

Cognitive Development: Winter 2011

Mondays & Wednesdays 12:00-1:20p.m.

Professor:

Dr. Dare Baldwin
Straub 386, 346-4964
baldwin@uoregon.edu
Office hours: Mon. 1:30-2:30 pm, Thurs. 10:00-11:00 am

Graduate Teaching Fellow:

Kara Sage
Straub 349
kara@uoregon.edu
Office hour: TBA

Course Description:

Children's grasp of the world changes dramatically with development. In a short two years from birth, we humans change from helpless bundles into walking, talking dynamos. As toddlers, however, we are prone to swallow strange substances and dash in front of cars unless adults are present to save us from the consequences of our own exuberance. As school-aged children we often hold unusual beliefs about people and the world, yet nevertheless can accomplish remarkable intellectual feats, such as reading and mathematical calculation. What accounts for the huge growth in knowledge and skill that we see in human development, and also for its seeming unevenness? Is knowledge accumulation what cognitive development is all about? Or do children's thinking skills also change in qualitative ways? If so, in what ways? In what ways is cognitive development in human children different from what we see in other species? How dependent is normal cognitive development on a certain kind of environment (e.g., nutritional, familial, academic, and/or cultural)? These are among the questions we will consider in this course. We will consider different accounts of how mental abilities develop, as well as the scientific methodologies psychologists use to investigate cognitive development. A particular focus will be the latest breakthroughs in the study of cognition in infancy and early childhood, as this is a period of almost explosive cognitive change, and this is an age range where rapid progress in scientific understanding of such change is currently being made.

Text:

Siegler, R., & Alibali, M. W. (2005). *Children's Thinking* (4th Ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc.

Required Reading: A list of lecture topics and reading assignments follows. The lecture topics will generally supplement rather than retrace materials presented in the text, and will reflect topical issues of contemporary interest in the field.

Blackboard: Blackboard will be a critical source of course-related information throughout the term. Study-guide questions for exams and exam scores will all be posted online. As well, powerpoint slides from lectures will be posted within a day or two after lectures have occurred. Check the blackboard website regularly for course-related announcements, and take advantage of the communication features to communicate with your term-project group.

Attendance: Class attendance is important to doing well in this course. And it makes the class a lot more engaging for all involved if you are there. Please come and join in our collective cognitive development enterprise. If you anticipate missing more than three classes, please come and discuss it with me.

Grading: Your grade in the course will be based on two exams (30% each) and a term-project (40%).

Exams: The two exams will be a mixture of short answer/short essay questions. They will not be cumulative. The first exam will take place in class on Wednesday, February 2, and the second exam will occur in class on Wednesday, March 9 (the last day of class). Material in text chapters 1-5 and 8 will be required for the first exam, and text chapters 6-7 and 9-12 will be required for the second exam. A study guide to assist in your preparation for each of the exams will be provided at least one week in advance of the exam. Spending time with the study guide and working together with others in the class in preparing answers to the study guide questions will be very helpful in improving your exam performance.

Term Project: Group debate and write-up. The term-project will involve both group and individual components. The goals of the term project are threefold: 1) to provide an opportunity to focus on an issue of debate within cognitive development that is of particular interest to you and to engage in a dialectic with other students on the topic, 2) to communicate with the class at large about your findings in order to help build our collective knowledge base on the topic, and 3) to build your individual writing skills. Because there is no final exam in this course, the term project will be a major focus of your intellectual efforts in the class, and it will account for 40% of your overall grade.

To carry out the term project, you will join together with other students in the class (groups will include 5-6 students) who share an interest in a similar sub-topic within cognitive development. As a group you will research the topic and present a debate on the topic to the class. You have two options for your group debate format: 1) organizing a 15-minute in-class debate in which your group presents both sides of the issue in 10 minutes in a powerpoint presentation, and moderates full-class discussion for 5 minutes, or 2) presenting the two sides of the debate in a powerpoint presentation posted on our blackboard website and moderating comments from the class in response to your debate material over the course of the term. You will need to decide, as a group, which format you prefer. Subsequently, on an individual basis you will write up your considered position on the topic that you chose to debate on, complete with references to all sources you consulted. It is fine if you ultimately adopt a different position in your final write-up than the one you espoused in your group debate. The project write-up should be 4-5 pages double-spaced (references excluded).

