Psychology of Sustainable Behavior

Fall 2023
Tuesday/Thursday 1:20-2:50
OLRI 243

Prof. Christie Manning
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Office hours: Monday, 4:00-5:00 and Wednesday, 2:30-3:30 in OLRI 158A

Course Materials

Book: Scott, B.A., Amel, E.L., Koger, S.M. and Manning, C.M. (2021). Psychology for Sustainability. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Course Description

Psychology of Sustainable Behavior is built around the argument that so-called "environmental problems" are actually *human behavior* problems. Global crises such as climate change, ocean acidification, plastic pollution, and deforestation ultimately stem from individual and collective human actions. Understanding the foundations of behavior is thus critical in addressing these issues. In addition, the deterioration of ecological systems has significant social justice implications; the world's poor and those already targeted for marginalization and economic disadvantage are disproportionately impacted.

This course approaches environmental degradation and environmental justice through a psychological lens. We will use psychological principles, theories, and methods to explore the complex web of factors underlying how people satisfy their needs, express their identities, participate in their communities, and experience nature. We will also apply psychological knowledge to real-world sustainability case studies at the individual level, on our campus, and in our larger community. Throughout the course we will emphasize the central importance of justice, equity and anti-racism, often overlooked in environmental initiatives.

Psychology of Sustainable Behavior is a project-based class. Students will participate in an individual self-change project (2-3 weeks), an education/communication project (2-3 weeks) and a campus- and community-based collaborative project (5-6 weeks).

Course Goals

- Introduce students to psychological perspectives on the global environmental crises caused by waste
- Examine human thinking and behavior at multiple levels: individual, social-network, organizational, community, governmental
- Explore the varying experiences with and perspectives on sustainability held by different US social groups and identities
- Develop and enhance student analytical skills through critical reading and discussion
- Demonstrate the practical implications and limitations of psychological theory with real-world testing and application of course material
- Encourage students to reflect upon their personal values and lifestyle choices

My hopes and expectations of You

- Be present and engaged. Listen. Ask questions. Offer your perspective.
- Communicate with me. Early. Often. Especially if you are struggling with any aspect of the course, or if you are having difficulty being present in the course due to other life concerns.
- Take responsibility for your own learning and growth.
- Be open to the diversity of perspectives that are available from your peers in this class.
- Visit my office hours to chat – in person or on zoom - not just about class, but about your life and ambitions, who you are and what you want to do to help fix what's broken in our world.
- Talk with Minori (she/her), our writing preceptor. Minori is wonderful and always willing to offer her perspective and help.

Course Assignment and Specifications Grading

In most learning situations in life outside of school, you are not assigned a grade. In academic settings, they are the norm. Yet conventional grading structures are often counterproductive. They may lead students to think more about their grades than about their writing or learning, or to focus on impressing (or fooling) a teacher rather than engaging wholeheartedly with the material, or to fear failure and thus be reluctant to take risks with writing or ideas. Many decades of psychological research in education suggests that grades, in the way they are traditionally given/used, can actually harm learning.

Thus, I have chosen to use an alternative system called "Specifications Grading" ("specs" for short) to determine final grades for this class. I have chosen specs because I believe it will encourage engaged learning, reward good effort, and acknowledge excellent work, while also being flexible and responsive to the ups and downs of normal life in college.

How it works:
1. You have the flexibility to opt out of a certain number of assignments, depending on the final grade you would like to earn in the class.
2. Everything that normally receives a grade (class participation, reading responses, project reports, presentations, the final portfolio) will be evaluated on a credit/no credit basis. "Credit" is given for work that fulfills all of the specifications for an assignment according to a clear rubric (available on Moodle). The specifications for all assignments are set at B+ quality work. If you do B+ quality work or higher, you will get credit. You will not receive credit for work that does not earn at least a B+.
3. Every time you earn credit for a graded course component by meeting its specifications, you will earn a point in the appropriate category. Your final grade will be determined by how many points you earn across each of the five categories of the course. (See the table below.)
4. I will give you feedback on the final versions of your formal written assignments (Self-change project, Communication project, Campus/Community project) and if they are not B+ quality work, you may turn in a revision one week after you receive my feedback.

