

PSYCHOLOGY 6760: SKINNER'S BEHAVIORISM

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY COURSE SYLLABUS FALL 2007

COURSE INFORMATION

Meeting Time:	Tuesdays 6:00pm – 9:00pm	Location:	Dunbar Hall Room 2203
Instructor:	Eric J. Fox, Ph.D.	Office Hours:	Mondays, 12:00–1:30pm Wednesdays, 12:00–1:30pm or by appointment
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COURSE OVERVIEW

It can be difficult to fully appreciate the role philosophical assumptions play in the development of theory, science, and applied knowledge. Both scientists and practitioners often leave core assumptions unstated, cobble together patchwork theories in the hope of embracing diverse perspectives, or trust that “brute force” empiricism will reveal all of the relevant facts. Unfortunately, such practices are unlikely to contribute to the development of a coherent and progressive discipline. Those who do not specify their core assumptions or claim that they have none are typically just adopting those of their mainstream culture, and are likely relying on a poorly articulated, contradictory, and incomplete philosophy. Those who carelessly “integrate” diverse theories run the risk of trying to combine mutually exclusive premises and producing little more than incoherence. And those who trust in merely amassing raw empirical data are advocating a strategy that can be grossly inefficient, uncharacteristic of scientific research, and ill-suited to the development of true technological innovation. Theories, and the philosophical assumptions that guide their construction and evaluation, are the foundation of scientific and technological progress.

There are many different ways we can choose to describe, analyze, and understand the events of our world. Our philosophical premises and assumptions, whether stated explicitly or not, guide the types of statements and theories we make and value. While many theories are obviously tied to empirical data, philosophical assumptions will nonetheless influence the creation, assessment, and evaluation of knowledge claims and theories. Regardless of the empirical support a particular theory might enjoy, for example, it is typically not difficult to find scholars or practitioners who eschew it (this is particularly true in psychology!). Sometimes this is because the critics have different criteria (or respect) for “empirical support,” sometimes it is because they do not view the theory as compatible with their belief system, and sometimes it is because they have a competing theory that can account for the same data. In all of these cases, philosophical assumptions are impacting their evaluation of the theory.

Behavior analysis is distinguished from other perspectives in psychology by its unique philosophical, theoretical, and methodological orientation. In this course you will learn about the premises and assumptions of B.F. Skinner's *radical behaviorism*, one of the philosophies of science underlying behavior analysis. We will also explore how the continual interpretation, modification, and evolution of this philosophy informs the development of theories, methods, and applications in our field. The course really is that awesome.

This course will primarily follow a discussion seminar format, not a lecture format. Thus, it is vital that you read all assigned materials before class and be prepared to discuss them during class. Many of the activities and assignments described below are designed to foster discussion of the readings and active participation by all students.

TEXT & MATERIALS

The following texts are required for the course, and are available at the WMU and University Bookstores:

1. Moore, J. (2008). *Conceptual foundations of radical behaviorism*. Cornwall-on-Hudson, NY: Sloan Publishing.
2. Skinner, B. F. (1974). *About behaviorism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
3. *Course website*. The course website contains several canonical articles by Skinner, along with other required and optional readings.

WEBSITE

A course website will be maintained using WMU's Blackboard Learning System. The website has the following key features:

- **Course materials** – a variety of materials will be available, including the syllabus, PowerPoint slides from lectures, readings, and handouts
- **Online reading quizzes** – these are *required* weekly assignments (see next page)
- **Assignment submission** – *all* assignments for this course (including discussion questions and final papers) must be submitted via the course website
- **Gradebook** – all scores and grades will be available online

You can access all of your Blackboard course websites from **GoWMU** (<http://gowmu.wmich.edu>). Click on the "e-learning" link from the row of icons near the top right of the screen. If you need help accessing or using the course website, try the following resources:

- E-Learning Support Website: <http://www.wmich.edu/vista/students>
- Office of Information Technology (OIT) Help Desk Phone Number: 269-387-HELP
- Office of Information Technology (OIT) Help Desk Phone Email Address: helpdesk@wmich.edu

REQUIREMENTS

Attendance & Participation

The majority of each class period will be devoted to discussions based on the questions you submit, with some time also devoted to lectures and presentations. An atmosphere of mutual respect is expected to be maintained during all class discussions and activities. Since the class only meets once per week, you are expected to attend and participate in every class. Missing all or a significant portion of a class meeting will result in an automatic deduction of 20 points from your overall course grade. If you have a legitimate excuse for missing class (e.g., serious medical problem, attendance at a professional conference, etc.), you may contact the instructor for a make-up writing assignment to recover all or a portion of the 20 points that would normally be deducted.

