EDHD 721
Cognitive Development and Learning: An Introduction

Fall 2013
Mondays 1:00 – 3:45
Francis Scott Key Hall 0117

Instructor: Geetha Ramani, Ph.D.
Office: 3304R Benjamin Building
Office Phone: 301-405-8777
Email: gramani@umd.edu
Office Hours: By appointment

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK

COURSE DESCRIPTION
The aim of this course is to present the major theories, issues, and areas of research in cognitive development. An emphasis will be made on the application of these concepts to education, learning, and academic skills development. The course will begin with discussions of theoretical frameworks for studying cognitive development, including constructivist, sociocultural, and information processing theories. The second part of the course will focus on specific areas of cognitive development, including memory and problem-solving. The final part of the course will cover the development of academic skills, such as scientific reasoning, reading, and mathematics, as well as issues related to learning inside and outside of the classroom.

COURSE GOALS
By the end of this course, students should be able to
- Understand theoretical perspectives in cognitive development, including their strengths and weaknesses.
- Recognize the importance of the interaction between children and their environment, and how children’s thinking and learning change with age and experience.
- Develop the ability to critically evaluate scientific research and interpret research findings.
- Appreciate that scientific research in cognitive development has implications for applied issues relating to education and public policy.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Class Participation: This is a seminar course. Therefore, the entire class is responsible for reading the assigned materials closely and thoughtfully before each weekly meeting. Everyone should come to class prepared to ask questions, raise issues, and contribute to the discussion. The success of this course, in a large part, relies upon each student’s class participation. If you are unable to attend a class, please inform the instructor as soon as possible.
**Course Structure and Readings:** This is a graduate seminar with a mixture of lecture and discussion. Students are strongly encouraged to make comments, ask questions, and raise issues for discussion during the entire class period. The readings for this course consist of chapters from Bjorklund (2012) and other book chapters and journal articles related to each weekly topic. The readings are available through the University’s Blackboard website, [https://elms.umd.edu](https://elms.umd.edu). If you prefer to make Xerox copies of the readings, please let the instructor know and the readings will be placed in the EDHD mailroom. Also, please let the instructor know if you have trouble accessing any of the readings.

**Discussion Questions and Assignments:** To facilitate class discussion, each student should write two questions on the week’s reading and topic. The questions should be thought provoking and identify issues or concerns that could be covered in the class discussion. The questions could also attempt to integrate material from other readings from the class, topics from other courses, or from specific research interests. The questions should be brought to class and turned in at the end of each class. Students may also be asked to complete a brief activity/assignment related to the week’s reading to further facilitate discussion. These assignments will be announced during class and/or posted on ELMS.

**Class Presentation:** Each student will give one presentation related to a week’s topic and readings. Students will choose one empirical article for their presentation, discuss the central themes of the paper, critique the accompanying reading, and lead an active group discussion. Students can choose the format of the presentation, and may include supporting materials, such as handouts or Powerpoint slides. Presentations should be 10-15 minutes in length. All students should inform the instructor on the paper they have chosen for their presentation at least one week before the class. Students are encouraged to provide a copy of the article they will be presenting to the instructor and/or set a meeting with the instructor 1-2 weeks before their class to discuss their presentations. At least 18 hours before class, students should post their article on ELMS, although other students are not required to read it. Presenters should bring a handout of the presentation to the instructor the day of their presentation.

**Midterm Exam:** Students will be given a take-home exam and will have one week to complete it. The exam will consist of 2-3 essay questions. Midterm exam questions will be distributed at the end of class October 7th and will be due at the beginning of class on October 14th.

**Final Paper and Final Paper Presentation:** As a final paper, students will write either a review of the literature in a specific area of cognitive development or a proposal of a research study. Each student is required to submit a 1-2 paragraph description of their paper, along with a list of at least three references by November 4th. Final papers are due December 13th. Students are also required give a presentation on the final paper. All presentations will be approximately 10-15 minutes long and will take place during the last two class periods.

**GRADE SUMMARY**
- Class participation 15%
- **Midterm take home essay 25%**
- Discussion questions and assignments 15%
- Presentation 10%
- Final paper and presentation 35%
BLACKBOARD
We will be using the University's Blackboard, https://elms.umd.edu. The syllabus, additional readings, and announcements will be posted on Blackboard. Students can login to the website using your University ID and Password. Please let the instructor know if you have trouble accessing the course website.

CLASS POLICIES
Academic integrity: The University of Maryland, College Park has a student-administered Honor Code and Honor Pledge. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/whatis.html. This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. The code prohibits students from cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and plagiarism. Instances of this include submitting someone else’s work as your own, submitting your own work completed for another class without permission, or failing to properly cite information other than your own (found in journals, books, online, or otherwise). Any form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and any sign of academic dishonesty will be reported to the appropriate University officials.

