

PSY-460 Senior Research Seminar

Course & Instructor Information

Class meetings: “Tuesdays, 3:10 – 4:35 PM” per the registrar — but this seminar runs as an independent study. We meet as a full group in Week 1 only; thereafter, each student meets with me individually for at least 30 minutes each week (in person; time arranged at our first meeting).

Professor: Michael W. Magee, Ph.D. Office: Lorenzo Hall, Top Floor

Office hours: by appointment (in person / Zoom) Email: mwmagee@sjny.edu

Course website: coolpsychology.com/psy460 — the weekly guide, core readings with summaries, templates, and handouts live there.

Course Description

The senior psychology major will select a specific topic of interest in the field of psychology for critical and intensive investigation. The student will review the psychological literature on the chosen topic, generate an original research question, and plan a method of research and an appropriate statistical analysis to further investigate the problem. Upon permission of the faculty member, a theoretical thesis may be undertaken.

Course Objectives

Students will select a topic of interest in the field of psychology for critical and intensive investigation, and will submit a written research proposal that conforms to APA style guidelines and SJNY senior thesis requirements. Creating the proposal requires reviewing the psychological literature on the chosen topic, generating an original research question, designing a feasible research study, and planning the appropriate statistical analyses — all while adhering to ethical principles regarding the use of human and/or animal subjects.

Specific objectives include providing you with the ability to...

- Summarize, organize, and critically analyze the empirical and theoretical literature in a self-selected content area of psychology.
- Generate and logically support an original hypothesis relevant to that content.
- Design an appropriate research method and procedures for testing that hypothesis, including specifications for sample selection, operational definitions of variables, needed manipulation and/or control procedures, and statistical analysis of results.
- Incorporate ethical principles in the design of this research.
- Produce an extensive and well-written thesis proposal according to APA guidelines, including the following chapters: Introduction, Review of the Literature, Method, Results, and References.

Readings

The core readings for this course — Bem’s *Writing the Empirical Journal Article*, Baumeister and Leary’s (1997) *Writing Narrative Literature Reviews*, and three chapters from Landrum (2020) — are provided in full on the course website, each with a summary of its main points. Read the summary first; download the full text when you need to go deeper. Readings are assigned in the weeks where you will use them (see schedule).

Reference texts:

- Landrum, R. E. (2020). *Undergraduate writing in psychology: Learning to tell the scientific story* (3rd ed.). American Psychological Association. (Chapters 4–6 provided on the course website)
- American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). (APA Style materials also provided on Canvas)
- Galvan, J. L., & Galvan, M. C. (2017). *Writing literature reviews: A guide for students of the social and behavioral sciences* (7th ed.). Routledge. (Recommended)

Course Evaluation

This course will not be graded by accumulating points or percentages on various assignments. Instead, I will evaluate your work *holistically*, taking into account everything I have observed about your progress across the semester, not just the final paper submission. This is your (3-credit) capstone course, and it comes with the expectation that you spend at least 6–8 hours each week working on your seminar paper outside of our meetings.

At the end of the semester, your grade will represent the whole story of your participation in this seminar. If you show up prepared, engage fully, take feedback seriously, and do your very best, you can earn an A — regardless of whether your paper looks “better” or “different” than another student’s. This is not a contest for who writes the “best” thesis, but a challenge to discover how deeply you can invest in your own project. I will be checking in with you the entire semester about where you stand; there will be no surprises.

In short: no spreadsheets of points, no anxiety about percentages. Just steady effort, authentic engagement in the research process, and a paper you can be proud of.

Organization of Materials: Your Seminar Docs & Research Journal

All of the writing you do for this course — your research journal, every draft, and the final proposal — happens in Google Docs that I create and share with you from my own account. The files live in my Drive; you have full editing access all semester, and I retain access to every document, including its complete revision history. Work only in the Docs I share with you: please do not draft in a separate document, in another app, or in your own copy and paste the result in. Your revision history is part of how I evaluate your work — it shows your writing developing across the week, which is exactly what the holistic grade rewards. Text that arrives in large pasted blocks with no drafting history cannot be evaluated as your writing and will be treated as unauthorized (see the AI policy). It is fine to paste a passage from a published paper into the reference tab of your journal — but label it as such. Pasted text is never your writing.

Your seminar Docs include your research journal. Each week, before your meeting, use the journal to keep a comprehensive record of all that you have done that week — searches run, articles read, sections drafted, problems hit — ending with at least two concrete goals for the following week. Journal entries cannot be written after the fact: they are the preparation for our meeting, and they are how I watch your project develop.

Weekly Meetings

Each week you will meet with me in person — for at least 30 minutes — for a conversation about your progress. Be well-prepared: one of the most important aspects of this course is showing that you have a real understanding of your topic and the articles you have been reading. These conversations matter more to your final grade than any single document you submit, because they are where you present the arguments you will make in your proposal and support them with evidence. I will also consider how you work — whether you space your work across the week or write in one blast the night before — along with the quality of your written work, the seriousness of your engagement, and the effort you put into meeting your own goals.

