UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

SYLLABUS DEL CORSO

Experimental Clinical Psychology and Principles of Ethics

2526-1-F5109P006

Learning area

Applied Experimental Psychological Sciences

Learning objectives

Knowledge and understanding

• Clinical psychological sciences: Methods and areas of investigation

• Research designs for treatment evaluation

• Experimental psychopathology: Investigating abnormal behavior, cognition, and emotion

• Professional ethics for psychologists

Applying knowledge and understanding

• Understanding, analysis, and evaluation of research designs in clinical psychology

• Identifying and analyzing the critical elements of research designs for treatment evaluation

• Applying experimental paradigms for the investigation of abnormal behavior, cognition, and emotion

• Applying the principles of professional ethics for psychologists

Making judgement
Students will develop the ability to independently analyze and critically evaluate research designs used in clinical

psychology, with particular focus on treatment evaluation and experimental psychopathology. They will be able to integrate methodological knowledge with ethical considerations and apply this to assess scientific papers, experimental paradigms, and empirical data. This competence will be fostered through critical discussions, group work, and individual assignments focused on treatment efficacy and research methods.

Communication skills
Students will acquire communication skills that enable them to effectively present complex scientific concepts related to clinical psychological research and experimental psychopathology. Through oral presentations, group discussions, and written assignments, students will learn to use appropriate technical language, engage in constructive academic dialogue, and communicate their ideas clearly to both specialist and broader academic audiences.

Learning skills
The course promotes autonomous and continuous learning by encouraging students to critically engage with current scientific literature, including international research articles and clinical materials. Students will develop strategies for effective bibliographic research and critical review, fostering the ability to update and deepen their knowledge in clinical psychological sciences and professional ethics, thus supporting lifelong learning and professional growth.

Contents

Clinical psychological research is often concerned with investigating the causes of abnormal behavior, cognition, and emotion or with its treatment. A range of study designs can be used to identify causes of illness and to evaluate treatments, and Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) have rapidly become the gold standard for evidence-based treatments. In this course we will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different treatment evaluation designs. Furthermore, experimental psychopathology represents a subfield of psychological science aimed at elucidating the processes underlying abnormal behavior. In this course we will review key elements of experimental psychopathology research and its methods. We will analyze different experimental paradigms, with a particular focus on Experience Sampling Methods (ESMs). Finally, principles of professional ethics for psychologists will be presented.

Detailed program

- Methodological and design considerations central to the scientific evaluation of treatment efficacy and effectiveness

- Strengths and weaknesses of different treatment evaluation designs (recent developments in psychotherapy research will be used as examples)

- Experimental psychopathology as a way to elucidate the processes underlying abnormal behavior.

- Methodological approaches and paradigms employed in experimental psychopathology research.

- The Experience Sampling Method (ESM) as a way to improve our understanding of how psychopathological symptoms unfold over time in everyday life.

- Professional ethics for psychologists

Prerequisites

A background in abnormal psychology and basic knowledge of psychotherapeutic interventions will help in understanding the course content. Students lacking such basic knowledge are encouraged to ask for a list of basic references.

Teaching methods

The course will be held in person. Teaching will consist of lecture-based lessons (60% of the course), and interactive classwork, discussion on scientific papers, group work and assignments (40% of the course). All lessons will contain at least a part of interaction with students. Smartphone apps (e.g., Socrative) that allow students to respond in real time to open or closed questions will be used. All course material (e.g., slides, readings) are made available to all students on the e-learning page of the course.

Assessment methods

The exam will verify the level of mastery of the course contents with special attention to:

- Methods and research designs for treatment evaluation;
- Methods and research designs in experimental psychopathology;
- Ability to elaborate course contents;
- Ability to analyze a scientific paper in the field of clinical psychology.
- Ability to apply professional ethics for psychologists.

The exam will consist of multiple choice questions and open-ended questions on the course topics. The multiple-choice questions aim to ascertain the student's preparation; the open questions aim to evaluate the ability to think critically and create links between the acquired knowledge.

For students willing to benefit from this opportunity, the examination could be replaced by activities to be held during term time. These will consist of:

- Mid-term assignment: Project work on development and presentation of a research project in clinical psychology (20% of final grade)
- End-term assignment: Critical analysis of a scientific paper (30% of final grade) consisting in an individual essay.
- End-term multiple choice test on course content (50% of final grade)

More details will be provided during the course.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

The bibliography will be provided at the beginning of the course and published in the course web-site.

Sustainable Development Goals