Extra Credit: There are two extra credit options, each of which potentially enables you to improve your overall grade by as much as 3%. You may choose one or the other, but cannot get credit for both, nor for any combination of the two.

Extra Credit Option 1 (Research Participation): You can participate in Psychology Department research through the Psychology Department Human Subjects Pool. For each credit of participation assigned to Psych 475/575, you can earn a 1% improvement to your final grade, for up to 3%. Also necessary for gaining the extra credit is that you hand in a one-page description of the research you participated in for each of the participation credits. You can gain information by contacting the human subjects coordinator, Ida, by email at hscoord@uoregon.edu. You can also gain additional information by going to the HSP website at <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~hscoord>.

Extra Credit Option 2 (Debate Participation): You can contribute written comments on debates that groups other than your own host on the blackboard website. One percent of extra credit will be awarded for each time you provide five substantive written comments on others' debates. Thus fifteen substantive comments will earn you the full 3% of possible extra credit. Note that "substantive" means a relevant, thoughtful comment at least two paragraphs in length. You will need to assemble a portfolio file of all your comments to hand in altogether in one set in order to receive credit. You can do this in either digital or hard copy format.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE FOR LECTURE TOPICS

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Lecture Topic</u> | <u>Readings</u> |
|-------------|---|-----------------|
| Week 1 | Mind matters: What develops, why wonder? | Chs. 1-3 |
| Weeks 2-3 | Perception: Window on the world | Chs. 4-5 |
| Weeks 4-5 | Conception: Making sense of it all | Ch. 8 |
| Week 6 | Remember, forget, and remember to remember | Ch. 7 |
| Week 7 | People smarts | Ch. 9 |
| Week 8 | The gift of gab | Ch. 6 |
| Week 9 | Learning, solving problems, thinking critically | Chs.10-11 |
| Week 10 | Cognitive challenges | Ch. 12 |

Dates of Special Significance:

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|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| February 2 (Wednesday) | First Exam |
| March 2 (Wednesday) | Group Debate Final Deadline |
| March 9 (Wednesday) | Second Exam |
| March 14 (Monday, 4pm) | Debate Write-up Due |
| March 14 (Monday, 4pm) | Extra Credit Due |

THREE IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL NOTES:

1. Guidelines for Teaching and Learning: The Psychology Department has developed guidelines for teaching and learning in Psychology. These guidelines can be accessed at the following web address:
<http://psychweb.uoregon.edu/undergraduates/guidelines>

- Please read these guidelines carefully as they clarify our general expectations and goals for each other in this course.

2. Academic Honesty: As a member of the university community you are expected to be honest and forthright in all your academic endeavors. To falsify the results of one's research, to present the words, ideas, data, or work of another as one's own, or to cheat on an examination corrupts the essential process by which knowledge is advanced. All work submitted in this course must be your own and produced exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly acknowledged and documented. For the consequences of academic dishonesty, refer to the Schedule of Classes published quarterly. Violations will be taken seriously and are noted on student disciplinary records. If you are in doubt regarding any aspect of these issues as they pertain to this course, please consult with the instructor before you complete any relevant requirements of the course. For more information regarding academic honesty and the student conduct code at the University of Oregon, visit

the University's Office of Student Life website at:

<http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/StudentConductCode/tabid/69/Default.aspx>

3. Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with the instructor soon. It would be wise to contact Disability Services (164 Oregon Hall, 346-1155, disabsrv@uoregon.edu, <http://ds.uoregon.edu/>). Also please request that the Counselor for Students with Disabilities send a letter verifying your disability. [Counselor for Students with Disabilities: Molly Sirois, 346-3211, 164 Oregon Hall, 346-1073, sirois@uoregon.edu]