SOSC1960 Introduction to Psychology (L1)
Spring 2026
Course Outline

Course description

This course examines human thinking and behavior processes from a psychological perspective and illustrates the relevance of psychological insights to the betterment of society. It is designed to help students acquire a basic understanding of psychology as a scientific discipline and prepare them for more advanced psychology courses in the future.

Intended learning outcomes (ILOs)

On successful completion of the course, you will be able to:
- recognize some fundamental scientific concepts about human mind and behavior
- analyze human performance and well-being in various societal settings with reference to these concepts
- explain how scientific research on human mind and behavior is conducted

Course design emphases

The course materials and learning activities are designed with the following emphases:
- portray psychology as an empirical science
- illustrate the breadth and diversity of psychology
- highlight the applications of psychology in everyday life
- introduce new ways of thinking about the world through the lens of psychology
- combat longstanding misconceptions and myths about the human mind and behavior

Below are the key references for the design of the course:
- Bernstein, D. A. (2017). Bye-bye intro: A proposal for transforming introductory psychology. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, *3*(3), 191-197.
- Bernstein, D. A., & Frantz, S. (2025). Teaching an introductory psychology course that matters. *American Psychologist*.
- Halonen, J. S., Whitlock, K., & Arena, L. (2021). The introductory psychology course in the 21st century: The challenge of finding common ground. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, *7*(3), 192-205.

Teaching team

Instructor: Kevin Tam, kevintam@ust.hk
TA: Vivien Pong, vivienpong@ust.hk; Gewei Chen, gchenbr@connect.ust.hk
- Emails will be responded to on working days only.
- When contacting us by email, always prefix the subject line of your message with the course code (e.g., "SOSC1960-L1 | exam"). Use your university email account only. Tell us who you are in the email; emails with no identity revealed will not be responded to. Do not send messages via Canvas.
- When you ask questions about an assignment, make sure you explain your difficulties clearly and ask specific questions. Do not send a draft to us and ask for comments; we will not answer such request. Make sure your questions or requests for consultation reach us at least 3 working days by the assignment's submission deadline; we will not respond to any late questions or requests.

Learning activities

Lectures (ILOs #1 to 3)
- The lectures serve as the foundation for your learning in this course and are organized into five modules. Each lecture is centered around a question related to human mind and behavior as a point of departure and introduces various concepts and theories in psychology to address the question.
- Each lecture includes multiple learning activities. Following the introduction of key concepts and theories, an emphasis is placed on the evidence-based investigative process that underpins these insights, along with cases and examples that illustrate their practical applications. (ILOs #1 to 3)
- Lectures will NOT be recorded.

Required and optional readings (ILOs #1 to 3)
- The required readings complement the lectures and will be covered in the exams.
- The optional readings are recommended for students who want to further explore a topic of interest.
- The reading list, available on Canvas, will be distributed and updated regularly.

Participation (10%) (ILOs #1 to 3)
- Active participation in the lectures enhances learning for both you and your peers. Each lecture includes multiple learning activities (in the form of questions on Mentimeter), and your participation in these activities is expected.
- Your participation will be recorded via Mentimeter (login is required). To receive a participation credit for a lecture, you must be physically present in the lecture room and respond to at least two of the questions on Mentimeter during that lecture.
- Participation credits can be earned during lectures from Feb 20 to Mar 11, and from Mar 25 to May 6, with a total of 17 lecture credits available.
- Your final class participation point will be computed based on the number of participation credits you have accumulated, using the following scale:
  14 to 17 credits = 10 points (equating to 10% of your course grade)
  11 to 13 credits = 8 points
  8 to 10 credits = 6 points
  5 to 7 credits = 4 points
  2 to 4 credits = 2 points
  0 to 1 credits = 0 point
- Due to the built-in buffer in the scale that allows for some missed lectures while still achieving the full 10 points, we will not accept requests for make-up participation. The only exception will be for students with long-term medical illnesses. In such cases, students should contact us as early as possible and provide supporting documentation, such as a doctor's note.
- Random attendance checks will be conducted in some lectures. Students who are not present in the lecture room but have participation recorded on Mentimeter will be considered to be cheating. If caught, these students will automatically receive 0 points for class participation and will be reported to the division head for further disciplinary action.

Investigative project (15%) (ILOs #1 to #3)
- This project aims to help you develop an understanding of the relevance of psychology in everyday life while enhancing your ability to think critically based on information from multiple sources.
- The project will focus on a specific question related to human mind and behavior. You will have the opportunity to choose a question of interest from a set of options.
- You will be guided to address this question from three perspectives: personal reflection, AI chatbots, and scientific literature. Additionally, you will compare and contrast these perspectives to generate your final answer to the question.
- You will receive learning support throughout the course and during the workshop on 20 Mar.
- Detailed guidelines will be released in due course.

Exams (30% + 40%) (ILOs #1 to #3)
- The two exams assess your basic understanding of course materials with multiple-choice and short-answer questions.

- They cover all materials discussed in the lectures and the required readings. Exam 1 covers Modules 1 and 2, and Exam 2 covers Modules 3 to 5.
- Exam 1: 16:30 – 17:50, 18 Mar, LTB
- Exam 2: date, time, venue to be announced by the university
- Please refrain from scheduling any trips, job interviews, or other activities on the exam dates, as no make-up exam will be arranged. The only exception is for students with medical illnesses. If you miss an exam due to an acute medical situation, you must contact us within three days after the exam and provide medical documentation; otherwise, you will forfeit your entitlement to a make-up exam. Please note that the make-up exam will consist of essay questions only.
- Detailed guidelines will be released in due course.

