

Psychology 485**Senior Seminar: Narrative Psychology**

Professor:	Dr. Marsha Walton	121 Clough	
Office hours:	Wednesdays and Fridays	3:00-4:00	drop-in (no appointments)
	Tuesdays and Thursdays		by appointment
Seminars:	Mondays	3:00 – 5:30	Barret 214

Course Description

This course is designed to give students the opportunity to apply and enhance skills and ways of thinking that are critical for psychologists in both applied and research settings: the ability to think theoretically, to participate with others in meaningful discussion, and to evaluate evidence relevant to the understanding of human behavior and experience. Students will be encouraged to take a second look at the approaches to psychology they have been introduced to in previous courses, and to think critically about the history and future of the discipline.

One of the significant behaviors engaged in by humans in every culture is story-telling – the creation of narrative accounts of human experience. Over the last two decades many psychologists have come to argue that memory, identity, social cognition and much of our social behavior may be fundamentally organized by narrative. In this course, we will examine the emergence of narrative as an influential paradigm in psychology.

Course Objectives

Knowledge Objectives: Students will review a body of theoretical writing and research literature pertinent to a clearly defined focus of inquiry in narrative psychology. Each student will become fully conversant with the work in this area. The level of expertise students gain by the completion of their senior papers should prepare them to communicate effectively with professionals in their area of study.

Personal Values/Attitudinal Objectives: It is my hope that students in this course will work to find an appropriate balance between critical skepticism and respectful appreciation of theory and research in psychology. Such a balance supports the kinds of discussions that deepen our understanding of the human condition. A critical feature of a ‘narrative turn’ in psychology is an inclination to respect the complexity of context and the multiplicity of processes by which humans negotiate to make their experience meaningful. Students in this course should nurture an inclination to tolerate, even embrace, complexity and ambiguity. I hope the course will feed an enthusiasm for serious discussion and hard thinking that will outgrow our classroom and will continue to flourish after graduation.

Student Skills Objectives: The student work and the use of class time in Senior Seminar will focus on exercising and improving a set of skills used by professionals in psychology and in many other related fields. Most notably, these will include:

- ◆ critical reading and evaluation skills: students will draw on the library research skills they have developed in their work as a psychology major. They will read challenging theoretical arguments and they will evaluate empirical work related to theoretical issues. They will formulate questions and critical analyses of these works to share in class discussion.
- ◆ professional writing skills: Students will write a literature review essay in APA format that demonstrates their ability to synthesize and organize information, and to formulate their own ideas about current work in psychology.
- ◆ collaboration skills: much of the work in our discipline is done in a collaboration model. Students will have an opportunity to gain experience working as part of a team and to gain experience providing and receiving critical peer feedback on all aspects of the work.
- ◆ professional communication skills: students will have opportunities to enhance communication skills in two areas:
 - the ability to make a formal presentation to a professional audience.

- the ability to contribute to conversations (in-class, in out-of-class informal meetings, and in an on-line forum) that encourage the thoughtful expression of different points of view and that deepen our mutual understanding of the work we are doing.

Readings

Bruner, J. S. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Purchase from bookstore.)

Harre, R. & Gillett, G. (1994). *The discursive mind*. London: Sage. (Assigned chapters will be on reserve in the Atkinson Reading Room or on our Moodle site.)

Harris, A. (2004). *In their own words: Exploring children's writing about emotion and conflict resolution strategies in personal narratives about conflict*. Memphis: Rhodes College Honors Thesis. (Available on reserve in the Atkinson Reading room or on our Moodle site.)

Josselson, R. (2004). On becoming the narrator of one's own life. In Lieblich, A., McAdams, D. P., & Josselson, R. (Eds.), *Healing plots: The narrative basis of psychotherapy*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association. (Available on reserve in the Atkinson Reading room or on our Moodle site.)

Nicolopoulou, A. (1997). Children and narratives: Toward an interpretive and sociocultural approach. In M. Bamberg (Ed.), *Narrative development: Six approaches*. Mahway, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. (Available on reserve in the Atkinson Reading room or on our Moodle site.)

Nicoloupoulou, A. (2006). From actors to agents to persons: The development of character representation in young children's narratives. *Child Development*, forthcoming.

Walton, M. D., & Brewer, C. L. (2002). The role of personal narrative in bringing children into the moral discourse of their culture, *Narrative Inquiry*, 11(2), 307-334. (Copies will be distributed in class.)

