

PSY260: Psychopathology of Heroes and Villains

Course Syllabus

Section S

Spring 2025

M-F 12:30-2:45pm

Science Center 147

COURSE INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Mary Saczawa

Office: Science Center 152

Email: saczawa@hanover.edu

Phone (call or text): (812) 307-5509

Office Hours: TWTh 11:00am-12:15pm or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will use origin stories for fictional and real-life heroes and villains to illustrate concepts in developmental psychopathology. We will discuss individual differences and interpersonal relationships as predictors of prosocial and antisocial behaviors. You will learn to identify risk factors for disordered behavior and to think critically about character development based on these factors.

COURSE MATERIALS

Readings will be provided on Canvas. All assigned television shows or movies that are not available on HBOMax or Disney+ will be provided to you on Google Drive.

COURSE WEBSITE

This course will rely heavily on material posted in Canvas (<https://hanover.instructure.com/courses/1063>). There is also a Q&A board where you can ask questions about concepts, assignments, or the course in general. You are also expected to check your **Hanover email account** regularly. Regardless of whether or not you read the emails, you are responsible for their content.

(UN)GRADING

This semester, I will be using a relatively new (but actually very old) method that is referred to as “ungrading”. In short, I will not be providing grades for any of your work all semester. I will, however, be giving you lots of individualized feedback on your performance. At the midterm and at the end of the semester, I will ask you to assign yourself a grade based on your performance, and we will meet briefly to discuss each of these grades. I reserve the right to overrule your grade, but I will only do so in an extreme case.

Final grades:

Exceeds expectations: You were actively engaged with the material. You were prepared for class every day and contributed to the discussions. You provided well-informed questions and comments, and you presented well-researched case reports and profiles. (letter equivalent: A)

Meets expectations: You were actively engaged with the material. You were prepared for class most days and contributed to the discussions. You provided thoughtful questions and comments, and your presentations were well done. (letter equivalent: B)

Bare minimum: You were present in class most days, but you were often unprepared or clearly had not completed the assigned readings/viewings. You occasionally contributed to the discussion, and you completed the presentations, but your final product was not particularly well-done. (letter equivalent: C)

Fails to meet expectations: You were regularly absent from class, either physically or mentally. You did not provide meaningful contributions to the discussions, and your presentations were either not submitted or were poorly executed. (letter equivalent: F)

COURSE COMPONENTS

ASSIGNED READINGS & VIEWINGS

Most class days will have assigned articles to read and movies or television episodes to watch. The purpose of these is to give you a deeper understanding of particular aspects of developmental psychopathology. The readings will typically (but not always) be peer-reviewed journal articles. I know that these can be dense, and there will be some parts that are over your head. I work hard to assign articles that are relatively short and understandable while still being informative and thorough. Articles will be available in Canvas, and you should aim to post 1-2 comments or questions about each article in the associated discussion board. These comments/questions will be used by the day's discussion leaders to facilitate discussion, so please post them before 11am so that your classmates have a chance to review them.

I will also assign movies or television episodes that I think do a particularly good job at illustrating the day's topic. If you have seen them before, you do not need to watch them again. However, if you have not seen them, I strongly encourage you to watch them. These viewings will give you examples of the concept as well as a starting point for the discussions.

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

Given that this is a discussion-based course, your attendance and participation are vital for the whole class to succeed. I will not be grading your daily attendance or participation, but these will be considered globally when determining your final grade for the course. I recognize that you may not have something to add for every single article, but you should make an effort to contribute at least once per class period (and more than just "I agree"), and when you are not speaking, you should always be paying attention to the discussion. If you are shy or a bit uncomfortable speaking up in class, feel free to read directly from the questions or comments you posted on Canvas. If you are concerned about this component of the class, please let me know. We can figure out a way by which you can contribute to the class in a medium that you are comfortable.

LEADING DISCUSSION

You and one or two classmates will be responsible for leading discussion once during the semester. You should prepare one or more examples of origin stories that include that day's topic, and you will facilitate discussion based on your classmates' responses and your own thoughts/questions from the readings. If you have a movie/television episode/comic book you want your classmates to watch/read ahead of time, you should let me know the title and year at least one week before you lead class. If you want to show a television episode or clip (<30 minutes) in class, let me know at least 12 hours ahead of time, and I can have it queued up for you, or you can bring it and play it from your own computer.