Tokens:
Because lots of life happens during the semester, it isn't always possible to complete everything we intend to do, or to complete things on the schedule we hoped to follow. Tokens are designed to recognize this reality and give you some additional flexibility to meet the goals you set for yourself for this class. Everyone in the class will begin the semester with four tokens. You can use these in whatever combination you'd like at the following 'rates of exchange'.
- 1 token = 1 reading response point OR 1 EnviroThursday attendance
- 2 tokens = 1 participation point OR 1-week extension on a project report OR 1 presentation point

If you fall behind and don't feel like you can catch up, even with the help of tokens, PLEASE talk to me. I will work with you to earn extra tokens and get back on track.

Attendance & Participation	Reading Responses	Self-change project	Campus/comm-unity project	Communication project	Portfolio	EnviroThurs-days	Course grade
21	14	2 (draft and final)	3 (draft, final, presentation)	3 (draft, final, presentation)	1	3	A
20	13	2	3	3	1	2	A-
19	12	2	2	2	0	2	B+
18	12	2	2	2	0	2	B
18	11	2	2	1	0	1	B-
17	11	2	2	1	0	1	C+
17	10	2	2	0	0	0	C/C-
16	10	1	2	0	0	0	D

Assignments

Full assignment descriptions will be posted on Moodle.
- Attendance and participation in class (21 possible points)
- Reading responses (16 possible points)
- Self-change project (draft and final report, 2 possible points)
- Communication/Education project (draft, final report, and presentation, 2 possible points)
- Campus/Community project (draft, final report, and presentation, 3 possible points)
- Final portfolio of in-class activities (1 possible point)
- Attendance at 3 EnviroThursdays (3 possible points)

Attendance and Participation

We continue to be in pandemic times, so attendance may be complicated this semester. That said, attendance – that is, being present and engaged in class – plays an essential role in learning, especially in a discussion-based and active learning class such as this one. During many classes, we will spend time applying the material through small group activities. Thus, attendance is important not only for your learning, but also for our collective ability to learn from each other and maintain a sense of connection and commitment to one another. Your presence in class matters.

One Attendance and Participation point will be given each time you:
- Come to class and remain for the entire period
- Participate in class discussion. Examples of participation include: contributing to small group discussions, contributing to large group discussions, taking an active/enthusiastic role in in-class activities, adding your ideas to collaborative documents, asking a question, sharing your thoughts in writing after class.
- Not using your phone during class, and not using your laptop for non-class-relevant things.

Other things to know:
- There are 21 class meetings this semester (not including the first day, and the two group project work days) which equates to 21 possible attendance and participation points.
- You may exchange 2 tokens for 1 participation points.
- I recognize that there are unavoidable circumstances that may sometimes make it impossible for you to attend class. Anyone may miss three class periods with explanation or penalty. If you miss more than

three class periods, you must come talk to me so we can work together to develop a plan for your well-being and success in this class.
- If you are having serious difficulties with participation, please talk to me outside of class so that we can develop a strategy together.

Reading Responses

There are 16 possible reading responses this semester; you may choose the number that complete depending on the grade you'd like to earn in the class (see Specs table above). There are five different possibilities for you to complete your reading response, each is described below.

To earn 1 reading response point, you must:
- Submit your response on Moodle by 9am on the day we discuss that particular reading
- Identify which of the 5 reading response options you've chosen
- Follow the instructions on that response option to engage deeply with one or two ideas from the text
- Write at least 200 words and try to write no more than 600

Other things to know
- These responses are your opportunity to demonstrate an ability to explore the ideas from the week's readings with a critical eye. Your response should display your own genuine reflection upon the material of the week. The best reading responses are both substantive and focused; it is better to choose a few key points and develop them well, rather than describe a set of disconnected and underdeveloped ideas. Strong reading responses call upon the week's readings and refer to specific points or paragraphs as evidence or to illustrate a point. Where relevant, reading responses should explicitly connect to ideas and readings from previous readings and discussions.
- These reading responses are an example of "writing to learn" writing rather than formal academic argument. Consequently, what is important is the thoughtfulness of the ideas and questions you raise rather than on writing style or polish.

