

# Designing and Conducting Research with Children

## (PSYC 4559-003)

### Fall 2017

**Time:** Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00am-12:15pm

**Location:** Gilmer B001

**Instructor:** Jessica Taggart

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**Office:** B006

**Office Hours:** Thursdays from 2:00pm-4:00pm and by appointment

## Where Are We Going?

Think back to your last interaction with a child. Did you find yourself noticing how simultaneously adult-like and, well, child-like he or she was? Children are all at once so much like us, and so different. How do we understand their lives—what they think, experience, and understand? And why is that a question even worth asking?

Psychology has come a long way since the belief that babies experience the world only as a “blooming, buzzing confusion,” or that children are merely a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) waiting to be filled. Instead, we believe that children have rich, vibrant lives of their own that are worthy of our interest and understanding. Is there a way to make sense of these fascinating beings? How can we begin to do so?

Together, we will discover the ways in which developmental psychology researchers develop research questions, test them through experimental studies, and share their findings. We will also encounter firsthand the unique challenges that come with trying to understand children as opposed to adults.

There are infinite questions that we could ask about child development. To narrow in on one of our own, we will focus on a ubiquitous experience: storybook reading. Many American children read or are read to often, and this is one of the early ways that children come to experience the world and what it is to be human. But despite all of this exposure to fiction, and the good intentions adults have when reading to children, we still don't know much about what children actually want to read.

When you imagine your own childhood, you probably had a few books that were your favorites, ones you wanted to read again and again. We want to leverage this anecdotal knowledge to understand what it is that children enjoy in fiction and subsequently predict the possible implications of those preferences.

The overriding goal for this course is for you to engage in the process of scientific discovery. I hope that you will leave this course inspired with new ideas and confident in your ability to not only understand research, but also contribute to it. As a developmental psychology researcher-in-training, you will:

1. Describe common research methods used with children
2. Design and conduct an empirical study
3. Analyze the data you collect and present those findings in an academic poster
4. Communicate your research to diverse audiences
5. Reflect on your research experience and explore your personal interests

## **How Will We Get There?**

Throughout the course, you will complete assignments and projects that will help accomplish our objectives. Some will be completed individually, while others will be done in teams. Below is an overview; each project will be discussed in more detail as the semester progresses. Specific grading rubrics will be provided in advance of each assignment's due date. Assignments are due at the beginning of the class for which they are assigned unless otherwise indicated. Late submissions will not be accepted.

### **Reflect on Completed Research (A)**

Before designing a study, one must read and understand the existing literature: this allows us to know what questions have already been asked and how they were answered, as well as what is known and what is still to be discovered. To inspire our own research ideas, we will read and discuss several articles related to children's fiction. Afterward, you will write a 2-page (double-spaced, Times New Roman, font size 12) response on a related topic of choice (i.e., social stories, gender, fantasy, or anthropomorphism).

This response should begin with a 1-paragraph summary of the article(s), followed by your own ideas for future directions. Consider each of the following: What would your follow-up research question be? Why is it an important question to ask? What would your hypotheses be, and why? How would you design a study to address your question? And what are considerations and implications for your proposed study?

### **Conduct Your Own Research**

There is no better way to understand research methods than to engage in them yourself. In teams, you will design and implement a developmental psychology study. You will engage in each step of the scientific process. Informed by prior research, you will: (1) Formulate a research question, (2) Determine hypotheses, (3) Devise methods, (4) Collect data at the Virginia Discovery Museum and in the Early Development Lab at UVA, (5) Enter and analyze data, and (6) Synthesize and present data.

As part of your research, you will create:

#### **A Study Handout (B)**

An important skill for researchers to develop is the ability to communicate their work clearly to the lay public. And for us, this especially means the parents/guardians of your child participants. To this end, your team will design a handout that families can take with them after participating in your study. This handout will include parent-friendly information about the study (background, research question, hypotheses, and methods) and will suggest related activities for parents to try at home. We will also make these handouts available to families online via a course website.

#### **A Study Abstract (C)**

Abstracts provide readers with a brief summary of your study. In many ways, writing a strong abstract is even more challenging than writing a full paper—you only have 250 words to get all of your information across! Your team will work together to write an abstract for your study that will then be included in a program for a research mini-conference at the end of the semester.

#### **An Academic Poster (D)**

It is also important for researchers to effectively communicate their work orally and visually to academic audiences, just as you would at a professional conference. To this end, your team will design an academic-style conference poster. This poster will be the culmination of your research and include: background, research question and hypotheses, methods, results, conclusions, future directions, and references. We will have these posters printed and you will present them to our department in a research mini-conference at the end of the semester.

