Horizon Seminar: Altruism

PSYC-4085

Spring 2020  Section 01  3 Credits  01/04/2020 to 05/05/2020  Modified 01/06/2020

Description

A special series of topical seminars meant to explore subjects at the leading edge of contemporary psychology, which are of special interest to students and faculty. May be repeated for credit up to a maximum of 12 hours.

Requisites

Prerequisites:
PSYC 1101
Corequisites:

Contact Information

Instructor: Jeffrey Reber, Ph.D.
Office: 123-A Melson Hall
Phone: 9-0612
Email: jreber@westga.edu
Office Hours: by appointment

Meeting Times

TR: 2:00-3:15
Humanities 208

Materials

Required Texts


Outcomes

Course Objectives

• to become familiar with altruistic and egoistic theories of motivation
• to evaluate the worldview and sense of identity underlying one’s own and others’ position on the possibility of human altruism
• to investigate and experience the possibility of altruism as a genuine motivation
• to analyze and synthesize issues in a psychological context

Course Description

In this course, we will explore individually and together the possibility of human altruism as a motivation for human action. This exploration entails not only a survey of the various theories, beliefs, and ideas about altruism emerging from psychology, philosophy,
religion, and economics, but also an evaluation of our personal theories, beliefs, and ideas about selfless behavior. We will examine how these ideas might influence our view of the world and our behavior toward others. We will carry out our exploration using at least 4 methods: First, we will read and evaluate texts. Second, we will have informed class discussions. Third, we will participate in community service. Fourth, you will conduct a research project. Ultimately, you will be able to say not only whether you believe altruism is possible, but you will be able to articulate thoughtful and well-supported reasons for your position.

✅ Evaluation

Course Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points Possible</th>
<th>Percent of Final Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Position Interview</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
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<td>Small Group Pilot Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Position Podcast</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>150 points</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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Grade Scale
A 90% and above
B 80-89%
C 70-79%
D 60-69%
F 59% and below

❗ Assignments

Course Requirements

Initial Position Interviews Your first assignment in the course will be to conduct an interview of a classmate on their response to the question: Is altruism possible? In conducting your interview, you should not only ascertain their answer to the question but also their reasons for their answer. That is, you should investigate whatever theories, beliefs, and ideas lead them to their conclusion. Furthermore, I want you to examine where their theories, beliefs, and ideas come from and why they have adopted them as their own. For example, do they come from their religious upbringing, a personal experience, family, culture, socioeconomic status, etc.? This may take some thoughtful prodding and deepening follow-up questions, but try your best to trace and articulate the origins of their position. Your interview must be transcribed as it will be an important resource for further research. Successful completion of this assignment will be worth 25 points.

Journals During the course I want you to keep a journal. In the journal you should take notes, paste newspaper clippings, draw pictures, express feelings, describe experiences, and keep a record of anything else you encounter that relates to the question: Is altruism possible? Like any good explorer you will want to record anything and everything you experience in or out of class, so keep the journal with you at all times throughout the semester. It too will be an important resource for other class assignments. It will be collected and graded at the end of class and is worth 25 points.

Community Service One way to examine the possibility of altruism is to engage in community service and investigate your own and others’ motivations for doing so. Community service could range from volunteer work with various non-profit organizations to city beautification. You may work individually or in groups. Your service will not be graded nor is it a requirement for the course, though it may be helpful to your personal investigation of altruism.

Small Group Pilot Study Working together in small groups (3-4 students) you will conduct a basic informal participant-observer study on the possibility of altruism. Details concerning the elements of and restrictions on the pilot study will be shared in class. All proposed studies must be approved by the course instructor in advance. The small group must submit a clear description of the study findings accompanied by all original data collected in the study, which will be another important research resource for the course. Successful completion of this study assignment is worth 25 points.

Final Position Podcast At the end of the course, small groups (3-4 students) will submit a podcast addressing the topic: Is altruism possible? The podcast will be between 40 and 50 minutes in length and all members of the group must contribute to the podcast
presentation, discussion, and/or production. The podcast should include a relevant recent and attention-grabbing event or story, theory and research on the topic, relevant personal experiences, and/or a guest (e.g., an expert in the field or an altruist exemplar). The primary source material for the podcast must include the initial position interview data, your personal journals and class notes, your community service experience, and the data from small group pilot studies. Ultimately, I would like you to produce an interesting and educational podcast on your exploration into the possibility of human altruism that is organized, edited, and polished to such a degree that it could be immediately published to the internet for access by the broader public. This assignment will be worth 75 points and will be graded according to its creativity/interest-value, how effectively and smoothly the source material from class is integrated into the podcast, and the quality and polish of the finished product.

