



PSY 115: The Psychology of Sustainability

Fall, 2011 ♦♦♦ TR 2:35-3:50
♦♦♦ 216 Wilson Hall♦♦♦

INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Leslie Kirby
Office: 533 Wilson Hall
Phone: 322-0059
email: leslie.kirby@vanderbilt.edu

Office Hours: T 9:00 – 10:30 am, R 1:30 – 2:30 pm, and by appointment

Office hours are the great under-utilized resource of the college experience. Looking back over his many years advising students, Richard Light (a Harvard professor) said that the greatest advice that he ever gave to his students was this: Every semester, get to know one faculty member. Please stop by to chat about the course, your plans for the future, or the mysteries of the universe. Talking with students is one of my favorite parts of this job. If you can't make office hours, just let me know and I am happy to set up another time to meet with you.

♦♦♦**Important:** I am here to help. Do not hesitate to come see me if you have questions or concerns. There is no question too small or too silly for office hours. Please use email to make appointments or for simple questions, but for any complex question or concern, please come in person. If you cannot make one of my scheduled office hours, just email me – I'm happy to schedule another mutually convenient time.

♦♦♦**Course Description**♦♦♦

Sustainability involves survival – specifically, the continued survival of our species and our planet. In the US and worldwide, there is a growing awareness of the importance of sustainability at multiple levels, from reducing our carbon footprints to buying locally and seasonal produce, to increasing our personal fitness levels. But for many people, the link between their actions and broader outcomes is unclear; for others, the motivation to implement sustainable choices is

absent, or the barriers are too high. The course will focus on the psychological processes involved in making choices regarding sustainability, at a personal, family, community and global level. We will read and discuss cutting-edge research on factors influencing decision-making, including social influences, motivational and emotional influences, and cognitive factors such as attention and memory. We will also use what we have learned theoretically and empirically to carry out a sustainability project on campus or in the local community.

Please note that this course will be PAPERLESS to the extent possible. You are encouraged to use the electronic version of the textbook, and to take notes via computer or other electronic device (note: this is a suggestion, it is not required; you are welcome to take notes on paper if you're more comfortable with that format). All feedback will be given electronically (please make a habit of checking your VU email and also the course page on OAK).

✧✧✧**Course Objectives**✧✧✧

- ✧ First, to learn about the psychology of attitudes, attitude change, and personal barriers to implementation of more sustainable practices.
- ✧ Second, to develop an increased appreciation for nature and the variety of ways you can interact with (and have FUN with) nature.
- ✧ Third, you should hone your critical thinking and writing skills, both formal and informal writing.
- ✧ Fourth, as part of the writing process, you will learn how to give substantive, meaningful and fair critiques of others' work.
- ✧ Fifth, you should discover the personal relevance of the course material, including understanding the role of psychological forces in your life and the lives of others, and an appreciation of the practical value of psychology.

✧✧✧**Required Materials**✧✧✧

- ✧ Conservation Psychology: Understanding and Promoting Human Care for Nature; Susan Clayton & Gene Myers. An electronic version of the text is available; if you wish to use the electronic version and have trouble finding it, please let me know.
- ✧ For some class sessions, you will have additional *required* readings, which will be posted online (Blackboard, accessed via <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/oak>). These readings are NOT optional, and WILL be covered in class discussions. You will also be expected to draw on these readings for your writing assignments.
- ✧ For some class periods, I will place a set of Powerpoint slides on Blackboard. You will be expected to review these slides prior to coming to class. We will generally not view the slides in class (since the focus of this course is discussion rather than lecture). But we will draw on the slides in class discussions, and you should treat them as an additional reading assignment.

✧✧✧**Supplementary Materials**✧✧✧

- ✧ For most topics, a set of *supplemental* readings will be posted on Blackboard. These supplemental readings are OPTIONAL, and are provided for those of you who would like further information on a particular theme from the course.

✧ For each topic, a set of related web links will be provided on Blackboard. These links, like the supplemental readings, are provided for those of you who would like further information on a particular topic.

✧ For each class session, we will have a “Song of the Day”. The song information will be posted on Blackboard, and we will play them before and after class. These songs are purely for fun, and as a potential study aide. You are not required to know anything about the songs, or even to listen to them.

✧✧✧**YOUR GRADE**✧✧✧

There are NO EXAMS in this course. Rather, your course grade is based on the weighted average of a variety of written and participatory assignments:

✧ **Class Participation & Attendance – 15%**

This is a class based on collaborative discourse. As such, it requires constant attendance, critical thinking about the readings and other assignments, and active participation in class discussions. I expect that you will attend each and every class, and that you come prepared to talk about – and question – the reading assignments for that particular day.

