

BUSF 38901-50 (PhD)
Current Topics in Behavioral Science I
Winter 2023

Course time: Wednesday 1:30 PM - 4:30 PM

Course location: Harper Center 3SW

INSTRUCTORS

Jane Risen (Jane.Risen@chicagobooth.edu)

Ed O'Brien (Ed.O'Brien@chicagobooth.edu)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a graduate seminar for Ph.D. students interested in behavioral science. The course will be divided into two parts.

The first part (taught by Professor Risen) will cover current topics related to the psychology of intuitive belief and judgment, including 1) superstition, magical thinking, and rituals, 2) more “false” beliefs (placebo effects, conspiracy beliefs, empty claims, and fake news), 3) information avoidance, and 4) and connecting across lines of difference. These topics have been selected to introduce you to the ideas that I have been playing with in hopes of inspiring collaboration.

The second part (taught by Professor O'Brien) will cover current topics related to the psychology of change, including 1) how people judge change from the past, 2) how people experience change in the present, 3) how people forecast future change, and 4) how people make and manage change. For each of these topics we will discuss recurring themes such as people's accuracy vs. inaccuracy in change judgment and how people differentially judge change in themselves vs. others. As in Part 1 of the course, these topics have been selected to introduce you to the ideas that I have been playing with in hopes of inspiring collaboration.

Students are expected to read the assigned articles in advance, actively participate in class discussions, generate original research ideas, and, provide critical and constructive comments on classmates' research ideas. The main purpose of this course is to stimulate research, and as part of this class you will be asked to develop two mini research proposals (one should be related to the topics covered in the first half of the class and the second to the second half of the class). Each proposal should include an experiment that you could conduct. After getting feedback on the two proposals, students will choose one of the two to present to class and to submit as a final paper.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class Participation: ~40%

All students are expected to:

- Each and every week: Complete all of the assigned readings before class and be ready to discuss
- Each and every week: Submit a short (~two paragraphs) reaction to the readings (due by Monday before class).

- Reactions: (due weeks 1-8): Write two paragraphs with thoughts, reactions, or questions that were most pressing for you from the reading. You do not have to respond to every

paper, but it can be useful to think about whether/how the papers “speak” to each other.

-Two weeks: Lead class discussion by synthesizing thought papers and generating discussion questions (each student will lead twice throughout the quarter: one Jane week and one Ed week).

- The discussion leaders should be prepared to *briefly* (~5 min) summarize the key findings in the article, describe the methodological approach, and pose (~4-6) discussion questions, based on their own and others’ thoughts.
- You do not need to prepare visual materials (e.g., powerpoint slides). If you choose to, please use them only to showcase key results or to visually clarify your summary or discussion point. Don’t come with slides full of bullet-points.

Research Project: ~60%

All students are expected to:

-Think of **two original research ideas** that are (at least somewhat) related to a topic covered in each half of the class. This must include the design of an experiment that you’d actually want to run. Write up each proposal very briefly (1 page max) for feedback from faculty. The first proposal is due at the end of week 4 and the second one is due at the end of week 7.

-Prepare a short presentation for **one of your two** proposals to get feedback from class during Week 9.

-Write one final research paper, in the style of a submission to Psychological Science for **one of your two** proposals. In the paper, you should first develop your idea and situate it within existing scientific knowledge, then propose at least one experiment to test the hypotheses empirically, and finally discuss future directions. We will provide a template for a Psychological Science paper. It is due at the end of the quarter (week 10).

Note that you are expected to turn-in two proposals (one for each half of class), but you will choose only one to present to class and write-up as a paper.

COURSE POLICIES

This Ph.D. seminar is intended to help you advance your own research interests. We will work together to further our understanding of how to conduct good research in behavioral science, how to raise interesting questions about what we read, how to present and explain that information to others, and how to develop an original research idea that adds to our knowledge of behavioral science.

Specifically, you are expected to:

1. Attend class. It’s hard to contribute and learn from others if you’re not in class.
2. Do the reading. This is not a lecture course. Discussion with your classmates is crucial for learning, so you will need to come to class prepared to discuss something with the rest of us. You will not be asked to memorize any terms, concepts, or formulas; rather, you should spend your time thinking of interesting questions or implications of the papers you read.
3. Respect others’ time. This includes getting to class on time and handing in your thought papers on time so that the discussion leaders can prepare for the in-class discussion each week.

All readings are available on Canvas. *Note that some of the readings will be working papers, some of which our colleagues have asked us not to distribute beyond the class. Please do not cite any working paper outside of class without checking with us first.*

COURSE DEADLINES

Each and every Monday by 5:00pm: By 5:00 each Monday, you should email your reaction paper to Jane, Ed, and that week's discussion leaders. The list of leaders will be posted on Canvas.

Friday, January 27th, 11:59pm: By the end of the day, you must email your short research proposal (1 page max) for the first half of the course to Jane.

Friday, February 17th, 11:59pm: By the end of the day, you must email your short research proposal (1 page max) for the second half of the course to Ed.

Wednesday, March 1st, in class: You will present one of your research proposals for feedback.

Friday, March 10th, 11:59pm: By the end of the day, you must email your Final Research Paper to Jane and Ed.

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

1. Week 1 (Jane) Jan 4 (Superstition, magical thinking, and rituals)
2. Week 2 (Jane) Jan 11 (More "false" beliefs: placebo effects, conspiracy beliefs, empty claims, and fake news)
3. Week 3 (Jane) Jan 18 (Information avoidance)
4. Week 4 (Jane) Jan 25 (Connecting across lines of difference)
5. Week 5 (Ed) Feb 1 (How people judge change from the past)
6. Week 6 (Ed) Feb 8 (How people experience change in the present)
7. Week 7 (Ed) Feb 15 (How people forecast future change)
8. Week 8 (Ed) Feb 22 (How people make and manage change)
9. Week 9 (Jane and Ed) Mar 1 (Presentations)