**Department of Psychology**

**USC** Dornsife College of Letters, Arts & Sciences

**PSYC 361: Introduction to Clinical Psychology**

**Units: 4**

**Spring 2022 TTh 10:00 am to 11:50 am KAP-156 (Beginning online because of COVID)**

**Gerald C. Davison, Ph. D., Professor of Psychology**

**Office Hours: Tuesdays, SGM-902,** 2:00 to 3:00 and by appointment

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**Course Description**

This course will provide an introduction to both the scientific and applied aspects of clinical psychology. A central focus will be on the dialectics of science and practice, that is, the dynamic interplay of the basic and the applied, the ways that scientific theorizing and research form the foundation for effective and responsible applied activities, and the ways that applied work provides material to be examined in a scientific fashion. We shall examine the principal paradigms in clinical psychology and allied professions such as psychiatry and social work; diagnosis and assessment; psychological intervention; ethical issues in research and practice; and emerging sub-disciplines such as health psychology and forensic psychology.

There are many career paths available to those with a doctoral degree in clinical psychology. Academic clinical psychology, the path I chose, is one such option. I will be able to tell students a great deal about this kind of career. I have worked as well in the more applied realm, and here too there are many opportunities I will discuss that are available to clinical psychologists.

There are important ethical and political implications in what clinical psychologists do – what they choose to research, what assessment and therapeutic procedures they develop and employ, and what goals they help their clients work towards. Throughout the course, social, political, philosophical, and ethical considerations will provide a broad context for our study.

One of the leitmotifs of the course will be the role of paradigms and personal biases in the conduct of scientific investigations and in clinical work such as psychological assessment and intervention. Increasingly mentioned in the popular press is the aphorism that if the only tool you have is a hammer, the more you tend to treat everything as if it were a nail. This folksy observation actually reflects some important thinking in a branch of philosophy called epistemology, the study of how we know what we know. If that sounds confusing, it will become less so as the semester unfolds.

My lectures, our class discussions, and the readings will complement and, I hope, enrich each other. ***I strongly advise against enrolling in this course unless you are prepared to keep up with the readings (about 6 hours a week outside of class), attend class faithfully, pay close attention in class, and study hard.*** ***I cannot emphasize this too much.*** Like other areas of psychology, clinical psychology is intellectually demanding, but being smart is not enough. You have to hunker down and take this course seriously. I can promise that you will come away from this course with a deep understanding of the field of clinical psychology, but this can happen only if you commit to it as much as I will. If you want to learn more about me, you can check my Wikipedia page at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerald_Davison>

**Learning Objectives**

Simply put, I hope students will learn what is going on in clinical psychology as an applied scientific enterprise; that they will come to understand the basics of psychological assessment and especially intervention; and that they will appreciate the broad social context for the past, present, and future of the field of clinical psychology.

**Prerequisite(s):** PSYC 100 or its equivalent, or permission of instructor.

**Recommended Preparation**

I will assume that students have not forgotten everything they learned in an introductory psychology course. However, especially motivated upper-level students who have not taken an introductory psychology course may enroll in this course after obtaining my approval.

**Some Comments on Trigger Warnings and the Emotional Content of the Course**

The very nature of this course entails consideration of the human condition that is usually not part of ordinary social discourse. In recent years the question has been raised about the need to provide “trigger warnings” before mentioning something that might be upsetting to. This issue has been a subject of sometimes heated debate in higher education circles, and I’m sure you have encountered the issue yourself. I have decided against consistently providing any such warnings in advance of discussing sensitive topics. I have several reasons for this. First, as just stated, the very subject matter of clinical psychology is impossible to engage seriously without dealing with emotionally laden issues. Furthermore, some of the students enrolling in this course are considering a career in mental health; I believe it would be a disservice particularly to such students to convey a tentativeness about addressing some challenging issues. In a friendly, supportive and respectful vein, I suggest that those who don’t feel capable of such study at this time are best served by not enrolling in this course; a career in mental health may not be right for them. Third, what little controlled research there is on the topic does not confirm the widely held belief that trigger warnings are advisable; they may either have little effect or even make things worse. If you’re interested, at the end of this syllabus is a report of such research from the Association for Psychological Science, a major professional organization of scientifically oriented psychologists like myself.

