

# Cognitive Development: Spring 2012

Tuesdays & Thursdays 12:00-1:20p.m.

**Professor:**

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Office hours: Wed 2-3 pm, Fri 11am-12pm

**Graduate Teaching Fellow:**

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Mon 12-1pm, Tues 1:30-2:30pm

**Course Description:**

Children's grasp of the world changes dramatically with development. In a short two years from birth, they alter from helpless bundles into walking, talking dynamos. As toddlers, children are prone to swallow strange substances and dash in front of traffic unless adults are present to save them from the consequences of their own exuberance. Even the older, school-aged child holds 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 look at 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 Thursday, May 3, and the second exam will occur in class on Thursday, June 7 (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: Observing cognitive growth and best practices write-up.** The goals of the term project are fourfold: 1) to provide an opportunity to focus on an area of cognitive development that is of particular interest to you, 2) to document change in your own cognitive development over a multi-week time-window, 3) to investigate and document what is currently known within the field about how best to foster change in your chosen arena of cognitive development, and 4) 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 choose a domain in which you would like to gain some skill. This can be a domain in which you already have some skill but would like to enhance existing skill, or a domain that is entirely new to you. You will develop a training curriculum for yourself, and implement this curriculum, carefully documenting your cognitive progress along the way. You will produce two products in conjunction with the term project: First, on an individual basis you will write up a formal paper that presents your analysis of current research evidence regarding best practices in fostering the cognitive skill you opted to focus on. The project write-up should be at least 4-5 pages double-spaced (references excluded). It is due latest by Thursday, May 17, 4pm. Secondly, you will produce a powerpoint presentation that showcases your learning process from pre- to post- as well as the nature of the training that you engaged in. You can undertake this on an individual basis, or as part of a small group, but each individual's cognitive progress must be documented in the powerpoint. The powerpoint is due latest by Monday, June 11, 4pm.

**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 work is due latest by Monday, June 11, 4pm.

**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](mailto: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 (Critique of an Empirical Article):** You can locate an empirical article relevant to the study of cognitive development in a major, peer-reviewed journal, summarize it, and evaluate its contribution to our understanding of cognitive development. A terrific critique (target length is 3 double-spaced pages) will earn you the full 3% extra credit. It would be wise to seek approval of your article from me or our GTF before beginning your evaluation/critique. To receive the extra credit you will need to hand in both a copy of the article and the evaluation/critique.

## 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:

May 3 (Thursday)	First Exam
May 17 (Thursday)	Best Practices Paper Due
June 7 (Thursday)	Second Exam
June 11 (Monday, 4pm)	Powerpoint Due
June 11 (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](mailto: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](mailto:sirois@uoregon.edu)]