A second book will be assigned to each team (see below). In addition, each team will select an article, chapter, or excerpts to assign to the entire class (generally, not to exceed 100 pages). Members of the team will be responsible to make a copy available to the class, either on-line or on reserve in the Atkinson Reading Room.

Other readings will be selected as students define their projects.

Course Topic Teams

Students will be assigned to one of the five topic teams described below. Assignments are based on student responses to the 'student information' survey sent at the beginning of the summer. Members of a team will read the assigned book and discuss it in team meetings outside of class time. Individual students will select a sub-area in their topic cluster as the focus for their senior paper. The teams will not be able to address all (or even most) of the questions pertinent to their topic; they will select the questions they find most compelling.

- **The CHILD Team:** (Amanda Sakla, Megan Bensen, Sarah Chichowski) What is the role of narrative in shaping child development, and how do developmental processes shape narrative?
Assigned reading for this team: Engel, S. (1995). *The stories children tell: Making sense of the narratives of childhood*. New York: W. H. Freeman & Company.
Students on this team may address questions in any of the following areas (or other related questions, with approval):
 - What is the role of storytelling in the socialization of children – the stories we tell children, and/or the stories children tell?
 - How are narrative pedagogies used in schooling to encourage literacy and other academic development?

- What is the role of storytelling in moral development?
 - How do family stories, and other story-telling in family interactions with young children influence the development of children's self-concept? The transmission of values?
 - What is the role of stories in the development of social understanding – the ability to infer other's motives, emotions, intentions, goals, etc.?
 - What is the role of story-telling ability in the development of social skills and role-taking abilities?
 - How do stories influence the developing ability to understand and manage emotion?
 - How do children use fantasy and narrative play? What can we learn about their 'inner lives' by studying their use of fantasy?
- **The CULTURE Team:** (John Garner, Joseph Goldsmith, Sophia King) What is the role of narrative in shaping human interaction, human relationships, and culture, and how is narrative shaped by culture, interaction, and relationships?
Assigned reading for this team: Goodwin, M. H. (1990). *He-Said-She-Said: Talk as social organization among black children*. Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press.
Specific questions in this cluster include:
 - How do story-telling traditions and/or narrative forms differ in different cultural contexts?
 - How and when do narratives arise in ordinary interaction, and what functions do they serve?
 - How does story-sharing influence the development of intimacy, and of other interpersonal relationship?
 - How are narratives influenced in content or form by the social roles of the story-tellers (and listeners) and/or the social context in which they are told?
 - How does the sharing of stories and the understanding of (or failure to understand) others stories relate to interpersonal conflict? To interpersonal violence?
 - How do cultural myths, genres, and commonly shared story types support and/or undermine political and economic systems?
- **The MIND Team:** Wendy Brooks, Valaree Casamer, Chase Williams). How is the human mind shaped by narrative, and how does human cognition constrain narrative form and function?
Assigned reading for this team: Bruner, J. S. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Questions to be addressed in this cluster:
 - How are autobiographical memories influenced by narrative form? (And how have the powers and limitations of human memory shaped narrative?)
 - What does it mean for a story to be 'true'? How should we understand accuracy and adequacy in personal narratives?
 - How does narrative thinking compare to other types of thought? How do we take in, maintain, and retrieve narrative information, as compared to other kinds of information?
 - What is the structure of narrative? What are the component parts? How must they work together to create coherence? And how do these characteristics of narrative map onto characteristics of the mind?
- **The SELF Team:** (Shawn Paterakis, Roslyn Valentine) How does narrative shape identity and create selves?
Assigned reading for this team: McAdams, D. (1997). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self*. New York: Guilford.
Example questions to be addressed in this cluster:
 - How does a narrative theory of self compare to other theories of what it means to have or be or develop a self?
 - How do we create life stories, and how do they influence our experience?
 - How do family stories form or influence our identity?
 - How do cultural myths, the stories of our religious traditions, and great literature influence identity development?
 - What is the role of 'coming out' stories in the formation of sexual minority identities.
 - How do we position self and other in narratives in ways that create or support valued (or de-valued) identities?

