Psy 101, Section 004H

Course webpage:  msu.edu/~ema/psy101
Instructor:  Dr. Erik Altmann

What is psychology?

• Study of behavior and mental processes
  – Behavior is directly observable
  – Mental processes are not directly observable
    • Need behavior to make inferences about them
• Interpreting behavior correctly is difficult
  – Ambiguous: Many possible explanations
  – Situational: Have to consider the context
  – Variable: Differs across people and time

President Bush was in California on 1/5/02, answering questions.

Questioner:  What was the first thing that went through your head when you heard that a plane crashed into the first building?

The President:
[Discusses his education program.]
... Anyway, I was sitting there, and my Chief of Staff—well, first of all, when we walked into the classroom, I had seen this plane fly into the first building. There was a TV set on. And you know, I thought it was a pilot error and I was amazed that anybody could make such a terrible mistake.

(Greenberg, 2004)
Psychological research

- Involves a research question and a research design
  - Just like any other research
  - In psychology, questions and designs are diverse
- Examples of research questions:
  - A tour of the MSU Psych department...

MSU Psychology programs

- Behavioral Neuroscience
- Clinical*
- Cognition & Cognitive Neuroscience*
- Ecological-Community
- Organizational
- Social/Personality*
  * - Found in most psych departments

Behavioral Neuroscience

- Focuses on model systems
- Juli Wade
  - How do hormones and genes contribute to the development of behavioral and anatomical differences between the sexes...
  ... in zebra finches and lizards?

Clinical

- Focuses on psychopathology
- Brooke Ingersoll
  - What are developmental signs of autism? What are useful interventions?
- Kelly Klump
  - What are genetic, neurobiological, and environmental causes of eating disorders? How do these factors interact?

Cognition & Cognitive Neuroscience

- Focuses on mechanisms of thought
- Erik Altmann
  - How to task interruptions affect rates of procedural error?
- Zach Hambrick
  - Is there a role for talent in skilled performance? (yes)
  Does cognitive training work? (there’s no good evidence)

Ecological-Community

- Focuses on social problems in real-world communities
- Rebecca Campbell
  - How do legal, medical, and mental-health systems respond to the needs of rape survivors?
### Organizational

- Focuses on work performance in organizations
- **Steve Kozlowski**
  - How do trainees interact with training technologies? How do teams adapt to long-duration missions?

### Social/Personality

- **Social**: Focuses on individual in context
- **Personality**: Focuses on stable characteristics of the individual
- **Joe Cesario**
  - How does a person’s race and class, and dangerousness of the neighborhood, influence an observer’s assessment of danger?