PSYCH 344 (Section 24):

Cultural Psychology

Instructor: bethany ojalehto, PhD Candidate (bethanyojalehto@u.northwestern.edu)

Class time and location: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:00pm – 9:00pm, Technological Institute M128

Office hours: Tuesdays, 3:30 – 4:30pm, Swift 220 (or by appointment)

Summer 2014 (4-week course): June 22 – July 19, 2015

Course Description: In this course, we will explore the cultural foundations of psychology. How do cultural environments structure and orient our conceptual knowledge, and how do these psychological processes feedback into cultural systems? Key topics include conceptual development, knowledge organization, causal reasoning, moral psychology, and environmental psychology. Jointly, the topics are integrated through a focus on social and ecological thought. We will engage in cultural artifact analyses, field experiences, and research inquiries. By the end of the course, you will have a deeper knowledge of concepts, culture, and their interaction, and you will be aware of the broader cultural frameworks that shape these very scientific inquiries.

Introduction to Psychology (PSYCH 110) is a prerequisite for this course. As a 300-level course, students are expected to be comfortable reading and assessing journal articles, which requires some knowledge of statistics and research methods. If you are unfamiliar with reading journal articles, please visit me in the first week of class to discuss this together.

Goals: Our goals for learning in this course are ambitious, but all students can realize them given appropriate time and effort. By the end of the quarter, you should be able to:

- Understand the importance of culture for cognition across development and several domains of conceptual knowledge
- Articulate multiple theoretical perspectives on what culture is and how it may influence cognition
- Appreciate canonical debates about psychological universality versus diversity
- Reflect on the significance of within-group and between-group cultural patterns
- Be equipped to consider how individual cognition feeds back into cultural systems

Course Organization and Learning System

Readings are the core of this course and foundation of class discussion. There will be four assigned readings for each class: three academic papers covering the focal topic from multiple perspectives, and one real-world application of these ideas from the nonacademic world of news, blogs, or other media. Readings will be posted on Canvas in advance. The key elements of learning include (1) reading responses and inquiries; (2) discussion coordination; (3) in-class activities; and (4) a final project.
1) Reading responses and inquiries: For each set of readings, you will be asked to (a) write a response (less than 500 words) to the root discussion question for that day (assigned by me); and (b) generate 2 individual inquiries or discussion points that incorporate your own experiences and interests with key ideas from the readings. These topics may be broadly interdisciplinary and intercultural in nature. Your individual inquiries/discussion points may take the form of a question, critique, anecdote, picture, poem, interview, cultural artifact, show-and-tell, simulated conversation, video, etc. Whenever the format allows, these should be made available online.

Additionally, (c) you are expected to read the responses of your peers and be prepared to engage with at least one peer comment in class. You need not post a response to your peers online, but do be prepared to discuss in class.

Collectively, the root discussion question, individual inquiries, and peer dialogue will structure class conversation. Responses and individual inquiries/discussion points should be posted as one Word document on Canvas discussion forums by 1 pm on the day of class. Timely posting ensures that your peers and I can devote appropriate consideration to your contributions prior to class.

2) Discussion coordination: Each student will be asked to coordinate 3 discussions of an academic reading during the course. You may use a presentation format if you wish. These discussions are open-ended: they are your chance to take the ideas in a new intellectual direction. Discussions should (1) briefly summarize the core idea and key contributions of the paper to the psychological literature, then move to focus primarily on (2) suggesting a novel real-world implication or application of the findings/theory, and (3) proposing a new perspective or hypothesis about any significant dimension of the research paper (including the theory, methods, results, or the researchers’ perspectives). Treat this as an opportunity to extend the ideas from our collective reading experience in new directions. Creative or controversial proposals are likely to be especially stimulating. Sign ups will occur on the first day of class.

3) In-class activities: Each class session will involve in-class activities designed to address the focal topic from new vantage points. In-class quiz: Every class session will include a quiz on the readings. These are designed to jog critical thinking about the readings and foster active reading outside class. Mock study participation: Class sessions will frequently include participation in mock studies, the results of which will be jointly analyzed for an interpretation of “our” (the classes’) cultural cognitive processes (and variations therein). Other activities: Class sessions will periodically include other activities such as field trips, structured debates, multimedia viewing and discussion, artistic or literary explorations, and guest lectures.