**Required Reading**

We will be reading the following textbook**:**

Trull, T. J., & Prinstein, M. J. (2013). *Clinical Psychology*. 8th edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

A word on obtaining the textbook: In paperback it is a little over $81.00 on Amazon. It can also be rented on Amazon for about $40.00. Moreover, with its 2013 copyright, used copies are available at Amazon as well as at the USC Bookstore.

**Lectures and Assigned Readings**

Before each class meeting I will be posting my Powerpoints on Blackboard so that you can have a good sense of what I’ll be talking about. What we discuss in class will relate to the readings, but ***by and large, my lectures will not entail a review of the textbook*.** To be sure, I will often refer to the readings during class, enough so that it will behoove you to have done the readings before the lecture – the approximate number of pages each week is indicated by brackets for your convenience; readings are lighter in the first third of the course -- and to have the textbook at hand during our class meetings. With some of the chapters, I will make specific comments and elaborations, emphasizing some sections that I believe are particularly important or controversial. Since the copyright of the textbook is 2013, I will be providing necessary updates when necessary. But ***I strongly advise you not to adopt the mindset that I will be going over the textbook in class*.** A corollary of this well-intentioned caution is that, if you want to do well in the course or even just pass it, you should attend all the classes. If a medical exigency prevents your attending a particular class, a video of each session will be available. The three non-cumulative examinations (more on exams below) will cover both the readings and the lectures, and it is very unlikely that a satisfactory grade can be earned without both attending class and doing the readings with care and focus.

**A comment on Zoom Protocol**

We’ve all had to make adjustments because of having to go online, and we all know that at least the first week of spring semester will be all online. Like yourselves, I very much hope that we’ll be returning to in-person classes in the second week. But since we’ll be on Zoom for at least the beginning of spring semester, I want to mention an issue for instructors I have conferred with since mid-March 2020, namely the practice of some students not to turn on their cameras during class. I understand and respect the reasons some students might have for doing this. But, if I may, I’d like to ask that you try your best to “join” the class fully by having your camera activated. There is something nice about being able to see students just as, I trust, it is preferable for students to be able to see the instructor (and each other). Ergo, if you can, please arrange your space so that you can have your camera operating. If you would like to communicate with me about this, please do so by email to [gdaviso@usc.edu](mailto:gdaviso@usc.edu) or by a pre-arranged Zoom conversation. Thanks.

**Examinations**

As I finalize this syllabus in early January, the University plan is to conduct the first week of classes on Zoom and then move to in-person in the second week. But what we have learned about COVID is that things can change. At this point I am going to assume that we will in fact be able to have in-person instruction beginning the second week of the semester or very soon thereafter. This means that the three examinations will be in-person, in which case they will be closed-book and multiple-choice. If, however, circumstances require that any of the scheduled exams take place when we are on Zoom, that exam/those exams will be open-book short-answer in format. I’ll keep you posted as we proceed.

Each of the three examinations will cover about 1/3 of the course. In other words, the exams are not cumulative. The dates and times are indicated in the course schedule below. While students will be required to take all three exams, the lowest score will be dropped. Thus, each exam will count ½ of the course grade. There won’t be make-up exams – if you have to miss an exam for medical reasons, the other two will constitute your grade for the course. There won’t be extra credit opportunities. Please do not request one. By not making the three exams cumulative, I am creating the opportunity for all students to do well.

Please do not make any travel plans that interfere with your taking any of the exams. This applies especially to the final exam.

The issue of study guides sometimes comes up. I am aware that some instructors provide study guides and sometimes quizzes as well. I do not do so for a mid- to senior-level college course like this one. The textbook itself is very well organized, and as already noted, I provide my Powerpoint slides in advance of each lecture. Sometimes there is a good deal of detail in these slides that should facilitate your mastery of the material. And I try my utmost to provide ample opportunities for questions and discussions during class. As already mentioned, I have also arranged for each class to be videotaped in case medical issues prevent you from attending on a particular day.

