PSYC 325-1: PSYCHOPATHOLOGY
Fall 2025

Patrick E. McKnight, Ph.D.

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Course Information

Instructor Details

Instructor: Patrick E. McKnight, Ph.D.
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Office Hours: noon-1p on Thursdays

Course Details

Lecture: Tues/Thurs 9-10:15am
Location: Planetary Hall (next to David King) RM: 122
Exams: Best 3 of 4 with one mandatory (Exam 1)
Grades Determined By: Attendance, Exams and Listening

Course Objectives

The goal of this class is to familiarize you with concepts and empirical research on adult psychopathology; we may address children and adolescents when pertinent. I designed the course to be broken into modules. Each module lasts a few weeks. Every day we meet, I present small lectures of material relevant to the module content. After each lecture, we discuss the material as a class. My plan is to treat this course as a stimulating seminar where we exchange ideas and, perhaps, disagree. Our collective goal is to learn from one another. As far as the course content, I focus on the big diagnostic categories where most people are likely to fall within their lifetime. Specifically, we discuss:

- **Diagnosis and classification** - naming the pathological behavior
- **Epidemiology** - the extent of the problem is it in society
- **Pathogenesis** - how did it develop?; what keeps it going?
    - **Genetic** - what hand was a person dealt that leads to certain problems?
    - **Neurobiological** - a mixed bag of causes and effects
    - **Psychosocial factors** - another mixed bag

Since interventions lie beyond the scope of the course, I plan to discuss them sparingly to provide evidence of differential diagnosis or etiological concerns.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

1. **Describe, compare and contrast** various symptoms (e.g., hallucinations, delusions, panic attacks) associated with psychological disorders.
2. **Understand** the continuity between non-pathological and pathological behavior, including socio-cultural factors influencing the definition of such pathologies and grasping the difference between dimensional and categorical approaches.
3. **Appreciate** the frequency and distribution of these problems in the United States and elsewhere (i.e., epidemiology).
4. **Recognize** the ways in which psychologists ask research questions about these disorders and the various research methods by which they seek answers to these questions. There is an important distinction between useful data and meaningless statistics.

Scientific Approach

The scientific investigation of pathological behavior carries with it the assumption that doing so is justifiable - that is, that psychopathology **can** be studied objectively. Scientists often adopt an open-minded skepticism that gets addressed with data. We do not seek just any data but rather data collected from appropriate samples, designs, and measures. I shall treat all the topics we discuss with the same level of rigor expected in the scientific community. I ask you to do the same. We are going to discuss several controversial topics, including sexual behaviors, drug use, and crime. In order to get the most out of this class, you may have to set aside – at least temporarily – personal beliefs that you have already acquired about psychopathology. Remain open but skeptical like a scientist.

Assigned Readings and Lectures

To get the most out of the course, you must read both the assigned materials (brief by most standards) and the lecture notes **BEFORE** class. Please read; failure to do so means that you will waste your time by attending lectures when you could be doing something more interesting and our collective time by chiming in with uninformed opinions. The course is not about opinions but rather about empirical evidence. Read the assigned materials and you will see that most of the opinions held by the general population are misinformed and, sadly, outdated. By participating in class, you engage in the learning process, assess the ideas presented, and shape the focus of the class. Class becomes more dynamic, interesting and rewarding when students actively share their ideas, objections, critiques, and questions. You are expected to come to class having read the assigned material and be prepared to make comments, raise questions, and offer counter evidence - **not opinion**. Every aspect of this class outside of the classroom is free. The assigned readings come from all free resources. Yes, the **TEXTBOOK IS FREE!** (via the **Noba Project**). I chose this text for its price and the fact that the chapters were written by the foremost experts in each area we discuss. The material comes as condensed online pieces that ought to take less than 60 minutes to read and understand the material. Thus, I chose materials that were expertly crafted, accurate, and inexpensive.

