

# Social Chameleons

January 2017 | 1-4pm | Building A2 Room 004

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**Readings:** Readings will be made available on the course website (via NYU Classes)

## Course Description

Humans are deeply social animals, changing our thoughts and actions to fit in with others. In this course, students will learn about the reasons why we identify with groups, how groups shape our perceptions and behavior, and how we can influence the groups we belong to. This interdisciplinary course will examine the role of groups in human life, drawing insights from organizational behavior, political science, sociology, psychology, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology. In addition to readings, demonstrations, and discussion, students will have the opportunity to get involved in real research, designing and conducting studies on group processes in the classroom and the field. These activities will go beyond the typical classroom experience and allow students to make connections to real world issues, like conformity, diversity, and intergroup conflict.

## Learning Outcomes, Course Format and Grades

The work in this course includes active participation, in-class presentations, and a final exam. Class assignments are designed to develop your ability to think critically and creatively, engage in discussion, learn how to do research, and present ideas—fundamental skills in whatever career path you decide to take. These are the **central learning outcomes**.

**Participation (25%):** Each student is expected to read the assigned articles before each class and participate in discussion and class activities. Students are graded on their ability to understand and integrate the material and to actively engage during class. We are especially interested in your ability to add to the dialogue, participate in activities, and challenge your peers (and us) by building on a discussion. Although we are looking for your critical perspectives on the course material, we are equally

interested in your ability to understand the historical and contemporary value of the material, including how you might apply it to the real world. You will also be graded on your ability to help your classmates by providing useful suggestions during their presentations. Lastly, there will be an interactive component to the course designed to teach you about how to use physiological measures to understand psychological process. You will be expected to participate in activities relevant to this course goal.

**Debate (25%):** Students will be assigned to a group to debate a topic. Debates will focus on the class readings and students will be randomly assigned to a side for the debate. Students will be graded on their preparation and ability to integrate material from the course (as well as material from outside the course) and formulate an argument. The whole class will participate the debate discussion.

**Presentation (25%):** Students will conduct a short presentation to the entire class (10-15 minutes). You will be asked to identify a social problem (e.g., recycling) and a solution (e.g., communicating social norms to increase compliance). The problem can be any issue we discussed in the class or in your community. The solution should be based on the lessons we learned in class (e.g., changing implicit attitudes, improving cooperation, etc). Standard presentation format involves PowerPoint or Keynote, but you are free to use any format necessary to communicate. You will be marked on your ability to clearly and elegantly communicate your main points and respond constructively to questions.

**Final exam (25%):** An open book exam will include short and long answer questions that cover materials from the course (readings, lectures, and discussion). The final exam will be administered on the last day of class. Some of the material covered on the exam will be from your assigned readings, and other material will come from lectures (not in your reading).

Make-up exams will be scheduled only in the event of a documented emergency (e.g., serious illness, death in the family). Excused absences **must be documented**. In such cases, you must contact the instructor(s) *prior* to the exam. Penalties will be imposed for late papers. Students who are unable to complete the required work on time are advised to drop the course.

#### **GRADING SCHEME**

Participation	25 points
Debate	25 points
Presentation	25 points
<u>Exams</u>	<u>25 points</u>
Total	100 points

A	93-100	B+	87-89
A-	90-92	B	83-86

B-	80-82	D+	67-69
C+	77-79	D	60-66
C	73-76	F	<59
C-	70-72		

If you have questions or concerns about your grades you should contact the instructor(s) to discuss them. We will not debate grading concerns during or immediately after class (unless I made a simple adding error). However, we will be happy to re-grade any assignment or exam.

## Topic and Assignment Schedule

As with any course, I encourage you to read the course material *before* the corresponding lecture. That way, the material covered in lecture will serve as a review, and you'll be in a better position to ask informed questions and to seek clarification on any confusing aspects of the material. This is especially true in this course because the articles are often dense and complex source material.