## **Reflect on Your Research Experience (E)**

Throughout the course, you will keep a personal research journal. These journals are intended to not only serve as inspiration for your research questions and experimental design, but also to serve as a record of your growth and experience as a researcher in the field of developmental psychology. You will be provided with a prompt to respond to in 1-2 paragraphs at the end of approximately every other class; you may have a few minutes to begin the response and then will complete the rest of that day's entry outside of class. If you miss class, you should ask a classmate or me for the prompt. To encourage active participation in reflection, throughout the semester you will post 5 entries (your choice) to the Forums and respond thoughtfully to 5 of your peers' posts, for a total of 10 posts. The weeks you do so are up to you.

## **Quizzes (F)**

There will be 6 quizzes (5 questions each—3 multiple choice and 2 short answer) throughout the course. These will allow you to demonstrate your understanding of the readings for that class. The quiz dates will not be announced. At the end of the semester, your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

## **Engagement (G)**

Class time will take many forms: interactive lectures, discussion, group activities, and other active learning strategies to support your growth and learning. Your active participation, both inside and outside of the classroom, will greatly enrich this course. Please come prepared to discuss assigned readings, ask questions, and participate in activities, as well as run your study and interact with families on data days.

## **What Resources Will Help Me Along the Way?**

### **Your Textbook and Required Readings**

Throughout the semester you will have assigned readings; these will come from our textbook, *Research Methods: From Theory to Practice*, as well as research articles (available on Collab under Resources). The textbook is available at the bookstore or online, as well as on reserve at the library.

**Textbook:** Gorvine, B., Rosengren, K., Stein, L., & Biolsi, K. (2017). *Research Methods: From Theory to Practice*. 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### **Supplementary Readings and Guides**

A folder of additional resources to aid you in reading and thinking critically about research articles, as well as designing, conducting, and presenting a research study will be available on Collab under Resources. You are encouraged to read these resources to develop your skills even though they will not be formally discussed. Bonus readings on fiction and children's preferences will be made available as well. While these readings are optional, they are highly encouraged for your response paper and once you have joined your team and decided upon your research topic. These readings will allow you to better motivate your study, talk about it in richer detail, and provide adequate background in your academic poster.

### **You, Your Peers, and the Instructor**

You are welcome and encouraged to share other useful resources, including relevant readings. Everyone enters this course with different experiences and backgrounds, and sharing them will enrich the experience for all. Research is a collaborative effort, and you and your classmates are a valuable resource.

And please do not hesitate to reach out to me with questions, comments, concerns, ideas, etc. regarding the course and beyond—I want this to be an enjoyable, educational, and valuable experience for everyone! You are always welcome to meet with me outside of class, either during office hours or by appointment, and I will be reachable via e-mail as well.

## How Will We Assess Whether We Got There?

### Grading

Grades will be earned on a point system:

- 50 Points — (A) Reaction Paper
- 25 Points — (B) Study Insert
- 125 Points — (C) Abstract (25 points) and (D) Academic Poster (100 points)
- 50 Points — (E) Forum Posts & Forum Responses (5 per post or response)
- 50 Points — (F) Quizzes (10 per quiz)
- 50 Points — (G) Engagement

To calculate your grade:  $(\text{Sum of Your Points} / 450 \text{ Points}) * 100 = X\%$  (See Letter Conversions)

**A+** = 97% +    **A** = 94-96%    **A-** = 90-93%    **B+** = 87-89%    **B** = 84-86%    **B-** = 80-83%  
**C+** = 77-79%    **C** = 74-76%    **C-** = 70-73%    **D+** = 67-69%    **D** = 64-66%    **D-** = 60-63%    **F** = < 59%

Detailed grading rubrics will be provided on Collab in advance of each assignment and project deadline. There will not be opportunities for extra credit in this course. You are welcome and encouraged to meet with me to discuss questions and receive feedback in advance of deadlines.

## What Else Do I Need to Know?

### Attendance

If you must miss class for an athletic or other school-sanctioned event, please notify me at least one week in advance. It is your responsibility to make up missed work. If you have an excused absence (e.g., illness, athletics, etc.), you can complete an alternate assignment to earn that day's engagement points.

You are required to complete one Saturday of data collection at the Virginia Discovery Museum (either October 21<sup>st</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup> for a 1-hour shift between 1:00-4:00pm). If you cannot attend either of these Saturdays due to work, athletic, or academic obligations, alternative accommodations will be made.

### Technology

You are welcome to use a computer in class to take notes, view readings, and work on in-class assignments. However, to avoid distracting yourself and your classmates, the Internet should be turned off when not used for in-class activities. Cell phones should be on silent and put away.

### Accommodations

I encourage students with disabilities, including nonvisible disabilities such as chronic diseases, learning disabilities, head injury, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or psychiatric disabilities, to discuss appropriate accommodations with me. The Disability Access Center is also available to facilitate the removal of barriers and to ensure reasonable accommodations. Visit:

<http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/sdac/sdac.html>

You are all highly encouraged to discuss questions or concerns with me at any time. My goal is to create a positive learning environment for everyone!