**Grading**

I will be assigning grades according to a predetermined set of cut-offs about which I have consulted widely both within USC and outside of USC. The following cut-offs represent a strong consensus and is furthermore what I have myself used in the past:

A: 93-100%

A-: 90-92%

B+: 87-89%

B: 83-86%

B-:80-82

C+: 77-79%

C: 73-76%

C-: 70-72%

D+: 67-69%

D: 60-66%

F: 59 and below

What this means is that the performance of your fellow students will not affect your own grades. I hope that the resulting distribution of grades will be heavier on the upside than on the downside. This has been the case every time I have taught this course. It’s up to each of you.

**Course Schedule**

#### Week 1

**January 11, 13**

Psychology Charts: DSM-5 List of Mental Disorders and DSM-5 Personality Disorders. For next week too. [These tables are in Content section of the Blackboard site for this course.]

#### Week 2

**January 18, 20**

Trull & Prinstein (T/P),Chapter 5. Diagnosis and Classification of Psychological Problems [26]

#### Week 3

#### January 25, 27

#### T/P, Chapter 12. Psychotherapy: The Psychodynamic Perspective; [22]; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTHM2o3dvao> (6 mins)

#### <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oS_L8efaJ-E> (4 mins)

#### <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ySsLRwE3Lk> (55 mins)

#### Week 4

#### February 1, 3

#### T/P, Chapter 13. Psychotherapy: Phenomenological and Humanistic-Existential Perspectives [24]; Fritz Perls at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=it0j6FIxIog>; Carl Rogers at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24d-FEptYj8>

#### Week 5

**February 8, 10**

T/P, Chapter 14. Behavioral and Cognitive-Behavioral Perspectives [29];Albert Ellis at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odnoF8V3g6g>

#### Week 6

#### February 15, 17

T/P, Chapter 11. Psychological Interventions [31]

**First exam, Thursday, February 17, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Covers material through February 15, Psychological Interventions**

#### Week 7

**February 22, 24**

T/P, Chapter 4. Research Methods in Clinical Psychology [33]

#### Week 8

Dates-March 8, 10-T/P, Chapter 6. The Assessment Interview; and

Chapter 8. Personality Assessment [ 61]

#### Week 9

Dates-March 15, 17-SPRING RECESS. T/P, Chapter 7. The Assessment of Intelligence; and Chapter 9. Behavioral Assessment [46]

**Week 8**

**March 1, 3**

T/P, Chapter 6. The Assessment Interview; and Chapter 8, Personality Assessment [61]

**Week 9**

**March 8, 10**

T/P, Chapter 7. The Assessment of Intelligence; and Chapter 9, Behavioral Assessment [46]

***SPRING BREAK, March 12 to March 20***

**Week 10**

**March 22, 24**

T/P, Chapter 15. Group Therapy, Family Therapy, and Couples Therapy [44]

**Week 11**

**March 29, 31**

**Second exam, Tuesday, March 29, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Covers material from Week 7 through March 24, Week 10.**

March 31, T/P, Chapter 16. Community Psychology [23, ½ week’s reading]

#### Week 12

**April 5, 7**

T/P, Chapter 17. Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine [24]; Chapter 18. Neuropsychology [20]

#### Week 13

**April 12, 14**

T/P, Chapter 19. Forensic Psychology [21]

**Week 14**

**April 19, 21**

T/P Chapter 1. Clinical Psychology: An Introduction; and Chapter 2. Historical Overview of Clinical Psychology [52]

#### Week 15

**April 26, 28**

T/P, Chapter 3. Current Issues in Clinical Psychology; and Appendix. A Primer for Applying to Graduate Programs in Clinical Psychology [58 ]

**Final Exam, 11:00 am to 12:30 pm. Covers material from March 31 of Week 11 through April 28,**

**Week 15.**

***FINAL EXAMINATION: TUESDAY, MAY 10, 11:00 AM TO 12:30 PM.* Covers material from March 31, Week 11 through April 28, Week 15.**

**Academic Conduct**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences.  A useful tutorial can be found at <https://libraries.usc.edu/tutorial/avoiding-plagiarism>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable.  See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university.  You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/>. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community.  Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person.  Problems that are not related to sexual assault or harassment can be reported to the Office of Conduct, Accountability, and Professionalism at <https://policy.usc.edu/conduct-violations/>.

