

**Columbia University - Spring 2026 Syllabus**  
**PSYC XXX INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES**  
**TBA at TBA**

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**Instructor:** Elif Aysimi Duman, Ph.D. (ead2145@columbia.edu)

**Office hour:** TBA

**TA:** TBA

Office hour: TBA

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**Course description and learning objectives:**

The course provides an integrative and multi-level analysis of individual differences. It moves beyond traditional definitions of personality and behavior to explore how and why people differ across a hierarchy of different influences. The course starts with an overview of how individual differences were historically examined, followed by contemporary discussions on how we define behavior, personality and health to lay the groundwork for the semester. We will then continue with a summary of fundamental measures and methodologies, followed by the contribution of developmental periods and programming to individual differences. Afterwards, we will start discussing individual differences at multiple levels, starting from the molecular and systems levels to emotional, cognitive, and motivational levels, ending with sociocultural factors and the influences of self and context. We will conclude the semester discussing the interactions between these levels and emphasize our potential for change.

**Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:**

- Attain a contemporary perspective towards understanding individual differences that is interdisciplinary and highly dynamic.
- Describe, compare and connect the contributions of different levels to individual differences.
- Critically think about the latest concepts related to individual differences and connect them with behavior and health.
- Critically evaluate the contribution of these current perspectives into different areas of psychology.
- Apply course content to inform understanding of their lives and relationships better and plan for the future.

**Prerequisites:** PSYC 1001 Introduction to Psychology is required. An additional course in neuroscience or personality is recommended.

**Course readings:** There is no textbook for this course. For every class, we will have readings in the form of book chapters and scientific articles. These will be posted on Courseworks. Lecture slides will be posted on Courseworks after class.

**Course grading and policies:**

Since the course focuses on individual differences, attendance and participation in lectures will be critical to your understanding. Students are expected to attend class and participate regularly. In case you will not be able to attend, you should notify me and your TA asap to guide you on how to catch up with the material/assignments missed. If you are experiencing any difficulty that influences your attendance and/or performance in the course, please notify me asap to find a solution together.

In addition to attendance and participation in discussions, we will have in-class activities and take-home assignments to facilitate your learning. In total, **10% of your grade** will come from these activities and assignments. There will be no make-up for in-class activities. For take-home assignments, in case of late submissions, 20% of your grade will be deducted for every 24 hours after the deadline.

The course will include **3 non-cumulative exams**, with each exam contributing to **25% of your grade**. Exams will consist of different types of questions like fill in the blanks, matching, multiple choice and essay questions. The class before each exam will be devoted to reviewing the material to facilitate your learning and studies for the exam. Make-up exams will *only* be given with a documented legitimate excuse (e.g. Doctor's note, Advising Dean's email). Students should request for make-up exams as soon as they can so that necessarily planning can be done and make-up exams would be completed the latest within a week after the original exam.

In order to strengthen your understanding and skills to analyze and interpret individual differences in real life, students will complete a final assignment that includes conducting an interview with someone and writing an analysis paper (4-5 pages excluding references; due last lecture). This paper will focus on individual differences of the interviewee with contributions of different levels as well as developmental processes, sociocultural factors and context, which can be complemented with comparisons with the interviewer. A detailed description of this assignment will be posted on Courseworks together with the grading criteria. We will also discuss your plans about these interviews during the semester so that you would start planning early. This analysis paper will be worth **15% of your grade**. In case of late submissions, 10% of your grade will be deducted for every 24 hours after the deadline.

<b>Participation, in-class activities, discussions</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Exams (25% each)</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>Interview &amp; analysis assignment</b>	<b>15%</b>

**Academic integrity:** Please review Columbia's policy on academic integrity at [www.college.columbia.edu/faculty/resourcesforinstructors/academicintegrity/statement](http://www.college.columbia.edu/faculty/resourcesforinstructors/academicintegrity/statement). All students are expected to avoid plagiarism in all submitted work. All essay assignments will be checked for plagiarism. If you have questions about avoiding plagiarism, please contact me at the beginning of the semester. In case of plagiarism, you will receive 0 points for that assignment, and you will be reported to the Dean of Student Affairs. If you need assistance in writing, I highly recommend contacting the Writing Center ([www.college.columbia.edu/core/uwp/writing-center](http://www.college.columbia.edu/core/uwp/writing-center)). In case you experience any difficulties or time pressure, please contact me to find a solution rather than violating your academic integrity to prevent its serious consequences on your academic career.