### Honor Code

I trust that you will fully abide by the UVA Honor Code. Any quotations or paraphrasing of others' ideas should be properly cited in APA format. For information on what constitutes an Honor Offense, visit

<http://www.virginia.edu/honor/faq/>

## Our Road Map: The Class Schedule

Readings should be completed for the class they are assigned.

| Date  | Topics  | Readings and Assignments  |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Theme 1: How do we study something as complex as learning and behavior, and with children?</b> |   |   |
| Tues.<br>8/22   | Introductions and Scientific Explanation        |   |
| Thurs.<br>8/24  | Basics of Experimentation: Theories and Methods | Chapter 1   |
| Tues.<br>8/29   | Methods Lab: Developmental Studies              | <a href="http://nobaproject.com/modules/research-methods-in-developmental-psychology">http://nobaproject.com/modules/research-methods-in-developmental-psychology</a> |

### Theme 2: Where do research questions come from?

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|----------------|--|---|
| Thurs.<br>8/31 | Finding and Reading Research                       | Chapter 4; Appendix (p. 423)  |
| Tues.<br>9/5   | Understanding Theory: Fiction as Social            | Mar and Oatley (2008)<br>Barnes and Bloom (2014)  |
| Thurs.<br>9/7  | Fiction Preferences I (Gender)                     | Kropp and Halverson (1983)<br>Bleakley, Westerberg, and Hopkins (1988)                                  |
| Tues.<br>9/12  | Fiction Preferences II (Fantasy, Anthropomorphism) | Barnes, Bernstein, and Bloom (2015)<br>Kotaman and Tekin (2017)<br>Guillot (2014, Chapter 2, pp. 22-47) |

### Theme 3: Once we have a research question, how do we test it?

|                          |                                      |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Thurs.<br>9/14           | Experimental Design: Ideas to Action | Chapters 5-6                            |
| <b>* Fri. *<br/>9/15</b> | -                                    | <b>Response Paper Due</b>               |
| Tues.<br>9/19            | Building Teams and Stimuli Design    | Chapter 8                               |
| Thurs.<br>9/21           | Stimuli Design                       | <b>Study Stimuli Due (End of Class)</b> |
| Tues.<br>9/26            | Study Handout Design                 |   |
| Thurs.<br>9/28           | Peer Feedback and Revisions          | <b>Study Handout Due (End of Class)</b> |

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|-------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Tues.<br>10/3           | <b>No Class - Reading Holiday</b>                           |                          |
| Thurs.<br>10/5          | Living Laboratory Training                                  | <b>CITI Training Due</b> |
| Tues.<br>10/10          | Study Practice:<br>Methods with Children                    |                          |
| Thurs.<br>10/12         | Study Practice:<br>Content with RAs                         | <b>No Jess - CDS</b>     |
| Tues.<br>10/17          | <b>* Data Collection *</b>                                  |                          |
| Thurs.<br>10/19         | <b>* Data Collection *</b>                                  |                          |
| <b>*Sat.*<br/>10/21</b> | <b>* Data Collection at the Virginia Discovery Museum *</b> |                          |
| Tues.<br>10/24          | <b>* Data Collection *</b>                                  |                          |
| Thurs.<br>10/26         | <b>* Data Collection *</b>                                  |                          |
| <b>*Sat.*<br/>10/28</b> | <b>* Data Collection at the Virginia Discovery Museum *</b> |                          |

**Theme 4: Once we've collected our data, how do we make sense of it?**

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|----------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Tues.<br>10/31 | Data Collection Debrief                  | <b>Data Entry Due (End of Class)</b> |
| Thurs.<br>11/2 | Data Analysis I                          | Chapter 13                           |
| Tues.<br>11/7  | Data Analysis II:<br>Computer Lab (SPSS) | Chapter 14                           |

**Theme 5: How do we share our findings with others?**

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|----------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Thurs.<br>11/9 | Bringing It All Together:<br>The Abstract | <b>Data Analyses Due</b>            |
| Tues.<br>11/14 | Presenting Research                       | <b>Abstracts Due (End of Class)</b> |

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| Thurs.<br>11/16 | Poster Preparation | Kitchens (n.d.)<br>Purrington (n.d.) |
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|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Tues.<br>11/21 | Group Check-Ins | <b>Posters Due (End of Class)</b> |
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| Thurs.<br>11/23 | <b>No Class - Thanksgiving</b> |  |
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| Tues.<br>11/28 | Poster Practice |  |
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| Thurs.<br>11/30 | Poster Session |  |
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| Tues.<br>12/5 | Wrap-Up | <b>Journals Due</b> |
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