Schedule

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan.</td>
<td>Topic Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Philosophies of Teaching</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Course Introduction</td>
<td>Syllabus</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Altruism or Egoism?</td>
<td>Batson, Ch. 1:</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Altruism and Philosophy</td>
<td>MacIntyre:</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Altruism and Science</td>
<td>Gantt, Reber, Hyde:</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Altruism and Religion</td>
<td>Bennett, Einolf:</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Initial Position Interviews/Community Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Initial Position Interviews/Community Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb.</td>
<td>Altruism and Psychology</td>
<td>Batson &amp; Powell:</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Small Group Pilot Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Altruism and Religion</td>
<td>Bennett, Einolf:</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Altruism and Evolution</td>
<td>Okasha:</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>The Puzzle of Altruism</td>
<td>Monroe: Intro., Ch. 1</td>
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<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Monroe Ch. 2</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Philanthropist</td>
<td>Monroe Ch. 3</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Heroine</td>
<td>Monroe Ch. 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar.</td>
<td>Heroine (cont’d.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rescuers</td>
<td>Monroe Ch. 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rescuers (cont’d.)</td>
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### Institutional Policies

#### Academic Support

**Accessibility Services:** Students with a documented disability may work with UWG Accessibility Services to receive essential services specific to their disability. All entitlements to accommodations are based on documentation and USG Board of Regents standards. If a student needs course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability or chronic illness, or if he/she needs to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, the student should notify his/her instructor in writing and provide a copy of his/her Student Accommodations Report (SAR), which is available only from Accessibility Services. Faculty cannot offer accommodations without timely receipt of the SAR; further, no retroactive accommodations will be given. For more information, please contact Accessibility Services [here](https://www.westga.edu/student-services/counseling/accessibility-services.php).

**Center for Academic Success:** The [Center for Academic Success](http://www.westga.edu/cas/) provides services, programs, and opportunities to help all undergraduate students succeed academically. For more information, contact them: 678-839-6280 or cas@westga.edu.

**University Writing Center:** The [University Writing Center](https://www.westga.edu/writing/) assists students with all areas of the writing process. For more information, contact them: 678-839-6513 or writing@westga.edu.

#### Online Courses

UWG takes students’ privacy concerns seriously: technology-enhanced and partially and fully online courses use sites and entities beyond UWG and students have the right to know the privacy policies of these entities. For more information on privacy and accessibility for the most commonly used sites, as well as technology requirements visit the [UWG Online](https://uwgonline.westga.edu/) site.

Students enrolled in online courses can find answers to many of their questions in the [Online/Off-Campus Student Guide](http://uwgonline.westga.edu/online-student-guide.php).

If a student is experiencing distress and needs help, please see the resources available at the [UWG Cares](http://www.westga.edu/UWGCares/) site. [Online counseling](https://www.westga.edu/student-services/counseling/index.php) is also available for online students.

### Honor Code
At the University of West Georgia, we believe that academic and personal integrity are based upon honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Students at West Georgia assume responsibility for upholding the honor code. West Georgia students pledge to refrain from engaging in acts that do not maintain academic and personal integrity. These include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, aid of academic dishonesty, lying, bribery or threats, and stealing.

The University of West Georgia maintains and monitors a confidential Academic Dishonesty Tracking System. This database collects and reports patterns of repeated student violations across all the Colleges, the Ingram Library, and the School of Nursing. Each incidence of academic dishonesty is subject to review and consideration by the instructor, and is subject to a range of academic penalties including, but not limited to, failing the assignment and/or failing the course. Student conduct sanctions range from verbal warning to suspension or expulsion depending on the magnitude of the offense and/or number of offenses. The incident becomes part of the student’s conduct record at UWG.

Additionally, the student is responsible for safeguarding his/her computer account. The student’s account and network connection are for his/her individual use. A computer account is to be used only by the person to whom it has been issued. The student is responsible for all actions originating through his/her account or network connection. Students must not impersonate others or misrepresent or conceal their identities in electronic messages and actions. For more information on the University of West Georgia Honor Code, please see the Student Handbook (https://www.westga.edu/administration/vpsa/handbook-code-of-conduct.php).

**UWG Email Policy**

University of West Georgia students are provided a MyUWG e-mail account. The University considers this account to be an official means of communication between the University and the student. The purpose of the official use of the student e-mail account is to provide an effective means of communicating important university related information to UWG students in a timely manner. It is the student’s responsibility to check his or her email.

**Credit Hour Policy**

The University of West Georgia grants one semester hour of credit for work equivalent to a minimum of one hour (50 minutes) of in-class or other direct faculty instruction AND two hours of student work outside of class per week for approximately fifteen weeks. For each course, the course syllabus will document the amount of in-class (or other direct faculty instruction) and out-of-class work required to earn the credit hour(s) assigned to the course. Out-of-class work will include all forms of credit-bearing activity, including but not limited to assignments, readings, observations, and musical practice. Where available, the university grants academic credit for students who verify via competency-based testing, that they have accomplished the learning outcomes associated with a course that would normally meet the requirements outlined above (e.g. AP credit, CLEP, and departmental exams).

**HB 280 (Campus Carry)**

UWG follows University System of Georgia (USG) guidance: http://www.usg.edu/hb280/additional_information# (http://www.usg.edu/hb280/additional_information)

You may also visit our website for help with USG Guidance: https://www.westga.edu/police/campus-carry.php (https://www.westga.edu/police/campus-carry.php)

**Mental Health Support**

If you or another student find that you are experiencing a mental health issue, free confidential services are available on campus in the Counseling Center. Students who have experienced sexual or domestic violence may receive confidential medical and advocacy services with the Patient Advocates in Health Services. To report a concern anonymously, please go to UWGcares.