

Philosophical
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EAB 6118

Theoretical Foundations of Behavior Analysis
University of Florida | Spring 2026

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Course Information:

Meeting time: Wed. 9:00am – 11:30am

Room: PSY 129

Course Description and Objectives

Unlike the usage of the word “theory” in everyday parlance, which tends to refer to a hypothesis, scientific theories are explanations of the natural world based on hypotheses and their evaluations. As an example, take the theory of evolution, which explains why various fauna and flora exist today. Theories explain natural events and allow scientists to make predictions. Theories are testable and falsifiable. This course will not focus on theories of learning; instead, it will focus on behaviorism. “Behaviorism is not the science of human behavior; it is the philosophy of that science” (Skinner, 1976). Therefore, a more accurate name for this course would be *Philosophical Foundations of Behavior Analysis*. I should note the class will not center Skinnerian behaviorism. After all, lots has happened in the field since he wrote his last work.

Objectives – By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Describe the historical background of behaviorism
- Compare free will and determinism, realism and pragmatism
- Define radical behaviorism and how it differs from methodological behaviorism
- Describe how private events are treated from this perspective, and to what the term *mentalism* refers
- Describe molecular vs. molar behaviorism
- Describe selectionism, evolutionary theory, and reinforcement
- Define voluntary behavior and purpose
- Define stimulus control and what it means to *know* something and what is scientific behavior
- Define verbal behavior, functional units, and meaning
- Describe rule-governed behavior and problem-solving
- Describe what it means to behave freely and responsibly
- Define self-control
- Describe social behaviors, interpersonally and at the organizational/institutional level
- Define control and counter-control
- Define values and morals
- Define culture from a behavioral perspective
- Describe the evolution and selection of culture

Course Materials

Required text: Baum, W. M. (2017). *Understanding behaviorism: Behavior, culture, and evolution* (3rd ed.). <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/book/10.1002/9781119143673>

This course also uses readings from various other sources such as chapters from edited books or peer-reviewed papers. All supplemental readings, listed below per class session, will be available on the class Canvas website. See the reference list for full citations.

Course Structure and Grading

This course is a graduate seminar (for success tips see [here](#) and [here](#)). In this course, my goal is to promote an environment in which you actively engage with course materials, participate in lively class discussions, and expand your knowledge of the foundation of behavior science. Reading in depth and “digesting” the material will be crucial. Please plan accordingly.



AI policy. All work you submit is expected to be generated entirely by YOU, whether working individually, or in groups. You should not have another person or entity (e.g., AI tools like ChatGPT) do any drafting or writing of assignments. I want to read and hear how you understand the material and integrate it with what you already know. Submitting assignments implies you agree to the following statement: *I certify the submitted work is my own, with all sources correctly attributed and that I did not use artificial intelligence (AI) in its development or completion.*



Reading Guides (25% of grade). Reading Guides provide (1) a set of questions or verbal prompts for required readings within Files through Canvas and (2) the opportunity to pose a question or statement aimed at promoting discussion of the material (see Point of Discussion below). Completing these guides while reading will assist you in applying and evaluating concepts from the readings more effectively than a passive read. Reading guides will be checked for completion, as well as relevance and thoroughness of your answer. Answers should be paraphrased and, therefore, should NOT be identical other students', online resources, or the readings (see AI policy above). Identical or incomplete answers will not be counted.

Please submit your answers via Canvas as a Word file (LastName_6118Week#) by the specified date/time. Please number each answer and refrain from copying the question in your document. Note that late submissions will be penalized 10% per day but complete submissions after 5 days can earn up to 50% until the last day of classes of the semester. It is your responsibility to ensure the file(s) you upload to Canvas saved properly (e.g., refresh the screen, open uploaded file(s), take screen shot).

In addition to answering the questions provided to you, you will come up with at least one Point of Discussion (POD) for each reading. *PODs* will be used during class to promote class participation and thorough discussion/analysis of the material. Therefore, you should avoid simple clarification comments or something you can easily Google. *PODs* can stem from covert verbal behavior evoked while reading, from questions in the reading guide, or your prior knowledge/experience. Feel free to add context to your question in the form of a preamble (e.g., “From my prior reading of work by Rachlin, my understanding of molar behaviorism is X; however, after reading this chapter, I am reconsidering my conceptualization of Y.”)



