

## PS336 Psychology, Society, and Human Values (5 ECTS)

**Module Coordinator:** Prof. Brian Hughes

**Description:** In wider society, observers often look to psychology to inform debates on contentious issues. However, it is often overlooked that psychologists themselves will have views on such issues, and/or personality characteristics and ethical dispositions that affect their production and interpretation of psychological knowledge. Further, there are considerable limits on the extent to which empirical scholarship in psychology can or should be considered to be of definitive relevance in debates on public interest issues. Finally, many of the issues relevant to public debate or social policy that psychologists study are also studied by scholars in other academic disciplines. This module is intended to provide an analysis of: (a) the role of personal values in the production of psychological scholarship; (b) how ethical values might be applied by psychologists; (c) whether psychologists should be seen as 'honest brokers', 'issue advocates', 'science arbiters', or 'pure scientists'; (d) the strengths and limitations of empirical research in public debate; and (e) the relationship between psychology and disciplines cognate to it. Throughout the module, students will be guided in considering specific areas of controversy where psychological expertise is often seen as pertinent (for example, right-to-life politics, religion, libertarianism, child-rearing, gay marriage and adoption, multiculturalism, etc.).

### Module objectives

Following the module, it is intended that students will be able to:

- Appreciate the role of empirical psychology in shedding light on issues of popular concern to society at large
- Acknowledge the role of cultural and personal values in the discipline of psychology
- Critique the assertions of public and academic commentators on social issues that fall under the purview of psychology
- Evaluate the relationships between psychology and other academic disciplines that consider social issues

### Basic Reading

- There is no required textbook for this module. Suitable readings lists relating to the various class exercises will be recommended over the course of the semester.

### Evaluation

Continuous assessment, based on in-class participation, participation in online discussion forums, and on three submitted assignments. Submission dates for these assignments will be spread across term and will be dependent, in part, on the number of students enrolled for the module.