Reading response option 1: Reflect on Christie's questions (posted on Moodle)
- Respond to the question(s) about the reading posed on Moodle.
- Engage with one or two ideas from the text deeply - show that you are trying to understand what the reading is about.
- Ideal length - 300-500 words

Reading response option 2: Reflect on something surprising, confusing, intriguing or important in the reading(s)
- Identify one or two things in the reading(s) that you found surprising, confusing, intriguing and/or important, and describe them. Describe why these ideas seem relevant to the class.
- Respond to the question(s) about the reading posed on Moodle.
- Engage with these ideas deeply - show that you are trying to understand what the reading is about.
- Ideal length - 300-500 words

Reading response option 3: Create a visual that captures something important in the reading(s)
- Visually represent a couple of the important ideas from the reading(s). You could create a mind map, a drawing, an infographic, a cartoon...
- Through your image, engage deeply with the ideas you're sharing - show that you are trying to understand what the reading is about.
- Include a brief text description of what your image is conveying (Ideal length of text description - 150-200 words)

Reading response option 4: Show your notes on the reading(s)
- Share your notes with me covering the entire length of the reading(s) (screenshot, or loose notes in notebook, or google doc, etc.).

- Be sure your notes capture the reading's main ideas, structure, and key points - show that you are engaging deeply with the reading(s) and trying to understand what it's about.
- Write a couple of sentences to summarize your learning from the reading (ideal length - around 150 words)

Reading response option 5: Propose your own way to engage with the reading(s)
- Have another idea about a way to show you've engaged a text? (E.g., want to write a Tweet/X thread? Put together an Instagram reel? Create a podcast teaser? Your creativity is the limiting factor.) Just be sure to tell me what you are doing (and maybe a little bit about why you chose to do it.)
- Show that you are engaging deeply with the reading(s) and trying to understand what it's about.
- Write a couple of sentences to summarize your learning from the reading and your creative response (ideal length - 150-200 words)

Self-Change Project

It is easy to underestimate how difficult behavior change can be when thinking about it in the abstract or when focusing on other peoples' behavior. To help you understand some of the challenges that arise when attempting to change a behavior, the thought patterns that accompany these challenges, you will undertake a quest to produce no garbage for ten days. You will write a report about your experience and the psychological concepts that help explain what happened.

Communication/Education Project

An important step in any social change is raising awareness of an issue. This assignment is meant to be low-work-intensity, fun, expressive, and creative. You will have two options: 1. You can develop a psychologically-informed communication/message about some aspect of waste/zero waste, or, 2. You can critique an organization's communication or approach (about zero waste) and offer them a set of bullet-point recommendations based on the psychology you've learned in class.

Community Project

Does this psychology stuff really work? For this project you will work with a small group of your peers in class to help the Sustainability Office on campus create the conditions for a desired "sustainable" behavior relevant to waste. Your group will make observations, interview community members to understand their vision and understanding of sustainability, and develop a strategy to foster change (based on course materials). Ideally, you will also pilot test your strategy and evaluate the results.

You will work with your group to write a report of your project and outcomes, and your group will also present your findings to the class and the Sustainability Office.

Portfolio

Instead of a final exam, I would like you to turn in a set of the in-class brainstorming, analysis, and application assignments that you have completed through the semester. Along with copies of these assignments, you will include a brief paragraph describing the psychological theory or principle that you based your ideas upon, your own evaluation of your work, and ideas of how you might use this work and/or improve it. Further information will be available before Fall Break.

EnviroThursday Attendance

On many Thursdays of the semester, the Environmental Studies department hosts EnviroThursday at noon (with food!). I ask that you attend up to three EnviroThursday talks over the course of the semester (depending on the grade you are pursuing, see the specs for details), and turn in a few sentences summary of each of them (in one document) on Moodle by the last day of class. If you have other commitments on Thursday over the lunch hour, then talk to me - there are many other events you can attend instead (e.g., the International Roundtable). The purpose of this assignment is to help you make connections with your class learning and other research and happenings in the world. You can find the EnviroThursday schedule here.