

MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE

Psychology 230: Introduction to Developmental Psychology

DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE

First the most important thing: You must be able to come to all class times, which this semester are Tuesday, 8:35-9:50 and Thursday 8:35-10-50. If you cannot come to the entire long class on Thursdays on a regular basis, you must not take this class this semester. You should plan to take it another semester; the course is offered every semester.

The goals of this course are to acquaint you with some of the most important phenomena of developmental psychology and with some of the major theories in this field. I hope to give you an idea of what developmental psychologists think about and the ways they think about these matters. The major content of the course will be drawn from infancy and childhood. However, it is important for you to realize that developmental psychology is broader than child psychology. For example, the principles used to describe and explain the behavior of a child might equally be used to account for any developmental phenomenon. Developmental psychology is concerned with describing changes over time and accounting for why those changes might occur. Although the focus of the course will be on infancy and childhood, we will be learning developmental principles and theories applicable to any period of development and any developmental phenomenon (even the development of a neurosis and the development of prejudice).

Reading The primary reading will be an excellent text by Laura Berk, Infants and children: Prenatal through middle childhood; be sure you have the 5th edition of this book (in paperback). We will also read a clinical case study, the book Dibs. There are a few other readings on the syllabus; they are posted on-line in e-reserves for this course (username: fall06; password: psycho). Classes will be used, in part, to discuss the issues raised by the reading. Classes will also be used for the presentation of information beyond your reading. You should keep up with the reading; read the material for each date on the syllabus before that class. You should also read "actively." That is, you should read carefully, being sure you know and understand things as you proceed, and always seeking to relate parts of the text to each other and to things discussed in class. There is too much material in this course (and in the text) to think that the classes can organize all this for you. You must be doing this as you proceed, and from the very beginning.

Films There is a series of films and videos, approximately one per week, required for the course. The films are not "add-ons" but rather an integral part of the course, and you can expect to see some material from films on the examinations. Some of these films describe research; a few are clinical studies. They are not commercially available, and generally cannot be rented or put on reserve. They will be shown during class times; there are no make-up show dates. See the syllabus for the tentative schedule of films. Although most films are scheduled for our long Thursday classes, this may vary depending on our progress through

the syllabus. We will still have the long class on Thursdays, even if a film is not shown on a particular Thursday.

Observations An unusual feature of this course is the opportunity to observe real children in a real preschool setting. These observations will be done from the observation booths at our Gorse Child Study Center, a facility which is part of the Psychology & Education Department (although it is located on opposite end of the campus from Reese Hall). There will be two observational exercises this semester, each one asking you to observe for about two hours (for a total of approximately 4 hours of observing during the semester). These observations are to be done outside of class time. The children are at Gorse between 9:00 and 11:00 and between 1:00 and 3:00, five days a week. Each time you have an assignment to go the Gorse to observe, you will be asked to sign up during one of our class times for the hours you want to be there. When an assignment is made, you will need at least one morning hour and one afternoon hour free sometime during the week. You do not have to commit yourself to fixed hours. This is not a regular laboratory period, and this is not a laboratory course. I just want you to know what the time commitments for the course will be. Please see me if you have a question about this, or if you have a time-conflict problem—usually this can be worked out for the one or two days it presents a conflict.

The purposes of the observations are: (1) to enrich your thinking about developmental phenomena by seeing real children in a real preschool; (2) to increase your sensitivity as an observer (for example, to be more appreciative of the nuances of individual differences); (3) to become acquainted with some of the more formal techniques of observational method (time sampling; event sampling); and (4) to appreciate the very wide range of behavior considered “normal” in childhood.

Examinations There will be three examinations as part of this course. All examinations will be administered in class, on these dates (also on the syllabus): October 5, November 9, and December 12. These exams generally will not be cumulative; they will focus on the readings, classes, and films since the previous exam. However, as you continue to learn, you should be able to bring in material from earlier in the course on the second and third exams, and this will help you to think more “developmentally.” The format of the examinations may be multiple-choice items, short-answer items (terms and concepts to identify), plus perhaps an essay question. Big Hint: as a way of preparing for these examinations as you read throughout the semester, the lists of terms at the end of each chapter in Berk’s text are particularly useful. Be sure you know all the terms at the end of the textbook chapters. There also will be some terms to identify which come from class discussion, films, and other readings, rather than from the text, although the majority will be from the text. I will pass out supplementary lists of terms before each exam.

For those who may need extra time on examinations: These are not timed tests. Anyone who needs extra time on an exam may have it without even asking. The first two exams this semester on Thursdays, our long class. The exams will be designed for a regular 75-minute class. Thus, you can simply continue into our extra hour if want to take more time on a particular exam. The 3rd exam is on a

Tuesday; we will discuss procedures for extra time on that exam as we approach that one.

Grades From the above, you can see the work for the course is composed of four parts: three examinations and your observations at Gorse. Each of these four components counts substantially in arriving at your final grade for the course. Thus, extraordinary weight is not placed on any one thing. Each exam will count about 25%-30% of your grade (they may not be weighted exactly equally, depending on how much material is covered in each), with the reports on your Gorse observations (and anything else I know about you, such as your class participation) contributing the rest. The observations at Gorse will not be graded formally, but rather will be assigned a value by a \checkmark , \checkmark^+ , \checkmark^- system. This system is designed for increasing your skills as an observer and recorder of behavior, rather than to evaluate formally your performance at this. By far, the typical "grade" will be a simple \checkmark on these assignments; a \checkmark^- means there is some important problem you should understand and attend to; you may re-do a \checkmark^- to bring it up to a \checkmark . A \checkmark^+ will be reserved for truly outstanding observation recording. The absence of \checkmark^+ 's will not hurt you, gradewise (although their presence can help you). For example, if you receive three "B+'s" on the three exams and all \checkmark 's (no \checkmark^+ 's) on your observations, you will still receive an B+ for the semester. I will also get to know you and be aware of your class participation during the semester, and that can be taken into account too in determining your final grade.

Other matters Please do not hesitate to see me at any time during the semester if you have a question or would like to chat. My official office hour this semester is Thursday from 11-noon. But we can arrange another time to talk if you see me before or after class. A good way to reach me is by e-mail (shilkret@mholyoke.edu): I check my e-mail regularly and usually respond promptly, and this is a good way for you to get questions answered quickly.