Course Structure

The course consists of four (4) modules - one required module and three "optional" modules. Module 1 (Classification of Psychopathology) is required. Everyone must attend Module 1 lectures and complete Exam 1. After that module, you may select from any of the three remaining modules including depressive (Module 2) and anxiety (Module 3) disorders, along with a combined module (Module 4) covering personality, substance use disorders, and other diagnostic groups. I labeled them as "optional" since you are only required to complete two of the three remaining modules.

Grading and Evaluation

I use three pieces of evidence to assign your final grade: attendance, exam performance, and attending to instructions.

Attendance (60 pts)

> "Showing up is 80 percent of life" – Woody Allen

You will learn more from me and your classmates in person than by any other means. Consistent with Woody Allen's perspective, I plan to take attendance. How? Every session we meet, at about 15 minutes into the class, I will take a photograph of all those present and, counted as in attendance. These AI tools now allow me to take attendance each day. I do this to ensure that everyone commits to showing up every week, every day, and every minute the course is in session. I give you all ample leniency with respect to showing up ON TIME. I ask you, please be sitting and ready to participate **NO LATER THAN 5 MINUTES AFTER 9AM (i.e., 9:05AM)**. Some students have gotten into the very bad habit of showing up (yes!!!) but showing up 30 minutes after the class started (boo!!). So, show up, show up on time, and, if you can muster it, show up early. I am often in the classroom with plenty of time to chat.

Exams (30 pts)

There will be four (4) exams with the best three (3) used to compute your grade. Each exam assesses your understanding of material presented in the lectures and the assigned readings for each module. **Exam 1 is mandatory for all students.** After Exam 1, you need only take two additional exams from Exams 2, 3, or 4 to complete the course requirements. **Exam 4 will be offered during the final exam period for those who wish to take it.** Students satisfied with their performance after the first three exams may skip Exam 4.

Each exam period includes 30 minutes of movie viewing related to the module content, followed by the exam. This allows students to see additional clinical examples and applications of the material before being assessed.

Exams must be taken on the scheduled date, in person, and without exception. There will be no makeup exams. Let me repeat myself. **THERE WILL BE NO MAKEUP EXAMS.** Plan ahead. Plan for deaths, weddings, babies, and such. Whatever you do, plan. The best plan is to take all four exams. The exams are in class with no notes, no devices, and no help from the outside world (hello ChatGPT); these exams will be challenging but fair.

Listening (10 pts)

I make announcements routinely throughout the semester and remind students frequently about deadlines, changes, and such. Your job is to listen and follow instructions. You get a free 10% boost in your grade if you simply follow instructions. You know, listen.

Final Grades

Your grade will be determined by your attendance (60 pts), the average of your **3 highest exam scores** (30 pts) and you **following instructions** (10 pts). If I ask the class to please follow directions (e.g., read the syllabus, listen to announcements, and such) then you know that failure to do so eliminates 10% of your final grade. Egregious offenses need not apply for any leniency. Please follow directions. I refuse to give any student an A who fails to follow simple directions - especially after being prompted to follow directions. Yes, refuse.

Grading Scale

Grade	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C	D	F
TOTAL	100	93-99	90-92	87-89	83-86	80-82	70-79	61-69	0-60

Calculate Your Grade

TOTAL = Exam Average × 30 + (# of classes attended / 26) × 60 + (did you listen: Yes = 1, No = 0) × 10

> 💡 Example Calculation
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> Suppose you average 70% on 3 of the 4 exams, attended all but two classes (24 out of 26) or 92.3% of the classes, and you listened (thank you). Based upon those numbers, your TOTAL is…
> **TOTAL** = 70% of 30 (pts) + 92.3% of 60 (pts) + 100% of 10 (pts) = 21 + 55.38 + 10 = 86.38 (**B**)
> Expect a **"B"** for the course. Note, you only averaged about a "C" on the exams but by showing up and listening, you got the benefit of the doubt and scored a better grade. Ain't that cool?

Important Considerations

1. You cannot pass the course (Grade > F) without attending AT LEAST 5 lectures provided you have 100% on the exams and you listen.
2. Attendance offsets your poor performance on exams. If you fail the exams or perform poorly, your grade will suffer in most classes but not as much in this class. Consider a simple example:

   - 50% Exam Average (15 pts)
   - 100% Attendance (60 pts)

- You listened (10 pts)
- FINAL GRADE: $15 + 60 + 10 = 85$ (**B**)

3. You must average at least 50% on the exams to earn a B grade - remember that point when I send out the grades on the exams. To be clear, you only need to score an average of 50% on the exams provided you attend all the classes, listen, and only care about getting a low B or higher.