Weekly Skill Assignments

Each week teaches one concrete research skill — database searching, dissecting an article, building a synthesis matrix, finding validated measures, power analysis, and so on — and each week’s assignment is that skill applied to your own topic. Nothing in this course is busywork: every assignment produces a piece of your final proposal,

and the sequence of assignments IS the paper, built one skill at a time. See the schedule below and the course website for details.

Managing Your Sources: Your Capstone Notebook (NotebookLM)

Alongside your seminar Docs, you will maintain a **capstone notebook in NotebookLM** (notebooklm.google.com, free) — one notebook, created in Week 2, holding the full-text PDF of every source in your project, each renamed to its APA citation. NotebookLM is *grounded*: it answers questions using only the sources you upload and cites the passage each claim came from, which makes it a legitimate tool for organizing your literature, checking your comprehension after you read, and fact-checking your own claims against your own sources. It is a filing cabinet that answers questions — not a reader and not a writer. Create it with your SJNY Google account (the University's license covers NotebookLM) and share it with me — mwmagee@sjny.edu, Viewer access — by the end of Week 2. Like your seminar Docs, your notebook is a window I can check in on; keep it current all semester. Its output is AI output: it belongs in your AI log and never in your paper (see the AI policy). Full setup steps and week-by-week guidance live on the course website: coolpsychology.com/psy460/notebooklm.html.

The Research Proposal

Literature Review

Your proposal begins with a substantial literature review (minimum 1,500 words — about six double-spaced pages) engaging at least 15 peer-reviewed references from the last 20 years. The review is the foundation of your thesis: it shows not only that you have read deeply but that you can organize, synthesize, and critique existing research. You will first submit a draft for detailed feedback. The real goal is not perfection on the first try but growth across drafts — how thoughtfully you revise, strengthen your argument, and refine your writing. Mastery of APA style is part of this process.

Method, Expected Results, and Discussion

After your literature review, you will draft the remaining sections: Method, Expected Results (with proposed analyses and a graph of predicted results), and Discussion. As before, your first submission is a chance to get detailed feedback, and your revisions should show responsiveness, clarity, and growing sophistication in thinking through research design. These sections demonstrate that you can propose a feasible, ethical, well-reasoned study — not that you get everything “right” the first time.

Complete Manuscript

Your final submission is a polished APA-style research proposal: Title Page, Abstract, Literature Review, Method, Expected Results (with proposed analyses and at least one figure), General Discussion (based on predicted results), References, Tables, and Appendices. **Your final submission must pass a TurnItIn plagiarism check. A complete first draft of the manuscript MUST be submitted by Wednesday, November 25 — the Wednesday before Thanksgiving break. No exceptions.**

Evaluation Philosophy

Instead of counting points, I evaluate your proposal holistically, weighing:

- **Growth across drafts:** how much your work improves as you revise.
- **Effort and persistence:** whether you set meaningful goals and worked toward them consistently.
- **Clarity and craft:** logical flow, conciseness, and attention to detail in your writing.
- **Engagement with research:** the depth and originality with which you synthesize prior literature, hypotheses, and design.
- **Methodological soundness and ethics:** how thoughtfully you design and justify your study, with attention to participants' rights and well-being.

If you lean into the process — reading widely, writing honestly, revising carefully, and bringing your best effort — your work will reflect it, and your grade will, too.

Semester Schedule (Fall 2026)

Dates may shift slightly with the official SJNY academic calendar. Full detail for every week — skills, readings, and assignment specifications — lives on the course website: coolpsychology.com/psy460

Wk	Date	Skill / focus	Deliverable
1	Tue Sep 15	GROUP MEETING. How the capstone works; how to read a scientific article	Three candidate topics with rationale
2	Week of Sep 21	Database searching (PsycINFO, Google Scholar); search-term matrix; capstone notebook setup (NotebookLM)	Search log + 10 candidate articles, loaded into your capstone notebook and shared with me (Viewer). TOPIC LOCKED
3	Week of Sep 28	Dissecting an empirical article: aims, sample, IVs/DVs, findings, limitations	Two article-dissection worksheets
4	Week of Oct 5	Synthesis matrix; finding the gap. Reading: Baumeister & Leary (1997)	Synthesis matrix (8–10 sources) + gap statement
5	Week of Oct 12	From gap to research question and hypothesis. Reading: Bem summary	One-page problem statement + hypothesis
6	Week of Oct 19	Outlining the funnel-shaped literature review. Reading: Landrum Ch. 5	Literature review outline, citations mapped
7	Week of Oct 26	Writing with style. Reading: Landrum Ch. 4	LITERATURE REVIEW, DRAFT 1 (min. 1,500 words, 15+ refs)
8	Week of Nov 2	Measurement: finding validated scales; reliability and validity	Scales table (constructs, instruments, reliability, cites)
9	Week of Nov 9	Design, operationalization, and research ethics (IRB basics)	Method blueprint
10	Week of Nov 16	Analysis plan and power (G*Power); graphing expected results	LITERATURE REVIEW REVISION + analysis plan with mock graph
11	Week of Nov 23	Telling the whole story: Method, Expected Results, Discussion. Reading: Landrum Ch. 6	METHOD / EXPECTED RESULTS / DISCUSSION DRAFT
—	Wed Nov 25	HARD DEADLINE	COMPLETE FIRST DRAFT of full manuscript — no exceptions
—	Nov 26–29	No meetings — Thanksgiving break	
12	Week of Nov 30	APA formatting pass against the manuscript rubric	FULL REVISION of complete proposal
13	Week of Dec 7	Final check-in and submission checklist	FINAL THESIS due finals week, with complete AI log

