Psychology of Diversity (Psychology 295)

Fall 2015

Thursdays 9:30am to 12:20pm
5461 Franz Hall

Instructors

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Office hours:  Mondays 2:00-3:00PM Thursday 2:00-3:00PM

Course website:  https://ccle.ucla.edu/course/view/15F-PSYCH295-1

Course Overview

This is a core course required for the psychology graduate minor in Diversity Science. The goal of this course is to provide you with an introduction to empirical research and theories in psychology and related disciplines that consider “how people create, interpret, and maintain group differences among individuals, as well as the psychological and societal consequences of these distinctions” (Plaut, 2010). We will cover research topics spanning disparities in health and mental health, intergroup relations and conflict, social identity and social cognition, and diversity in development across the lifespan and across social and cultural contexts. We will critically examine research questions from both the majority and minority perspectives. The goal of the seminar is to provide students with a primer on selected lines of inquiry across sub-specializations in psychology to encourage a more comprehensive approach to the study of psychological processes in diverse societies.

We realize that some students may have had significant exposure to some or many of these topics and readings, while the material will be new to others. Across disparate levels of background preparation, we expect students to be able to work toward a new level of reflection, analysis, and synthesis of these topics and to individualize their course of study to enrich their own research progress.

While research that falls under the umbrella of diversity science has grown rapidly in recent years, the field is very much in its infancy. One thing we will do throughout this course is to consider what the emerging field of diversity science should look like – to set an agenda for future scholarly inquiry. We will work to prioritize among a range of potential research questions taking into account what we know, what we need to know, what tools we have to answer these questions, and how the findings can be applied to address critical social problems.
Course Structure

The course will be structured as a weekly seminar in which one of the instructors (Anna weeks 2-5 and Yuen weeks 6-9) will introduce the topic and an overview of the readings. Although the instructors will give a presentation at each meeting, this is a seminar. As such students are expected to actively contribute to our collective learning in class discussions. During weeks 2 through 9, the presentation and class discussion will be followed by a “practice” agenda setting workshop led by a pair of students. During week 10, we will work as a class to visualize an agenda for the future of Diversity Science.

Requirements:

The formal requirements for the course are:

Class Participation (20%): This includes doing the reading and regularly contributing insights, criticisms, and questions to the weekly discussion. Candid, civil (dis)agreement with fellow participants is encouraged. This can be done in several ways: 1) share reactions to ideas and evidence introduced in the readings; 2) connect insights from the readings with other streams of research; 3) suggest ways in which the research findings can help to solve specific social problems. Instructors will include discussion prompts eliciting these contributions during class.

Agenda Setting Framework

In addition to general class participation, there are three additional requirements. Each is designed to help us work toward setting a meaningful agenda for the field. Each task will be approached using an agenda setting framework. Imagine that we get to decide what research in this emerging field should look like over the next two decades. We get to define what diversity science is and what research questions should be prioritized. We also have the responsibility of proposing theoretical frameworks, methods, and other tools that can be leveraged to address the questions we pose. While these tasks will challenge us, it is also an exciting time to be working in this emerging field.

Mini Agenda Setting Workshop (20%): Each week a team of two students will identify a single important, unanswered question inspired by that week’s readings. Consider what the current state of the field tells us about a phenomenon and tell us what you think is a productive direction for future scientific inquiry. We do not expect you to propose research studies. We do want to know what you think are the gaps or unexamined assumptions in a specific area of research covered that week. More importantly, we would like to hear your thoughts about what are some ways we can begin to address these gaps. For example, you can try out a new conceptual framework that integrates two different theories or lines of research to explain an observed finding. You can make an argument for how a different methodology or approach can generate novel insights. You can argue for how the study of a particular social group can teach us something about a psychological phenomenon we do not already know. You could identify an application of the research finding that could be tested to solve a critical social problem.
We want this “working” workshop to be an opportunity to test out ideas among a group of smart, likeminded individuals. You can think of it as a lab session where you can count on your classmates to pose questions that challenge your thinking and to provide suggestions that help to propel your ideas forward. You and your partner will give a brief presentation and solicit feedback from the class. The workshop in whole (presentation and discussion) should last about 30 minutes.

**Class Agenda Setting Session (10%)**: As our last class meeting in Week 10, each student will come to class prepared to share a diversity science research priority. This priority should be the same one addressed in your final paper. The ideal priorities will identify a specific research question that remains poorly understood, hotly contested, or not yet considered within the broad topics presented in class. Each student will give a brief summary in class of their proposal for the inclusion of a scholarly problem in the agenda. We will use the proposals to launch our discussion about what the future of the field should look like.