Discussion Questions

For each unit, you will be required to prepare at least three discussion questions based on the assigned readings. The questions should address substantial issues and be designed to promote discussion. I will typically select one or two of your questions for class discussion. You should be prepared to take the floor and lead the discussion of your questions when they are raised in class.

Each set of questions will be scored on a 10-point scale (please see "The Doc Fox Guide to Writing Awesome Discussion Questions" for detailed guidelines and scoring criteria), and must be submitted via the "Assignments" section of the course website by the deadline (9:00am the day of class). Late assignments will be docked 2 points for every 10 minutes they are late. If you have trouble accessing or submitting your questions via the course website, you may email them directly to the course instructor (this is only to be done in emergency situations, however; you are expected to submit them via the website whenever possible).

Online Reading Quizzes

For each unit you must complete an online reading quiz on the course website (accessed via the "Assessments" link). The quizzes cover key points and issues in the assigned readings for that week. Although I will not give you specific study objectives for these quizzes, the study questions at the end of each chapter in the *Conceptual Foundations of Radical Behaviorism* textbook are a good guide for quizzes based on that book. You may use your readings and notes while taking the quiz, and you may take it wherever and whenever you want (before the deadline). You may **not** work with other students on the quiz, however, and any reports of students doing so will be treated as a violation of the university's academic dishonest policy. Note that the quiz must be *completed* and *submitted* before the deadline, not simply *started* before the deadline. Quizzes submitted after the deadline will receive a grade of 0.

Each reading quiz consists of 10–15 questions (primarily multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank) and is worth a total of 15 points. You will have 90 minutes to complete each quiz. It is strongly recommended that you complete the readings before taking the quiz; if you try to look up all of the answers without having read anything yet, you will struggle to complete the quiz in the allotted time. The deadline for each reading quiz is 6:00pm the day before class (see Course Calendar below).

If you wish to contest your score on a reading quiz (i.e., answer key seems incorrect, minor spelling error on a fill-in-the-blank question, etc.), you must submit a re-grade request to the instructor via email within one week of the quiz deadline. Your request should identify the specific quiz score you are contesting, the question(s) you believe should be re-graded, and the reason(s) why you believe more points should be awarded. References to relevant material in the readings (provide page numbers) will make it easier to evaluate your request. Re-grade requests submitted more than one week after the quiz in question will not be honored.

Final Paper Outline

You will submit an outline for your final paper worth 50 points. This will be your primary opportunity to receive guidance and feedback about the content, direction, and purpose of your paper. Guidelines for writing the outline will be provided.

Final Paper

You will write a 10–15 page paper for this course related to key philosophical assumptions of radical behaviorism, important conceptual or empirical developments in behavior analysis, an important historical influence on Skinner's system, or some other approved topic. The final paper is worth up to 100 points. Detailed guidelines for the paper will be provided, along with a list of possible topics.

Final Paper Presentation

You will be required to present your final paper in summary form to the class during one of the final two class periods. You will have 10 minutes to speak, followed by a 5-minute discussion/question-and-answer session. The final presentation will be worth 60 points, with up to 20 points awarded via a peer evaluation system and up to 40 points awarded by the instructor.

Relational Frame Theory Tutorial

You will be required to complete a fully online tutorial on Relational Frame Theory (RFT) to facilitate discussion of this theory and verbal behavior in general. The tutorial may be completed any time before the deadline (see Course Calendar), and can be accessed via any computer connected to the web at http://www.contextualpsychology.org/access_tutorial. You **must** enter this Course Access Code when registering your student account for the tutorial: G2007FA227.

The tutorial takes most people approximately 2–3 hours to complete, but you **do not** have to complete it in one sitting. You can logout using the "Exit" button and the tutorial will save your progress (the next time you login you will start at the beginning of the last uncompleted lesson). A total of 15 points is available for completing the tutorial. You will receive 10 points for simply completing the tutorial, and up to 5 points based on your performance on the 36-question tutorial quiz (5 points for a score of 30 or higher on the quiz, 4 points for a score between 25 and 29, 3 points for a score between 20 and 24, etc.). The tutorial quiz can be re-taken as many times as you wish; only your highest score will count toward your grade.