Every week, regardless: your research journal entry is due in your seminar folder before your meeting.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tool Usage Policy

This course uses a **disclosed-use policy with an AI log**. You may use AI tools for defined support tasks — explaining a concept you are stuck on, brainstorming search terms, checking your understanding of a statistical

test, or flagging APA formatting errors for you to fix — provided every use is disclosed. The required capstone notebook (NotebookLM) falls under this policy: storing sources, locating which source said what, checking your comprehension after reading, and fact-checking your claims against your sources are sanctioned uses — with substantive queries logged. Notebook output is AI output; pasting or paraphrasing it into your work is never permitted.

What is never permitted: submitting AI-generated prose, summaries, analyses, or ideas as your own, in any draft, journal entry, or assignment. The thinking and the writing in this capstone must be yours; that is the entire point of the course.

The AI log: keep a running document in your seminar folder with one entry per AI interaction: the date, the tool, what you asked, and what you did with the output. Submit the log with every draft. An honest log entry is never penalized. Your Doc's revision history is part of this system: because every draft lives in a Doc I own, steady, visible drafting is the easiest way to show that the work is yours.

Undisclosed AI use is unauthorized use. Any work crafted by AI tools in unauthorized ways — even in part — will be treated as plagiarism under SJNY academic integrity policies: a report to the Academic Dean and a zero for the assignment; a repeat infraction means failure of the course. If any part of this is confusing or uncertain, please reach out for a conversation before submitting your work.

Classroom Policies

Email expectations: Check your university email with great frequency — it is my preferred method of communication. Configure Canvas to email you immediately whenever announcements are made.

Canvas expectations: Canvas will be used for communication, course materials, and submissions. Enter Canvas through the SJC Portal, go to ACCOUNT → NOTIFICATIONS, and make sure Canvas emails you IMMEDIATELY whenever an announcement is made. There is no excuse for “not seeing” something posted to Canvas.

Communicating with your professor: Please don't hesitate to speak with me, especially if you are having difficulty. The most reliable way to reach me is via email or during office hours. I do not respond to emails I do not recognize — put the course name and section in the subject line (e.g., PSY-460-B02). Email is a formal means of communication with your professors.

A note on reaching me: I read and answer email, and I want to be responsive to you — but expecting a response instantly is not reasonable. Please allow at least 24 hours on weekdays for a reply before following up; and know that an email sent Friday evening may not get an answer until Monday. Also...I go offline at 9:00 PM each evening (because I get up at 5:45 AM!), so anything sent after that I will not see until the next day. If you write me at 10 PM the night before something is due, my answer will arrive too late to help you. This is not me ignoring you — it is how I stay rested enough to teach you well. Ask early and you will always hear back.

Absences / late / missed assignment policy: Nothing will be accepted late. Journal entries and drafts are deadline-sensitive because they are the preparation for our meetings: miss the deadline, miss the momentum — and your evaluation reflects consistency.

Academic integrity: The University expects students to observe academic integrity in all aspects of their academic life, including the conduct of their examinations, assignments, and research. All members of the University community share the responsibility of creating a climate of academic integrity, based on fairness to others and respect for oneself. Violations are treated very seriously. Plagiarism (the act of copying, stealing, or representing the ideas or words of another as one's own without giving credit to the source), cheating on examinations, and all forms of academic dishonesty are forbidden. Students found guilty of such behavior are subject to appropriate disciplinary action, which will include a reduction in grade and possible failure of the course, suspension, or expulsion.

Student Accessibility Services

St. Joseph's University, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), provides assistance and resources to students with disabilities. If you have a documented physical, psychological, cognitive, and/or medical disability and require accommodations, please contact the Office of Student Accessibility Services, McEntegart Hall Room 300A: Coordinator Hannah Singer, 718.940.5859, hsinger@sjny.edu. It is the student's responsibility to communicate with faculty members; all information is kept confidential.

Wellness

All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. There are many helpful resources available on campus, and an important part of the college experience is learning how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is almost always helpful.

If you or anyone you know experiences academic stress, difficult life events, or feelings like anxiety or depression, we strongly encourage you to seek support. The Office of Counseling and Wellness is here to help: 718-940-5853, bkwellness@sjny.edu, or the BK Path to Wellness appointment link on the SJNY website. Consider also reaching out to a friend, faculty member, or family member you trust for help getting connected to support.