

## Sample Capstone Course Syllabus

**Course Title:** Psychological Issues and Social Values

**Catalog Description:** Explores psychological issues, social values, and personal responses to social issues and choices. Integrative review of psychology emphasizing class discussion, oral presentation, and written reports. A capstone experience.

**Course Prerequisites:** Writing for Psychology, Abnormal Psychology, Ethics, and a minimum of 24 hours in Psychology or related coursework.

**Restrictions:** Undergraduate Psychology Majors only.

**Intended Audience:** Students in their last semester of the undergraduate psychology program.

**Rationale:** Human services professional or paraprofessionals should be familiar with the social issues that confront them and their clients in today's society. You, your potential clients, and your associates may have had many different life experiences. The more information you have about the variety of social issues and values that people face and the more you have examined your personal responses to these issues, the more prepared you will be to serve clients well. In addition, we strive to provide an integrative experience wherein candidates for graduation are asked to integrate their knowledge and skills from disparate courses in the program. This follows recommendations from the American Psychological Association for a capstone experience in developmentally coherent and balanced programs wherein students are asked to demonstrate knowledge of overarching themes, broad or enduring controversies, and major problems in psychology.

**Required Text:**

Slife, B. (2010). *Taking sides: Clashing views on psychological issues (16<sup>th</sup> Expanded ed.)*. New York: McGraw-Hill. ISBN: 978-0-07738287-2

**Expected Student Outcomes:** *(Parenthetical numbers refer to related APA Undergraduate Learning Goals)*

Upon successful completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. Recognize and evaluate some of the psychological issues involved in social, developmental, and stress-evoking situations. (4.2)
2. Recognize similarities and differences in customs, values, and expectations in various religious, ethnic, and racial groups and the psychological research related to these issues. (4.3, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 8.1, 8.4)
3. Apply psychological theory / content knowledge learned in other courses to the analysis or understanding of social issues. (1.3, 1.4, 4.2, 4.3, 4.5)
4. Explore and share their personal values, priorities, and experiences with the above problems and situations, giving respectful consideration to alternative points of view and values. (5.1, 5.7, 9.1, 9.4)
5. Integrate the major issues addressed in the course into hypothetical mental health service situations and recognize the issues that evoke closed-mindedness in themselves. (4.5, 5.4, 8.5, 9.1, 9.4)

6. Identify and evaluate their involvement in civic, social and global responsibilities. (5.6)
7. Write a position paper in APA format on one of the topics in the course. Review and evaluate the literature on the problem/topic. Describe the views of the problem and its causes, the history, cross-cultural differences and opportunities, trends in approaching the problem and providing services, effects on families, various psychological issues and values, possible resources, alternative and integrative ways of treating the problem and/or of preventing its development. (6.3,6.4, 7.1)
8. Create an integrative program portfolio which includes the paper (objective 7), assessment and reflection of program goals, and plans to promote personal and professional/career development. (9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 10)

**Instructional Modality:** Lecture/discussion. Web enhanced

**Instructional Activities / Assignments and Requirements:**

**Psychological Issues and Values Debates (50%)**

There will be six (6) oral debates on various controversial psychological issues over the term. Students will be divided into three (3) teams at the beginning of the semester and will participate in each debate in one of three ways: PRO/YES side (2 times), CON/NO side (2 times), and OBS (observer) (2 times).

When you are a PRO or CON, you will be required to: (50 points each debate) (4 times total)

Participate in online discussions leading up to your debate (10 points)

Participate in the debate (5 points)

Complete a **short position paper** regarding the issue (see below) (20 points)

Complete a “**Merit Pay**” form for yourself and your teammates (see below) (15 points)

**Short Position papers:** You will be required to review and evaluate some of the literature on the issue for the debate. Your paper may include: a description of opposing views of the topic or problem and its causes, the history, cross-cultural differences or trends in approaching the topic or problem and providing psychological services, effects on families, alternative and integrative ways of treating the problem, and/or of preventing its development. At the end of the paper, you should also briefly address the personal meaning the topic has for you (regardless of which side you were assigned in the debate).

It is expected that you will utilize appropriate college level writing skills: appropriate grammar, spelling, and paragraphs which logically develop ideas. If you have difficulty with writing, the Center for Learning Assistance provides you with an opportunity to improve your skills free of charge. All papers must be typed double-spaced. No hand written papers will be accepted. GSU has a computer center in which you can write your papers and print them if you do not have your own computer. You are to make clear what your original thinking is and what ideas you have gotten from others, using citations in APA format, e.g., (author, date of publication, page). You will need a references list for the sources used at the end of your paper. Use a font size of 12 points. You do not need to provide a cover page or abstract, but APA style should be followed for the paper.