More broadly speaking: Ask questions. Be curious. You are more than welcome to have a different opinion than that presented in the readings or by me or your other classmates. Just be sure to share your perspective in a productive and supportive manner. Since the course will be conducted as a seminar rather than a series of lectures, the substance of our class meetings will primarily consist of **your responses** to the course readings. Your thoughts and questions will provide the starting point for our discussions.

Because participation is so crucial to this course, the participation component is worth 10% of your final grade, and attendance alone is worth an additional 5%. You may miss 1-2 classes without it impacting your grade, after that I reserve the write to lower your grade at my discretion. Please note that this means even if you attend every class, your grade will be a full letter grade lower if you never participate. If you are reluctant to speak up in class, please talk to me and we'll figure out a way for you to participate. We will have a class blog, so that is one option for those who don't like to talk in class.

I grade participation over the course of the whole semester. The grade represents my overall assessment of your participation in the class. I will give you an indication at midterm of what your participation grade would be if the class indicated at that point, but your final grade in participation won't be computed until the end of the semester.

✧ **Try-Its/Journal: 10%**

You will complete regular journal writing assignments involving “try-it” activities (personal mini-experiments) and/or thought questions relating to the readings and class discussions. You will complete a journal assignment most every week. I will ask you to complete some of these before coming to class; others we may do in class. These journal assignments will involve writing a short, reflective paper (usually 1-2 pages) regarding what you learned (if anything), what worked (or did not), and if the exercise changed you in any way or made you consider how you live your life. Journal assignments will be graded and returned weekly, so that you have feedback you can incorporate into future assignments. On some of these assignments, you will (anonymously) review and provide feedback on a classmate's assignment. All together, the journal assignments will be worth 10% total of your grade.

✧ **Class Research Project: 20%**

We will work together as a class to develop a survey on barriers to sustainability, administer the survey, then interpret the data results (I will analyze the data) and react to them. This will involve a series of short assignments as we develop the survey, administering the survey to a number of people outside of class, and then writing a short (2-3 page) reaction paper based on our findings. Although we will develop the survey as a group, you will each administer it separately to friends/family members, and will be responsible for writing an individual reaction paper. This project will begin early in the semester and data collection needs to be completed by the start of Fall Break (October 6th).

✧ **Field Trips: 10%**

As part of the course, you will have the opportunity to participate in a variety of field trips, both on and off campus. These field trips will generally not take place during class time, but rather will take place mostly on weekends and occasionally at night. You are required to participate in at least two of the field trips over the course of the semester, and write short (2-3 page) reaction papers on these field trips. You may participate in all of the field trips if you wish; however, you still only need to turn in two reaction papers (though you can turn in more and take the highest grades if you wish).

✧ **Research/Laboratory participation: 5% (details provided below)**

Research participation is a requirement of this course. You can fulfill this requirement by participating in experiments, writing reports about psychological research, or some combination of the two. Experiments and/or reports must be related to the content of the course, and you will need to turn in a written summary for each study you participate in. You are required to participate in 4 hours of experiments (8 credits), or the paper equivalent. The research participation component amounts to 5% of your grade. You need to complete your research participation component by Fall Break (October 6th) so that you are able to draw on what you've learned in developing your sustainability intervention.

✧ **Sustainability Intervention: 30%**

You will do a service-learning group project (with 1-2 other students) on a sustainability topic of your choice. Your project will involve designing, publicizing, and implementing an intervention to boost sustainability on campus or in the local community. You will choose your topic in consultation with me, but each group will be free to choose what aspect of sustainability to focus on, and how. In total, your sustainability project will comprise 30% of your final grade. There are four steps to this project.

Step 1. Create a project proposal for your topic, which will include (1) a discussion of the need for an intervention in your particular area (including historical background, current impact assessments, areas of debate, etc.), (2) psychological motivations for, and barriers to, action in your particular area (including both theoretical and empirical findings in the area), (3) your proposed intervention (including a detailed methods section), and (4) an assessment of what type of impact you think your project will have (both short and long term) and why. Your proposal will be 10 to 15 pages in length and is designed to help you rigorously examine your intervention and its likely impact. You will be expected to use the knowledge you have gained in the course to attempt to “ward off” some of the usual barriers to action in your area. This portion of the project will be worth 10% of your final grade. The proposal will be due by October 13th. You will turn in ONE proposal for each group. You will also peer-review other groups' proposals (anonymously) to provide suggestions and feedback to help them implement their projects. Peer reviews will be due by October 20th.

Step 2. Create a website (or Facebook page, etc.) to publicize the need for action in your area, and also to outline and draw attention to your plan of action. This aspect of the project involves writing of a different type than the more formal writing in the proposal. You will be encouraged to implement social interaction components to your site in order to promote awareness and action (in other words, to get people to come out and help you). This portion of the project will be worth 5% of your final grade. Your website/page must be live by October 27th.