CASE REPORT

You will pick a character and present case reports for them, either as a written document or as an in-class or virtual presentation, whichever you prefer. This should include details about the individual's background, significant events, and current behaviors. You will tie your character's behaviors into the different characteristics we have discussed all semester, highlighting factors that may have made them become the way they are or that may have helped prevent them from becoming good/evil. Your case study should include references to at least three peer-reviewed journal articles (in APA format). I will give you several example case studies so that you can see the general format and what kind of information should be included. We will work on these throughout the semester, and I will give you lots of feedback throughout the process.

REAL-LIFE PERSON PROFILES

Most of this class focuses on fictional characters, but there are many real-life heroes, villains, antiheroes, and controversial figures. This is readily apparent by the recent rise in popularity of true-crime media and biopics. You should pick one of these individuals and present their story. You can pick any real-life person **except a serial killer, cult leader, or dictator**. I want you to really think about what makes someone a hero or villain in real life, and serial killers, cult leaders, and dictators are a little too clear-cut villains.

COURSE POLICIES

STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

Your success in this course and throughout your college career depends heavily on your personal health and wellbeing. Stress is a common part of the college experience, and it often can be compounded by unexpected life changes outside the classroom. Your other professors and I strongly encourage you to take care of yourself throughout the term before the demands of midterms and finals reach their peak. Before circumstances and conditions become overwhelming, come speak with me about any difficulty you may be having that may affect your academic performance. Please know as well that there are several support services on campus available to assist you, as needed. You can make appointments with Health Services by calling x-6102. Appointments for Counseling Services can be made online at any time through [MyHanover](#).

HANOVER COLLEGE POLICIES

HONOR CODE

As stated in the Hanover College Principles, students, faculty, staff, and trustees of Hanover College seek to promote academic, personal, and moral growth within a safe, challenging, and responsive community. This includes a commitment to academic integrity. Violations of academic integrity have a broad impact on the College and will result in College review and action.

Academic dishonesty includes any action with the intent to deceive in order to obtain an unfair advantage, as well as any act of aiding and abetting academic dishonesty. Note that the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools without the direction or approval of the instructor may be considered academic dishonesty. The Hanover College statement on academic dishonesty may be found in the Catalog and in the Student Handbook. Any given instance of academic dishonesty is dealt with by the instructor of the course in which it occurs. All instances of academic dishonesty are reported to the chair of the Student Academic Assistance Committee, and repeated instances of academic dishonesty will subject a student to additional penalties up to and including dismissal from the College as outlined in the College Catalog.

DISABILITIES

Hanover College offers accessibility services to students with documented physical, visual, hearing, learning, or psychiatric disabilities. Any Hanover student is eligible for special services or accommodations if: 1) The student self-identifies that he or she has a disability and needs accommodation; 2) The student provides appropriate and verifiable documentation of the disability; and 3) The student provides notification in a timely fashion. For accessibility services, [Email Accessibility Services](#) or call 812-866-6836. The Accessibility Services (AS) office is in the Gladish Center for Teaching and Learning on the first floor of Duggan Library.

NONDISCRIMINATION

Hanover College is committed to providing equal access to its educational programs, activities, and facilities to all otherwise qualified students without discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, color, creed, religion, sex, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other category protected by applicable state or federal law. Anyone who observes or who is a victim of bias is encouraged to report incidents using the [online bias reporting forms](#). An Equal Opportunity employer, the College also affirms its commitment to nondiscrimination in its employment policies and practices. In compliance with Title IX (20 U.S.C Sec. 1681 et seq.) Hanover College prohibits sex discrimination, including sexual harassment. For student related disability discrimination concerns, contact the Gladish Center for Teaching and Learning at 812-866-6840. For other discrimination complaints, including any arising under Title IX, contact the Title IX Coordinator at 812-866-6740 or the Deputy Title IX Coordinator at 812-866-7097.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1

Monday	Course Review & Psychopathology
Tuesday	Heroes vs. Villains
Wednesday	What makes them that way?
Thursday	Neuroanatomy & Physiology
Friday	Personality

Week 2

Monday	Emotion Regulation
Tuesday	Intelligence
Wednesday	Trauma/Abuse
Thursday	Guilt
Friday	Parenting & Genetics

Week 3

Monday	Attachment
Tuesday	Grief/Loss
Wednesday	Society
Thursday	Hero Analysis
Friday	Villain Analysis

Week 4

Monday	Antihero Analysis
Tuesday	Real-Life Person Profile Presentations
Wednesday	Cults
Thursday	Nazis
Friday	Case Report Presentations