**Academic support:** If you request any consideration regarding a disability, please inform me and Office for Disability Services (ODS) at the beginning of the semester and we would be happy to accommodate all the necessary arrangements. You can find how to register with ODS from <https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services> or 212-854-2388.

### **Curriculum fulfillment:**

This lecture course is designed for undergraduates majoring in Psychology or Neuroscience & Behavior or Cognitive Science. It fulfills the following degree requirements:

- For the Psychology major in Columbia College and in the School of General Studies, it will fulfill the special elective requirement.
- For the neuroscience and behavior major it will fulfill the P4 requirement.
- For the Cognitive Science major, it will fulfill the Psychology course requirement.

<b>PSYC XXX INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES</b>	
<b>Week</b>	<b>Content</b>
<b>1</b>	Course overview / Foundations of Individual Differences Understanding Behavior, Personality and Health

2	Understanding Behavior, Personality and Health Measurement & Methodology
3	Developmental Effects Developmental Effects: Developmental Programming
4	<b>Exam 1 Review</b> <b>Exam 1</b>
5	Molecular Level: Behavioral Genetics Molecular Level: Gene-Environment Interactions
6	Molecular Level: Epigenetics Molecular Level: Epigenetics
7	Systems Level: Nervous and Endocrine Systems Systems Level: Nervous and Endocrine Systems
8	<b>Exam 2 Review</b> <b>Exam 2</b>
9	<i>Spring break</i> <i>Spring break</i>
10	Systems Level: Other Systems Systems Level: Other Systems
11	Emotional-Motivational-Cognitive Levels Emotional-Motivational-Cognitive Levels
12	Sociocultural Level Self and Context Effects
13	<b>Exam 3 Review</b> <b>Exam 3</b>
14	Individual Differences: Focusing on Change Making Connections: Final wrap-up and discussion of interviews
* Schedule is subject to change anytime during the semester.	

### Article Assignments:

#### Week 2

Cuthbert, B. N. (2022). Research domain criteria (RDoC): progress and potential. *Current directions in psychological science*, 31(2), 107-114.

#### Week 3

Heim, C. M., Entringer, S., & Buss, C. (2019). Translating basic research knowledge on the biological embedding of early-life stress into novel approaches for the developmental programming of lifelong health. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, *105*, 123-137.

### **Week 5**

Plomin, R., DeFries, J. C., Knopik, V. S., & Neiderhiser, J. M. (2016). Top 10 replicated findings from behavioral genetics. *Perspectives on psychological science*, *11*(1), 3-23.

Virolainen, S. J., VonHandorf, A., Viel, K. C., Weirauch, M. T., & Kottyan, L. C. (2023). Gene-environment interactions and their impact on human health. *Genes & Immunity*, *24*(1), 1-11.

### **Week 6**

Meaney, M. J. (2010). Epigenetics and the biological definition of gene× environment interactions. *Child development*, *81*(1), 41-79.

Scorza, P., Duarte, C. S., Hipwell, A. E., Posner, J., Ortin, A., Canino, G., ... & Program Collaborators for Environmental influences on Child Health Outcomes. (2019). Research review: intergenerational transmission of disadvantage: epigenetics and parents' childhoods as the first exposure. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *60*(2), 119-132.

### **Week 10**

Pariante, C. M. (2017). Why are depressed patients inflamed? A reflection on 20 years of research on depression, glucocorticoid resistance and inflammation. *European neuropsychopharmacology*, *27*(6), 554-559.

Pariante, C. M. (2021). Increased inflammation in depression: a little in all, or a lot in a few?. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *178*(12), 1077-1079.

### **Week 11**

Sandel-Fernandez, D. B., Pearlstein, J. G., Swerdlow, B. A., & Johnson, S. L. (2023). Who disengages from emotion and when? An EMA study of how urgency and distress intolerance relate to daily emotion regulation. *Emotion*, *23*(4), 1102.

### **Week 12**

Terrana, A., & Al-Delaimy, W. (2023). A systematic review of cross-cultural measures of resilience and its promotive and protective factors. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, *60*(4), 733-750.