

PSYC SPECIAL TOPICS COURSES 2026-2027 – COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

PSYC 435 Fall 2026 (Dr Ali) – Stress and Fertility

The goal of this class is to develop an understanding of the biological and psychological constructs of stress, and how they relate to male and female fertility. This includes the review of scientific literature and critical evaluation of the evidence, summarizing research findings to the class, and leading critical discussions. The course will be divided into three modules: (1) Instructor-led foundational lectures and discussion, (2) Student-led presentations, and (3) Collaborative paper writing.

PSYC 440 Fall 2026 (Dr Nitschke) – Stress, Cognition and Social Behaviours

This seminar introduces students to stress research within a social-affective framework: the major theoretical models, past and present, and the role of social buffering. We will consider how acute and chronic stress shape attention, cognition, and behaviour, with a specific focus on social functioning — empathy, trust, and cooperation — drawing on behavioural, neuroendocrine, and computational evidence. Students will review and critically evaluate primary research, present findings to the class, and lead discussions. The course proceeds in three parts: foundational lectures, student-led presentations, and an independently developed research proposal.

PSYC 320 Winter 2027 (Dr Poppenk) - Individual Differences

What makes you who you are? In this course, you'll explore the psychological and neuroscientific bases of this question. You'll trace how personality, development, cognitive style, genetics and epigenetics, neurophysiology, and more shape your unique profile. Each module covers ethics, state of research, classic discoveries and core methods, from whole-genome studies to neuroimaging volumetry, equipping you to understand current research efforts in the context of this exciting and expanding area.

PSYC 350 Winter 2027 - The Development of Decision-Making (LAB course)

How do children learn to make decisions about fairness, risk, cooperation, and self-control? How does the environment in which they grow up shape their developing decision-making processes? This laboratory course explores the development of decision-making from infancy through adolescence, drawing on research in developmental psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and behavioral economics. Students will examine how cognitive, social, and environmental factors shape decision-making across development while gaining hands-on experience with the methods used to study these processes. Laboratory activities will include designing experiments using online survey and behavioral testing platforms, developing interactive decision-making tasks, coding behavioral data, and analyzing and interpreting research findings. Students will also practice skills in communicating scientific research to broader audiences.

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[PSYC 420 Winter 2027 \(Dr Poppenk\) – Mind and Memory](#)

What explains the entanglement of memory and consciousness? We harbour conscious and unconscious memories; we consolidate waking experiences in our sleep; memory shapes our awareness; and awareness unlocks otherwise inaccessible memories. In this seminar, you'll dissect foundational theories (from memory systems to state space models), analyze landmark papers, review cutting-edge methods (from machine learning of sleep neuroimaging data to gaze tracking), and synthesize your own view of the curious link between these interwoven constructs.

[PSYC 450 Winter 2027 \(Dr Kuhlmeier\) – Development of Prosocial Behaviour](#)

This seminar examines the development of prosocial behaviour across infancy, childhood, and adolescence, with a focus on actions such as helping, sharing, comforting, and cooperation. Drawing on classic and contemporary empirical research, we will explore theoretical perspectives on the origins of prosociality, including evolutionary, social-cognitive, and socialization approaches. Topics include the roles of empathy, moral reasoning, parenting, and cultural context in shaping prosocial development. Students will critically engage with primary research articles and consider methodological challenges in studying prosocial behaviour. The course emphasizes developing skills in evaluating evidence and applying developmental theory to real-world social issues.