UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Applied Social Cognition To Public Policies

2627-2-F9202P015

Learning area

APPLIED EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES

Learning objectives

Knowledge and understanding

Students will develop a solid understanding of how individual, social, and societal factors influence cognitive processes and behaviors. The course explores major socio-cognitive theories that explain human actions in social contexts, as well as the role of attitudes, values, and belief systems in shaping behavior. Students will also gain familiarity with a range of intervention techniques and research methods used to analyze and address real-world social issues.

Applying knowledge and understanding

Students will learn to apply socio-cognitive knowledge to real-world problems by understanding, analyzing, and evaluating research designs aimed at addressing societal challenges. They will explore diverse applied contexts—such as political, public health, environmental behavior, and technology use—and learn to use various methodological approaches and paradigms. Through critical examination of applied research examples, students will develop practical skills for designing and implementing evidence-based interventions.

Making Judgements

Students will develop critical thinking and independent judgment through the analysis of empirical studies, the evaluation of socio-cognitive interventions in policy contexts, and the preparation of reports on real-world societal issues. Activities will include classroom discussions, critique of case studies, and the interpretation of research findings. The exam format—open-ended questions in the form of short essays—further supports the development of

these skills by encouraging reflective and evidence-based reasoning.

Communication Skills

Students will enhance their ability to communicate complex concepts effectively through group discussions and the written articulation of research-based arguments, particularly through the development of a group project addressing an applied research question. The use of open-ended essay questions in the final exam also reinforces written communication skills, with a focus on clarity, structure, and relevance when presenting ideas and evaluating the societal impact of socio-cognitive processes and interventions.

Learning Skills

Students will acquire conceptual and methodological tools that support independent learning beyond the course. By engaging with academic literature, case analyses, and different methodological techniques they will be prepared to autonomously deepen their expertise in applied social cognition and its relevance to public decision-making.

Contents

The course will provide an overview of domains in which socio-cognitive theories and research have been applied outside the laboratory to influence public policies. The course will be devoted to examining a sample of behavioral domains and contexts in which applied research has made contributions. These include political issues (e.g., reducing inequalities and improving intergroup relations), psychological and physical health (e.g., promotion and prevention behaviors, vaccination behavior), environmental concerns (e.g., climate change), mass media effects (e.g., scientific misinformation and conspiracy beliefs). Practical problems and ethical issues unique to the applied research will be considered.

Detailed program

- Understanding social issues through applied social cognition
- Beliefs' system and attitudes
- Focus on models of attitude and behavior prediction
- Interventions and public policies
- Behavioral intervention strategies
- Interventions based on social influence
- Implementation and analysis of researches applied to the different behavioral domains: politics, health, environment, social media, and other new technologies.
- Thematic sessions: scientific misinformation; conspiracy beliefs; vaccination behavior; climate change; food psychology

Prerequisites

No previous knowledge is required. Good knowledge of the basis of Social Psychology enables a more informed fruition of the course contents. Students without such background knowledge are encouraged to request a list of basic references.

Teaching methods

The course will be held in presence. Teaching will consist of lecture-based lessons, and also interactive classwork with discussion of scientific articles, videos' presentations and comments, practical exercises, and discussions on the course topics. The course material (slides and, when possible, scientific articles) will be made available on the e-learning site of the course so that also non-attending students can use it.

Students will be given the opportunity to deepen a topic of the course through an assignment (e.g., project development) analyzing applied research of public interest.

Assessment methods

The exam is written (computer exam in the lab via the Moodle EsamiOnline Bicocca) with six open-ended questions (equivalent to concise essays) to answer in 90 minutes. The questions aim to ascertain the effective acquisition of socio-cognitive theories and methods to solve societal issues.

The evaluation criteria are:

- Correctness and theoretical relevance of the answers;
- Critical reasoning and the ability to construct well-founded arguments;
- Ability to create meaningful connections among the topics;
- Clarity of expression and coherence in presenting ideas.

Participation in optional activities (see teaching methods) contributes to the final evaluation.
Special attention will also be devoted to the acquisition of methods and measurement tools in applied social cognition field and the ability to analyze a scientific paper in the field.

Textbooks and Reading Materials

Mandatory reading material (research articles) will be made available by the professor during the course on the e-learning page of the course.

RECOMMENDED READING:
Maio, G. R., Haddock, G., &; Verplanken, B. (2018). The psychology of attitudes and attitude change. Sage Publications Limited. (only chapters indicated on the e-learning page).

Sustainable Development Goals

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | GENDER EQUALITY | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES | RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION | CLIMATE ACTION | PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS