

## PSYCH 334. Cultural Psychology

Fall 2017. Meetings: Tuesdays 6:15 - 9:15 pm, Kresge Hall 2-325

**Instructor:** Kensy Cooperrider

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“Office” hours: Peet’s, 1622 Chicago Avenue, Tuesdays 5:00 – 6:00 pm

**Course description:** There are now more than seven billion people in the world. They speak an estimated 7000 distinct languages, make their livings in countless ways, and worship different gods; many live in vast metropolises, others in lowland jungles or arctic wildernesses, still others in temperate suburbs. Do all these people, across all these diverse cultures, think in the same ways? This course reviews research suggesting the answer is a resounding "no." We will consider evidence that people around the world have different concepts of space, time, numbers, nature, and more; that people in the "West" and "East" process information differently; and that there is a cognitive divide separating people in small-scale traditional cultures from people in globalized ones. We will also examine how cultural tools—from ancient ones like writing and abacus to recent tools like GPS and Google—have shaped and continue to re-shape human cognition.

**Learning objectives:** By the end of this course should understand...

... the evidence for variability in how people think across cultures

... which aspects of culture shape human psychology, and how

... how different psychological theories view the role of culture in shaping the mind

**Course format:** This is technically a lecture course but will be run more like a seminar. It will consist of: discussions of readings; student presentations of supplementary readings (see below); in-class activities; and lecture modules. Lecture modules will be used to situate the required readings, suggest conceptual frameworks, and introduce material not covered in the required readings. The majority of class-time, however, will be spent working through ideas together as a group. For this reason, engagement is essential to the vitality of the class.

**Required text:** In addition to journal articles to be distributed through Canvas, we will read and discuss the following book, available at the Norris Center bookstore:

Nisbett, Richard (2003) *The Geography of Thought* (paperback)

### Overview of grade components:

#### **Attendance, participation, and engagement (weekly) — 15%**

Description: You are expected to attend every class and to be a lively participant in class discussions.

#### **“Three things” (weekly) — 15%**

Description: For each class, you will prepare “three things” about the reading: 1) one concept or argument you didn’t fully understand; 2) one criticism of an argument or conclusion; 3) one idea the reading gave you for future research. These three things can be about any (combination) of the readings for a given meeting. They should be posted on Canvas **by noon on the day of class.**

### **Quizzes (weekly) — 20%**

Description: Brief quizzes at the start of every class and will cover core concepts from the readings or from the previous class meeting. (I know, life's tough—this will be a nudge to keep everyone on top of the material, and our in-class discussions will be better for it.) Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

### **Supplementary reading presentation — 10%**

Description: Each student will give one (~15 minute) presentation on readings that supplement the required readings. More detailed guidelines to follow. A list of possible supplementary readings will be made available for each week, and students are also welcome to suggest other readings.

### **Final project — 40%**

Description: There is no final exam for this class— rather, there is a final project. The project will be on a topic of your own choosing (in consultation with me and your peers) and will unfold in a series of steps:

- a brief written topic proposal (required but not graded);
- an annotated bibliography **(5%)**;
- a peer review exercise **(5%)**;
- a ~15-minute presentation on the last class meeting **(15%)**;
- and a final written product **(15%)**.

More information will follow about the various components of the final project.

**Readings:** Unless noted on the syllabus, all readings should be done before the class meeting on which they are listed. All readings are available on the Canvas site, unless a link is provided directly in the syllabus. Additional readings may occasionally be done in class.

**Academic Integrity:** Students are required to comply with University regulations regarding academic integrity. If you are in doubt about what constitutes academic dishonesty, speak with your instructor before the assignment is due and/or examine the University website. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating on an exam, obtaining an unfair advantage, and plagiarism (e.g., using material from readings without citing or copying another student's paper). Failure to maintain academic integrity will result in a grade sanction, possibly as severe as failing and being required to retake the course, and could lead to a suspension or expulsion from the program. Further penalties may apply. For more information, visit: <[http://www.sps.northwestern.edu/student/issues/academic\\_integrity.cfm](http://www.sps.northwestern.edu/student/issues/academic_integrity.cfm)>.

Plagiarism is one form of academic dishonesty. Students can familiarize themselves with the definition and examples of plagiarism, by visiting: <<http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/plagiar.html>>.

