Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Syllabus Analysis of
PSY5 6919: Professional Development for Psychology Doctoral Students
(Current Research Topics in Psychology)
https://dionnestephens.wixsite.com/gradschool101
Summer 2021

COURSE OVERVIEW
The objective of this course is to help doctoral students hone skills and gain experience in key areas that spell success in graduate education and beyond. This will include helping students understand the traditional important research skills and knowledge, management and leadership, effectiveness and purpose, professionalism, communication, and career advancement. Further, we are integrating an empowerment approach that also seeks to advance doctoral students’ intellectual curiosity, competency and self-advocacy skills to ensure they are able to achieve their ongoing personal and professional goals.

DEI COURSE INTEGRATION SELF ASSESSMENT
The self-assessment of this course is timely given the American Psychological Association’s strategic plan calls for a strong, diverse, and unified psychology that enhances knowledge and improves the human condition (2018). In line with this vision, APA has expressed its commitment to equity in its practices and systems, including training foci, academic outputs (e.g. journals), and policies (2018). It is important to note that DEI in this course does not solely focus on race and ethnicity outcomes/ experiences; we use an intersectional lens. Toward this end, students are encouraged to center their own values and experiences within the established by Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (WEIRD) contexts shaping the field of psychology (see Thalmayer, Toscanelli, & Arnett, 2021) and academia more broadly (Damodaran et al., 2015; Isom et al, 2021; Jackson, 2019). For these reasons, integrating social justice and DEI goals into this graduate-level professional development course was achievable.

While I believe my syllabus (see below) integrates foundational DEI approaches, a limitation of my current course is the clear articulation of how I will ensure the content reflects each students’ experiences and career goals, and how I will assess my ability to foster a sense of inclusion in the classroom community. One way to do this is by consistently “checking in” with students at the beginning of class and through reaching out individually throughout the semester. This is important as formal mentoring, or unstructured mentoring focused on both career and psychosocial development of students has been found to impact student perceptions of their graduate experience, particularly those with marginalized identities (Brown, Boness, & Sheerin, 2021; Jones et al., 2018). Further, taking these additional steps will provide insights into the applicability and accessibility of the content across students.

Description & Learning Outcomes: To competently engaged in practical and research focused work, it is critical that psychology doctoral programs ensure that their students demonstrate acceptable levels of knowledge, skills and awareness to work effectively with diverse individuals (Isom et al, 2021). These goals and foci in the course are clearly articulated in the Course Description and Course Learning Outcomes. DEI efforts are not segregated to individual weeks; rather, these topics and related issues are centered throughout the course and are interrogated in every meeting session.

Course Readings: Requiring readings drawing from different abilities, cultures, beliefs, and experiences encourages students to embrace differences while situating themselves in the broader course goals (APA, 2018; Isom et al, 2021). Further, having a range of perspectives provides students opportunities to view academic cultural experiences and goals from differing positionalities. This is why I purposefully assigned a broad selection of both required and suggested readings for each session meeting.
**Expertise Representation:** The NIH has asserted that “Diversity means bringing together a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences to solve complex problems” (2018). Toward this end, representation was addressed at both the individual and cultural level in this course. The broader cultural issue focused on the ways in which academia centers white, male experiences and values. Addressing the ways in which students can negotiate this exclusionary position throughout different phases of their academic journey was central to this course. Relatedly I have integrated research outputs and foci that both reflects and is articulated by members of underrepresented populations and from diverse sectors of academia. The guest lectures that will introduce students to diverse professionals; this includes racial/ethnic, gender, career status, differing abilities, career outcome, familial structures, and training backgrounds. These efforts are critical given the prior research has noted that addressing inclusion at multiple levels is critical for graduate student retention, academic productivity, and overall commitment to their academic institution (Elliott, 2021; Holley & Gardner, 2012; Isom et al, 2021; Lund, 2021).

**Action & Empowerment:** Beyond giving information, students are provided with the knowledge and skills for ensuring their mental health and wellbeing can be prioritized through their journey. Students were guided through the formal and informal power structures in academia in general and within the department. Skills for negotiating these were discussed via a presentation from current doctoral students from across areas in the department. Having students facilitate this discussion ensured that faculty biases and experiences were not centered; further, peer led discussions increase students, particularly for those who have marginalized identities or feel a sense of isolation (Bale & Moran, 2020; Holley & Gardner, 2012; Jones et al., 2018; Yusuf, Saitgalina & Chapman, 2020)

   Additionally, we openly discussed many factors that limit student’s ability to thrive through both dedicated seminar topics and throughout the course general discussions (e.g. microaggressions, racism, misogyny, classism, mentor/mentee conflicts, financial stressors, familial stressors). Research has shown that frank and honest conversations with faculty about these topics help students take control of their academic journey (Brown, Boness, & Sheerin, 2021; Jones et al., 2018; Overall, Deane & Peterson, 2010), and increases retention, time to graduation, and academic productivity (Brown, Boness, & Sheerin, 2021; Elliott, 202).