Learning reflection (5%) (ILOs #1 and #2)
- At the end of the course, you will be guided to reflect on how your learning experience has transformed your knowledge and yourself as a person.
- Detailed guidelines will be released in due course.

Communication and feedback

Scores and comments for assessed activities will be communicated via Canvas within two to three weeks of submission. Feedback will include strengths and areas for improvement. Students who have further questions about the feedback should consult us within five working days after the feedback is received. If you have any question about your score, you may contact the teaching assistants to set up an appointment for a discussion. If after the discussion you wish to pursue a formal review, you have to submit an application within three days (please ask the teaching assistants for the form). On the application form, you must provide a justification for your request, and agree that the instructor will review your submission, and the score assigned by the instructor will be final (it could be higher than, the same as, or lower than your original score).

Final grade descriptors

Assessment will be made using criterion-referencing; scores and grades will NOT be assigned on a curve.

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration
A	Excellent Performance	- demonstrates comprehensive grasp of course materials - exhibits a high capacity for scholarship, going beyond requirements - shows originality in works submitted - shows an extraordinary level of motivation to learn - displays eagerness to apply materials learned
B	Good Performance	- demonstrates good understanding of course materials - exhibits a good capacity for scholarship within course requirements - shows a high level of motivation to learn - displays interest to apply materials learned
C	Satisfactory Performance	- demonstrates adequate understanding of course materials - exhibits some ability to think critically and analytically - fulfils all course requirements satisfactorily - displays moderate motivation to learn and apply materials learned
D	Marginal Pass	- demonstrates poor understanding of course materials - fails to think critically and analytically - barely fulfils all course requirements - displays weak motivation to learn and apply materials learned
F	Fail	- fails to adequately understand course materials - fails to fulfil all course requirements - shows minimal motivation to learn and apply materials learned

Policies

1. *Learning attitude.* Your active participation not only helps you and your peers learn more but also enables us to teach better. Think about what you want to learn and how you are going to learn it. Use grades, scores, and comments from us to understand how much and how well you have learned and how you can improve.

2. *Academic integrity.* Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to [Academic Integrity | HKUST – Academic Registry](#) for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.

3. *Lecture slides.* The lecture slides will be available on Canvas before each lecture. Note that some contents (mainly examples and activities) might be removed from the shared version. You are encouraged to take your own notes and generate your own examples. Research has shown that personal notetaking and example generation improve learning and course performance.

4. *Submission policy.* We have a grace period policy that allows for submissions to be accepted up to 5 hours late without penalty. Penalties apply to submissions late for more than 5 hours.

5. *AI policy.* The use of generative AI to assist your own learning is permitted under the conditions that proper acknowledgement is provided, and the use does not replace your own work.

Course contents

The following is subject to change. Each question will be addressed in a single lecture.

Introduction

Why does psychology matter?
Isn't psychology just common sense?

Module 1: Our experience of the world
(biological psychology; cognitive psychology; experimental psychology; psychology of perception)

Why does the moon look so big near the horizon?
Can people die from not sleeping?
Are you truly in control, or is your brain on autopilot?
Why do we feel emotionally connected to characters in animations?
How is it possible to teach pigeons to play ping-pong?

Module 2: The way we think
(cognitive psychology; human factors and engineering psychology; performance psychology)

Why do you forget things you have studied?
Why do people stick to bad investments?
Does a high IQ guarantee success?

Module 3: Who we are and why we do what we do
(developmental psychology; family psychology; personality psychology; social psychology)

Are you more introverted or extraverted?
What makes a good parent?
Would you trust your own eyes or follow the crowd?
Why do we need friends?

Module 4: Our health and well-being
(abnormal psychology; clinical psychology; health psychology; positive psychology; social psychology)

Why do some people handle stress better than others?
Is fearing birds a mental disorder?
What do most people get wrong about schizophrenia?
Is therapy just talking and a waste of time?
Is a good life just a happy life?

Module 5: Living in the digital age
(cyberpsychology, psychology of AI, psychology of social media)

Is social media bad for you?
Can an AI truly be a companion or friend?

Calendar

The following is subject to change. Meeting time and venue: 16:30 – 17:50, every Wednesday and Friday, Room 2465

4 Feb	Introduction
6 Feb	Introduction
11 Feb	Module 1
13 Feb	Module 1
18 Feb	(holiday)
20 Feb	Module 1
25 Feb	Module 1
27 Feb	Module 1
4 Mar	Module 2
6 Mar	Module 2
11 Mar	Module 2
13 Mar	Module 2; Consultation
18 Mar	Exam 1 (LTB)
20 Mar	Workshop for assignment
25 Mar	Module 3
27 Mar	Module 3
1 Apr	Module 3
3 Apr	(holiday)
8 Apr	(holiday)
10 Apr	Module 3
15 Apr	Module 4
17 Apr	Module 4
22 Apr	Module 4
24 Apr	Module 4
29 Apr	Module 4
1 May	Module 5
6 May	Module 5
8 May	Module 5; Consultation
May	Exam 2 (date, time, and venue to be announced by the university)

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