## **Support Systems**

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing.  Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more.  Students whose primary language is not English can avail themselves of the services at the *American Language Institute* at[https: ali.usc.edu](http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali). ALI sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international students.  *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations: https://dsp.usc.edu/

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**The Following News Release Contains Potentially Disturbing Content: Trigger Warnings Fail to Help and May Even Harm**

June 9, 2020

***Summary: New research suggests that trigger warnings have little or no benefit in cushioning the blow of potentially disturbing content and, in some cases, may make things worse.***

For some, traumatic events leave deep psychological scars that can resurface many years later as renewed emotional pain or unwanted memories. In an effort to spare survivors reminders of past trauma, some institutions and individuals provide so-called trigger warnings, alerts that an upcoming program or text may contain unsettling content. Recently, however, a growing body of research has called into question the effectiveness of trigger warnings.

A new study published in the journal *Clinical Psychological Science* shines additional light on this ongoing debate and finds that trigger warnings offer little to no help in avoiding painful memories and perhaps are even harmful for the survivors of past emotional trauma.

“Specifically, we found that trigger warnings did not help trauma survivors brace themselves to face potentially upsetting content,” said Payton Jones, a researcher at Harvard University and lead author on the study. “In some cases, they made things worse.”

Worryingly, the researchers discovered that trigger warnings seem to increase the extent to which people see trauma as central to their identity, which can worsen the impact of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the long run.

In academic settings, a trigger warning is typically an alert given by a teacher or professor that upcoming content or course materials may be distressing to individuals who have experienced certain traumatic life events. Such warnings are intended to give students the opportunity to step outside of the lecture hall or to overlook certain passages in reading assignments. According to a 2016 survey conducted by National Public Radio, about half of professors said they have used a trigger warning in advance of introducing potentially difficult material.

“Over the past decade, there has been extensive debate on the appropriateness of trigger warnings, particularly in academic environments, where they have been accused of promoting censorship,” Jones said. “Other critics have suggested the trigger warnings may create an unrealistic bubble, free from negative thoughts, which would not prepare students for life beyond academia.”  
  
Until recently, much of this debate was based on conjecture with little scientific research to back up claims either way.

To improve the body of research on this topic, Jones and his colleagues conducted a randomized experiment among two groups of people who had experienced a serious trauma in the past.

Both groups read a series of literature passages. One group received trigger warnings prior to distressing passages while the other did not. Participants rated their emotions after reading each passage and also completed a series of questionnaires at the end.

Overall, the researchers found little statistical differences in the reactions of both groups. Neither seemed to be spared the emotional impact of reading the text. Whether trigger warnings are explicitly harmful was less clear, though Jones and his colleagues did find evidence that trigger warnings increased the belief that their trauma is an essential part of a survivor’s life story, which research has shown is countertherapeutic.

“I was surprised that something so small—a few trigger warnings in a short experiment—could influence the way someone views their trauma,” noted Jones. “In our culture, I think we overemphasize how important trauma should be in a person’s life. Trigger warnings are one example of this.”

The debate about trigger warnings has raged over the past decade, yet until very recently there was no science or research to inform the practice. “Science is perhaps the most powerful tool we have available for finding the truth. Why did no one think to use it earlier?” Jones concluded.

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*Clinical Psychological Science* publishes advances in clinical science and provides a venue for cutting-edge research across a wide range of conceptual views, approaches, and topics. For a copy of this article, “Helping or Harming? The Effect of Trigger Warnings on Individuals With Trauma Histories,” and access to other research in Psychological Science, contact news@psychologicalscience.org. Jones, P. J., et al. (2020) Helping or Harming? The Effect of Trigger Warnings on Individuals With Trauma Histories. *Clinical Psychological Science*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702620921341>

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January 2, 2022