Some assignments in this course may be required to be submitted through Turnitin, a plagiarism detection and education tool in Canvas. In brief, Turnitin compares the submitted assignment to millions of documents in large databases. It then generates a report showing the extent to which text

within a paper is similar to pre-existing sources. The user can see how or whether the flagged text is appropriately cited. Turnitin also returns a percentage score, indicating the percentage of the submitted paper that is similar or identical to pre-existing sources. High scores are not necessarily bad, nor do they necessarily indicate plagiarism, since the score does not take into account how or whether material is cited. If a paper consisted of one long quote that was cited appropriately, it would score 100%. This would not be plagiarism, due to the appropriate citation. However, submitting one long quote would probably be a poor paper. Low scores are not necessarily good, nor do they necessarily indicate a lack of plagiarism. If a 50-page paper contained all original material, except for one short quote that was not cited, it might score around 1%. But, not citing a quotation is still plagiarism.

Some courses may include a Turnitin draft option in which the student can submit a paper and see the resultant report before submitting a final copy to the instructor. This ideally will help students better understand and avoid plagiarism.

**Students with disabilities:** Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU ([accessiblenu@northwestern.edu](mailto:accessiblenu@northwestern.edu); 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

## Course schedule

\*\* not set in stone; stay tuned for updates

### Week 1, September 19: Laying the groundwork

### Week 2, September 26: Linguistic relativity; space

*Readings:*

Henrich et al., 'The weirdest people in the world?' (target article only)

Colville, 'Spot the WEIRDo' ([link](#))

Whorf, 'The relation of habitual thought and behavior to language'

Majid et al., 'Can language restructure cognition? The case of space'

*Supplemental presentation:* demonstration

### Week 3, October 3: Space; time

*Readings:*

Haun & Rapold, 'Variation in memory for body movements across cultures'

Casasanto, 'Who's afraid of the big bad Whorf?'

Boroditsky & Gaby, 'Remembrances of times east'

Cooperrider & Núñez, 'How we make sense of time' ([link](#))

*Supplemental presentations:* 1, 2

### Week 4, October 10: Numbers

*Readings:*

Gordon, 'Numerical cognition without words'

Everett, 'How do you count without numbers?' ([link](#))

Miller et al., 'Pre-school origins of cross-national differences in number-naming systems'

*Supplemental presentations:* 3, 4

### Week 5, October 17: Colors and smells

*Readings:*

Winawer et al., 'Russian blues reveal the effects of language on color discrimination'

Jones, 'Do you see what I see?' ([link](#))

Majid & Burenhult, 'Odors are expressible in language, as long as you speak the right language'

*Supplemental presentations:* 5, 6

### Week 6, October 24: Morality; East vs. West

*Readings:*

Barrett et al., 'Small-scale societies exhibit fundamental variation in the role of intentions in moral judgment'

Nisbett, 'Geography of Thought' (Chs. 1-3)

*Supplemental presentations:* 7, 8

### **Week 7, October 31: East vs. West**

*Readings:*

Nisbett, 'Geography of Thought' (4 to end of book)

Talhelm et al., 'Large-scale psychological differences within China explained by rice versus wheat agriculture'

*Supplemental presentations:* 9, 10

### **Week 8, November 7: Small vs. Big; Pirahã**

*Readings:*

Diamond, 'The World Before Yesterday' (excerpt)

Everett, 'Cultural constraints on grammar and cognition in Pirahã'

Colapinto, 'The Interpreter' ([link](#))

*Supplemental presentations:* 11

### **Week 9, November 14: Old tools—writing, abacus**

*Readings:*

Dehaene 'Reading in the brain' (excerpt)

Huetig & Mishra, 'How literacy acquisition affects the illiterate mind'

Stigler, 'Mental abacus'

*Supplemental presentations:* 12

### **Week 10, November 21: Peer review exercise**

*Readings:*

Clark, 'Everyone can write better, and you are no exception' ([link](#))

### **Week 11, November 28: New tools—Google, GPS**

*Readings:*

Sparrow et al. 'Google effects on memory'

Loh & Kanai, 'How has the Internet reshaped cognition?'

Dobbs, 'Are GPS apps messing with our brains?' ([link](#))

*Final presentations—early volunteers*

### **Week 12, December 5: Final presentations in class!**