4) Final project: Cultural artifact analysis. Every cultural community produces objects, artifacts, institutions, and practices that are reflective of its values and common-sense perspectives on the world. What is the nature of these differences in material cultures and why might they be important to understand? You will choose a product (broadly defined) and analyze it from a cultural psychological perspective. Your proposed topic for artifact analysis is due in class on June 30. Final projects (including a brief presentation) are due July 16, the last day of class.
**Learning and Grading:** The primary goal of this course is learning and inquiry, and my grading system reflects this. Your engagement, curiosity, and contributions to the intellectual environment of our course are key to learning, and will also be key to your grade. In order to share these qualities with us, you will need to come to class well prepared each day. Specifically, your overall grade will be based on reading responses (27%), discussion coordination (20%), in-class activities (13% quizzes; 15% other) and the final project (25%).

*Grading feedback:* Learning is most productive when we receive continual feedback. Accordingly, I will post grades for your reading responses, discussion coordination, and in-class activities on Canvas every Saturday. If you have questions about your progress in this course, please see me in a timely manner to discuss these questions. *Given our condensed timeframe, timely = within 48 hours.*

*Grading scale:* Grade cut-offs will be as follows: 98-100% (A+); 92-97% (A); 90-91% (A-); 88-89% (B+); 82-87% (B); 80-81% (B-); 78-79% (C+); 72-77% (C); 70-71% (C-); 68-69% (D+); 62-67% (D); 60-61% (D-); 59% and below (F).

*Attendance and participation.* Given the brief duration of this course, regular attendance is essential. If you must miss a class session, your absence should be coordinated with me *in advance* to arrange your contributions to the class discussion and activities for that session. If your absence and contributions are coordinated in advance, no points will be lost. Otherwise, class discussions and activities missed due to absence will receive a 0. In extenuating circumstances, make-up assignments may be submitted within 5 days of the missed class, but these will receive an automatic grade reduction of 13%. Make-up assignments will not be considered more than 7 days after the missed class.

*Miscellaneous.* Late assignments will receive a 13% grade reduction for each day following the due date. There will be no extra credit or re-grading. If you would like to review your grade on any of the assessments or projects, you may do so within 7 days of receiving the grade.

*Technology Policy:* It is strongly preferred that you take notes by hand rather than computer. This method enhances learning and fosters richer classroom conversation. Only if necessary, laptops may be used to access a reading or give a presentation. Any other use (including email) is inappropriate. It distracts others and detracts from our learning collaboration. Phones and other such devices should be silenced and stowed during class.
UNIT 1: Why culture matters

An introduction  ◆ Tuesday, June 23 – Meeting 1


UNIT 2. Perspectives on concepts and culture


### Part 2: Concepts & domains: (Super)natural transmission ✤ Tuesday June 30 – Meeting 3


### UNIT 3. Cultural psychology: What does it mean for social worlds?

#### Part 1: Self, mind & society ✤ Thursday July 2 – Meeting 4


#### Part 2: Psychological pluralism? Perspectives on mind ✤ Tuesday July 7 – Meeting 5

**Fieldtrip:** Chicago Zen Center, Introduction to Zen Buddhism, 7:00pm – 9:00pm

*Read the introduction + conclusion for each of these two articles, then comparatively analyze 2 matching cultural foci across anthropological and psychological theories of mind:*


**Part 3: Morality in thought, speech, and emotion**  
*Thursday, July 9 – Meeting 6*

**Guest Lecture:** Dr. Sonya Sachdeva, *Research Social Scientist, USDA Forestry Service*


**UNIT 4. Cultural psychology – What does it mean for the environment?**

**Part 1: Folkbiology: on humans & other animals**  
*Tuesday July 14 – Meeting 7*

**Guest Lecture:** Dr. Patricia Herrmann


**Part 2: Environmental thought and morality**  
*Thursday July 16 – Meeting 8*


