

Development

Psychology 610, Winter 2009
Mon/Wed 10:00-11:50am, Straub 143

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Wed. 1-2 pm, Fri. 11am-12pm

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Overview

In this course we will discuss a series of central topics within the study of human development. We will strive for some historical perspective on the study of development as well as discussing important contemporary theoretical and empirical issues. We will focus in particular on fundamental processes and mechanisms that influence development, and the research techniques that are opening new windows on such processes. The following are some of the questions we will be considering:

- In what ways do genes and environment interact in children's development?
- What are the typical patterns of structural and functional brain development impact, and how are these neurophysiological changes related to infant, child, and/or adolescent cognitive and socioemotional development?
- How successfully can we identify children at risk, and how can we improve these children's trajectories once identified?
- In what ways does parental divorce affect children's development, and what factors help to buffer any possible negative impacts?
- What can parents do to promote a loving and healthy relationship with their children, and what impact does the quality of the parent-child relationship have on children's development?
- What are the mechanisms that enable children to acquire knowledge – about language, objects, social relationships, and the like – at such a phenomenally rapid pace from so early in life?
- Why are infants and young children remarkable language learners?
- How do emotions, self-regulatory abilities, and peer relationships (with members of the same- and opposite-sex) change across development, particularly during the transition to adolescence?

Reflecting the current state of the field, the course will focus heavily on development in the infancy period up through adolescence. We hope you will find the material to be both challenging and interesting.

REQUIREMENTS

1. **Class participation** (5%). Class meetings will always involve some combination of lecture and discussion. Your contributions to the discussion are key to establishing a lively intellectual climate for the course. If you are the quiet type, please just work on blurting out what occurs to you without censorship. If you are the garrulous type, go for it – we will let you know if you need to rein it in!
2. **Mini-lecture** (15%). A 10-to 15-minute conference-style powerpoint presentation on a current topic, debate, or empirical investigation that is covered in one or more of our course readings.
3. **Seed papers** (30%). Seed papers are short (approximately 1 page double-spaced) and required to be posted once per week on Blackboard, due by Sundays, 9pm (even when class is not scheduled for Mondays due to holidays). The seed paper will respond to issues raised in the readings assigned for that week. The paper could present an argument about the issues, raise questions regarding the readings, sketch a new research idea on the issues, or any of a number of other possibilities.
4. **Research proposal** (50%). The research proposal (10-15 pages double-spaced) will present original ideas for empirical work investigating a question regarding human development. There are several ways you could approach the proposal. It could provide a detailed rationale, with well-formulated methodological details, for empirical investigation of a specific and important question about development. Alternatively, it could present ideas for investigating a set of closely related questions – as in a small grant proposal – which would involve less detail regarding each but cover a wider range of issues that are carefully integrated. Yet another possibility is to focus the proposal on utilizing a new methodology or empirical tool (e.g., a neuroimaging technique, a computational modeling approach) to investigate a developmental question in a new manner. Please do seek us out to discuss your proposal ideas in advance if you would wish to. We would enjoy the opportunity to help you shape them. The proposal is due Friday, March 13th by 4p.m., either in the Psychology Department Main office, or in the form of a digital file emailed to both Baldwin and Pfeifer.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Jan. 5 – Historical and Contemporary Issues in the Study of Human Development

Jan. 7 – Neurophysiological Development

Jan. 12 – Early development, parenting, attachment and ameliorating risk, Part I

Jan. 14 – Early development, parenting, and ameliorating risk, Part II
(Guest: Jeffrey Measelle)

Jan. 19 – No class meeting

Jan. 21 – Early development, parenting, and ameliorating risk, Part III
(Guest: Jennifer Ablow)

Jan. 26 – Perceptual development and action processing

Jan. 28 – Conceptual development, Part I

Feb. 2 – Conceptual development, Part II

Feb. 4 – Developments in social cognition, Part I

Feb. 9 – Developments in social cognition, Part II
(Guest: Lou Moses)

Feb. 11 – Developmental social neuroscience of mentalizing

Feb. 16 – No class

Feb. 18 – Language development, Part I

Feb. 23 – Language development, Part II

Feb. 25 – Language development, Part III
(Guest: Helen Neville)

Mar. 2 – Peer relationships

Mar. 4 – Personal and social self/identity development

Mar. 9 – Adolescence, Part I – Emotion and the development of self-regulation

Mar. 11 – Adolescence, Part II – Puberty and sexuality
(Guest: Jane Mendle)