

# Psychology of Learning — Spring 2011

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## Contact Information

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## Books

- Bouton, M. E. (2007). *Learning and behavior: A contemporary synthesis*. Sinauer: Sunderland, MA.
- Journal articles (to be determined).
- **Recommended:** American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, D.C.: Author.

Table 1  
*Topics & Reading List*

Topic	Reading	Week
History of Learning	1	1
Adaptive Value	2, 3	1–2
Pavlovian: Mechanisms	3	3
		<b>Exam 1</b>
Pavlovian: Theories	4	4–5
Pavlovian: Back to Behavior	5	6
Pavlovian: Generalizability	6	7
		<b>Exam 2</b>
Instrumental: Mechanisms	7	8–9
Instrumental: Stimulus Control	8	10–11
		<b>Exam 3</b>
Role of Motivation	9	12
Synthetic Perspective	10	13–14
		<b>Exam 4</b>

## Course Description

Course is housed in a Social Science department.

Class meets M, T, W, & F from 9:10am – 10:00am in Olin 218.

Prerequisite: Psychology 101 or permission of instructor.

A survey of major concepts and issues in conditioning, learning and memory processes. Emphasizes research dealing with the ways learning and memory interact with other variables such as development and species-typical behavior.

This course will introduce you to the psychology of learning, the process of changing behavior as a result of experience. The course will *not* address how students learn in the classroom (although our

material is certainly relevant to that); instead we will focus on basic research in learning, often involving nonhuman animals. Because experience can affect behavior in many ways, the field of learning is a diverse one; we will examine many of its topics. Learning researchers must take great care to ensure that they understand exactly how an experience has affected a behavior; therefore learning studies often involve complicated controls in order to determine the exact nature of the learning that has occurred. By the end of the semester you will be better scientists (or at least better designers of well-controlled experiments) as a result of what you learn in this course.

My own interests lie squarely in the realm of Pavlovian conditioning, and it might seem that much of the semester is devoted to this topic. Instrumental learning is so heavily influenced by Pavlovian conditioning that the two are hardly separable, and in fact time spent considering Pavlovian matters directly benefits one's understanding of instrumental learning.

An important component of the course will be an examination of scientific articles. Papers will be selected that highlight both what we know about learning and how we know it. If you leave this class understanding how to read scientific articles then this course will have succeeded on at least one front.

## Course Objectives

At the conclusion of the course, the student will be able to

- explain the evolutionary processes that shape behavior.
- discuss the procedural differences between Pavlovian and instrumental learning.
- explain the major theories of Pavlovian and instrumental learning.
- design an experiment that addresses the role of learning in behavior.
- read and understand the scientific literature in learning theory.

## Grading

### Exams

There will be four exams, consisting for the most part of short-answer essay questions. Each exam will cover explicitly the material presented in class and in the readings since the previous exam. There is no cumulative final exam; however, you should not assume simply because you have been tested on something that it is no longer important. An understanding of material presented later in the semester will require a knowledge of material presented earlier.

If you miss one exam, for a sufficiently serious reason, and inform me of this within 24 hours of the exam, you may take a make-up test. If you miss more than one exam, you will receive a grade of ZERO for each additional missed exam.

## Term paper

A term paper is required in this course. It should be about 5 or 6 pages long (excluding title page, abstract and references) and must address an empirical article that you read. You may choose the article, but I will have to approve the choice before you write the paper. Paper must be chosen by Tuesday, March 1. Your paper should briefly describe the main focus of the original article, indicate whether the study examined classical or instrumental learning (or some other form) and your basis for this decision, and then discuss the context of the study (what other research led up to this particular study; what interesting studies followed this one?). Pretend that I have hired you to summarize this paper for me: why was it done, what question did it address, what were the future implications, what was good about it, what was bad about it? More information about the paper will be forthcoming. The paper must be written according to APA style. The due date for the paper is Wednesday, April 20 (I will review a printed draft of the paper if you turn it in by April 8); your paper **MUST** be turned in to me in class on the due date. Late papers will be penalized at a rate of 10% of their potential value per day.

## Electronic Submission of Papers

All papers must be turned in *both* as printed copies and electronically. Submission of a printed copy ensures that the paper that I grade is formatted the way that you intend. There is no guarantee that formatting of an electronic version will look like what you expect (different versions of Word format things differently, for example). The printed copy must be turned in by the deadline. You can email the electronic version to me up to a day later, but its content must be the same as the printed version. Electronic files should be in L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X, text, or word-processing (e.g., Word .doc, but not .docx) format. If you want to use a different format please talk to me about it ahead of time.

Please be aware that in the event of questions about academic honesty the e-paper might be submitted to an online service that checks for plagiarism, or portions of it might be used for Google searches. This should pose no problem for anyone unless you have plagiarized portions of the paper. Please do not do so.

## Class Participation

Learning can be a complex and difficult topic. I hope to make it understandable by fostering an atmosphere of shared inquiry and discussion. It is not possible to benefit fully from class discussions without being present.

## Course Grade

Your grade will be based on a weighted average of your grades on the exams and the paper. The exams will count for 85% of your grade (lowest test score: 10%; others 25%), and the paper 15%. Then your grade for the course will be determined as follows:

90 - 100: 4.0	70 - 72.9: 2.0
87 - 89.9: 3.7	67 - 69.9: 1.7
83 - 86.9: 3.3	63 - 66.9: 1.3
80 - 82.9: 3.0	60 - 62.9: 1.0

77 - 79.9: 2.7

&lt; 60: 0

73 - 76.9: 2.3

## Disability Statement

If you have a disability and may require accommodations or modifications in class instruction or course-related activities, please contact the Learning Support Center (LSC) staff who can arrange for reasonable accommodations for students who provide documentation of their disability/condition. If you are presently registered with the LSC and have requested accommodations through the LSC for this semester, please plan to meet with me as early as possible to discuss the best way to implement these accommodations in this class. The LSC is located on the third floor of the Seeley Mudd library or call 517-629-0825.

## Attendance

Attendance at class is expected. As you will learn from the first exam, material presented in lecture is important, and material presented in lecture will not always appear in the readings. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed, both in terms of lecture material and announcements about exams, assignments, etc.

Albion College policy on attendance: "Regular attendance in all classes is expected. Every absence from class is inevitably a loss — usually one which can never be made up. A student has the responsibility to inform his or her faculty member, whenever possible in advance, of an absence due to serious or prolonged illness, and verification of absences due to emergency reasons, may be obtained from the Office of Residential Life."

## Academic Integrity

Albion College policy, endorsed by you professor: "As an academic community, Albion College is firmly committed to honor and integrity in the pursuit of knowledge. Therefore, as a member of this academic community, each student acknowledges responsibility for his or her actions and commits to the highest standards of integrity. In doing so, each student makes a covenant with the college not to engage in any form of academic dishonesty, fraud, cheating, or theft."

## Academic Skills Center

THE ACADEMIC SKILLS CENTER, located in the Seeley Mudd Building of the Library, supports student success at Albion College through the Learning Support Center, the Quantitative Skills Center, and the Writing Center. The ASC also coordinates academic peer tutoring services and educational technologies for enhancing student learning. For information, visit the ASC website at <http://www.albion.edu/asc>.

## A Final Note

If you find that you need assistance with the material presented in this course, or if you just want to talk about it, please see me. My office hours are listed above, but if you cannot meet with me at those times please make an appointment with me. I am on campus every day, often including weekends, and will find time to meet with you.