

PSYCHOLOGY 220: HONORS CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Course Syllabus

Fall 2009

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Required Texts: For this honors section of Child Development, in place of a standard child-development textbook we will use the following source as a “primary” textbook:

Crain, W. (2005). *Theories of development: Concepts and applications* (5th Ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Additionally, a student subscription (or at least regular access) to the *Watertown Daily Times* is required.

Why are the above materials required? First, the Crain (2005) book will provide solid grounding in all of the major theories, in the field of child development, which we will be discussing in class. Second, once you have a theoretical basis from which to think analytically about controversial issues involving children (and in conjunction with both your child-observation assignment and newspaper-reading assignments, detailed below), you can begin to wrestle with, and thereby come to a better understanding of, the links between a knowledge base, a research agenda, and the social-policy applications of work in the field of child development. Finally, see **Course Format**, below, regarding specific reasons for the requirement of a *Watertown Daily Times* subscription.

Course Objectives:

First of all, and most importantly, I believe that you will derive benefit from this course in direct proportion to the effort you put into it. For example, I will not be “checking up” (e.g., through quizzes) to make sure that you’ve read your assignments in the Crain (2005) textbook. But you will derive maximal benefit from in-class discussion and other course activities if and only if you have read assigned materials and are otherwise well prepared for each day’s class.

Here are the Honors Child Development course-specific objectives:

Through this course, we will examine and discuss the psychological aspects of growth and development, from the prenatal period through approximately the middle-childhood period. This examination and discussion will include a review of pertinent theories and research studies and an introduction to research methods used in developmental psychology, and is likely to include an exploration of such topics as physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and moral development. Several common themes

linking different areas of child development will be interwoven throughout the course. Through this course students will be exposed to rudimentary aspects of the design and conduct of a psychological study involving human subjects, as well as the observation of child behavior. This course will likely touch on aspects of other disciplines related to the study of child development--including anthropology, biology, medicine, politics, economics, and sociology--through student presentations and subsequent discussion.

Here are some of the objectives that I believe are either implicit or explicit in any liberal-arts course (including those at the honors level):

First, be able to think critically (meaning analytically) about ideas and issues (including recognizing what information is sloppy and unfounded, and what information is based upon reliable and trustworthy sources). Second, develop a balanced approach to thinking, whereby you are able to recognize the merits of arguments (even those in support of positions opposing your own), and can separate high-quality arguments from poor-quality arguments for a given thesis. Third, become a careful and wise consumer of information. Fourth, develop the habits of life-long learning, the willingness to “think outside the box,” and the ability to blend subject material cross- and inter-disciplinarily. Fifth, integrate “book” knowledge with “practical” knowledge in useful and meaningful ways (including ways commensurate with your emerging role as a leader in society). Sixth, consider, almost constantly, how information can be put to use to help other people. Seventh, develop skills that will permit you to “thresh out” the “wheat” from the “chaff,” as regards the abundance of information that is available from a plethora of sources (books, newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, movies, CD-ROM-based materials, the Internet, friends, professors, etc.). Eighth, experiment with knowledge and information creatively and productively. Ninth, come to understand how knowledge is acquired and how its veracity is tested. Tenth, develop the ability to contribute new, high-quality knowledge of your own to the world. Eleventh, develop the ability to communicate the results of your research to the world.

We will try to address as many of the above objectives (of both types) as possible throughout this course.

Course Format:

This (honors) section will include extensive in-class discussions, both of the student-with-student and student-with-professor varieties. Substantial class time will be devoted to discussion of assigned readings and other course assignments (e.g., the child-observation assignment, the in-class-presentation assignment, and the newspaper-reading assignment). Additionally, since developmental psychology is a discipline that lends itself easily to application, while still maintaining its base in theory, students will be expected to keep up with a daily newspaper (namely, the *Watertown Daily Times*) and, on a regular basis, find and bring for class discussion articles contained therein which involve the knowledge base, research agenda, or social-policy applications of children and their development.

Points and Criteria (100 total points possible for the entire course):

Watertown Daily Times articles (15 points):

Criterion: Students will read and clip (or otherwise have readily available) articles for discussion

from the *Watertown Daily Times*. **So literally, each student should bring and have a stack of clipped articles from the newspaper, taken from the previous two weeks' worth of *Watertown Daily Times* articles pertinent to child development, every time we hold a current-events discussion in class.**

Reason: In essence, the stack of clipped articles represents our common text from which to work. You are responsible only for Monday-through-Friday issues of the newspaper, and only on days when the Union Market is open.