   The assignments in the course also contributed to this DEI focus. To help with balancing these concerns, students were encouraged to articulate sources of support/challenges both in their personal and professional life. For the latter, they identified graduate level professional development and social groups within their area’s relevant organizations. Having these open and honest discussions provides students a space to feel more empowered, engaged and willing to actively address concerns related to their personal and professional development (Callahan et al., 2018; Holley & Gardner, 2012; Yusuf, Saitgalina & Chapman, 2020).

**Course Assignments.** Beyond the presentation of DEI, I sought to help students operationalize these values through their actual course work. All assignments require students to gain professional development skills or develop relevant products. However, students are strongly encouraged to center their own identities, experiences, and values within these efforts. This requires a great deal of self-reflection from using an intersectional lens, as the majority do not feel they fit within traditional frameworks of academic culture. Additionally, the assignments encourage thinking about the ways in which their degrees are applicable outside of the traditional program focus of academia, to encompass a more broad outlook on their career planning (Callahan et al., 2018; Yusuf, Saitgalina & Chapman, 2020).
References


PSY 6919: Current Research Topics in Psychology
Department Of Psychology- College Of Arts & Sciences
Sections RVC– Summer 2021
www.dionnestephens.wixsite.com/gradschool101

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Course Description & Purpose
This seminar class consists of discussions and activities designed to provide a realistic and broad view of academic culture, behavioral expectations, and career expectations. Students will be equipped with contextual and interdisciplinary understanding of their doctoral degrees application in both academic and non-academic settings. Further, tools for establishing a balance between academic and personal life priorities as students pursue their graduate studies will be highlighted. The overarching goal of the program is to enable graduates to make the transition successfully to career positions upon graduation from their doctoral degree. Each seminar session and assignment has been designed to equip students to achieve their diverse educational and career goals.

Course goals include:
• Advancing doctoral students' intellectual curiosity, competency and skills for graduate training settings
• Developing critical thinking, creativity and effective communication for academic and non-academic goals
• Establishing plans for making meaningful contributions to personal and professional communities

Student Learning Outcomes
By the end of this course, the successful student should be able to:
• Display professionalism and ownership of professional growth and learning
• Extend collaboration to students, colleagues and the community
• Clarify their graduate training values, interests, strengths and skills
• Articulate their transferable, psychological knowledge, graduate school and work-related skills
• Identify and research a wide variety of career fields and opportunities
• Market themselves effectively to prospective employers (through written documents, online presence, and articulation of skill across diverse platforms)
• Understand and plan for future career pursuits (post-doctoral positions, professional credentials, academic and nonacademic settings, professional development, etc.)
• Produce an original and cumulative professional document that synthesize course objectives
• Articulate an understanding of the impact of history, culture, race, class and other factors on diverse graduate students’ multiple realities
### GRADING

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### COURSE SCHEDULE OVERVIEW
*(See course site for current detailed schedule, readings & guest speakers)*

**Unit 1: Graduate School Cultures & Hierarchies**
This unit will focus on students’ positionalities and engagement across various graduate school contexts. The emphasis will be on developing an empowered lens for negotiating professional relationships, power dynamics and cultural norms of graduate school.
- What I wish I knew in my first year: Advanced Doctoral Students & Alumni Reflections
- Graduate School Cultures 101
- Faculty Advisors, Mentors & Supervisory Relationships

**Unit 2: Beyond Surviving... Thriving**
This unit will focus on students' self-awareness and wellbeing through the graduate school journey. The emphasis will be on developing an empowered self-identity, prioritizing well-being, identifying your purpose(s), and support systems.
- Intersectionality, Inclusion & Interpersonal Relationships
- School/ Life Integration
- Cultivating your Support System
UNIT 3: Research, Writing, & Service Responsibilities
This unit of the course will help students map out skills, strategies, and goals they need to acquire during this phase of their career journey. Key areas that will be explored include research skills and knowledge, responsibilities management, and productivity.

- Developing your Academic Identity
- Politics of Publishing & the Publishing Process
- Exploring Grant & Funding Processes

UNIT 4: Conceptualizing YOUR Career
The ways to showcase core competencies across multiple career paths is the focus of this final unit. Skills you can take to develop and enhance your post graduate career path will be discussed in depth.

- Conceptualizing your Career
- Non-Academic Career Job Search
- Post-Doctoral Positions
- Academic Career Job Search