear and compelling, one's research may have very little impact. The ability to convey your ideas in clear and appealing ways is a skill that is essential for many different fields (e.g., teaching, advertising, entertainment, law, journalism, etc.) and thus we will focus on it in this course. Even if this is the only concept that you take with you from this class, I will be very happy!

**Organization of this Course:** You will learn about experimental research methods in social psychology through lectures, reading assignments, and research projects. Each class meeting will be divided roughly into one hour of lecture and one hour of lab (separated by a 10-minute break), although this will vary somewhat from week to week. During the lecture portion of the class, you will learn the basic concepts of experimental research methods and how to translate abstract ideas into testable hypotheses.

The laboratory portion of each class meeting will be devoted to completing hands-on exercises that will improve your understanding of experimental research methods. It will also be devoted to planning and conducting your own research study. The lab sessions are an essential part of the course and attendance is necessary for completing course requirements.

**Requirements:** Your grade in this class will be based on a combination of 6 areas of participation and assessment:

1. **In-Class Exam.** During the first five weeks of class, I will present a series of lectures on research methods, and you will cover some very similar material in your textbook. At the end of the fifth week, on **Wednesday, October 28**, you will be tested on the lectures and the text. Because individuals differ in the type of test questions they are best at, the exam, to be fair, will have a variety of types of questions. The in-class exam will cover all of the assigned chapters and pages in the text and all material from the lectures. *(30% of final grade).*
2. **Group Project.** The primary activity in the course will be the development, conduct, and presentation of a group project. Because it's much more fun to collect data on questions that interest you than on topics that your instructor forces upon you, you will do a research project in an area that is of interest to you. For the project, you will work in groups of about 4 to 5 people. You will need to come up with a hypothesis and a research design (and get your instructor's approval on it), and then collect and analyze some data on the topic. Your project must be an original true experiment with two fully crossed independent variables.

Although it is a lot of work to plan and conduct a study within 10 weeks, we will be spending a lot of time in class helping you plan and conduct your study. We will try to make sure to give you the time that you need to complete this task. During the last week of the quarter, each group will present its findings to the class. Each group will have 20-25 minutes for its presentation, and every member of the group must participate. Your grade on the project will be based on creativity, rigor of the experimental methods, theoretical significance, and the presentation itself. You will be graded by your group as well as by your instructor. *(20% of final grade).*

3. **Writing Exercise.** Prior to turning in your final research report, you will be asked to turn in your "Introduction"—an initial presentation of your background and hypotheses in an APA style research paper. This paper will form the basis of your final paper and each member of your group will write their *own independent* paper. It must be concise – no longer than 2-3 pages double-spaced using APA style. In this paper, you will be able to practice: 1) conveying the justification for your study and your research hypotheses in a clear and straightforward manner and 2) presenting your research ideas in a way that is compelling for your reader. *It will also give you a chance to start working on your full research report before the very last minute!!* This paper will be due during Week 7. *(10% of final grade).*
4. **Critical Thinking Exercise.** As mentioned earlier, one of the primary goals of this course is to foster good communication skills both in writing and in oral presentations. One way to improve our ability to communicate clearly and effectively is to spend some time thinking about what makes for clear, good writing. In order to practice this, you will be asked to write a critique of another student's introduction (see item #3 above) and to provide feedback about what was good as well as what needs improvement. You will focus on whether the ideas were conveyed in a clear way, such that you were able to understand the background and goals for the research project. This will be done completely anonymously—you will not know whose paper you are reading. You will be graded on how well you are able to point out what needs to be improved in the other student's paper. Once we have graded all of the critiques, they will be handed back to the original author so that he/she can read the feedback on their introduction. Again, this will be done completely anonymously. In addition to not knowing who you are critiquing, you will not know who critiqued you. *(5% of final grade).*

- 5. Research Report.** Your final paper will be an APA-style research report based on the findings of your group project. Although you did the project as a group, you will each write an *independent* paper on the project. You will prepare a concise (no longer than 7-pages of text—not including title page, abstract, references, graphs—double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins) report based on the findings of your study. (25% of final grade).
- 6. Class Participation in Discussions and Attendance.** Throughout the quarter, we will do many activities and have many discussions as a class, as well as in smaller groups. Enthusiastic and creative participation is encouraged, and attendance is required. We will take attendance every day. (If you have to miss a class, check the website for any materials or assignments that you may have missed: <http://www.lsic.ucla.edu/webapps/login/>) (10% of final grade).

