

PSCH 354 (Knowledge Acquisition)

Instructor

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Topic and Learning Goals

The topic of this course is how people acquire new knowledge and change their minds. By knowledge is meant the kinds of things a person might acquire by reading, practicing, observing or in other ways, so it includes knowledge in the ordinary sense as well as skills. The course will draw on several different cognitive sciences to answer the question how knowledge changes over time. Specific topics include learning from discourse, skill acquisition, learning across the life span and educational applications of the psychology of learning. You will learn to recognize different types of knowledge, to understand various hypotheses about how knowledge might be acquired, to link such hypotheses to the behavior of learner and to think about how learning can be facilitated via instruction. You will learn about the major methods used to study learning, and the associated methodological problems.

Format

The format of the course is a mixture of lectures, reading materials and outside-of-class activities. The lectures will introduce the central concepts, answer questions and also serve as a time to discuss the reading materials. The latter include handouts and original research articles. The class activities include reports and participation in demonstration experiments ("labs", as we will refer to them).

Course documents, announcements, lab instructions etc. will be posted on the **Blackboard site** for this course. Because you are reading this, you obviously found your way to that site. If you have questions about or problems with Blackboard, contact the course TA as your first step in fixing it. Pay attention to Blackboard, because all announcements etc will be posted there.

Reading Materials

There is no textbook. There will be handouts authored by the instructor, roughly one per week. These introduce the concepts used in the class activities. The handouts will be posted on Blackboard. There will be some original research articles. These will also be posted on Blackboard. They will be discussed in class and there will be exam questions that refer to them.

In addition, we might post supplementary reading materials as the course goes on for those who might be interested in reading further about some particular topic. These readings will also be posted on Blackboard, but they might not be discussed in class and there will be no exam questions that pertain to them. The two groups of readings will be posted in separate folders on Blackboard.

Activities

There are five outside-class activities. They are all voluntary, but you cannot do well in the course if you skip all of them. On the other hand, if you do all of them, you are almost assured of a top grade.

Activity 1: Write a Group Discussion Report

You can earn points by participating in a group study event in which 5-9 students enrolled in the course get together and discuss some topic covered in the course for at least 2 hours. There can be no fewer than 5 participants and no more than 9. Look at the Blackboard site under "Assignments" for the detailed instructions about how to do the group discussion.

Activity 2: Write a Book Report

You can earn points by writing a book review. The review has to be about a book that's on the acceptable books list; see the Blackboard site. The books there have been selected because they are good, relevant for the course, written by leading cognitive psychologists, fun to read, and informative; a couple of them are bestsellers. Read *one* of the books from the list and write a review of it. See the instructions under "Assignments" on the Blackboard site for more details about how to write the Book Report and about the approved books.

Activity 3: Write a Personal Learning Report

You can earn points by writing a paper about your own learning in everyday life, outside UIC classes and academic courses. You might be learning things in sports, in organizations, on the job, in non-academic educational institutions, or in any other part of your life.

The idea is to select something that you know you'll be learning this coming semester, keep a diary of how your learning proceeds, and perhaps collect some other type(s) of records as well, if relevant; then write a report about your own learning.

You find the detailed instructions for how to do the Personal Learning Report on the Blackboard site, in the "Assignments" folder.

Activity 4: Participate in Experiments

The major activity outside class is to participate in or carry out demonstration experiments. You will receive detailed instructions about what to do for each lab on the Blackboard site.

There are four experiments altogether. They are activities that you do yourself. For each, you download an instruction booklet from the Blackboard site. The booklet is self-explanatory; you follow the instructions and then turn in the data sheet that comes with the booklet to the instructor. The TA's will enter the data into a data file and do some analyses; we then discuss the results in class. Each of these labs is worth 10 points.

Specific instructions for each lab will be posted on the Blackboard site under "Assignments."

Activity 5: Take the Examinations

There will be two "midterm" examinations, at the end of the 5th and 10th weeks, respectively, and one final examination. The final exam consists of three parts. The first part of the final covers the same material as the first "midterm" and so serves as a make-up opportunity for that exam; the second part of the final likewise consist of questions covering the same material as the second "midterm". The third part of the final covers the material discussed in the last third of the semester. Once we know the date for the final examination, Dr. Ohlsson will announce an alternative time late in the day before, and early the day after the scheduled time. Those are the only make-up opportunities for the final exam. Details will be posted on the Blackboard site.

All three exams consist of multiple choice questions. There will be 20 questions on each of the two "midterms". The questions are worth 1 point each, for a total of 20 points. The final exam will have three parts, each with 20 questions, for a total of 60 questions. The exams are not graded with letter grades. They are merely activities among others, and the points you earn on them are added to the points you earn through other activities.

The relation between the "midterms" and the final exam are handled as follows: Your score on the first part of the course is *either* your score on the first "midterm" *or* your score on the first part of the final, *whichever is highest*. Likewise for the second part of the final. This means that you can't loose by trying to improve your score.

Neither the "midterms" nor the final exam are mandatory. In particular, you can choose which section(s) of the final exam you want to take. If you do well on one of the "midterms", you can ignore the corresponding part of the final.

Grading

The grading system is simple: You earn points for every activity you participate in, and the sum of your points at the end of the semester determines your grade. This includes the exams; they are just one type of activity among the others.

The course as a whole is worth a total of 150 points. See the table on the next page for what each activity is worth in terms of points, and the grading scale. Notice that the grading scale is in terms of *points earned*, not *percentage points*. The cut-off point for an C grade is thus 95 points, not 95 % of 150.

That the exams can earn you a total of 60 points; that is not even sufficient to pass the course. **YOU CANNOT PASS THIS COURSE BY ACING THE EXAMS.** You have to
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engage in at least one of other activity to get a "D", let alone a higher grade. However, if you do all three reports and all four labs and collect $50+40 = 90$ points, you only need to collect a total of 30 more points on the three exams to get an A; that's *ONLY* half the questions. In fact, if you turn in all activities on time and answer 3 out of 4 questions right on both midterms exams, you could earn 120 points, and hence be ensured of an A grade, *without even taking the final*. Every time Dr. Ohlsson teaches this course, there are students who achieve this.

The various activities are worth the following in points:

Activity	Max points
Group Discussion Report	10
Personal Learning Report	20
Book Report	20
	50
Wacky Town Lab	10
Body & Soul Lab	10
Practice Lab	10
Why Knot? Lab	10
	40
Midterm 1	20
Midterm 2	20
Final, Part III	20
	60
Sum	150

The grading scale is as follows:

Score interval	Grade
120 - above	A
105 - 119	B
90 - 104	C
70 - 89	D
0 - 69	F

Dr. Ohlsson does not grade on a curve. You do not compete against other students. If you help another student study, and he/she does better as a result, this will not affect your own grade. The ideal outcome of the course is that everyone gets an "A"; in fact, it happens regularly in this course that "A" is the most frequent grade.

Policies on Late Submissions Etc

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Dr. Ohlsson's policies on extra credit, late submissions, missed exams, incompletes and academic dishonesty are detailed in a separate document posted on the Blackboard site under "Course Documents." You should read that document. Dr. Ohlsson will not accept "I didn't know this because I didn't read it" as a valid excuse.

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