Special needs: If you have a registered disability that will require accommodation, please see the instructor so necessary arrangements can be made. If you have a disability and have not yet registered with the University, please contact Disability Support Services in the Shoemaker Building (301.314.7682, or 301.405.7683 TTD) as soon as possible.

Religious observances: The University of Maryland policy on religious observances states that students not be penalized in any way for participation in religious observances. Students shall be allowed, whenever possible, to make up academic assignments that are missed due to such absences. However, the must contact the instructor before the absence with a written notification of the projected absence, and arrangements will be made for make-up work or examinations.

Course evaluations: As a member of our academic community, students have a number of important responsibilities. One of these responsibilities is to submit course evaluations each term through CourseEvalUM in order to help faculty and administrators improve teaching and learning at Maryland. All information submitted to CourseEvalUM is confidential. Campus will notify you when CourseEvalUM is open for you to complete your evaluations for fall semester courses. Please go directly to the website (www.courseevalum.umd.edu) to complete your evaluations. By completing all of your evaluations each semester, you will have the privilege of accessing online, at Testudo, the evaluation reports for the thousands of courses for which 70% or more students submitted their evaluations.

Missed single class due to illness: Once during a semester, a student’s self-authored note will be accepted as an excuse for missing a minor scheduled grading event in a single class session if the note documents the date of the illness, acknowledgement from the student that information provided in the note is correct, and a statement that the student understands that providing false
information is a violation of the Code of Student Conduct. Students are expected to attempt to inform the instructor of the illness prior to the date of the missed class.*

**Major scheduled grading events:** Major Scheduled Grading Events (MSGE) are indicated on the syllabus in bold. The conditions for accepting a self-signed note do not apply to these events. Written, signed documentation by a health care professional, or other professional in the case of non-medical reasons (see below) of a University-approved excuse for the student’s absence must be supplied. This documentation must include verification of treatment dates and the time period for which the student was unable to meet course requirements. Providers should not include diagnostic information. Without this documentation, opportunities to make up missed assignments or assessments will not be provided.

**Non-consecutive, medically necessitated absences from multiple class sessions:** Students who throughout the semester miss multiple, non-consecutive class sessions due to medical problems must provide written documentation from a health care professional that their attendance on those days was prohibited for medical reasons.

**Non-medical excused absences:** According to University policy, non-medical excused absences for missed assignments or assessments may include illness of a dependent, religious observance, involvement in University activities at the request of University officials, or circumstances that are beyond the control of the student. Students asking for excused absence for any of those reasons must also supply appropriate written documentation of the cause and make every attempt to inform the instructor prior to the date of the missed class.

---

**Note:** Readings may change or added during the semester. Changes will be announced in class or by email.

**CLASS SCHEDULE**

**September 9:** Course Overview and Introduction to Cognitive Development

Bjorklund, Chapter 1: An Introduction to Cognitive Development

**Theoretical Perspectives**

**September 16: Piaget’s Theory**

Bjorklund, Chapter 5: *Thinking in Symbols: The Development of Representation* (pp 160-185)


Optional:

**September 23: Vygotsky and Sociocultural Approach**  
Bjorklund, Chapter 3: *The Social Construction of Mind: Sociocultural Perspectives on Cognitive Development* (pp. 75-97)


Optional:  

**September 30: Core Knowledge Approach**  
Bjorklund, Chapter 4: *Infant Perception and Cognition* (pp: 102-106; pp. 129-146)  
Bjorklund, Chapter 6: *The Development of Folk Knowledge* (pp 198-229)


**October 7: Information-Processing Approaches to Development**  


Optional:  


**Midterm Distributed**
Specific Areas in Cognitive Development

October 14: Executive Function (Working Memory)
Bjorklund, Chapter 7: Learning to Think on Their Own: Executive Function, Strategies, and Problem Solving (pp: 251-265)


Optional:

Midterm Due

October 21: Problem-Solving, Strategies, and Peer Collaboration
Bjorklund, Chapter 7: Learning to Think on Their Own: Executive Function, Strategies, and Problem Solving (pp. 265-298)


Optional

October 28: Memory Development
Bjorklund, Chapter 8: Memory Development (pp 320-346).


November 4: Language and Vocabulary Development
Bjorklund, Chapter 9: *Language Development (pp 348-394).*


Optional:

*Paper Proposals Due*

**Development of Academic Skills and Learning Inside and Outside of the Classroom**

November 11: Learning to Reading and Reading Comprehension
Bjorklund Chapter 11: *Schooling and Cognition, (pp. 443-459)*


November 18: Mathematics Development
*Bjorklund Chapter 11: Development of Academic Skills, (pp. 459-480)*


November 25: Scientific Thinking and Reasoning


December 2: Student Presentations (All Final Presentation Due)

December 9: Student Presentations

December 13: Final Papers Due