COURSE GOALS
The overarching goal of this course is to provide a graduate-level introduction to the major theoretical and empirical issues in contemporary personality psychology. Specifically:

1. Students will learn contemporary theoretical models that integrate multiple levels of individuality from traits to narrative identities.
2. Students will learn how the person-situation debate shaped current thinking about the interplay between dispositional and situational factors.
3. Students will learn about biological (e.g., genetic and physiological) contributions to personality as well as the controversies associated with these approaches (e.g., false positive gene by environment interactions).
4. Students will learn about basic issues in personality assessment including foundational psychometrics, issues with informant reports, and the predictive validity of trait measures.
5. Students will learn how personality psychology intersects with clinical, developmental, organizational, and social psychology.

PREREQUISITES
Current psychology graduate student or approval of instructor.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
1. Constructive participation in seminar and weekly discussion questions (10% of your final grade). It is critical that everyone actively participates in this course. Accordingly, you are required to carefully read the material for each week in advance of class and post a minimum of three questions about these readings. You must post your questions on the course website by 6 pm on Sunday. Make these questions thoughtful and insightful and avoid pedestrian postings (see the guidelines on page 2). Please identify the reading that is the primary focus of each of your questions.

2. Complete three written papers (60% of your final grade). In lieu of a final paper, you will be given 1 week to answer a specific question related to course readings at three times during the semester. These papers will be limited to 4 pages of double-spaced text (12-point font and 1-inch margins) so you must write concisely. The point of these written assignments is to give you a chance to practice responding to challenging questions in a thoughtful and compact fashion. The schedule for paper assignments is listed on the following pages.

3. Lead Discussion of Articles (30% of your final grade): At least three times per semester you will be required to lead discussion of a particular article. Your responsibility is to motivate and sustain a critical discussion about that article. This will involve providing an accurate “two minute” summary of the core themes and findings reported in the article and organizing the discussion questions related to that article in a coherent fashion. I also expect that you will do additional research related to your article so that you are well versed about how that particular reading fits within the broader literature. Leading discussion is an important skill so please take this requirement seriously (see the guidelines on page 2). We will pick articles the first day of class.
**FINAL GRADES**
There are 100 total points in this class. Scores required for each letter designation in the grading system:

- 4.0: 90-100 points
- 3.5: 85-89 points
- 3.0: 80-84 points
- 2.5: 75-79 points
- 2.0: 70-74 points
- 1.5: 65-69 points
- 1.0: 60-64 points
- 0.0: any score below 60 points

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**
I borrowed many ideas for these readings from friends and colleagues. This syllabus borrows heavily from prior syllabuses by Brent Donnellan, Rob Ackerman, and Emily Durbin; see prior versions of their syllabuses for acknowledgements of others who have contributed.

**ACCOMMODATIONS**
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities [https://rcpd.msu.edu](https://rcpd.msu.edu).

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**
I expect all students to work with the highest level of academic integrity. MSU’s policies regarding academic integrity are listed here: [https://ombud.msu.edu/academic-integrity/index.html](https://ombud.msu.edu/academic-integrity/index.html). Most importantly, students in this class are expected to provide original, independent work when completing any assignments for this course.

**DISCLAIMER**
Personality psychology is a large and diverse field with many controversies. This makes selecting readings a daunting task and my syllabus reflects my own biases and interests. I acknowledge upfront that my interests are generally focused on the trait/disposition level. *There is more to personality psychology than the topics I have decided to cover!* Moreover, there is a limited amount of class time so I have included a number of suggested additional readings for you to consider as supplements. I also encourage you to take a look at the webpage maintained by Brent Roberts as it lists a number of personality syllabuses from stellar researchers at other universities (see below). You should also consider reviewing the most recent handbooks available in the field to get a sense of the topics I omitted.

Syllabus Repository: [http://pigee.wordpress.com/?s=syllabus](http://pigee.wordpress.com/?s=syllabus)

**GUIDELINES FOR POSTING QUESTIONS**
1. Come up with an interesting question that can stimulate a scientific discussion. Avoid posting questions that you could answer yourself with some additional research. If you are raising an abstract idea or an objection to a reading, make sure to provide a concrete example so that people can more easily understand your perspective.

2. Have a clear question in mind for each posting. If you are not sure of the point that you are trying to raise, then it is unlikely that anyone else will get it.

3. I may call you out if you post a question that is inane, incoherent, or inappropriate! Do not free associate or otherwise waste our time.
4. You should read the other postings and respond accordingly. It is fine to build on someone else’s question but add something constructive. Feel free to disagree with others but do so with respect and tact. Be charitable to opposing arguments and perspectives.

5. Finally, note this perspective espoused by Kimble (1994):
   “…the business of psychology is to understand behavior. The values that govern the endeavor are scientific values… How you feel about a finding has no bearing on its truth.” (p. 257).


GUIDELINES FOR LEADING ARTICLE DISCUSSIONS
1. Read the article thoroughly. Consider doing this multiple times. Consider doing additional reading on the topic.

2. Prepare a 2 to 3 minute summary of the reading. Identify the main points and crucial take home messages. Be ready to give this summary in class. I may ask for it!

3. Copy all posted questions for your “target reading” to a separate document.

4. Read each question and rank the questions from best to worst on the following oblique dimensions: Clarity; Interestingness; Ability to stimulate discussion; Whether or not the issue is scientific; Any other relevant dimension. Decide on a final ordering of the questions. Bottom Line: Give preference to the “best” questions in case you run out of time.

5. Paraphrase the questions to facilitate discussion. You might want to prepare a handout with the paraphrased questions.

6. If someone asks a “factual” question about terminology or methodology make sure that you can answer such a question (but see Point #1 in the previous section).

7. Have fun!

Course Schedule and Reading List
Note: The articles are listed in the order that I think you should read them. All readings should be available as pdfs through the MSU library system unless indicated by an asterisk (*). I will provide access to those readings through the course website.

Week 1: Overview and Introductions

7 January (3 Readings)
Week 2: Traits and Trait Structure

14 January (4 Readings)

21 January: No Class, Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Week 3: Assessment and Personality Judgment

28 January (5 Readings, plus podcast)
Rationally Speaking Podcast. “Why people think some things can’t be quantified (and why they are wrong)”

Week 4: Person-Situation Debate

4 February – Paper 1 Handed Out (4 Readings)
Zimbardo, P. G. (2004). A situationist perspective on the psychology of evil: Understanding how good people are transformed into perpetrators. In A. Miller (Ed.). The social psychology of good and evil: Understanding our capacity for kindness and cruelty. *
Lucas, R. E., & Donnellan, M. B. (2009). If the person–situation debate is really over, why does it still generate so much negative affect?. Journal of Research in Personality, 43, 146-149.

11 February: No Class

Week 5: Person and Situation Integration

18 February – Paper 1 Due (5 Readings)
Week 6: Evolutionary and Physiological Approaches

25 February (4 Readings)

4 March: No Class (Spring Break)

Week 7: Genetic Perspectives

11 March – Paper 2 handed out (5 Readings)

18 March (4 Readings)

Week 8: CAPS, Goals, and Within-Person Dynamics

25 March – Paper 2 due (4 Readings)

*Week 10: Personality Traits and Life Outcomes II: Relationships, Work, and Well-Being*

1 April (6 Readings)


*Week 11: Narcissism and Self-Esteem*

8 April (5 Readings)


*Week 12: Developmental Considerations I*

15 April – Paper 3 handed out (5 Readings)


*Week 13: Developmental Considerations II*

22 April – (4 Readings)


**Paper 3 is due by noon on April 29, 2019**