### January 4: Introduction to the Social Chameleon

- **Reading:** Research ethics: complete [CITI Training](#)
- **Activity:** Introductions + Psychophysiology hook-up (Play Taboo)
- **Lecture:** Course overview + Review psychophysiology

### January 5: Prejudice from Thin Air

- **Reading:** [Tajfel \(1970\). Experiments in intergroup discrimination. \*Scientific American\*.](#)
- **Activity:** Creating Minimal Groups + [Brown Eyes/Blue Eyes Video](#) (53 min) + Learn about psychophysiology study (60 min)
- **Lecture:** Social identity lecture (60 min)

### January 7: Conformity & Dissent

- **Reading:** [Carey \(2008\). Would I pull that Switch? \*New York Times\*.](#) + [Konnikova \(2015\). The real lesson of the Stanford Prison Experiment, \*New Yorker\*.](#)
- **Activity:** Break a norm + Milgram (The Experiment) video
- **Lecture:** Social norms lecture

### January 8: Emotional Contagion & Empathy

- **Reading:** [Waters, West & Berry Mendes, \(2014\). Emotional Contagion, \*Psychological Science\*](#) + [Van Bavel & Cikara \(2010\). Schadenfreude in Gaza, \*Washington Post\*.](#)
- **Activity:** Yawning video + Emotion induction contagion
- **Lecture:** Emotional Contagion & Empathy lecture

### January 9: Identity & Perception

- **Reading:** [Vanderbilt \(2014\). How your brain decides without you. \*Nautilus\*.](#) + [Van Bavel \(2016\). The psychology of insiders and outsiders can explain why we have such a hard time agreeing on reality. \*Quartz\*.](#)
- **Activity:** Cultural Food Day + Cultural Mindsets (language)
- **Lecture:** Identity and perception lecture

#### January 10: Leadership & Status

- **Reading:** [Van Bavel & Packer \(2016\). The problem with rewarding individual performers. \*Harvard Business Review\*.](#) + [Waytz et al \(2015\). Not lonely at the top. \*New York Times\*.](#)
- **Activity:** Watch the Stanford Prison Experiment
- **Lecture:** Leadership and status lecture

#### January 11: Implicit Bias

- **Reading:** [Dovidio, Gaertner, & Pearson \(2016\). Racism among the well-intentioned, \*Chapter\*.](#) + [Yudkin & Van Bavel \(2016\). Roots of implicit bias, \*New York Times\*.](#)
- **Activity:** Complete Implicit Association Test ([ProjectImplicit.edu](http://ProjectImplicit.edu)) + NBC Dateline + NYTimes Videos
- **Lecture:** Implicit bias lecture

#### January 12: Political Animals

- **Reading:** [Van Bavel \(2016\). Some men's testosterone levels are plummeting thanks to the results of the election. \*Quartz\*](#) + [Klein & Chang \(2015\). Political identity is fair game for hatred. \*Vox\*.](#)
- **Activity:** Debate: Person vs. Situation
- **Lecture:** Political preferences lecture

#### January 15: Collective Intelligence + Groupthink

- **Reading:** [Chabris. \(2015\). Why some teams are smarter than others, \*New York Times\*.](#) + [Waytz, Dungan, & Young \(2013\). The whistle-blower's quandry. \*New York Times\*.](#)
- **Activity:** MIT Collective Intelligence measures + Geoff's Murder Mystery
- **Lecture:** Collective Intelligence + Groupthink lecture

#### January 16: Altruism & Cooperation

- **Reading:** [Rand and Dunham \(2016\). Will Sanders supporters come around, \*New York Times\*](#) + [Hutson \(2016\). Selfishness is learned. \*Nautilus\*.](#)
- **Activity:** Public Goods Game + Golden Balls Video
- **Lecture:** Cooperation lecture

#### January 17: Moral Minds

- **Reading:** [Zaki \(2011\). Sci-Fi Morality, \*Huffington Post\*.](#) + [Jordan et al \(2016\). What's the point of moral outrage? \*New York Times\*.](#) + [Strohinger & Nichols \(2015\). Your brain, your disease, your self. \*New York Times\*.](#)

- **Activity:** Complete morality measures (Yourmorals.org + moral dilemmas)
- **Lecture:** Moral neurobiology lecture

**January 18: Individual Presentations (problem and solutions)**

**January 19: Course Evaluations & Open Book Exam**

## **Course website**

Log in and you should see this course. If you don't, please let the instructor(s) know. Readings, grades, assignments and handouts will be posted online. There is also a discussion board for questions. If you have a question you can email the instructor(s), or post it online. If several people email a similar question we will post it on the website. Please treat the website as a collective resource to ask questions of common interest and share ideas with one another. If you have a problem with someone, please email the instructor(s) directly and do not try to deal with it on the course website.

## **Academic Conduct**

All work must be your own. NYU uses *Turnitin*, which can automatically detect plagiarism. If you cheat, you will be caught. Cheating or plagiarism will be reported through official university channels, and the consequences will be severe. If you are unwise enough to plagiarize, the minimum punishment is usually failure in the course. If the case of plagiarism or cheating is especially blatant, you may be expelled from the university. The papers and assignments are designed for what you can do based on what we are covering in this class and the skills you have already learned.