Topical Conversations in Psychology

IEEL023  5 credit module (equivalent to 2.5 ECTS)

1. Module Leader

Ian Schermbrucker

Biography. I have taught at the University of Liverpool for 13 years. My area of interest is social psychology, my PhD was on intergroup relations in Northern Ireland. I have also been involved in organising interdisciplinary international conferences with the School of English and have published books looking at the fruitful ways that psychology and literature can combine in the exploration of human nature.

2. Module Description

The module will explore both theory and research of current and topical aspects of psychology. Students will discuss recent research papers and consider how the various topics explored relate to ‘real world’ lives and contemporary events.

3. Module Aims

The module aims to:

- develop confidence in understanding and communicating complex ideas.
- develop skills in research and collaborative learning.
- introduce students to research and theory of topical issues current in psychology

4. Content

The module will cover the following topics:

- Politics and the media
- Sex specific research (a review of research identifying differences between the sexes)
- Effective Learning Strategies for students
- The Obesity Crisis and the food environment
- Different approaches to leadership and their relative merits
- Current research on aggression. How conflict might be reduced and can we build a peaceful society?

5. Module structure

The module will be delivered over a three week period. There will be six two hour blocks (four hours per week).

It is expected that students will also spend 38 study hours outside of the classroom contact hours on activities including assigned reading, optional reading of areas of personal interest, homework tasks, web research, and preparation for assessment.
The assessment will be a reflective written essay, allowing for evaluation of both knowledge and understanding across the range of topics covered, along with in-depth understanding.

6. **Teaching methods**
   Teaching activities will include:
   - Taught sessions
   - Online learning
   - Student preparation
   - Small group working
   - Group discussions

7. **Assessment:**
   Assessment will be by:
   - Written Essay of 1200 words (worth 100% of the overall mark)

8. **Course structure:**

   The indicative schedule is as follows:

   **Session One:**

   *Obesity*
   This session will look at the suggested aetiology of the obesity epidemic. In particular changes to the food environment, and how this might have influenced the rise in obesity, will be discussed. We will explore changes in the portion sizes and energy density of foods in our eating environment, as well as changes in snacking behaviors and eating outside of the home. The pervasive influence of television advertising on what we eat will be discussed, as well as more recent, evolving problems of online advertising and celebrity endorsement. Students will discuss potential solutions, as well as barriers to those solutions, to help reduce obesity.

   **Session Two:**

   *Psychology of Politics*
   How do politicians and political campaigns attract our attention? Do they influence the way we think or behave? This session will explore a range of political issues including political bias, propaganda, and political engagement by the general public. We will also look at specific political campaigns (e.g., the Obama campaign) to understand why they have been so successful and popular political narratives in the media.

   **Session Three:**

   *How do we learn and what are effective learning strategies?*
   Why is it that sometimes we find it easy to recall information and at other times, it just does not seem to stick? One reason could be the ways in which you are trying to learn the information. This session will cover some of the strategies students use to help them learn and help you understand why some of these strategies work better than others. You will discuss what learning strategies you currently use and learn some tactics you
can use for your next exam or piece of coursework. The session will cover six strategies proven by research to be make your learning more effective.

Session Four:

Sex-specific research in Psychology
This session will highlight the importance of sex-specific research in Psychology, with examples of areas that have and have not considered such differences and the implications of these. We will explore in-depth how sex-specific research within the field of addiction is becoming increasingly popular since the highlighted differences between males and females has been evidenced. The real-world impact of such differences will be discussed with reference to treatment and treatment outcomes for individuals who are addicted to substances.

Session Five:

The Psychology of Aggression
This session will explore different explanations for why people are aggressive, including evolutionary theories, the impact of the media and violent computer games and cultural factors. The module will look at research on warfare and how ordinary people drafted into the army have reacted during past wars. We will also explore whether any very peaceful societies exist in the world and if so what kinds of common factors they share. Building on this the module will look at ways in which peace between factions in a state of conflict might be promoted. All of these approaches will be discussed by students in the light of contemporary conflicts and sources of aggression in the world.

Session Six

Leadership
Are great leaders born or are they made? Should great leaders lead from the front and direct their followers, or listen to and respond to the wishes of their followers? This session will look at which factors promote effective leadership. The session will include practical advice from psychology on how to be a more effective leader. The session will also explore the topic of how important leaders actually are for effective group functioning. Students will also discuss their own experiences of effective leadership as well as discussing the success or failure of different leaders in the media spotlight.

9. Learning outcomes

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<tr>
<th>Learning outcome</th>
<th>Assessment component which assesses this learning outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students will have developed confidence in understanding and communicating complex ideas in written language.</td>
<td>Written Essay</td>
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Students will be able to research a topic within the subject area, be better able to work collaboratively in this research and to produce a piece of work based on that research. Written Essay

Students will be able to demonstrate insight and understanding about research approaches and theory of a topical issue current in psychology. Written Essay

10. Skills

Key skills that will be developed:

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<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>How this skill is developed</th>
<th>Mode of assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Group discussions, activities and tasks in class</td>
<td>Written Essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Group discussions, activities and tasks in class, collaborative research</td>
<td>Written Essay</td>
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11. Books, ebooks and websites:

The University Website at [www.liv.ac.uk/library](http://www.liv.ac.uk/library) provides access to many relevant books and electronic books, as well as academic journals and databases.

Reading lists will be provided for each session

Example material:


[https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2217/17455057.4.1.51](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2217/17455057.4.1.51)


[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ole_Boe/publication/295800960_The_effects_of_the_role_of_the_group_the_role_of_the_leader_the_emotional_distance_to_the_enemy_and_the_aggressive_predisposition_upon_killing/links/56cd773508ae85c8233d9326.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ole_Boe/publication/295800960_The_effects_of_the_role_of_the_group_the_role_of_the_leader_the_emotional_distance_to_the_enemy_and_the_aggressive_predisposition_upon_killing/links/56cd773508ae85c8233d9326.pdf)