**Merit Pay:** You will be required to complete a Merit Pay form each time you are on a PRO or CON side of a debate (4 times total). This form is meant to provide you the opportunity to evaluate the group process and team evaluation. The two main goals for this assignment are to provide you experience in evaluation and promote equal participation in the debate process from

all team members. Merit pay forms will be distributed in class as well as available on the course web page. You are required to turn in a Merit Pay form each time you participate in a debate (PRO or CON) on the day of your debate.

### **Program Portfolio (50%)**

You will create a comprehensive program portfolio over the term which will contain the following sections:

#### **I. Core Section:**

The Core section will contain the following documents:

- A statement describing your immediate and long-term career and life goals, including an explanation of why these goals are appropriate in terms of your knowledge, skills, characteristics, values, and experiences
- An evaluation of how successfully you have acquired the 10 program goals of the psychology program, including: (1) a description of your strengths and weaknesses in each of these areas, (2) an explanation of why you are strong and weak in these areas, and (3) suggestions for the department to enable it to help future psychology majors develop these strengths and strengthen these weaknesses
- Topic Paper: Demonstrate your writing in psychology knowledge and skills by inserting a corrected copy of a paper you completed for another course as well as the original paper. Instructor permission is required ahead of revision.

**II. Employment section or a Graduate School section** (select one) depending upon your post-baccalaureate plans:

Both choices should include: A current, accurate, and professional-appearing resume that has been written with the help of a one of the career counselors in the Career Services office.

The Employment section will contain the following documents:

- The results of a computerized search strategy showing what you can do with a BA in Psychology.
- A professional-appearing cover letter that can be modified for specific job applications.
- Completed letter of recommendation request forms (not completed recommendation letters!) from at least three appropriate people who have agreed to write strong letters of recommendation for you for a job.
- Evidence of a genuine attempt to develop or strengthen interviewing skills.
- Complete applications for at least two jobs.

The Graduate School section will contain the following documents:

- Results of a search for appropriate graduate programs.
- A personal statement that can be modified for specific graduate programs.
- Evidence of preparation for the entrance exam your graduate/professional program requires (e.g., GRE or MCAT).
- Completed letter-of-recommendation request-forms (not completed recommendation letters!) from at least three appropriate people who have agreed to write strong letters of recommendation for you for graduate school.
- Completed applications for at least two graduate programs.

**Late Work Policy:** All presentations and papers are to be completed and turned in on the date due, as noted in the course calendar, except for extenuating circumstances, with approval of the professor. *Assignments handed in after the due date will be reduced one letter grade for each week the assignment is late.*

**Course Evaluation:** Both undergraduate and graduate students:

**Points:**

**Debates**            200 points

**Portfolio**           200 points

**Grading Scale:**

**A** = 90 - 100%    **B** = 80-89%    **C** = 70-79%    **D** = 60-69%    **F** = below 60%

**Student Academic Honesty:** Students are expected to fulfill academic requirements in an ethical and honest manner. This expectation pertains to the following: use and acknowledgment of the ideas and work of others, submission of work to fulfill course requirements, sharing of work with other students, and appropriate behavior during examinations. These ethical considerations are not intended to discourage people from studying together or from engaging in group projects. The university policy on academic honesty appears in the catalog appendix, which can be found on the website at \*\*\*\*\*

*In addition, students should be aware that all work submitted for this course may be subject to plagiarism detection software.*

**Services for Students with Disabilities:**

\*\*\*\*\* is committed to providing all students equal access to all university programs and facilities. Students who have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability and need academic accommodations, must register with Access Services for Students with Disabilities (ASSD). Please contact the Coordinator of ASSD in\*\*\*\*\* in person; by e-mail, \*\*\*\*\*; or by calling \*\*\*\*\* If you are already registered, please contact your instructor privately regarding your academic accommodations.

**Tentative Class Schedule and Topical Outline \*\*\***

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topic</b>
1    AUG 22	Introduction and Syllabus Writing Persuasive Arguments
2    AUG 29	Portfolio: Goal statement and Goals 1-5
SEPT 5	Labor Day: closed
3    SEPT 12	Portfolio: Goals 5-10
4    SEPT 19	<b>DEBATE ONE:</b> Was Milgram's study of obedience unethical?
5    SEPT 26	Portfolio: Paper Revision and goal work
6    OCT 3	<b>DEBATE TWO:</b> Is homosexuality biologically based?
7    OCT 10	Portfolio: Employment or Graduate School?
8    OCT 17	<b>DEBATE THREE:</b> Do online friendships hurt adolescent development?

