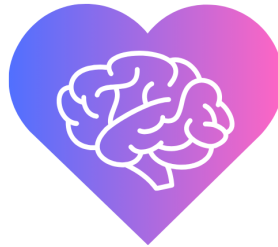# PSYC S399: Psychology For a Better World

Winter 2024–25

1   Course information

Class schedule	Section 01: M/Th 3:00–4:50 pm
	Section 02: T/F 3:00–4:50 pm
	Room: J204
Instructor	Alan Jern
	Office: A202D
	Email: jern@rose-hulman.edu
Open meeting time	TBD (On Microsoft Teams)

2   Overview and objectives

Most people want to help others and make the world a better place. Looking just at the US, charitable donations in 2023 totaled $557 billion, with the largest share coming from individuals. Between 2020 and 2021, 23% of Americans formally volunteered with an organization, and about half of Americans polled in 2022 said they had donated to a charity in the past year.

We clearly have a tremendous capacity for generosity. Unfortunately, this generosity can be short-sighted, impulsive, biased, and inconsistent. In this course, we will explore the ways in which psychology gets in the way of our potential to improve the world as effectively as possible and how we, as individuals and as a society, can overcome these limitations. At the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Describe the scope and impact of some of the world's most pressing problems.

- Explain several psychological factors that have limited people's ability to accurately identify and effectively respond to these problems.

- Discuss the potential and limits of applying behavioral science to addressing world problems.

- Summarize the key points of a social science research article.

- Apply your knowledge of relevant research to propose an effective behavioral approach to address a world problem.

3   Assessment

Component	Points
Syllabus quiz	10
Participation (online)	150
Participation (in class)	150
Assignments (3)	150
Presentation	100
Project	230

3.1   Participation

This course will be heavily dependent on discussion. You are expected to come to class having already completed the required materials (reading, podcasts, videos) and prepared to discuss them in depth.

3.1.1   Online score

To make discussions more productive, some pre-discussion of the materials will happen online through Perusall. See Moodle for details about signing up and using this site. Your online Perusall scores will be based primarily on the number of thoughtful, high-quality comments you make and the number of upvotes and responses you make to other students' comments. In general, the more thoughtful and engaged you are in the discussion, the higher your score will be.

Your scores for the first day of Perusall assignments and your lowest score after that will be dropped.

Note: Signing up for Perusall is required and costs \$10. If you cannot pay the \$10, please contact me right away.

3.1.2   In-class score

The Perusall discussions will serve as a jumping-off point for our discussions in class. Your in-class participation will be self-assigned using a rubric I will provide you. At three points in the quarter, you will use the rubric to determine what participation score you have earned for that third of the quarter. I will review these scores and may make adjustments if I feel they are off the mark. Your class participation score will be the sum of these scores.

3.2 Assignments

Some weeks, you will get a homework assignment that serves as the basis of discussion in class. These will be scored according to posted rubrics.

3.3 Presentation

You will be randomly assigned to one class day to give a group presentation. The details of this presentation will be posted on Moodle.

3.4 Project

Benchmark	Points
Proposal	30
Report	150
Presentation	50
Total	230

Over the course of the quarter, you will apply what you learned on a project of your choice. You may complete the project alone or with 1–2 other students. You will present the conclusion or results of your project during the last week of class. The details of the project assignment will be posted on Moodle.

3.5 Final grade

Grades will be assigned as follows.

Points	Grade
$\geq 90\%$	A
87%–89.9%	B+
80%–86.9%	B
77%–79.9%	C+
70%–76.9%	C
67%–69.9%	D+
60%–66.9%	D
$< 60\%$	F

3.5.1 Grade boost

I won't round up grades, so don't contact me if you are close to the grade boundary unless you believe I made an error. However, if your grade is within 1 percentage point of the next level (for example, an 86%), I will use your responses to the Moodle discussion questions to judge whether to boost your grade to the next level. I will take the quality of your responses and whether you consistently submitted them before class into account in deciding whether to boost your final grade.

4 Course policies

4.1 Late assignments

Late assignments (including the self-assigned participation scores) will receive a point penalty that doubles for each additional day they are late. Specifically:

- 1 day late: 1% deduction

- 2 days late: 2% deduction

- 3 days late: 4% deduction

- 4 days late: 8% deduction

- 5 days late: 16% deduction

- 6 days late: 32% deduction

- 7 days late: 64% deduction

- 8+ days late: No credit

An assignment counts as 1 day late as soon as the deadline for that assignment has passed. If you submit an assignment late, you do not need to notify me. Just submit the assignment on Moodle. It will be automatically timestamped and I will deduct the appropriate number of points when I grade it.

No assignments will be accepted later than 7 days after their deadlines. You should plan to submit your assignments before the deadline. The purpose of this policy is that if something unexpected comes up, you can submit one or two days late and it won't matter much.

Note: The late policy does not apply to the online discussions on Perusall because the whole point of those deadlines is to prepare you for in-class discussion.

4.2 Anonymous grading

Do not include your name on anything (including file name) you submit on Moodle, unless I say otherwise. The reason for this is because I use an anonymous grading feature on Moodle that lets me grade your assignments without seeing your names. Your names are revealed after I've finished grading the assignment. I do this to keep my grading as impartial as possible. If you put your name on the assignment, it undermines the process for everyone.