Quizzes (25% of grade). Weekly quizzes based on the current Reading Guide will begin approximately 5 minutes after class begins. You are welcome to discuss/study with others before the quiz begins. You will have 15 min to take quizzes. Quizzes will have 3-8 fill-in-the-blank or short answer questions and will be completed on paper. **Please bring paper and pen/pencil to every class so you can take quizzes.** Your lowest quiz score will be dropped, except for any unexcused absences/tardiness, which will result in a

zero score for that quiz. Excused absences will result in that quiz not being counted toward your overall quiz grade.



Class Participation (25% of grade). Class discussion will be conducted in various formats – e.g., full class, small groups or pairs, written activities. All students are expected to participate actively in discussions during each class. Active participation involves (1) remaining attentive and engaged throughout classes, (2) posing and answering questions during class discussion, (3) engaging in prompted and unprompted discussion with the instructor and other students, and (4) refraining from staring at electronic devices. I recommend taking notes by hand on paper rather than on a computer or tablet. Some suggest taking notes by hand has benefits, such as minimizing distractions and better understanding of concepts (see [here](#) and [here](#); but see [here](#) for counterpoint).

Active engagement with course materials before class facilitates active engagement during class. As you work through the Reading Guides and develop *PODs*, you will likely come up with ideas for interacting during class. Write these down and bring them with you to class. Receiving credit for class participation includes filling out the weekly **Participation Survey** in Canvas following the class meeting. Unexcused absences not meeting university guidelines will result in a zero for the class-participation grade for that week.



Presentation (25% of grade). One third of your presentation grade will be the average of your peers' evaluation and the remaining portion will be assigned by me. We will all be using the presentation rubric available on Canvas. You will provide a 20- to 30-min presentation of a supplemental reading(s). You will be tasked with highlighting key points, providing background information where needed (e.g., relevant background from a different paper, definitions of terminology), and explicitly connecting it to the topic discussed in class that week. The presentation will also require you to critique and extend what is presented in the reading beyond "it would be interesting if..." or "I wonder if anyone has studied this." You can use a database (e.g., Google Scholar) to find relevant scholarly work. Finally, your presentation should include at least two discussion questions (akin to *PODs*), to promote discussion from the audience.

Remember to **present to your audience**. It is very possible that members of the audience are not familiar with the particular paper you are presenting, so make sure you clearly articulate points and [use visuals to aid your presentation](#). The purpose of these presentations is to assess your understanding of the material and ability to convey that understanding. Therefore, please present to a generally educated audience and be sure to explain the information presented sufficiently so all members of the audience can easily understand your presentation. All members of the audience are expected to attend to the presentation and demonstrate "attending" either by asking follow-up questions or engaging in discussion relating the presentation to course material [here's another opportunity for class participation!].

As you prepare your presentation, **feel free to give and receive feedback** from your peers and anyone else who is willing. Practice giving and receiving feedback is the best way to improve your overall comfort and effectiveness when presenting. When commenting on others' presentations, merely indicating places in which you get confused is a big help. Do not expect all your or your peers' comments to be substantive, as it is likely neither of you are experts in the topic. Some resources you might find useful include this short [visual summary of how to receive feedback](#) and these [strategies for more inclusive and effective feedback](#).

Grades:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
A	93%+
A-	90-92.9%
B+	87-89.9%
B	83-86.9%
B-	80-82.9%

Special Accommodations

Every effort will be made to show consideration to all students and to create a classroom environment in which students feel that their contributions are valued. Students requesting special accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office, which will provide documentation that the student must give to me when requesting accommodation. All properly requested accommodations will be granted discreetly. If other special circumstances should arise during the term, please contact me directly and as soon as possible.