- How is gender identity created and maintained in narrative practices?
- **The Coping Team:** (Brad Crawford, Collie Scott, Abby Walsh) How do the stories we tell about trauma, disease, disorder or disability influence our ability to cope, and how does the effectiveness of our coping influence the way we tell our stories?
Assigned reading for this team: Mattingly, C. (1998). *Healing dramas and clinical plots: The narrative structure of experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Questions appropriate for this cluster include:
 - What are the salient characteristics of stories told about illness, pain, and disease? What can we learn from these about the nature of human suffering?
 - How are narratives used in psychotherapeutic interactions? How does what we know about narrative inform therapeutic practice?
 - How is recovery from trauma dependent on the ability to tell the story of what transpired?
 - How are ordinary coping skills influenced by the inclination to share (or not) stories about negative emotions?
 - How is psychological well-being/adjustment/health related to the ‘accuracy’ or ‘veracity’ of one’s self-stories?

Course Requirements

Preparation for and Participation in Meaningful Discussions (40% of final course grade)

Engaged Reading (5% of class grade). In order to encourage the engagement of all students in our discussions, we will ask each student to formulate at least one question as he or she is reading, and to post that question on the class Moodle website by 9 a.m. each Monday. These contributions will not be credited if they are late, since their purpose is to facilitate class discussion.

Team-Assigned Readings, and Team-Led Discussion (20% of class grade). Each team will meet together to select a reading assignment to give the entire class, generally not to exceed 100 pages. These may be journal articles, chapters, or material excerpted from the readings you are doing in your team. You will be responsible for making these readings available to the class, either on-line or on reserve in the Atkinson Reading Room at least one week before they are due. By Thursday at 5, of the week before each reading is to be discussed in class, the team that assigned the readings will post a ‘reading guide’ on the Moodle site. These may provide an orienting framework for the reader, relating the reading to previous course discussions or other familiar material. Reading guides may be a set of discussion points that the readers should think about as they read, in order to be prepared for class. Team members will be responsible for leading class discussion on the day their readings are assigned.

In-class and after-class discussion of readings (15% of class grade). Student engagement in discussion of readings will be critical to the success of class, and it will be important that everyone’s ideas are shared. My assessment of your participation in discussion classes will be based not only on how clearly you express your own ideas, but also on how well you elicit, encourage, and help develop the ideas of your classmates. Be attentive to opportunities to ask follow-up questions, and to respond to or elaborate on the ideas expressed by others in class. We will sometimes be discussing controversial issues of considerable importance to us all. Please remember that a good discussion is not necessarily an argument. We certainly may have arguments in class, but our overriding goal is to increase our mutual understanding of the issues, not to prove one another right or wrong.

Sometimes you may find that you are unable to express your ideas on a topic during a class discussion. The course of the discussion may move on before you have had enough time to formulate your thoughts, or you may be especially interested in discussing an aspect of the reading that we never get to in class. Sometimes you just need to contemplate your reactions and to explore your own ideas on the topic after the class session has ended. When this happens, you are encouraged to contribute your remarks to the class electronically at our Moodle website.

The ‘afterthoughts’ you enter in Moodle will be considered equally with in-class discussion as part of the class participation grade. Students are required to read the contributions that have been submitted by their classmates before each class session. Failing to do this will hurt the class participation grade. Just as with in-class discussions, you are encouraged to respond to one another, and to encourage the expression, clarification, and development of ideas.

If you must be absent from class for any reason (including illness or other excused absence), you are required to contribute your thoughts on the reading by Moodle in the “Missed Classes” forum. Missed-class essays should be about 500 words, and should be posted as soon after the absence as possible. (For absences caused by illness, you may wait until you have recovered; for absences due to graduate school or job interviews, or other scheduled events, you should try to contribute your essays in advance of the class session.) All students are required to read the ‘missed class’ essays submitted by their classmates, and responses are encouraged. Each absence diminishes our class discussion, so this is a way to recover what we miss. Absences not made up with missed-class essays will lower the class participation grade by one half letter.

Senior Literature Review Essay (40% of final course grade)

Each student will examine the theory and research relevant to one of the questions posed in his or her cluster. The student will formulate his or her own thinking about this topic, and will write a 5000-6000-word essay that will develop a thesis and review the published research literature relevant to the thesis. Papers must be written according to APA style (5th edition of the Publication Manual), with the exception described below.¹

Preliminary thesis statement, organizational framework, and annotated bibliography (10% of course grade). This record of progress toward the final paper will be due right after the midterm recess. It will suffer a 3-point per day late penalty, accruing at 5:15 each day.