Step 3. Carry out your project. After carefully planning in your group and consulting extensively with me, you will implement your intervention. The length of the intervention will vary depending on the specifics of your particular project. During the intervention, you will do journal assignments (see above) on the details of your implementation, reactions, etc. Your intervention must be completed prior to Thanksgiving break. Completion of your project is worth 5% of your final grade. Note that although you are encouraged and expected to plan carefully and consider resistance to action, etc., your grade on the project does not depend on the success or failure of your actual intervention. Projects need to be completed by November 19th (the start of Thanksgiving Break). This is a final deadline, you are welcome and encouraged to complete your project before this.

Step 4. During the last two weeks of the semester, you will do a 15-20 minute class presentation based on your research area. Your presentation should summarize key points from your proposal, details of your intervention, and an assessment of the impact of your project. During your presentation, you should also include interactive elements to engage your classmates in discussion. The class presentation will be worth 10% of your final grade.

✧ **Final Paper: 10%**

In place of a final exam, you will write a final paper (8-12 pages in length) reflecting on your experiences in the course and mapping out a plan for your sustainable future. You will focus on sustainability for your personal, in your interpersonal relationships, your role in your community, and your role as a global citizen. You will be expected to draw on the theoretical and empirical papers we have discussed in class, as well as the practical experience you gained from your sustainability intervention. The final paper will be worth 10% of your grade.

✧ **Grading scale:**

>= 93% A	73-76% C
90-92% A-	70-72% C-
87-89% B+	67-69% D+
83-86% B	63-66% D
80-82% B-	60-62% D-
77-79% C+	<= 59% F

✧✧✧ **A Note on Feedback** ✧✧✧

Research indicates that students better process and incorporate feedback when it is separated from grades. As a result, you will receive written feedback (electronically) on your writing BEFORE receiving your grade. Grades will be posted on OAK 2-3 days after feedback is sent.

✧✧✧ **Honor System** ✧✧✧

This class operates under the principles established by Vanderbilt's Honor Council. Students are bound to abide by the Honor Pledge, which applies to **all work** contributing to a grade in this course. The pledge follows:

“I pledge on my honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.”

If you have any doubts about how the Honor Code applies to this class, ask **me** (not a fellow student or the TAs). **I take the Honor Code very seriously**, and I do not hesitate to report suspected cases of misconduct to the Honor Council.

◆◆◆**SCHEDULE**◆◆◆

This schedule is tentative, although we **will** adhere to the exam schedule. In other words, if we get behind on content, or change the order of some of the material, the exams will still be administered on the dates listed below, but will cover only the material we have gotten through.

Date	Topic	Reading* (check OAK weekly)
R 08/25	Orientation	
T 08/30	Motivations, Goals & Behaviors	Textbook, Ch. 1
R 09/01	Research Skills	
T 09/06	Construal & Biased Processing	
R 09/08	Guest Speaker - Sam Davidson	
T 09/13	Cognitive Dissonance & Self-Perception	
R 09/15	Persuasion	
T 09/20	Social Influences on Decision-Making	
R 09/22	Emotional Influences on Decision-Making	
T 09/27	Human Responses to Nature	
R 09/29	STUDY DAY	no class meeting
T 10/04	Domestic Nature	
R 10/06	FALL BREAK	no classes
T 10/11	Managed Nature	
R 10/13	Wild Nature	
T 10/18	Promoting Sustainable Behavior	
R 10/20	Social Dilemmas	
T 10/25	Sustainable Individuals & Families	
R 10/27	Sustainable Communities	

T 11/1	A Sustainable Planet	
R 11/3	Positive Psychology & Sustainability	
T 11/8	Environmental Education	
R 11/10	STUDY DAY	no class meeting
T 11/15	Is It Too Late?	
R 11/17	Meaning-Making	
T 11/22	THANKSGIVING BREAK	no classes
R 11/24	THANKSGIVING BREAK	no classes
T 11/29	Class Presentations	
R 12/1	Class Presentations	
T 12/6	Class Presentations	
R 12/8	Your Sustainable Future Last Day of Classes	
W 12/14	final projects due (by 3:00 pm) note: there is NO final exam	

* NOTE: readings listed are chapters from primary textbook unless otherwise noted.

