

PY 600M Cognitive Processes
Course Syllabus
Colorado State University, Spring 2006

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Course Overview and Objectives: *Cognitive Processes* surveys fundamental concepts and current issues in areas of “higher” cognition, areas such as knowledge representation, language and psycholinguistics, judgment and decision making, and problem solving. The course has several functions in the Department—it serves as a core course for all of our graduate programs, it may be used to fulfill one of the breadth requirements for APA-accredited counseling psychology programs, and it serves as a foundation course for students in the Cognitive Psychology Program. Given these multiple functions, as well as the diversity of students in the course, the primary goal of *Cognitive Processes* is to provide broad coverage of the central topic areas of higher cognition. Note, however, that the coverage of most topic areas includes an accelerated overview of central concepts and findings followed by in-depth coverage of a narrower subset of topics. The in-depth follow-up topics will focus on particularly important, interesting, or controversial issues in the field. It is here that we will cover key applications of higher cognition to areas such as education, assessment and diagnosis, and mental health.

Course Format: The prerequisite for the course is an undergraduate course in cognitive psychology. The course will be taught at a considerably higher level and more accelerated pace than an undergraduate course, so those of you who have not had an undergraduate course in cognitive psychology may have to put in more effort (e.g., do some additional background reading, spend more time going over the assigned readings, etc.). In most cases, two or more class meetings will be devoted to a topic, at least one covering background material and one or more covering advanced material. Background material will be covered in lecture format, and lectures will review, elaborate, and extend on the readings under the assumption that you have read the material ahead of time. Advanced material will be covered in a more discussion-oriented fashion, some led by student discussion leaders. Although a good portion of the course will be presented in lecture format, I encourage discussion and interaction at any time (and there will be frequent demonstrations, exercises, and examples to promote this).

Course Material: The readings for the course have been selected from a variety of textbooks, edited volumes, and journals on human cognition. Discussion leaders will have some input on the readings assigned for in-depth topics. The readings will be posted on the course WebCT page in pdf file format.

Evaluation: Grades will be determined using a straight scale (where 90%=A, 80%=B, etc.). There will be three non-cumulative exams—two midterms and a final—worth 30% each. Exams will consist of several short essay questions, will cover both reading and lecture material, and

will primarily test your conceptual understanding of the material. Everyone must complete all three exams, but if you are dissatisfied with the grade you get on either of the first two exams, you will be given the opportunity to write a paper and take your grade on the paper as a substitute for an exam grade. The remaining 10% of your grade will be based on class participation on the days of in-depth topics. Credit for participation is earned by leading discussion once during the semester and by turning in discussion questions on those days that you are not leading discussion.

Correspondence: Don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions—I have an open-door policy and strive to be readily available outside of class. I typically work in my office with the door open, and at those times, your free to stop in unannounced. If you want to be sure to catch me, you may come by during office hours or set up an appointment.

Tentative List of Topics

Introduction

Introduction to Cognitive Psychology
History and Foundations of Cog. Psych.

Knowledge Representation

Semantic Organization
Concepts and Categories
Schemas and Scripts
Representation of Visual Information

Language

Structure of Language
Comprehension of Language
Language Disorders
Reading and Text Comprehension

Decision Making

Judgment and Decision Making
Assessment and Diagnosis

Problem Solving

Fundamentals of Problem Solving
Expertise in Problem Solving
Creativity in Problem Solving