A draft of the final paper is to be submitted electronically to me, to the other members of your team, and to one classmate from another team for classmate feedback by 5 p.m. on November 13. A failure to submit this draft will reduce the final paper grade by three points per day, accruing at 5:15 each day.

Final Senior Essay (30 % of course grade). The final paper is due to me in paper copy by 5 p.m. on December 8. Late papers will lose three points per day, accruing at 5:15 each day.

Collaboration (10% of final course grade)

Each student is expected to provide thoughtful feedback on the preliminary drafts of each team member. In addition, you provide feedback for one student from a different team. Comments and suggestions will be given to the author and to me electronically by 5 p.m. on November 20.

Public Presentation of Final Essay (10% of final course grade)

Each student will be required to present his or her work publicly. These presentations will be scheduled for Reading Day. Team members should collaborate to produce a flier and an email announcement of the presentation that includes an abstract.

Honor Code

All work in this course should be pledged. Students are encouraged to collaborate and to help each other as much as possible on all assignments. Sources used should be cited in accordance with APA style, and the assistance of classmates who edit and provide useful feedback should be acknowledged in a note to the final paper.

¹ Although the copies you print for your classmates or for your own portfolio should STRICTLY follow APA style, the copy you turn in to me must be printed, double spaced, in a font no smaller than Times New Roman 14. (This syllabus is in font size 10, and size 12 is typical for academic papers. Indeed, ALL work turned in to me must meet this specification. Any assignment turned in with smaller fonts, or single-spacing, will be returned and will suffer the late penalty.)

In this course, we replace the standard college pledge (that I have neither given nor received help) with the following: “I pledge that this work reflects my own thinking and my current understanding of this material.”

If a student should feel unable to sign this pledge, he or she should attach an explanation.

Tentative Class Schedule and Assignments:

Date	Reading	Topic	Assignment Due
8/28 MON		Introductions/Orientation	Classmate Information Surveys (sent by email)
8/29 – 9/8			Schedule team meetings with me
9/4 MON		Labor Day Recess	
9/11 MON	Bruner preface, Ch. 1; Harre, Ch. 1-2	The discipline of psychology: Putting narrative psychology in historical perspective	Engaged Reading Question (ERQ) – due 9 a.m.
9/18 MON	Bruner, Ch. 2 Josselson	What it means to be human. What it means to STUDY humans. What it means to HELP humans.	ERQ – 9 a.m. Individual Topic Statements due
9/25 MON	Bruner, Ch. 3 Walton & Brewer	The narrative grounding of human development. The storied nature of morality.	ERQ – 9 a.m.
9/25 – 9/30			Schedule meeting to show me initial literature review results
10/2 MON	Harris	The narrative construction of emotion and conflict.	ERQ – 9 a.m.
10/9 MON	Nicolopoulou, 1997 and 2006	A sociocultural approach to narrative. A narrative approach to character.	ERQ – 9 a.m.
10/12 THURS			CHILD Team makes reading assignment Missed-class essays must be submitted by 5 p.m.
10/16 MON		Midterm recess	
10/19 THURS			CHILD Reading Guide
10/23 MON	CHILD Team Reading		ERQ – 9 a.m. Preliminary Thesis/ Organizational Framework/ Annotated Bibliography – due 5 p.m. CULTURE Team makes reading assignment
10/26 THURS			CULTURE Reading Guide
10/30 MON	CULTURE Team Reading		ERQ – 9 a.m. MIND Team makes reading assignment

11/2 THURS			MIND Reading Guide
11/6 MON	MIND Team Reading		ERQ – 9 a.m. SELF Team makes reading assignment
11/9 THURS			SELF Team Reading Guide
11/13 MON	SELF Team Reading		ERQ – 9 a.m. COPING Team makes reading assignment Essay Draft due to Cluster-mate, Prof, and outside reader, 5 p.m.
11/16 THURS			COPING Reading Guide
11/20' MON	COPING Cluster Reading		ERQ – 9 a.m. Feedback on classmates' drafts, due 5 p.m.
11/23 THURS		Thanksgiving Recess	
11/27 MON		Practice Presentations	Titles, Abstracts, advertising posters and email announcements presented for class feedback and approval
11/31 THURS			Email announcements sent out and posters advertising presentations put up.
12/4 MON		Practice presentations	Missed-class essays submitted by 5 p.m.
12/7 THURS		Public Presentations of Final Papers	
12/8 FRI			Final Papers due 5 p.m.