Important Dates

> ❗ Key Academic Deadlines
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> - **Last Day to Add Classes:** September 2nd
> - **Last Day to Drop (No tuition penalty):** September 8th
> - **Last Day to Drop (50% tuition penalty):** September 16th
> - **Unrestricted Withdrawal Period:** September 17th-30th

Additional Course Policies

Students with Special Concerns

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Statement of Academic Integrity

In accordance with University policies, I enforce the George Mason University Academic Standards Code (2025-2026). Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work. Please consult the full Academic Standards Code document to understand all policies and procedures.

Course Schedule

> ⚠️ Tentative Schedule
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> Below is a tentative schedule meaning that we are likely to change things as weather, pandemics, and unusual acts of nature often interfere with the educational process.

MODULE 1: Classification of Psychopathology

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Assignment
8/27	Tue	Introduction & Course Guidelines	Read syllabus (THIS DOCUMENT)
8/29	Thu	Defining Pathology and Disorder	History of Mental Illness | Noba
9/3	Tue	**Girl, Interrupted Part 1** (65 min)	
9/5	Thu	Understanding Causes and Maintenance	Gross & Jazaieri (2014), Culture and Emotion | Noba
9/10	Tue	**Girl, Interrupted Part 2** (62 min)	
9/12	Thu	Discussion: Movie & Cultural Factors	
9/17	Tue	**EXAM 1 (Mandatory)** *+ 30 min movie preview*	

MODULE 2: Depressive Disorders

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Assignment
9/19	Thu	Depressive Disorders I	Mood Disorders | Noba
9/24	Tue	**The Soloist Part 1** (65 min)	
9/26	Thu	Depressive Disorders II	Rottenberg (2005)

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Assignment
10/1	Tue	**The Soloist Part 2** (51 min)	
10/3	Thu	Discussion: Movie & Module Review + **EXAM 2** + *30 min movie preview*	

MODULE 3: Anxiety Disorders

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Assignment
10/8	Tue	Panic Disorder	Anxiety and Related Disorders	Noba
10/10	Thu	Generalized Anxiety Disorder	Behar et al. (2009)
10/15	Tue	**Reign Over Me Part 1** (65 min)	
10/17	Thu	Social Anxiety Disorder	Social Anxiety	Noba, McNally (2003)
10/22	Tue	**Reign Over Me Part 2** (59 min)	
10/24	Thu	Discussion: Movie & PTSD + **EXAM 3** + *30 min movie preview*	

MODULE 4: Personality, Substance Use, and Other Disorders

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Assignment
10/29	Tue	OCD & Specific Phobias	ADHD and Behavior Disorders	Noba

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Assignment
10/31	Thu	ADHD & Bipolar Disorder	Gruber (2011)
11/5	Tue	**Repulsion Part 1** (65 min)	
11/7	Thu	Dissociative Disorders	Dissociative Disorders | Noba
11/12	Tue	**Repulsion Part 2** (40 min)	
11/14	Thu	Discussion: Repulsion & Schizophrenia	Schizophrenia Spectrum | Noba
11/19	Tue	**Basketball Diaries Part 1** (65 min)	
11/21	Thu	Personality Disorders	Personality Disorders | Noba, Psychopathy | Noba, Alcohol Disorders
11/26	Tue	**THANKSGIVING WEEK - NO CLASS**	
11/28	Thu	**THANKSGIVING - NO CLASS**	
12/3	Tue	**Basketball Diaries Part 2** (37 min)	
12/5	Thu	Discussion: Movies & Substance Use + Final Review	
Final Exam (12/11 @ 7:30a)	Wed	**EXAM 4 (Optional)** + *30 min movie viewing*	

> **Free Textbook**
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> **NOTE:** Get the entire textbook online here

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