GRADE

Your course grade is based on the points you receive on the assignments described above. Point totals are summarized below.

Assignment	Points	%of Total Points
Online Reading Quizzes (11 @ 15 points each)	165	33%
Discussion Questions (11 sets @ 10 points each)	110	22%
Final Paper	100	20%
Final Paper Presentation	60	12%
Final Paper Outline	50	10%
Relational Frame Theory Tutorial	15	3%
TOTAL	500	100%

Letter grades will be assigned according to the following criteria:

Grade	A	BA	B	CB	C	DC	D	E
Points	450+	425-449	400-424	375-399	350-374	325-349	300-324	< 300

INCOMPLETES

In keeping with the University's policy on the grade of Incomplete, a grade of incomplete (I) will **NOT** be given as a substitute for a failing grade. Incompletes are only given when a student who is passing course with a grade of C or better has to miss the remainder of the semester due to an unavoidable circumstance (e.g., a serious illness). Contact the instructor as soon as possible if you believe you need (and are eligible) to take an Incomplete for the course.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

You are responsible for making yourself aware of and understanding the policies and procedures in the Graduate Catalog that pertain to Academic Honesty. These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submission, plagiarism, complicity, and computer misuse.

If there is reason to believe you have been involved in academic dishonesty, you will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. You will be given the opportunity to review the charge(s). If you believe you are not responsible, you will have the opportunity for a hearing. You should consult with me if you are uncertain about an issue of academic honesty prior to the submission of an assignment or test. Any student found to be responsible for the act of academic dishonesty will be given a failing grade in the course and may be suspended or expelled from the university.

EMERGENCY CLASS CANCELLATION

In the event that classes are officially canceled (due to weather, rioting, rip in the space-time continuum, etc.), please note that **all** reading quiz, discussion questions, and other assignment submission deadlines will **remain the same**. We will simply discuss two units of material at the next class meeting.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES POLICY

The University is a diverse, multicultural enterprise and, as a community, we jointly embrace both individual responsibility and dignified respect for our differences. It is our general policy to permit students to fulfill obligations set aside by their faith. It is our intent that students who must be absent from scheduled classes to fulfill religious obligations or observe practices associated with their faith not be disadvantaged. However, it is your responsibility to make arrangements with the instructor in advance.

If you anticipate an absence due to a religious obligation, you must notify the instructor in writing at least one week in advance. All reading quiz, discussion question, and other assignment submission deadlines will remain the same. To avoid missing the 20 points that would normally be deducted for an absence, the instructor will provide you with a make-up writing assignment.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that all qualified persons have equal opportunity and access to education regardless of the presence of any disabling conditions. Access to education means providing students with the tools needed to be successful in higher education, including physical accommodations in classroom and lab space, course substitutions and/or waivers, modifications of classroom presentations, and modifications in testing and course requirements. If you have some specific learning disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment, seizure disorder, motor impairment, psychological disorder(s), and/or any other disabilities, you should register with the Disabled Student Services on campus, get a note from them outlining any special attention you may need, and bring that to me as soon as possible. I will make every effort to provide any accommodations necessary.