**Final Paper (50%)**: For the final paper, we ask you model it after papers that appear in the journals, *Current Directions in Psychological Science* and *Perspectives in Psychological Science*. Papers in these journals are relatively brief and succinctly propose and argue for novel research agendas. The topic of your paper should be the same as what your articulated in the class agenda setting session.

In the paper you should address the following: 1) Identification of an unexplored psychological phenomenon that can advance diversity science; 2) Proposal of a framework for studying this phenomenon (theoretical integration, conceptual model, study of group(s) that could provide an empirical test that exemplifies the phenomenon); and 3) Clear articulation of how research motivated by the framework can help solve problems in contemporary society (e.g., policy recommendation, interventions).

Final papers (two copies) are due to the instructors by Monday of Finals Week. The paper should be 10-12 pages double-spaced pages in length (not including references, cover page, abstract, and figures).
Reading List

9/24/15 Week 1: Overview of Course Themes (Anna and Yuen)


10/01/15 Week 2: Cultural Psychology (Anna)

“Cultural psychology is often viewed in psychology as a peripheral field… But there are many questions that cannot be answered fully, or even at all well, unless one takes a cultural approach. Put another way, studying certain phenomena only within one’s own culture, for example, the dominant version of the Anglo-Saxon culture in the United States, leaves one unable to adequately address important psychological questions and issues.” (Sternberg, 2014, p. 208-209)


10/08/13 Week 3: Psychology of Social Class and Social Change (Anna)

A main tenet in cultural psychology is that culture is dynamic rather than static and has many more ecological and social inputs than can be marked by national/ethnic origin. Readings for this week illustrate the role of local economic development and personal wealth (or lack thereof). These perspectives provide concrete illustrations of the mutual constitution of culture and selves dominant in cultural psychology.


10/13/15 Week 4: Multicultural Perspectives (Anna)

“Currently worldwide, an estimated 130 million people are living in countries they were not born in – approximately the population of Japan. In the United States, about 10% of the population has moved there from another country… With such large numbers of people crossing borders, encountering people from different cultures has become a very common experience for most people… Although the ever-increasing contact between cultures has complicated comparisons of their psychological processes, it has paved the way for investigating a series of fascinating psychological questions.” (Heine, 2008, p. 509-510).


10/22/15 Week 5: Discrimination, Stress, and Mental Health Disparities (Anna)

The study of the consequences of intergroup contact between dominant and minority groups was introduced in Week 4. The readings this week provide an introduction to the plethora of research documenting the effects of discrimination that occurs in the context of intergroup contact within a stratified society. Attention is devoted to apparent paradoxes in this literature and discussion will focus on unanswered questions concerning mechanisms that underlie observed effects.


10/29/15  Week 6: Diversity Models (Yuen)

A longstanding question is how society should approach diversity. Colorblindness and multiculturalism are two key diversity models. Each has its supporters and critics. This week’s readings highlight current work examining how minority and majority group members respond to the implementation of these models. Together, we will review the evidence, identify gaps in the empirical literature, and discuss possible policy recommendations.


11/05/15  Week 7: Understanding the Nature of (Contemporary) Prejudice

Racism today is a different beast than the old-fashioned form. The first reading provides an overview of what contemporary racism looks like and when it emerges. The next two readings provide perspectives on what we can do to temper the psychological processes that activate prejudice.


11/19/15  Week 8: Discrimination and Interventions to Reduce Group-based Disparities

In recent years, research has tackled the question of what institutions can do to reduce the insidious effects of discrimination on individuals. The first reading provides an overview of the extensive research on the now well-known phenomenon of stereotype threat. The subsequent
readings suggest strategies, some provocative, that institutions can take to reduce group-based disparities.


Social inequality is pervasive. This week’s readings explore why this is the case. The first reading provides an overview of research on how ideology is used to maintain social hierarchy. The other readings present research from the perspective of the dominant group.


12/03/15 Week 10: Agenda Setting Session (Everyone)

Individual Presentations

Each person presents their proposal for an item to add to the diversity science agenda. No more than 7 minutes per person. You will be “trying out” the ideas you will unpack in your final paper. We will use your proposals to discuss what the future of diversity science should look like.