Student understanding of current-events issues and stories related to the knowledge base, research agenda, or social-policy applications of children and their development will be assessed qualitatively, as the instructor will consider the quality—and not necessarily just the sheer quantity—of articles that each student brings in to discuss in class. Each student will bring in articles of sufficient quality and quantity to provide evidence of having read the newspaper thoroughly. ('Thoroughly' can be defined as "if there was an article anywhere in the newspaper that was pertinent to child development, you saw it and read it.") Discussion of newspaper articles will take place on alternate Fridays (usually, I hope).

Child observation (10 points):

Short description of assignment: Students in this (honors) section of PSYC-220 will conduct and report on three out-of-class observations of children. The quality of each student's out-of-class observations will be evaluated via a required written report.

Long description of assignment: Each student observer will complete three 30-minute observations, each of a different student, at school during a school day (one observation each for children in grades K-3, 4-6, and 7-9). These observations will not have to occur all on the same day; nor will they necessarily even have to occur within the same school district. But the general template to follow will be that student observers will spend the first 30 seconds of each one-minute period of their observation time unobtrusively observing the behavior of their chosen school child, and then spend the remaining 30 seconds of each minute recording their observations.

Since this is an honors course, I do not want to be too prescriptive as to what you must look for or observe. Neither do I especially want to prescribe the precise setting for that observation (e.g., playground, lunchroom/cafeteria, classroom, music classroom, etc.). But in general I want you to observe the behavior of three schoolchildren, as described above, and integrate those observations (and your subsequent findings), in a two- or three-page typewritten (double-spaced) paper, with a discussion of some aspect of children's development (e.g., social, physical, moral, etc.) which we have touched upon in class or that you came upon as a result of some out-of-class experience (independent readings, conversations with a person who works professionally with children, etc.). Perhaps relate your observations to one of the theories that we have discussed in class. That paper will be due on the Monday of Week 14. With that paper, I ask you please to turn in your original observation "logs" for each child as well.

I would like, if possible, to leave it as an option that, if you want, you can interview the teachers of the children whom you choose to observe. This would be for the purpose of discussing the teacher's opinion regarding such student characteristics as: typical grades received by the observed student in class, the student's estimated socioeconomic status, whether the student is an introvert or extrovert, whether the student is perceived to have an internal or external locus of control, etc.

You will be responsible for arranging your own transportation to the school site, arriving punctually, and dressing and behaving in a professional manner. These last points merit re-emphasis before anyone goes out to begin observing children.

Test (25 points):

Your understanding of, and ability to integrate and evaluate, theories and research related to child development will be assessed via one take-home essay test. Your response will need to be returned in typed, double-spaced format. Both the content and format of your response will be evaluated. Correct grammar, spelling, usage, punctuation, and other elements of proper style are important and will be evaluated, as will be the content of what you write. The two areas (elements of style and content of writing) are inseparable when it comes to excellent writing.

In-class presentation (25 points):

Students will either pair up and work jointly, or work by themselves, in preparing and delivering their presentations. I suggest that each student (including each student of a presenting pair) read a minimum of five journal articles or other “refereed” not-for-profit references (including monographs; encyclopedia articles; ERIC documents; other sources found on Wilson Disk or other CD-ROM based media, or a research-library consortium; etc.--but ordinarily excluding for-profit “dot-com” Internet sources--I can explain why) and at least some current-events sources (including a reputable newspaper or news magazine, but excluding dot-com Internet sources) on a topic of your choice (subject to instructor approval--primarily to ensure that you’re choosing a topic that is neither too broad nor too narrow). Interview someone who is a professional in a child-development-related area if you like. In other words, the world of “edited” knowledge (the word “edited” was chosen because not all sources are equally credit-worthy or credible) is your oyster!

Your research will culminate in an in-class presentation (a total of 30 to 40 minutes in length [essentially taking all of one entire class day] for pairs of presenters; a total of 15 to 20 minutes in length for individual presenters). **Important:** You must provide copies for everyone in class of at least two pages: (1) an outline page, and (2) a list of references cited (as opposed to a bibliography, which is a list of suggested readings, and which in this case is optional). You may include other materials in your hand-out as you deem appropriate. If you would like me to take care of photocopying your materials for you, please get those materials to me at least three business days in advance of the date on which they will be needed in class.

