PSY 640: Foundations of Developmental Psychology

Thursdays, 4 - 6:30 pm
Webster 103

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Goals
The principal goal of this course is to familiarize students with the nature of
developmental inquiry in psychology. Students will learn about historically important
theories in developmental psychology and their impact on current research, and will acquire
knowledge about methodological issues in developmental research and the ability to read and
critically evaluate research papers in the field. They will also gain understanding of how a
developmental perspective can enrich our understanding in other subfields of psychology.

The course is recommended as the introductory course in the field for all graduate
students in developmental psychology, and it fills one of the "foundations" requirements for
students in other programs within the psychology department.

Readings
We will read a substantial portion of Durkin’s (1995) Developmental Social Psychology
textbook in this course. It is available for purchase at the bookstore. Additional readings—
journal articles and excerpts from books—are indicated on the course schedule. These will be
distributed via email, whenever possible.

Assignments and Grading
Grades will be based primarily on two short papers and two class presentations.
Attendance and class participation, including discussion question contributions (see below),
will also be a factor in grading.

Discussion questions. As a contribution to class discussions, students are
encouraged to identify issues they would like to see discussed in class. These should be
questions that either (a) explore interrelations between one or more readings for the current
week and either other current readings or prior readings; (b) explore the implications of one
or more developmental ideas that play a prominent role in the current readings for other
topics of interest to you. These questions must be emailed to csophian@hawaii.edu no later
than 48 hours before class. I will integrate and/or select among them, and circulate a list of
discussion topics to the class, whenever possible by the evening preceding our class meeting.
Papers. In the papers, you will be asked to reflect upon and integrate the course material in response to specific questions. These are indicated on the course schedule along with their due dates. There is a strict 800-word limit for each of these papers. Please use your word processor to determine the number of words in your paper (excluding references) and record that at the top of your paper.

Presentation #1: Assigned paper. One presentation will consist of leading class discussion of one of the assigned readings outside of our textbook. The leader’s goal is to facilitate a discussion that will deepen the class’ understanding of the research reported in the article and its significance. Handouts or powerpoint slides providing an outline of the discussion and/or presenting key information to be referenced in the discussion are highly recommended. However, the presentation should not be so scripted by the handout as to preclude open discussion. Likewise, while it will often be appropriate, in preparation for these presentations, to familiarize yourself with related work beyond the materials the rest of the class is reading, the presentation should not be a lecture in which the student who is presenting does all or most of the talking. The instructor will be actively supporting the student leaders in making these discussions as productive as possible; hence, substantial instructor participation should be expected and it should not be interpreted as implied criticism of the student leader’s performance. The amount of time we spend on these presentations may vary, depending in part on how much other material there is to be covered. Feel free to consult with the instructor after the class period preceding your presentation for clarification as to how your presentation will fit into the overall plan for the next class period.

Presentation #2: Paper not on syllabus. A second presentation (not necessarily later in time than the first, as the timing will depend on the topics chosen) will be based on a research article you select (a primary-source research report, NOT a review or discussion paper) that looks developmentally at a research problem of interest to you. You will have a maximum of 20 minutes to tell the class about a specific finding from the article you have chosen and why you think it is important. Your presentation does not need to describe the entire article but should include enough information about the research project that is reported that we can understand and evaluate the empirical basis for the conclusion that you are discussing. It is highly recommended that the presentation be supported by a handout or powerpoint presentation that provides a complete reference and one or more figures and/or tables summarizing aspects of the data on which you want to focus. These presentations should still be interactive, although more oriented toward presenting information and correspondingly less oriented toward promoting discussion than the presentations based on papers the whole class has read.

Powerpoint Slides

I will circulate my powerpoint slides before we meet when possible (provided it does not have a detrimental effect on class attendance or preparedness), otherwise shortly afterward.
Course Schedule

1/15  First class

1/22  Cognitive development and learning
Durkin, pp. 14-21 (cognitive developmental theory), 199-206 (learning theory and language, biological theory of language)

1/29  Social development and learning
Durkin, pp. 21-32 (social learning theory, ethology, sociobiology)

2/5  Culture and development
Durkin, pp. 368-374 (Vygotsky)
2/12 Attachment

Durkin, Chapter 3: Attachment to others (pp. 77-110).


DUE 2/16: Reflecting on the kinds of developmental analyses offered by Chomsky, Piaget, Bowlby, and Vygotsky, which two theorists strike you as the most similar in the stances they take on the nature/nurture issue (irrespective of differences among them in the aspects of development they focus on, i.e., language, cognition, attachment)? Explain the similarity you see between the two theorists you have chosen, and how it contrasts with the positions each of the other two theorists promulgate.

2/19 Beyond Nature Vs. Nurture


2/26 Language development

Durkin, review pp. 199-206

Durkin, pp. 206-222 (child language; cognition & language) & pp. 224-230 (social context of language acquisition)


3/5 Origins of Knowledge

3/12 Contexts of Socialization
Durkin, pp. 116-123 (childrearing styles), 130-135 (day care)

3/19 Self Regulation
Durkin, pp. 287-302 (concept of self)
4/2 Social Cognition & Relationships with Peers

Durkin, pp. 144-145 (peer group formation); 302-317 (knowledge of others)


4/9 Theory of Mind


4/16 Developmental Changes in Cognitive Processes


4/23 Development of Aggression

Durkin, Chapter 12: The Development of Aggression (pp. 391-427)


4/30  Moral Development

Durkin, pp. 463-486 (moral development—biological and cognitive-developmental theories)


DUE 5/4: Characterizations of cognitive development as, in part, a matter of socialization and of social development as, in part, a matter of cognitive change suggest that each subfield might benefit from ideas in the other. The assignment for this paper is to develop a specific proposal for this sort of cross-fertilization. Specifically, either:

(a) Choose a specific theoretical construct that has been used in research on cognitive development (e.g., modularity, strategy choice) and propose a way in which it might be fruitfully extended to research in social development, or

(b) Choose a specific theoretical construct that has been used in research on social development (e.g., attachment, self efficacy) and propose a way in which it might be fruitfully extended to research in cognitive development.