COURSE SYLLABUS

Psychology of Human Cooperation

Course code: PSY 325/525
Semester and year: Fall 2025
Classroom: 3.26
Day and time: Wednesday 15:00 – 17:45
Instructor: Dr. Joshua Hayden
Instructor contact: Joshua.hayden@aauni.edu
Consultation hours: Mondays 9-11; Tuesdays 13-16; Fridays 13-15 and by appointment

Credits US/ECTS	3/6	Level	Introductory
Length	15 weeks	Pre-requisite	Introduction to Psychology
Contact hours	42 hours	Course type	Bachelor Required/GEC

1. Course Description

Cooperation is necessary to solve many of our most pressing challenges – including depletion of natural resources, managing global pandemics, and effective policy making. By studying the psychological processes underlying cooperation we gain knowledge that can help us create environments and institutions which will be more successful in tackling societal challenges. The main goal of the course is to introduce students to the psychological processes of human cooperation. This course draws on theories and empirical findings from social, cognitive and developmental psychology, and behavioral economics.

The course will address questions such as:
- What are the evolutionary roots of human cooperation?
- How does prosocial behavior develop in children?
- What are the major strengths and weaknesses of human cooperation?
- Which factors support interpersonal and group cooperation?
- What is the role of communication and leadership in cooperative behaviors?
- How can our knowledge about game theory models improve decisions in public policy?
- How can we develop cooperation within organizations and in civil society?

The course consists of three main sections:

Section 1 will explore the origins of human cooperation. It will introduce the basic evolutionary mechanisms (such as direct reciprocity, reputation, punishment etc.) and psychological mechanisms from a developmental and comparative perspective.
Section 2 will address psychological mechanisms of cooperation such as communication, perspective taking, and empathy. We will discuss both positive and negative motivational forces beyond cooperative behaviors.
Section 3 will address challenges to cooperation, including cheating and exploitation. A brief introduction to game theory and the key concepts behind it; such as equilibrium, rationality, and cooperation. We will discuss applications of cooperation in organizational contexts, public policy and civil society.

2. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will gain knowledge and various skills and will be able to:

Knowledge
- Demonstrate understanding of basic terminology, concepts and principles of the human cooperation.
- Recognize that human cooperation has multiple layers.
- Understand how scientists accumulate scientific knowledge about human cooperation through discovery, confirmation, and correction.
- Understand how psychology is applied to improving various areas including prosocial behavior and inter- and intra-group cooperation.

Information literacy skills
- Use Google Scholar to identify the relevant scientific articles for their questions about human cooperation.
- Evaluate popular and scholarly sources and their contents for answering questions about human cooperation.

Collaboration and Communication skills
- To communicate and collaborate with their classmates in a group research project.

Competence
- Apply a basic understanding of human cooperation in practice.

3. Reading Material

Required Materials: All required materials will be available on NEO under the lessons.

Here are some **recommended books** that we will read chapters from:

- o Brooks, D. (2012) *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement*. NY: Random House.

- o Grant, A. (2013) *Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success*. Viking.

- o Haidt, J. (2006) The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom. New York: Basic Books.

- o Tomasello, M. (2009). *Why we cooperate*. Boston Review Books.

- o Ripley, A. (2021) High Conflict: Why we get trapped and how we get out. NY: Simon & Schuster.

- o Zaki, J. (2020) *The War for Kindness: Building Empathy in a Fractured World*. NY: Crown.

4. Teaching methodology

Lectures, reflections, debates, group discussions, simulations, presentations.

Each session is based on materials (readings and links to videos) available for students on NEO LMS course page. Students will use these materials to prepare for a session.

Students are expected to actively participate each week (see active participation part of grade).

5. Course Schedule

Date	Class Agenda
Session 1 Sept. 3	**Topic: Course Overview & a Multidisciplinary Approach Towards Understanding Human Cooperation** **Description:** • Active learning introduction to the course • Discussion: class expectations, assignments, effective learning methods. • Lecture: A multidisciplinary approach towards understanding human cooperation. **Reading:** • This syllabus **Assignments/deadlines:** • Course information form completed
Session 2 Sept. 10	**Topic: Origins of Human Cooperation** **Description:** ● How and why do researchers use qualitative and quantitative methods to study human cooperation? ● The basic evolutionary mechanisms such as direct reciprocity, reputation, punishment supporting cooperation ● What can we learn from great apes and children about cooperation? ● The basic psychological mechanisms from a developmental and comparative perspective. **Reading:** • Tomasello, M. (2009). *Why we cooperate*, Introduction and Chapter 1 "Born (and Bred) to Help". • Haidt, *Happiness Hypothesis* ch. 3 "Reciprocity with a Vengeance" **Assignments/deadlines:** • Debate #1: Are people fundamentally selfish?
	PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS OF COOPERATION
Session 3 Sept. 17	**Topic: Communication and Prosocial Skills** **Description:** ● The role of social cognition in cooperation. ● The importance of attention sharing, knowledge sharing and shared experiences for cooperation ● Nonverbal signals that support cooperation **Reading:** • Brooks, D. (2011) *The Social Animal* "Introduction" and "Decision Making" • Hall, Horgan & Murphy (2019) Nonverbal Communication, *Annual Review of Psychology, 70.* **Assignments/deadlines:** • Reflective synthesis #1

