**BIRKBECK, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**

**Module/Occurrence Code:** FFPS024S4DCB  
**Subject Area:** Psychology  
**Module Title:** BIOLOGICAL BASIS OF BEHAVIOUR  
**Award Designation:** Psychology (Certificate of Higher Education)  
**Level/credits:** Level 4, 30 credits  
**Class Venue:** Central London  
**First Meeting:** Thursday 12th January 2017, 7-9pm  
**No of Meetings:** 22 meetings  
**Class Dates:** 12/01/16 - 23/03/16; 27/04/16 - 06/07/16

Please note that this syllabus is provisional and subject to change prior to the class start date. Enrolled students will be notified of any changes by e-mail.

**ENTRY REQUIREMENTS**
No formal qualifications are required. However, all modules are taught at university level and students should be able to read, write and speak English fluently. Students who have not studied psychology before must undertake some preparatory reading, details of which are given below.

**AIM**
To evaluate the contribution made to human behaviour and experience by our biological heritage.

**OBJECTIVES**
- Enhance understanding of the part played by the brain and nervous system in psychological processes.
- Evaluate the lessons learned from the study of other species.
- Identify ethical problems in research with human and non-human participants.
- Give an overview of the research methods used within psychology including a basic evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of each.
- Identify the ethical issues involved when conducting research [with particular reference to harm] and the issues that arise when trying to generalise results (for example across cultures).
- Support students to take part in the assessment process.
- Support and develop students’ study skills, including note taking and essay writing.
- Build students’ confidence in presenting their own ideas and in critical thinking.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**
By the end of the course you will be able to:
- Demonstrate an understanding of the role of the brain and nervous system in psychological processes.
- Discuss what has been learned from the study of other species.
- Identify ethical problems in research with human and non-human participants.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the development of ideas within this field, and of contemporary approaches and issues.
• Describe, discuss and evaluate a range of research methodologies that might be appropriate to the study of psychology (identifying strengths and weaknesses of core methodologies, including both qualitative as well as quantitative approaches).
• Identify the ethical issues when conducting psychological research (with particular consideration of harm).
• Demonstrate an appropriate awareness of cultural considerations in the evaluation of theory and research.
• Illustrate the practical applications of research findings.
• Think critically about the subjects covered.
• Present your own ideas about issues addressed on the course.
• Discuss and implement a range of strategies to support your learning.
• Successfully plan and write essays or other assignments which have been set to support your learning on this course.

CONTENT
The structure of the brain and nervous system
The nervous system consists of around 12 thousand million interconnected nerve cells (neurons). In this part of the course we examine the structure and function of the brain and the way biochemical processes and hormones come to influence behaviour.

Evolution, adaptation and genetics
The study of behaviour involves many diverse phenomena: the action of a gene, the structure of a brain, the relation of the individual to his/her environment, and evolutionary events over millions of years. In this part of the course we will examine how far human behaviour can be accounted for in terms of evolution and genetics.

Research methods and ethics
What are the methods that physiological psychologists use? Can we justify using animals in our research?

Biological aspects of psychological processes
The biology of sleep, sex, aggression, memory and others will be considered, as will biological aspects of social life and social organisation.

It is expected that 75% of the syllabus content will be covered.

TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODS
A range of teaching methods may be used e.g. lectures on the area being studied - students are encouraged to ask questions and discuss points throughout. There may also be small group exercises with feedback to the large group to provide an opportunity for clarification of ideas and discussion. Other methods may include: videos, experiments, student presentations, discussion of published articles, etc. Students will be given help with study skills.

Credit points are used to summarise and describe the amount of learning taking place for a given module. For a 30 credit point module this equates to 300 hours most of which is comprised of independent learning. Normally 44 hours would be delivered in the classroom but it may sometimes be necessary to cover a small part of the learning by other means such as directed independent learning.

As such students should also expect to build on their learning in class by undertaking guided independent study including appropriate reading and research. Further details can be found in the appropriate Course Handbook as detailed below.

METHODS OF ASSESSMENT
Students will be expected to prepare four pieces of coursework for assessment, two of which will be written under timed conditions in the classroom. The other two may take a variety of forms such as essays, case studies, reports and possibly class presentations.
**INDICATIVE SYLLABUS**

1st Timed Essay:
w/b 27 Feb 2017

2nd Timed Essay:
w/b 12 June 2017

Regulations regarding assessment are detailed in the appropriate Course Handbook, which will be circulated electronically prior to the course start date. Students are strongly advised to read the Course Handbook prior to commencing their studies.

This module is part of the Certificate of Higher Education in Psychology. If the course is completed successfully, 30 credit points will be awarded, which may be transferred to some degree courses.

**READING**

1. **Preparatory Reading - Students New to Psychology**

If this is the first course you have taken in psychology you should read the appropriate chapter(s) from an introductory text that outline the main schools of thought within psychology and the main approaches to research methods. Particularly useful are:


You will also find it useful to read the introductory chapter to one of the following books:


2. **Preparatory Reading - All Students**

Although there is no compulsory prerequisite reading set for students who have some experience of studying psychology, students may find it helpful to do some preparatory reading before the course starts. For interested students the following text may be particularly suitable:


3. **RECOMMENDED TEXTS**

You are not expected to read all the books listed below. They are examples of books that you may find interesting or useful. Your tutor will give you further guidance once the course begins.

*Introductory books on the biological basis of behaviour:*


*More detailed or advanced books:*


MALIM, T. et al. (1996) Comparative Psychology, Palgrave Macmillan

The course lecturer may also recommend other books and reading during the course.

Please note: Psychology books are frequently revised and updated. Any recent edition would be suitable to use.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The My Birkbeck website (http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/) is your gateway to accessing all student support services at Birkbeck.

You may find the following links particularly useful:

- Obtaining your library/ID card: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/you/cards
- Accessing IT Services: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/computing/username
- Contacting our disability office: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/disability/disability-office
- Study skills support: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/support/study-skills

You can visit the My Birkbeck helpdesk on the ground floor of the main Birkbeck building on Malet Street (entry via Torrington Square). For details of opening hours visit: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/facilities/helpdesk/

You can also call the helpdesk on 020 7631 6316.

LIBRARY AND STUDY SKILLS RESOURCES

Once you have your ID card, you may use the Birkbeck library and associated resources. You may find the following web links helpful:

- For information on how best to access the resources available for psychology students through Birkbeck College Library, students may wish to work through the tutorial available at http://www.bbk.ac.uk/lib/life/
- For specific guidance for psychologists and psychology students on getting the best out the internet go to: http://www.vtstutorials.co.uk/ and search for ‘Psychology’
- For specific guidance on how to avoid plagiarism in your course work go to https://connect.le.ac.uk/p50066682/ and press the ‘play’ button.

COURSE EVALUATION

During the course students will be asked to complete an evaluation form which gives the opportunity to provide feedback on all aspects of their learning.

WHAT CAN I DO NEXT

It is important you are clear which award the module you are enrolled on counts towards. Our website provides an overview of each Certificate award so you can decide which best suits your needs: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/study/2014/certificates/subject/psychology/

Information is available on core and option modules for each Certificate. Your choice of subsequent modules you take should be informed by this information. Modules can be taken in any order although it is recommended that certain core modules are taken first. Not all core modules have to be taken in the same year. If you need further advice you can
contact the department by telephone on 0207 631 6669 or by e-mail: psychologycert@bbk.ac.uk

Revised July 2014