**Grading:** Your final grade breakdown looks like this:

In-Class Exam	30%
Group Project	20%
Writing Exercise	10%
Critical Thinking Exercise	5%
Research Report	25%
Class Participation and Attendance	10%

Grades will be assigned fairly and curved only if necessary. If you wish to dispute a grade on a question on the test you must make the case in writing (not by email) within two days of receiving your graded test to the instructor. If the instructor deems this case fair, the question will then be re-graded (by a different grader and so it is possible that your grade may go down). Of course clarifications on grades are readily given and you are encouraged to discuss things you do not understand with the instructors. Final grades are not negotiable and will only be changed if there is a miscalculation.

**Course Policies:**

- 1. Academic honesty:** Your writing should come from *you*. While you may draw from other sources to help formulate or support your work, you **must always cite these sources** and tie them into your own ideas and theses. Plagiarism is a serious offense, and may result in students failing the course or being expelled from the university. Guidelines on citing references will be provided in class.
- 2. Complete and submit your assignments on time.** It is your responsibility to make sure you are in class to complete and hand in assignments, and to hear any and all information and announcements. Not being in class the day an assignment is explained or due does not grant you extra time to complete it.

**Note about enrollment:** Because Psychology 136A is an impacted course, enrollment activities are regulated by strict rules set by the University (and not by your instructor): 1) Enrollment is processed solely through the university's automated computer system; 2) Permission to Enroll Authorization Numbers (PTEs) are not issued for this course. I realize that many of you need a lab course to fulfill the major requirement. As much as I would like to accommodate you, enrollment for this course is out of my control. If you are not enrolled in the course and need a lab to graduate, you should make an appointment at the Psychology Advising Office (Franz Hall 1531) as soon as possible. A counselor will do his or her best to help you find an open lab section.

## Tentative Course Schedule

*Note: The following schedule is subject to change based on students' mastery of course material.*

Week	Date	Lecture Topic	In-Class Lab Activity	Reading T# = textbook chapter	Due at Start of Class
1	Mon, Sept. 28	Course Overview/ Why do we do Research?	Introductions	Read the syllabus T1*,T2* (Skip pp 50-56)	
	Wed, Sept. 30	How do we Show Causality?	Practical applications of science	T7 (pp. 192-196)*	
2	Mon, Oct. 5	How do we Design a Valid Study?	In-class Experiment	pp. 59-68*, T5	
	Wed, Oct. 7	How do we Manipulate Psychological Phenomena?	Manipulating mood		"Interesting Questions" from Target article due
3	Mon, Oct. 12	How do we Measure Psychological Phenomena?	Meet with groups to present and discuss ideas	T3, T4 (pp. 68-72)*	Collected Data from In-class exp. due
	Wed, Oct. 14	Quasi-experiments and Factorial Designs	Interactions	T8	
4	Mon, Oct. 19	Within Subjects and Mixed Designs	<b>Move to computer lab 3260:</b> Literature Search with groups	T9	
	Wed, Oct. 21	Who Needs Stats?	Discuss Results from In-class Experiment	T10	
5	Mon, Oct. 26	How do we Conduct Ethical Research?	Review for Exam	pp. 50-56	
	Wed, Oct. 28	<b>IN-CLASS EXAM</b>			
6	Mon, Nov. 2	How to write an introduction	Meet with groups to finalize study plans		Group hypothesis and design due by end of class
	<b>Wed, Nov. 4</b> <b>Meet in computer lab 3260</b>	Hand Back Exam	Meet with Groups to finalize study materials		
7	<b>Mon, Nov. 9</b> <b>Meet in computer lab 3260</b>	<b>In-Class Data Collection Day!!</b>			Introductions due by email at 5pm
	Wed, Nov. 11	<b>VETERAN'S DAY—NO CLASS</b>			
8	<b>Mon, Nov. 16</b> <b>Meet in computer lab 3260</b>	How To Enter & Analyze Your Data	Meet with Groups		Critiques due; Data for Group Project due
	<b>Wed, Nov. 18</b> <b>Meet in computer lab 3260</b>	How to give a good talk/ Tips for using Powerpoint	Meet with Groups	T11:pp. 311-317	
9	<b>Mon, Nov. 23</b> <b>Meet in computer lab 3260</b>	How to Present and Graph Your Findings; Final Presentation and Paper Info	Meet with Groups	Appendix 3: pp. 362-376 (especially Study 1,4, & 6)	
	Wed, Nov. 26	<b>THANKSGIVING—NO CLASS</b>			
10	Mon, Nov. 30	Student Presentations/Group Projects <b>Attendance Mandatory</b>			
	Wed, Dec. 2	Student Presentations/Group Projects <b>Attendance Mandatory</b>			
	Wed, Dec. 9	Final Paper Due by 5:00 pm			

\* = won't be covered in class, but know for the exam