

# Virginia Western Community College

## PSY 200

### Principles of Psychology

#### Prerequisites

The assignments in the course require college-level reading fluency and coherent communication through written reports.

#### Course Description

Surveys the basic concepts of psychology. Covers the scientific study of behavior and mental processes, research methods, biological bases of behavior, sensation and perception, developmental psychology, learning, memory, thinking, intelligence, personality, social psychology, and psychological disorders and treatment. The assignments in the course require college-level reading fluency and coherent communication through written reports. This is a Passport and UCGS transfer course.

**Semester Credits: 3**

**Lecture Hours: 3**

#### Required Materials

1. Textbook
2. Internet access
3. Canvas
4. Microsoft word
4. Synchronous online sections: Video camera and audio

#### General Sections:

Schacter, D.L., Gilbert, D. T., Wegner, D. M. & Nock, M.K. (2024) *Introducing Psychology*. 6<sup>th</sup> edition. New York, NY: Worth.

#### Low Cost Sections:

Griggs, R.A. (2014). *Psychology: A Concise Introduction*. 6<sup>th</sup> edition. New York, NY: MPS. (with Achieve access)

#### Other Required Materials for Low Cost Sections:

Achieve

**General Course Purpose**

PSY 200 explores the history, major theories, perspectives, and methods of the field of psychology and apply them to human individuals and groups. This course introduces general topics of psychology that will be foundational for advanced courses in psychology.

**Course Objectives**

Upon completing the course, the student will be able to:

**Science of Psychology: Perspectives in Psychological Science**

- Define psychology as the scientific study of behavior and mental processes.
- Identify and explain the primary objectives of psychology (e.g. describing, understanding, predicting, and controlling behavior and mental processes).
- Describe how psychology emerged and evolved as a scientific discipline.
- Identify overarching themes, persistent questions, or enduring conflicts in psychology, such as the interaction of heredity and environment.
- Identify and describe the major contemporary perspectives of psychology (e.g. psychodynamic, behavioral, humanistic, biological, and cognitive).

**Science of Psychology: Research Methods**

- Describe the scientific method and its role in psychology.
- Explain the strengths, limitations, and conclusions that can be drawn from various research designs and data collection methods (including case study, observation, survey, correlational, and experiment).
- Describe systematic procedures used to improve the credibility of research findings (e.g. blind or double blind designs, control or placebo groups, peer-review, replication).
- Explain the ethical obligations of researchers toward their research participants, both human and animal.

**Science of Psychology: Critical Thinking**

- Discern differences between personal views and scientific evidence in understanding behavior.
- Apply psychological concepts, theories, and research findings as these relate to everyday life.

**Science of Psychology: Sociocultural Diversity**

- Discuss social and cultural diversity.
- Discuss psychological research examining diversity among individuals.

**Biological: Biological Bases of Behavior**

- Identify the major divisions and subdivisions of the human nervous system.
- Identify the parts of the neuron and describe the basic process of neural transmission.
- Differentiate between the structures and functions of the various parts of the central nervous system.
- Discuss the mechanisms of, and the importance of, plasticity of the nervous system.
- Identify tools used to study the nervous system.

**Biological: Consciousness**

- Identify states of consciousness.
- Distinguish between processing, which is conscious (i.e. explicit) and other processing, which happens without conscious awareness (i.e. implicit).
- Describe characteristics of sleep and theories that explain why we sleep and dream.
- Characterize the major categories of psychoactive drugs and their effects.

**Biological: Sensation and Perception**

- Describe processes of sensation and perception and how they interact.
- Explain the concepts of threshold and adaptation.
- Describe the capabilities and limitations of sensory processes.
- Explain the interaction of the person and the environment in determining perception.

**Cognitive: Memory**

- Describe the differences between working memory and long-term memory.
- Discuss types of memory and memory disorders.
- Identify factors and strategies influencing how memories are encoded, stored, retrieved, or forgotten.
- Explain how memories can be malleable.

**Cognitive: Thinking** (Option 1 of 2)

- Explain psychological processes of thought, reasoning, problem solving, and decision-making.

**Cognitive: Intelligence** (Option 2 of 2)

- Discuss different perspectives on intelligence (e.g. general intelligence, multiple intelligences).
- Discuss the history of intelligence testing, including historical use and misuse in the context of fairness.

**Developmental: Learning**

- Describe the principles of classical conditioning (e.g. acquisition, extinction, generalization, discrimination).
- Describe the principles of operant conditioning (e.g. reinforcement, punishment, shaping, reinforcement schedules, and extinction).
- Describe cognitive approaches to learning (e.g. observational learning, social learning).
- Describe applications of learning theories in real life (e.g. phobias, animal training, and habit change).

**Developmental: Developmental Psychology**

- Discuss theories of cognitive, moral, and social development.
- Describe the role of sensitive and critical periods in development.
- Identify the major physical, cognitive, and psychosocial changes across the lifespan, including influences on prenatal development.
- Explain the interaction of environmental and biological factors in development.

**Developmental: Language Development** (optional content)

- Describe the structure and function of language.
- Discuss the relationship between language and thought.
- Describe theories and developmental stages of language acquisition.
- Explain the relationship between language and the brain.

**Social & Personality: Social Psychology**

- Identify relationships between thought processes (e.g. attributions, attitudes, bias, and perception) and social behavior.
- Discuss obedience, conformity, and compliance in relation to behavior and their impact on the power of the situation.
- Describe how group dynamics influence behavior.
- Discuss the nature and effects of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination.
- Discuss influences on pro-social (e.g. altruism) and anti-social (e.g. aggression and conflict) behaviors.

**Social & Personality: Personality**

- Compare and contrast the major theoretical approaches to personality (e.g. psychodynamic, trait, humanistic, and social-cognitive theories).
- Identify techniques of personality assessment.
- Discuss biological and situational influences on personality.
- Discuss stability and change of personality.
- Explain how culture and gender influence personality.

**Social & Personality: Emotion (Optional Content)**

- Describe the biological and cognitive components of emotion.
- Differentiate among theories of emotional experience.

**Social & Personality: Motivation (Optional Content)**

- Describe major theories and perspectives of motivation.

**Mental & Physical Health: Psychological Disorders**

- Define psychologically abnormal behavior.
- Describe major models of abnormality.
- Describe the classification of psychological disorders.
- Describe symptoms and causes of major categories of psychological disorders (including schizophrenic, mood, anxiety, and personality disorders).

**Mental & Physical Health: Treatment of Psychological Disorders**

- Explain different perspectives on treatment of psychological disorders.
- Identify biomedical and psychological treatments.
- Evaluate the efficacy of treatments for particular disorders.

**Mental & Physical Health: Health (Optional Content)**

- Define stress as a psychophysiological reaction.
- Identify and explain potential sources of stress.
- Identify and explain physiological, cognitive, and behavioral strategies to deal with stress.
- Identify behaviors and attitudes that promote health.

**Major Topics to be Included:**

Science of Psychology  
Biological  
Cognitive  
Developmental  
Social & Personality  
Mental & Physical Health

**Notes to Instructors**

None

[ADA Statement \(PDF\)](#)

[Title IX Statement \(PDF\)](#)