4.3 Asking for help

I highly encourage you to contact me if you ever need help in this course. That's what I'm here for! But I also want to encourage you to be self-sufficient. So if you ever ask me a question that can be easily answered on this syllabus or the Moodle page (a due date, a page limit, a detail about the late policy), **I will deduct 1 point from your grade total**.

The corollary of this policy is that if you ever find anything on this syllabus or the Moodle page that looks like a genuine mistake (the wrong date, inconsistent information) and you ask me about

it, **I will give you 1 point of extra credit**. (Only the first person to tell me gets the extra credit.)

Don't be afraid to contact me. The point of this policy is to incentivize you to try to find answers yourselves first. If you look for an answer and honestly can't find it, I want to know that too. Just tell me you tried to find it on your own first and where you looked. You won't be penalized for that.

4.4 Academic integrity

Academic misconduct will be addressed according to the policies described in the Rose-Hulman student handbook. Academic misconduct includes: (1) submitting work that is not your own (including AI-generated work); (2) copying ideas, words, or graphics from any source without appropriate citation; (3) misrepresenting your work or yourself (i.e., deliberately submitting the wrong assignment or lying to explain a late assignment); (4) collaborating with other students when this is not permitted; and (5) submitting the same work for credit in two courses without prior consent of both instructors. If you are unsure whether something qualifies as academic misconduct, please check with me before doing it.

5 Institute policies

5.1 Students with accessibility needs

Rose-Hulman is committed to working with students who have special needs or disabilities. Visit the Accessibility Services website for more information. Requests for academic accommodations must be documented with and approved by the Accessibility Services office before they can be implemented in this course.

5.2 Counseling

The Student Counseling Center helps students identify barriers to success, build personal awareness, and develop life skills. Counseling appointments are free and confidential.

5.3 Diversity statement

Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology is committed to being an inclusive community in which the multiplicity of values, beliefs, intellectual viewpoints, and cultural perspectives enrich learning and inform scholarship.

6 Course schedule

All required readings, assignments, and due dates will be posted on Moodle.

Week 1: Introduction

- Caviola, L., Schubert, S., & Greene, J. D. (2021). The psychology of (in)effective altruism. Trends in Cognitive Sciences.

- Berman, J. Z., et. al. (2018). Impediments to effective altruism: The role of subjective preferences in charitable giving. Psychological Science.

Due: Syllabus quiz

Week 2: Global health

- Ord, T. (2013). The moral imperative toward cost-effectiveness in global health. Center for Global Development.

- Bettle, R. (2022). Measuring health: How we use (and sometimes don't use) DALY estimates. Founder's Pledge.

- Rational Animations. (2024). The world is awful. The world is much better. The world can be much better.

- Rationally Speaking. (2021). Is cash the best way to help the poor? (Michael Faye).

Week 3: Parochialism

- Burum, B., Matin, A. N., & Hoffman, M. (2020). An evolutionary explanation for ineffective altruism. Nature Human Behavior.

- McManus, R. M., Kleinman-Weiner, M. & Young, L. (2020). What we owe to family: The impact of special obligations on moral judgment. Psychological Science.

- Vox. (2017). Why humans are so bad at thinking about climate change.

- Sparkman, G., Geiger, N., & Weber, E. U. (2022). Americans experience a false social reality by underestimating popular climate policy support by nearly half. Nature Communications.

Due: Assignment 1; Participation 1

Week 4: Climate change

- Kahan, D.. (2012). Science literacy, numeracy, and climate change risk perceptions. Garrison Institute.

- Nyborg, K., et. al. (2016). Social norms as solutions. Science.

- Huber, R. A., Anderson, B., & Bernauer, T. (2018). Can social norm interventions promote voluntary pro environmental action? Environmental Science and Policy.

- Berkbile-Weinberg, M., et. al. (2024). The differential impact of climate interventions along the political divide in 60 countries. Nature Communications.

Week 5: Presentism

- Hennigan, W. J. (2024). Nuclear war is called unimaginable. In fact, it's not imagined enough. The New York Times.

- Karan, A & Luby, S. (2021). A natural pandemic has been terrible. A synthetic one would be even worse. Stat News.

- Harari, Y. N. (2015). Industrial farming is one of the worst crimes in history. The Guardian

- Hidden Brain (2019). Pets, pests and food: Our complex, contradictory attitudes toward animals

Due: Assignment 2

Week 6: Animal welfare

- Loughnan, S., Bratanova, B., & Puvia, E. (2012). The meat paradox: How are we able to love animals and love eating animals? In-Mind Italia.

- Humane Hancock (2023). I finally understand speciesism and now I can't sleep.

- Wilks, M., et. al. (2021) Children prioritize humans over animals less than adults do. Psychological Science.

Due: Participation 2

Week 7: Speciesism

- The 80,000 Hours Podcast. (2024). Bob Fischer on comparing the welfare of humans, chickens, pigs, octopuses, bees, and more.

Due: Final project proposal

Week 8: Personal impact

- 80,000 Hours. (2023). Career guide.

Week 9: Project time

Due: Assignment 3; Final project poster; Participation 3

Week 10: Presentations

Due: Final project report