Your speech will be judged according to the following six criteria: clarity of purpose, substantive accuracy, overall clarity and style of presentation, use of lecturing aids, handling of questions, and use of time. **Please note:** Time spent answering questions and discussing each presentation does not count against the above-mentioned time limits. In fact, I fully expect that we will devote substantial time to discussing each presentation.

Be sure to cite verbally the references that you use, in the context of your speech, each time you refer to one of your resources. Why? That way, people in your audience who may be interested in extending your research on their own will have the

ability to do so. Also, I encourage you to use edited journals and books, and I discourage the use of “dot-com” Web sites. Why? It is important to emphasize the role of information gained from the world of “edited” knowledge, and to de-emphasize information gained from sources of dubious reputation or reliability.

Attendance and discussion (25 points):

The attendance-and-discussion component of your grade will be based upon the consistency of your attendance and the consistency and quality of your contributions to in-class discussion. **The standard is that you will be in class, on time, and participating, every day.** The two criteria of attendance and discussion are related, because obviously one cannot discuss something in class if one is not actually in class. Both the quality (value) and quantity (frequency) of student contributions to discussion are important. Why? We all need frequent repetitions in order to develop the skills involved in thinking on our feet (just as, for example, repetitive practice can help a basketball player improve free-throw accuracy), but what and how one practices are just as important as how often one practices. I will form an evaluation of each person’s total number of points earned in this area at the end of the semester. I recommend that you be at class several minutes early on the day when you are scheduled for an in-class presentation. I will expect that any student who has to miss a class will inform me of that fact.

Please note: This is an honors course. Therefore, in the mode of “all chiefs and no Indians,” no person needs to feel pressure to be “the best” in this class to earn lots of points for attendance and discussion. It is an absolute, not relative, standard against which your performance will be measured. Also, evidence of intellectual growth throughout the semester counts, since I assume that you’re here to learn and will be learning.

Typical schedule: On Mondays, Wednesdays, and alternate Fridays, we will devote time to theories, the child-observation assignment, discussion of the in-class-presentation assignment, the actual presentations themselves, and the like. On the other alternate Fridays we’ll discuss our *Watertown Daily Times* articles and will try to discern how they relate to the theories and other issues/topics with which we have become involved.

A note regarding plagiarism or cheating: Plagiarism or cheating will result in the offending person's receiving a grade of 0.0 in this course.

The table on the following page illustrates how a student’s percentage of possible points earned will translate into that student’s final grade:

| Percentage Range | Final Grade |
|------------------|-------------|
| 90-100 | 4.0 |
| 87-89 | 3.7 |
| 83-86 | 3.3 |
| 80-82 | 3.0 |
| 77-79 | 2.7 |
| 73-76 | 2.3 |
| 70-72 | 2.0 |

| | |
|----------|-----|
| 67-69 | 1.7 |
| 63-66 | 1.3 |
| 60-62 | 1.0 |
| below 60 | 0.0 |

Approximate schedule for activities during the semester:

Please note: When we discuss theories, questions around which we can focus may include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) What do you see as the fundamental tenets of the theory? (2) How does the theory relate to, or provide contrast with, other theories in its area? (3) What are its strengths? (4) What are its weaknesses? (5) How good of a job does the theory do of explaining, or accounting for, observed phenomena? (6) What is your overall appraisal of the theory?

Week 1 (week of Monday 8/31/09)

- Mon Go over syllabus. **Please note:** As you can see below, once we begin discussing chapters from the Crain (2005) textbook, the pace quickens. Therefore, it would be good for you to begin reading over the chapters soon, in preparation for discussion that is, at this point, still a few weeks away.
- Wed Finish going over the syllabus. Address the question, "If you had to summarize your observations of human behavior in one sentence, what would you say?"
- Fri Finish any remaining introductory topics (**including** explaining the out-of-class child-observation assignment); discuss what is meant by the terms 'cohort,' 'age changes,' 'age differences,' 'longitudinal study,' and 'cross-sectional study.'
Discuss the in-class-presentation assignment; have people choose (a) whether or not they want to work with a partner, and (b) their preferred presentation date. I have lots of examples of presentation topics, as well as samples of hand-outs, available for those who may be interested in perusing them.