9	OCT 24	Portfolio: work session
10	OCT 31	<b>DEBATE FOUR:</b> Are today's youth more self-centered than previous generations?
11	NOV 7	Portfolio: work session
12	NOV 14	<b>DEBATE FIVE:</b> Are the recovered memories of psychological trauma valid?
13	NOV 21	Portfolios: final touch ups
14	NOV 28	<b>DEBATE SIX:</b> Is American psychological research generalizable to other cultures?
15	DEC 5	Portfolio submission

\*\*\*Note: This schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

## Merit Pay Form

**Your Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Debate Topic:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Side:** PRO CON

**Team Members Names:** Put these members's names in boxes below!

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Please be aware that I will be sensitive to your comments and rankings on this form. It is important to know that this process is completely anonymous to your classmates. You (and they) will only be aware of you were rated by your team generally, not who gave you certain ratings or their comments. This is meant to promote honesty and objectivity on your part. Remember, as a professional in a leadership position, you may have to conduct evaluations similar to this in the future!

I will also be consulting with the online discussion boards to check for participation. I will calculate final merit pay based upon these forms, participation in the debate, and participation online. It could be that everyone in the group gets 15 points or some/all get less.

**Teamwork Ratings** (assign ratings for each member, including yourself with 5=Always and 0=Never)

	Your Name:	Member Name:	Member Name:	Member Name:	Member Name:	Member Name:	Member Name:	Member Name:
<b>How often did the team member.....</b>								
Attend class and team meetings?								
Participate in online discussions?								
Meet deadlines?								
Produce high quality work?								
Take a leadership role?								
Do her/his fair share of the work?								
Help other team members?								
Improve the morale of the team?								
How much you would want to be on a team with this person again?								
Help to resolve conflict in the team?								
Produce conflict in the team?								
Cause other team members to work harder than they should have?								
Cause morale of the team to decrease?								

### Collaboration Evaluation

List and briefly describe what items you feel YOU added to this debate:

List and briefly describe tasks created by others that you performed.

List and briefly describe any ways in which your actions in this group contributed to the successful completion of the debate other than those you listed in the above two lists.

**Recommendations for Merit Pay:**

Pretend you have the 15 total merit pay points to award but only 1-2 can get the whole 15. The others will get 10, 5, and 0. Show below who you would award the points to by putting team members names in the corresponding point boxes (no more than 2 in each!).

<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>

Note below any additional comments you would like to contribute before merit pay is decided.

**Portfolio Rubric**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ ID: \_\_\_\_\_

**I. Core Section:**

Area	Component/Criteria	Point Value	Points Earned
Goal Statement	immediate and long-term career and life goals, including an explanation of why these goals are appropriate in terms of your knowledge, skills, characteristics, values, and experiences	10	
Program Goal Evaluations	Goal 1: Knowledge Base of Psychology	12	
	Goal 2: Research Methods in Psychology	12	
	Goal 3: Critical Thinking Skills in Psychology	12	
	Goal 4: Application of Psychology	12	
	Goal 5: Values in Psychology	12	
	Goal 6: Information and Technological Literacy	12	
	Goal 7: Communication Skills	12	
	Goal 8: Sociocultural and International Awareness	12	
	Goal 9: Personal Development	12	
	Goal 10: Career Planning and Development	12	
Topic Paper	Corrections to graded Topic Paper for the course	10	

**Program Goal Evaluations** (10) each section should include an evaluation of how successfully you have acquired that goal of the psychology program, including: (1) a description of your strengths and weaknesses in each of the area, (2) an explanation of why you are strong and weak in the area, and (3) suggestions for the department to enable it to help future psychology majors develop these strengths and strengthen these weaknesses

**II. Employment or Graduate School section**

Employment		or		Graduate School		
Area	Points	Earned		Area	Points	Earned
BA job search results	8			Program search results	8	
Cover letter	8			Personal statement	8	
3 rec. forms	8			3 rec. forms	8	
Interviewing skills	8			Exam prep	8	
2 job app's	8			2 sample app's	8	

**III. Current, accurate, and professional-appearing Resume (20 points) Resume Points: \_\_\_\_\_**

**COMMENTS:**

**TOTAL POINTS EARNED: \_\_\_\_\_ / 200**