UNITS

UNIT	Required Readings
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website: A Brief Biography of B.F. Skinner • Website: "The Limits of Technological Talk" (Hayes) • About Behaviorism: Introduction and Chapters 1 – 8
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About Behaviorism: Chapters 9 – 14
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFRB: Chapter 1 – Radical Behaviorism as a Philosophy of Science • CFRB: Chapter 2 – History of Behaviorism and Behavior Analysis: 1800-1930 • CFRB: Chapter 3 – History of Behaviorism and Behavior Analysis: 1930-1980
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website: "Phylogeny and Ontogeny of Behavior" (Skinner) • CFRB: Chapter 4 – Behavior as a Subject Matter in Its Own Right • CFRB: Chapter 5 – Categories of Behavior
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website: "Selection by Consequences" (Skinner) • CFRB: Chapter 6 – Consequences and Concepts in the Analysis of Behavior • CFRB: Chapter 7 – Selection by Consequences
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFRB: Chapter 8 – Verbal Behavior I: Elementary Verbal Relations • CFRB: Chapter 9 – Verbal Behavior II: Complex Verbal Relations • An Introduction to Relational Frame Theory online tutorial
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website: "The Operational Analysis of Psychological Terms" (Skinner) • CFRB: Chapter 10 – Private Events • CFRB: Chapter 11 – Methods in a Science of Behavior
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website: "Are Theories of Learning Necessary?" (Skinner) • CFRB: Chapter 12 – Scientific Verbal Behavior: Theories • CFRB: Chapter 13 – Scientific Verbal Behavior: Explanations
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFRB: Chapter 14 – Opposition to Mentalism • CFRB: Chapter 15 – The Challenge of Cognitive Psychology • CFRB: Chapter 16 – The Challenge of Psycholinguistics
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFRB: Chapter 17 – Radical Behaviorism and Traditional Philosophical Issues - 1 • CFRB: Chapter 18 – Radical Behaviorism and Traditional Philosophical Issues - 2
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFRB: Chapter 19 – Radical Behaviorism as Epistemology • Website: "Finding the Philosophical Core: A Review of Stephen C. Pepper's <i>World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence</i>" (Hayes, Hayes, & Reese) • Website: "Constructing a Pragmatic Science of Learning and Instruction with Functional Contextualism" (Doc Fox, yo)

Note: CFRB = *Conceptual Foundations of Radical Behaviorism* textbook

COURSE CALENDAR

The calendar below lists relevant dates and events for this course. Class meeting dates are shaded. This schedule is subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

DATE	EVENTS AND DEADLINES
Tuesday Sept. 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class meets 6:00pm – 9:00pm (course intro & overview)
Monday Sept. 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 1 Online Reading Quiz due at 6:00pm
Tuesday Sept. 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 1 Discussion Questions due at 9:00am • Class meets 6:00pm – 9:00pm
Monday Sept. 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 2 Online Reading Quiz due at 6:00pm
Tuesday Sept. 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 2 Discussion Questions due at 9:00am • Class meets 6:00pm – 9:00pm
Monday Sept. 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 3 Online Reading Quiz due at 6:00pm
Tuesday Sept. 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 3 Discussion Questions due at 9:00am • Class meets 6:00pm – 9:00pm
Monday Oct. 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 4 Online Reading Quiz due at 6:00pm
Tuesday Oct. 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 4 Discussion Questions due at 9:00am • Class meets 6:00pm – 9:00pm
Monday Oct. 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 5 Online Reading Quiz due at 6:00pm
Tuesday Oct. 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 5 Discussion Questions due at 9:00am • Class meets 6:00pm – 9:00pm
Monday Oct. 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 6 Online Reading Quiz due at 6:00pm
Tuesday Oct. 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 6 Discussion Questions due at 9:00am • Class meets 6:00pm – 9:00pm
Monday Oct. 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 7 Online Reading Quiz due at 6:00pm
Tuesday Oct. 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 7 Discussion Questions due at 9:00am • Class meets 6:00pm – 9:00pm
Friday Oct. 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Paper Outline due at 6:00pm (submit via course website)
Monday Oct. 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 8 Online Reading Quiz due at 6:00pm
Tuesday Oct. 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 8 Discussion Questions due at 9:00am • Class meets 6:00pm – 9:00pm
Monday Nov. 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 9 Online Reading Quiz due at 6:00pm
Tuesday Nov. 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 9 Discussion Questions due at 9:00am • Class meets 6:00pm – 9:00pm

DATE	EVENTS AND DEADLINES
Monday Nov. 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 10 Online Reading Quiz due at 6:00pm
Tuesday Nov. 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 10 Discussion Questions due at 9:00am • Class meets 6:00pm – 9:00pm
Tuesday Nov. 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thankskinner Holiday and Work on Your Final Paper Day – NO CLASS!
Monday Nov. 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 11 Online Reading Quiz due at 6:00pm
Tuesday Nov. 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT 11 Discussion Questions due at 9:00am • Class meets 6:00pm – 9:00pm
Friday Nov. 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Paper due at 6:00pm (submit via course website)
Tuesday Dec. 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class meets 6:00pm – 9:00pm • Final Paper Presentations
Tuesday Dec. 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class meets 7:15pm – 9:15pm • Final Paper Presentations
Tuesday Dec. 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Grades submitted by noon