❖❖❖ Important Additional Dates:

Tuesday, August 30th (11:59 pm) – last day to add a class, change sections, drop a class (no notation on transcript), or register for pass/fail status

Friday, October 7th – midterm deficiencies mailed out

Friday, October 14th (4:00 pm) – last day to withdraw from a class (instructor & advisor's signature required), last day to change from pass/fail to graded status

Monday, October 31st – spring enrollment begins (check with your advisor for your enrollment window)

Thursday, December 8th – last day of classes

December 9th – 17th – final examination period (check your individual courses or the university registrar website for exam dates/times; exams are scheduled by the university registrar, not individual instructors and may not be changed)

RESEARCH PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENT

Psychology is an empirical science. Therefore it is important for students in psychology courses to have first-hand acquaintance with actual experiments. By seeing how experiments are done, students can appreciate the methods, purposes, and results of psychological research. To fulfill this purpose, each student is given the opportunity to spend a few hours participating in research conducted by faculty and graduate students of the Department of Psychology and/or doing library research related to psychological experiments.

❖❖❖OPTION 1: PARTICIPATION IN PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIMENTS❖❖❖

The *requirement* is **8 credits**, with each credit representing one half hour of research participation time. Many studies last between 30 and 60 minutes, and are therefore worth from 1 - 2 credits. A few sessions may last over an hour; for these you will receive correspondingly more units of credit.

If you are taking another Psychology course that requires lab participation, you are welcome to “double-count” your participation hours – so you do not need to do 8 additional credits for this course. However, unlike those courses where you have until the end of the semester, for this course, you need to have 8 credits completed by Fall Break (October 6th). If you begin participating in experiments early in the semester, there will be enough research projects to provide all students with an opportunity to gain all 8 credits by Fall Break. However, **students who delay their participation until mid-late September may find it difficult to gain enough credits**. If you fail to gain enough credits, then you must complete the requirement by writing reports (see option 3 below).

You will sign up for studies using the Department of Psychology’s **Research Sign-up System**. Instructions for using this system are available at:

http://www.vanderbilt.edu/psychological_sciences/ResearchParticipation

From that site you will find detailed instructions in the Student Participation Manual:

http://www.vanderbilt.edu/psychological_sciences/research/sonamanuals/SubjectPoolEMSManualStudent2010.pdf (also posted on Oak). **Please read the instructions, before using the system.**

A link to the Research Sign-up system is available through the same website, or you may access the Research Sign-up System directly at:

<http://vanderbilt.sona-systems.com/>

The Research Sign-up System lists multiple experiments, and provides a brief description of the experiments in order to let you choose which studies to participate in. The system will automatically assign you the amount of credits earned (usually within 24 hours of completing the study). You can check on the system at any time to make sure that you have been credited for the experiments that you participated in, and check your current total balance. In order for your credits to be counted for the right class, it is important that you select your class when you register for the first time on the system. It is possible to edit your profile, and re-assign credits later if you fail to pick your class when you register, but it is easier to just pick the proper class from the start.

❖❖❖OPTION 2: PSYCHOLOGICAL REPORTS FOR LABORATORY REQUIREMENT❖❖❖

FOUR reports on research articles will satisfy the laboratory requirement. Each report should consist of a two- to three-page (double-spaced, typed) summary of a research article from a standard psychological research journal (see list of examples of appropriate journals below). Each report should follow the outline below. **The articles you choose must be related to the course content, and must have been published in the last 6 months.**

I. Introduction: (One paragraph) What is the basic theoretical question or concern of the research? This might include a statement of a particular theory being examined or a statement or particular theories being compared and a statement of the hypothesis being tested or a statement of expected results.

II. Method: (One to three paragraphs) What subjects or organisms are being tested? What is the basic form of experimental test being used?

III. Results and Conclusions: (Summarize briefly) What are the basic findings of the experiment and how do they relate to the theoretical concerns and hypotheses in the introduction? Also, how is this study related to the course content?

NOTE: Each of these sections should be brief and the statements should include only the basic and most general points and not many very specific details.

Examples of Appropriate Journals

American Journal of Psychology, American Journal of Psychiatry, British Journal of Psychology, Child Development, Cognitive Psychology, Emotion, Journal of Abnormal Psychology, Journal of Comparative and Physiological Psychology, Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, Journal of Experimental Psychology, Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Psychological Bulletin, Psychological Review, Psychological Science

Reports must be turned in by October 6th, 2011. Email your reports directly to me. No late reports will be accepted.

❖❖❖OPTION 3: COMBINATION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPATION AND REPORTS❖❖❖

One report is equivalent to 2 credits of laboratory participation. Any combination of laboratory and reports equaling 8 credits is acceptable.

Important Date Summary

First two weeks of class : Register on the Research Sign-up system at <http://vanderbilt.sona-systems.com/>

October 6th (4 PM): Deadline for reports & last day to participate in experiments for this course (note that if you are in other courses, you generally have until the end of the semester to complete the participation requirement, but you need to complete 8 credits for this course by this date).