Attendance and Missed Assignments

Given this is a weekly class, missing just one class period results in missing a lot of material. If you are unable to attend class, be sure to collect notes for any missed classes from a peer. Attendance is required to complete weekly quizzes and participate in class discussions. Missed assignments due to unexcused absences cannot be made up – all assignments/quizzes must be submitted at scheduled times. Excused absences must be consistent with university policies in the [Graduate Catalog](#) and require appropriate documentation. Additional information can be found in [Attendance Policies](#). Traffic problems, trouble finding parking, leisure travel, and not hearing your morning alarm are not legitimate excuses to miss class. Please ensure you arrive on time. You need to let me know ahead of time if you have a scheduled miss of great importance – you will need to hand in all assignments ahead of time. Please make sure to provide me with a documented and university-approved excuse if you must miss class.

Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor in this class. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to complete all or portions of your work is considered unauthorized aid in this course and will be considered academic dishonesty.

Sexual Harassment

UF fosters a campus free of sexual harassment, which is a violation of state and federal laws as well as of the policies and regulations of the university. All UF employees and students must adhere to UF's sexual harassment policy, which can be found at: <https://hr.ufl.edu/forms-policies/policies-managers/sexual-harassment/>. Please review this policy and contact a university official if you have any questions. University employees (e.g., administrators, managers, supervisors, faculty, teaching assistants, staff) are required to report knowledge of sexual harassment to UF's Title IX coordinator. For more information about UF's Title IX office see: <https://titleix.ufl.edu/>. You can also complete a Sexual Harassment Report online (Title IX) at: <https://titleix.ufl.edu/title-ix-reporting-form/>.

This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see [this link](#).

UF Resources for Students

Health and Wellness

- U Matter, We Care: If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352 392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.
- Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.
- Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.
- *University Police Department*, 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies). <http://www.police.ufl.edu/>
- Title IX coordinator: <https://titleix.ufl.edu>
- Center for Inclusion and Multicultural Engagement: <https://multicultural.ufl.edu>

Academic Resources

- *E-learning technical support*, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to Learning-support@ufl.edu. <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>
- *Career Resource Center*, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling. <http://www.crc.ufl.edu/>
- *Library Support*, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- *Teaching Center*, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <http://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>
- *Writing Studio*, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>
- *Public Speaking Lab*, Rolfs Hall 5th floor, <https://cwoc.ufl.edu/programs/public-speaking-lab/hours/>

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>

Course Schedule is tentative and may change as the semester progresses. Any changes will be announced via Canvas ahead of time. If a class is canceled (e.g., inclement weather, illness), please be prepared to cover the missed material and quiz during the next scheduled class meeting.

Week	Date	Topic	Required reading	Supplemental readings (subject to change)
1	1/14/26	Introduction, Course Overview, Background	Syllabus, SHB 1-3	
2	1/21/26	Behaviorism: history	Baum 1; Rakos et al. (2025)	Staddon Chap. 1 & 2
3	1/28/26	Behaviorism as philosophy of science	Baum 2; Moore (2011)	Day (1980); Staddon Chap. 10
4	2/4/26	Public vs. Private events	Baum 3; Simon (2023)	Staddon Chap. 13, 16, 17
5	2/11/26	Evolutionary theory and reinforcement	Baum 4; Wasserman (2025)	Simon et al. (2020); Palmer (2021)
6	2/18/26	Purpose and reinforcement	Baum 5	Neuringer (2023); Burgos & Killeen (2019)
7	2/25/26	Stimulus control	Baum 6	Urcioli (2013); Cowie et al. (2024)
8	3/4/26	Verbal behavior	Baum 7; Michael (1984)	Palmer (2006); Petursdottir & Ingvarsson (2024)
9	3/11/26	Rule-governed behavior	Baum 8	Harte et al. (2020); Schlinger & Blakely (1987); Blakely & Schlinger (1987)
10	3/18/26	Spring Break (no class)		
11	3/25/26	Freedom and responsibility	Baum 9, 10	Staddon (1995); Staddon Chap. 19
12	4/1/26	Relationships, control	Baum 11; SHB 20	Nevin (2010); Delprato (2002)
13	4/8/26	Values	Baum 12	Staddon Chap. 12; Nevin (1991)
14	4/15/26	Culture	Baum 13, 14; SHB 27	Glenn (2004); deCarvalho & Sandaker (2016)
15	4/22/26	Differing views	Baum (2004); Staddon (2004); Rachlin (2013)	Donahoe (2004); Thompson (2019)
16	4/29/26	Bringing it all together	Skinner (1963)	