Week 2 (Week of Monday 9/07/09)

- Mon Lecture on the origins of developmental psychology, focused around the nature/nurture continuum and time line. Pay particular attention to the characteristics separating structuralism from behaviorism
CHAPTERS: 1, 2 (review); 4
- Wed Discuss in-school child-observation policies and procedures with Mrs. Kay Caldwell (x2539; caldwekm@potsdam.edu). Discuss the question, "What is 'development'?"
CHAPTERS: "Introduction" (pp. xi-xii), 2
- Fri Current events discussion

Week 3 (Week of Monday 9/14/09)

- Mon Begin to discuss Piaget's theory of cognitive development
CHAPTER: 6
- Wed Continue discussion of Piaget's theory of cognitive development

CHAPTER: 6 (review)

Fri Continue discussion of Piaget's theory; incorporate discussion of Kohlberg's theory of moral development

CHAPTER: 6 (review), 7

Week 4 (Week of Monday 9/21/09)

Mon Conclude discussion of Piaget's and Kohlberg's theories

CHAPTER: 7 (review)

Wed Begin discussion of Freud's theory

CHAPTER: 11

Fri Current events discussion

Week 5 (Week of Monday 9/28/09)

Mon Continue discussion of Freud's theory.

Wed Finish discussion of Freud's theory. Talk about some similarities and differences between it and Erikson's theory.

CHAPTERS: 11 (review), 12

Fri Begin discussion of classical conditioning and behaviorism

CHAPTER: 8 (begin). Note: This coming Sunday is "International Truckers' Day": Ten-Four, Good Buddy!

Week 6 (Week of Monday 10/05/09)

Mon Continue discussion of behaviorism and social-learning theory. Social-learning theory is part Freudian, part Skinnerian in its origin and precepts.

CHAPTERS: 8 (finish), 9

Wed Conclude discussion of behaviorism and social-learning theory.

Fri Current events discussion. **[Also about here: Hand out and go over the take-home "test." The test is due one week from the day it is handed out.]**

Week 7 (Week of Monday 10/12/09)

Mon [No class: Fall Recess]

Wed Meet with Ms. Carol Franck in the Crumb Library to talk about research for in-class presentations.

Fri Meet with Ms. Carol Franck in the Crumb Library to talk about research for in-class presentations. **[Please note: The test is due today if it was handed out last Friday.]**

Week 8 (Week of Monday 10/19/09)

Mon Discussion of 'intelligence;' perhaps briefly discuss results of the take-home test.

Wed Discussion of 'intelligence' (continued)

Fri Current events discussion

Week 9 (Week of Monday 10/26/09)

Mon In-class presentation #1
 Wed In-class presentation #2
 Fri In-class presentation #3

Week 10 (Week of Monday 11/02/09)

Mon In-class presentation #4
 Wed In-class presentation #5
 Fri Current events discussion

Week 11 (Week of Monday 11/09/09)

Mon In-class presentation #6
 Wed In-class presentation #7
 Fri In-class presentation #8

Week 12 (Week of Monday 11/16/09)

Mon In-class presentation #9
 Wed In-class presentation #10
 Fri Current events discussion

Week 13 (Week of Monday 11/23/09)

Mon In-class presentation #11
 Wed [No class: Thanksgiving Break]
 Fri [No class: Thanksgiving Break]

Week 14 (Week of Monday 11/30/09)

Mon In-class presentation #12; child-observation papers due today.
 Wed In-class presentation #13
 Fri Current events discussion

Week 15 (Week of Monday 12/07/09)

Mon In-class presentation #14
 Wed In-class presentation #15
 Fri Course evaluation; discussion of child-observation experiences

Final Exam Week: Wed 12/16/09 from 8:00 – 10:00 a.m.

In-class presentation #16

In-class presentation #17

Possible overflow topics, if time permits, include: language development [including a review of Chomsky's theory in Chapter 17 of Crain (2005)]; the scientific study of attachment [Chapter 3 of Crain (2005)]; emotions; expanded treatment of Erikson's theory; self-esteem and self-concept formation; childhood disease and health; the future of children; and the future of the study of child development.