EnvS 6300/7300 – Conservation Psychology

Instructor: Mark Brunson, 797-2458, Mark.Brunson@usu.edu

Office hours: MW 10:30-noon, also anytime my office (NR 216) door is open.

Course description and purpose
This course examines how social science research and theory can add to our understanding and practice of environmental and natural resource stewardship, focusing on human phenomena that occur primarily at the individual level. We will draw upon ideas and discoveries from social psychology, environmental psychology, and various applied social science fields, emphasizing how this work can be applied to problems in human thought and behavior processes regarding nature. Because this is an applied social science course, we will look for ways both researchers and potential practitioners can use the information.

Course structure
This is a graduate seminar course so we’ll have lots of discussion, although I will formally introduce topics throughout the semester. Most days I’ll ask you to read two articles or book chapters before each class, and we’ll use those as a focal point for discussion. For some of you this will feel like an awful lot of reading; for others it will be a lighter load than usual for graduate social science courses. I’m seeking a balance between covering the breadth of literature on these topics and being able to absorb the material; this reading load seems to achieve that.

In November the focus will shift from reviewing literature to applying what we’ve learned, first as researchers and then as practitioners. At that point the reading expectations will decrease significantly and there will be opportunities for group and individual problem solving.

Web support
All readings will be available through the Canvas course management system. When you log on to the course, the first page you’ll see is the Modules page. Each day will have its own module that contains the readings for that day as well as any presentations that I might have given on that topic in the previous class meeting. The Canvas site will also be used to present and upload assignments, post grades, and offer a platform for you to discuss course topics and assignments outside of class (if desired).

Expectations/requirements
Article summaries (35% of course grade): Every other week I will ask each of you to turn in a one- to two-page summary of one of the readings for the previous two weeks. Summaries will be due at 8:30 am Monday (which for many of you probably means midnight Sunday), and should be uploaded onto the Assignments feature in Canvas. You get to choose which article to summarize, but I do want the summary to follow the following format:
a. A description of the “researchable problem” in theory or management that the paper attempts to address, and the method(s) the authors used to do so;
b. Key findings and/or recommendations made by the authors; and
c. A personal critique of the paper: e.g., is it useful, are the methods straightforward? Did you detect flaws in the research approach? Do you agree with the authors’ arguments? Was there anything in the paper that you felt was unclear?

I’ll use this method to assess whether you’re learning the material. Any summary that follows the above format and shows real effort will receive an A. If you don’t receive any feedback from me, that means you did fine. If you do get feedback, you’ve still got the A but you also get some potentially useful help – in other words, it might be a valuable strategy to choose the article that gave you the most trouble during the previous couple of weeks.

Mid-Course Assessment (10%)
This assignment, due in the 8th week of the semester, will ask you to synthesize information from one or more course topics and concepts we’ve discussed so far. It will also include a mid-term evaluation of the course itself. I use this assignment to see which aspects of the course may merit more or less attention than they’ve been getting.

Research Design Paper (10%)
Later on in the semester we’ll identify some topics that are of particular interest to the group, and we’ll discuss them in class. This assignment will ask you to choose one of those topics, and provide a rudimentary study design for a research project that would test a relevant theory while leading to a practical, applied social science result.

Knowledge Application Paper (10%)
This will be done in groups of 3-4. Just before the end of the term, we’ll spend some time discussing potential applications for social and environmental psychology research findings. We will do so in the context of the topics we identified for the research discussion (or additional topics, if new enthusiasms arise among the group). The final short paper will ask you to choose one of the topics we’ve been discussing, and describe an intervention, campaign, or other application of social science research that might be developed based on research such as that discussed in this class.

In-class participation (35%): All students should participate in discussions during class.

Learning objectives
This course has two essential learning objectives and one important learning objective. These are the objectives that will appear on the IDEA evaluation. Their relevance to the course should be self-explanatory.

- Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories (essential)
- Learning to apply course material to improve thinking, problem-solving, and decisions (essential)
- Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view (important)
Calendar of topics and readings

Aug. 27  Introduction to course topics, procedures, participants
Aug. 29  Overview: Explaining/encouraging conservation behavior (Readings: 1,2)
Sept. 3   No class – Labor Day holiday
Sept. 5  Introduction to social psychology (3,4)
Sept. 10  Attitudes: the “most indispensable concept” (5)
                   First article summary due
Sept. 12  How are attitudes related to behaviors? (6, 7)
Sept. 17  Broader influences: worldviews and societal contexts (8,9)
Sept. 19  Socio-demographic correlates of attitudes and perceptions (10,11)
Sept. 24  Fostering pro-environmental behavior: Is better education the answer? (12,13)
                   Second article summary due
Sept. 26  Message content and delivery (14,15)
Oct. 1   Behavioral interventions (16,17)
Oct. 3   Insights from behavioral economics (18,19)
Oct. 8   Norms, conformity, and compliance (20,21)
                   Third article summary due
Oct. 10  Affective influences on attitudes and behavior (22,23)
Oct. 15  Introduction to environmental psychology (24)
                   Mid-Course Review paper due
Oct. 17  Nature and its role in psychological wellness (25,26)
Oct. 22  Environmental perception and its relationship to nature stewardship (27,28)
                   Fourth article summary due
Oct. 24  Place attachment (29,30)
Oct. 29  Does recreation participation enhance pro-environmental behavior? (31,32)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 31</td>
<td>Justice, equity, and trust</td>
<td>(33,34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 5</td>
<td>Fear, risk, and natural disasters</td>
<td>(35,36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Fifth article summary due</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 7</td>
<td><em>No class – instructor out of town</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 12</td>
<td>Adoption of innovations to enhance sustainability</td>
<td>(37,38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 14</td>
<td>Designing research projects (discussion and group work)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 19</td>
<td>Designing research projects (discussion and group work)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 26</td>
<td>Work in groups on research design paper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 27</td>
<td><strong>Research Design paper due (upload to Canvas) – note this is a Tuesday</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 28</td>
<td>Developing practical applications (discussion and group work)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 3</td>
<td>Developing practical applications (discussion and group work)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 5</td>
<td>Synopsis and synthesis: The role of social science in conservation</td>
<td>(39,40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 10</td>
<td><strong>Knowledge Application paper due (upload to Canvas)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reading List


