

EAB 4184: Behaviorism and Contemporary Society

Spring, 2026

Class

M,W,F | Period 3
(9:35 AM - 10:25 AM)
[PSY 0130](#)

Professor

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(she/her/hers)
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Overview

Most challenges we face in society are behavioral in nature. Consider: addiction, crime and delinquency, overconsumption, corruption, domestic violence, child abuse, climate change, prejudice, terrorism. This course will explore how a behavior analytic perspective may help us face these challenges, and understand, re-imagine, and change the world in which we live. During the first part of the course we will analyze the philosophy of modern behaviorism, and become familiar with core concepts and terms that will guide our later discussions. During the next part of the course, we will ask how a science of behavior might shed light on our social ills, and how these insights can mitigate suffering and promote human welfare. Throughout, we will consider both the potential and the limitations of behavioral science to address the social and environmental crises of our time and to promote human welfare. Like all courses I teach, my more ambitious goal for the course is to change your life.

Format

Class will be held in-person on the specified dates and times. We will use a variety of activities to digest the challenging and provocative issues raised during this class. We will use class discussion, collaborative projects, small group discussion, and interactive lectures.

A behavioral approach to teaching and learning will be used in this class. You will be provided with study guides each week, quizzed frequently, and receive immediate feedback on your performance.

Readings

The required text is Johnston's *Talking about Behavior: Radical Behaviorism for ABA Practitioners (2nd Edition)*. You should buy the [ebook](#) or hard copy asap. In general, I recommend the hard copy especially if you plan to pursue advanced academic study or a career in behavior analysis. And don't worry, you don't need to be an ABA practitioner. A "practitioner" is someone interested in understanding and solving behavior problems. That's everybody in this class.

Articles in pdf format will be available in Canvas, under the corresponding module.

The readings in this course are central to your understanding of key concepts in behavior analysis and their application to real-world issues. To get the most out of them and succeed in the class, I recommend reading actively and critically. When you come to a new concept, ask yourself if you can explain the concept in your own words or connect it to a real-world example. *The amount of reading for each class may be more than you are used to. It will be extremely difficult to procrastinate and digest the material in one sitting.* Planning ahead will be essential!

During the first half of the semester, I will provide completed study guides for each assigned reading. I suggest reading the chapter/article first, then use the study guide to check your understanding, clarify key points, and reinforce learning. If your takeaways differ from what's in the guide, or something doesn't make sense, please reach out to me or your TA—or bring it up in class.

During the second half of the semester, I will provide blank study guides to guide your reading. These will not be graded but using them effectively will help you succeed on exams and in-class activities. You're always welcome to ask questions about your answers or interpretations.

If something confuses you or sparks your interest, make a note and bring it to class or office hours. This course is about building your ability to think behaviorally and critically—your questions are a vital part of that process.

Course Communications

Please use Canvas to message me or the TAs. Expect us to respond within 24 hrs during the week and 48 hrs during the weekend. Check Canvas and your email for any updates on a daily basis during the week.

How You'll Be Graded

Quizzes: On most Fridays there will be a short quiz that will cover material from the in-person classes since the last quiz, and the assigned module readings. Quizzes will be worth 5-10 points. The format will be multiple choice, true/false, fill in the blank, and some short answer may be included. Quizzes will be taken either by students individually (5 min time cap), or in small groups (variable time cap). I will let you know the format the day of the quiz.

The cultural design lab: from blueprints to studio: Throughout the semester, a variety of activities will be scheduled in-class. During the first half, these will be "Behavioral Blueprint" activities, and during the second half the activities will be part of the "Cultural Analysis Studio." Each activity will be worth 5 points. They will require knowledge from the readings and class lecture. Some activities may be started in class and completed outside of class and submitted via Canvas.

A blueprint refers to a conceptual diagram or understanding of the biological, behavioral, and cultural processes that shape individual and collective action. Just as an architect's blueprint guides the construction of a building, a behavioral blueprint identifies the underlying variables — biological susceptibilities, Pavlovian processes, role models, reinforcers, rules, verbal processes, and metacontingencies—that maintain cultural practices. These blueprints will serve as the foundation for the second half of the course, when we transition to applying this knowledge in the Cultural Analysis Studio, where we will propose, critique, or re-imagine solutions to societal problems.

If a score of 0, 3, or 4 is received, students may work with the TA or instructor to improve the diagram and provide one re-submission by the midterm for Blueprint activities or by the final for Cultural Analysis activities.

Midterm and Final: The midterm and final will be worth 30 points each. Each will consist of about 20 multiple choice questions (1 pt each) and several short answer questions. The midterm and final will be held in-class. Please bring a device (ipad, laptop, etc) to complete the midterm and final in Canvas. Exams are closed-book/closed-notes.

