Psychology 303: Biobehavioral Proseminar
Part I: Learning

8:30 – 11:30 Wednesdays, Room 100 John Dewey Hall

The first half of this semester-long course will examine a number of core issues in Learning. The second half will focus on related issues in behavioral neuroscience. The course is a prerequisite for all biobehavioral seminars offered in the Psychology Department, and is taken by first-year General-Experimental Psychology students, second-year Neuroscience students, and second-year Clinical Psychology students.

My goal in this part of the course is to expose you to some of the fundamental issues that define modern learning theory, and to get you thinking about how they might relate to (and be useful in) your own area of psychology or neuroscience. This is consistent with the department’s explicit goals for proseminar, which are to

- Promote understanding and knowledge related to the specific foundational area through readings, class discussion, and assignments,
- Identify principles and analytic tools that may broaden students’ understanding of issues in their own discipline,
- Improve the quality of students’ research by making them aware of relevant research and theory in areas outside their own discipline.

I hope these next weeks will be stimulating, useful, and fun.

The Learning part of the course will mainly follow a discussion format, with occasional micro-lectures by me when the spirit moves me. It is essential that you do the required reading before the corresponding class meeting. Each week’s readings will be available as pdf files on Blackboard at https://bb.uvm.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp

To help facilitate discussion, I will distribute “thought questions” a week ahead of each class. These are mainly intended to help you orient to and integrate the reading. You will also be required to write a 2-page “thought paper” before each class. In these papers, I ask that you simply reflect on any aspect of the reading that interests you. Your thought papers can address the thought questions, but they do not have to. They are mainly designed to help stimulate your discussion and thinking, and it would be great if you used them to think through issues or questions that you would like to raise and discuss in class. I will read and comment on each paper, but will not grade them.

I will distribute a take-home exam in the last class (October 8) that will be due the next Tuesday (October 14). The exam will encourage review of some key concepts and have you relate material we have covered to a topic that excites you in your own research area.

The readings for each class are given beginning on the next page. They have been chosen for their coverage and for their ability to stimulate good discussion. The a’s and b’s at left merely indicate natural groupings of readings when more than three readings are assigned. It might be best to read them in the order given.
Class Meetings and Readings

August 27 (brief meeting)
Introduction and orientation

September 3
*Core concepts, applications in everyday life, and scientific explanations in psychology*


September 10
*What learning theory really looks like*


September 17
*Role of conditioning in drug tolerance and drug dependence*


**September 24**

*Perspectives on the effects of reinforcers I*


**October 1**

*Perspectives on the effects of reinforcers II*


**October 8**

*Memory*


Fivush, R., & Nelson, K. (2004). Culture and language in the emergence of