Participation: Participation will be worth 40 points and will be based on completion of a short in-class assignment on Monday or Wednesday most weeks during the semester. Each assignment will be worth 2-4 points.

Grading

	Points	Grade	Percentage Range
Quizzes (~9xTBD points)	~60	A	93-100
Midterm	30	A-	90-93
Final	30	B+	87-90
Participation	~40	B	83-87
Cultural design lab	~40	B-	80-83
		C+	77-80
		C	73-77
		C-	70-73
		D+	67-70
		D	63-67
		D-	60-63
		E	<60

Note: There is no rounding.

Specialization Track in Behavior Analysis

The Department of Psychology offers a specialization track in Behavior Analysis. The curriculum includes coursework in behavior analysis, psychology, statistics, mathematics, and biology. Please click [here](#) for more information.

COURSE POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

1. Please do not post or share any material from this course to any online platform or share it in any way electronically. Please do not use material from previous courses posted online (some of it is incorrect).
2. All interactions with instructors and among class members are expected to be professional and appropriate.

3. Announcements will be made periodically about class issues (such as reminders about upcoming assignments). These will be visible on our course's home page. Students are responsible for all announcements made there.
4. This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see [this link](#).
5. Attendance and Missed Assignments. Attendance is required to complete weekly quizzes and in-class activities. Missed assignments due to unexcused absences cannot be made up. Missed assignments due to excused absences can be made up but it is at the instructor's discretion which make-up assignments may be submitted and the timeline. *If you know you will be unable to attend class, please contact me as soon as possible for arrangements*. Excused absences and extension of deadlines must be consistent with university policies and require appropriate documentation. Requests for extensions must be made before the assignment deadline, if possible, or within 24 hours of the deadline for unexpected emergencies. Late assignments without approved extensions will not be accepted. Additional information can be found in [here](#).
6. Leaving class early. Please minimize any disruption by notifying the instructor and sitting near the door if early departure is necessary.
7. Artificial intelligence. All work students submit for this course will be their own. Students are not allowed to use any generative artificial intelligence tools (e.g. ChatGPT or Dall-E 2) at any stages of the work process, including preliminary ones. AI-generated submissions are not permitted and will be considered as plagiarism.
8. Health and Safety. If you are sick, stay home. Please call your primary care provider if you are ill and need immediate care or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 to be evaluated.
9. Syllabus Change Policy. Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change.

TOPICS	DATES	READINGS
Introduction and Overview	Jan 12	
1. Review of behavior analysis	Jan 14, 16	Cooper et al: Basic Concepts Shawler & Blair (2021): FA of TPB
2. Free will and determinism	Jan 21, 23 (NO CLASS 1/19)	J. Preface J. An unavoidable but reasonable assumption J. It's just verbal behavior
3. Mentalisms and self-awareness	Jan 26, 28, 30	J. Nevermind J. What is really inside? J. Seeing yourself
4. Responsibility and ethics	Feb 2, 4, 6	J. The misdirection of everyday dialect J. Behavioral Responsibility J. Ethics, Rights, Values – without the heat
5. Culture and radical behaviorism	Feb 9, 11, 13	J. A social life J. Radical Behaviorism Malagodi (pp.1-6): A call for cultural analysis
6. Behavioral vulnerabilities and survival	Feb 16, 18, 20	Skinner: Why we are not acting to save the world Chance: The ultimate challenge: Prove Skinner Wrong
Midterm	Feb 23, 25, 27	Review Midterm
7. Addiction and reinforcer pathology	Mar 2, 4, 6	Knerr, Ives, Dallery Hart: Viewing addiction as a brain disease promotes social injustice
8. Marketing, inequality, and capitalism	Mar 9, 11, 13	Biglan Chapters 7-9 in “The Nurture Effect”
SPRING BREAK	Mar 16-20	NO CLASS
9. Political Contingencies	Mar 23, 25, 27	Lamal and Greenspoon: Political metacontingencies Goldstein & Pennypacker: From candidate to criminal: The contingencies of corruption
10. Consumerism and climate change	Mar 30 Apr 1, 3	Grant: Can We Consume Our Way Out of Climate Change? A Call for Analysis
11. Conspiracy theories, fads, and virtual worlds	Apr 6, 8, 10	Guerin (pp. 1425-1428): Behavior analysis and the social construction of knowledge Vyse: Facilitated communication (blog) Normand: Skepticism and Applied Behavior Analysis
12. Racism	Apr 13, 15, 17	Matsuda et al. (2020). Can Behavior Analysis Help Us Understand and Reduce Racism? Moore (2003). Behavior analysis, mentalism, and the path to social justice. Li et al (2019): Solidarity: The Role of Non-Black People of Color in Promoting Racial Equity Biglan: Reforming criminal justice
13. Review	Apr 20, 22	
Final	TBD	

* The class schedule is subject to change