Session 4 Sept. 24	**Topic: Love, Attachments & Intimacy** **Description:** • Psychology of intimate romantic relationships • The role of understanding and how intimacy works • Marriage and family as an "institution" • Building close friendships (compassion) **Reading:** • Haidt, Happiness Hypothesis ch. 6 "Love and Attachments" • Listen to Hidden Brain "What Makes Relationships Thrive" https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/what-makes-relationships-thrive/ • Aron et. al. (1997) The Experimental Generation of Interpersonal Closeness: A procedure and preliminary findings. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23 (4). **Assignments/deadlines:** • Debate #2 Is love really blind?
Session 5 Oct. 1	**Topic: Empathy and Compassion** **Description:** • Perspective taking- the mental capacity to understand other people and their behavior by ascribing mental states to them • Empathy as a complex and fading phenomenon • How to develop empathy. **Reading:** • Zaki, J. (2014) Empathy: A Motivated Account. *Psychological Bulletin*. • Watch Jamil Zaki's TED talk on Empathy: https://www.ted.com/talks/jamil_zaki_we_re_experiencing_an_empathy_shortage_but_we_can_fix_it_together • Listen to Hidden Brain "The Empathy Gym": https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/you-2-0-the-empathy-gym/ **Assignments/deadlines:** none
Session 6 Oct. 8	**Topic: Altruism and Generosity** **Description:** • Altruism as freely chosen helping behavior at personal cost • Workplace generosity: reciprocity styles and outcomes • Charitable giving as an altruistic activity • Differences in networking with others among reciprocity styles **Reading:** • Grant, *Give and Take* chapters 1 & 2: "Good Returns" and "The Peacock and the Panda" • Fehr & Fishbacher (2003) The Nature of Human Altruism, *Nature*, 425. **Assignments/deadlines:** • Reflective synthesis #2
Session 7 **FRIDAY** **Oct. 10**	**Topic: Interpersonal and Social Trust** **Description:** • The dynamics of building trust • Social trust and sense of obligation to cooperate • Cultural inhibitors/ facilitators of trust **Reading:** • Tomasello, M. (2009) Why We Cooperate ch. 2 "From Social Interactions to Social Institutions"

	Assignments/deadlines: • Debate #3: Should trust be given or earned?
No Class meeting Oct. 15	**International Leadership Association conference in Prague (let the professor know if you'd like to volunteer and/or attend)**
Session 8 Oct. 22	**Topic: Apologies, forgiveness and reconciliation** **Description:** • The anatomy of effective apologies • Watch documentary "As We Forgive" about the Rwandan reconciliation process after genocide • The relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation • Forgiveness, truth and moral distancing **Reading:** • Listen to Hidden Brain podcast "The power of apologies" https://hiddenbrain.org/podcast/the-power-of-apologies/ • Exline, J.J. (2013) The Thorny Issue of Forgiveness: A Psychological Perspective. Pepperdine Dispute Resolution Law Journal, 13. • Staub, E. (2014) The Challenging Road to Reconciliation in Rwanda: Societal Processes, Interventions and Their Evaluation, Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 2 (1) **Assignments/deadlines:** • Experimental research proposal due
Oct. 29	**ENJOY YOUR FALL BREAK**
	CHALLENGES TO COOPERATION
Session 9 Nov. 5	**Topic: Social Dilemmas: Game Theory and Free-riding** **Description:** • Simulations: Students will learn about various strategies in game theory by playing and making decisions in several games. • The basic ideas behind the key concepts in game theory, such as equilibrium, rationality, and cooperation. • Prisoner's dilemma and how to escape it • The Stag Hunt game and social structure **Readings:** • Listen to Freakonomics episode 132 "Jane Austen, Game Theorist": https://freakonomics.com/podcast/jane-austen-game-theorist/ • Gross, et. Al. (2018) Ethical Free Riding: When Honest People Find Dishonest Partners. *Psychological Science*, 29 (12). • Watch "How to Outsmart the Prisoner's Dilemma": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emyi4z-O0ls **Assignments/deadlines:** none
No class meeting **Nov. 12**	**NO CLASS MEETING- WORK ON YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT!**
Session 10 Nov. 19	**Topic: Relational Impact of Adversity and Trauma** **Description:** • Negative psychological and physiological effects of trauma

	• What post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is and is not • Social impacts of personal suffering • Pro-social uses of adversity • Altruism borne of suffering **Reading:** • Haidt, J. Happiness Hypothesis chapter 7 "The Uses of Adversity" • Rendon, J. Upside: The New Science of Post-traumatic Growth ch. 1 "Reversing Psychology" **Assignments/deadlines:** • Debate #4: Is personal pain socially useful?
Session 11 Nov. 26	**Topic: Tribalism and Group Conflict** **Description:** • Enculturation & Acculturation in group contexts • The Robber's Cave experiment • Psychology of implicit bias, group rivalry and hatred • Contact theory and cooperative antidotes to group conflict and hatred **Reading:** • Ripley, A. (2021) *High Conflict* ch. 3 The Fire Starters • Cikara, et. Al (2011) Us and Them: intergroup failures of empathy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20 (3). **Assignments/deadlines:** • Reflective synthesis #3
Session 12 Dec. 3	**Topic: Self-interest and the Common Good** **Description:** • The tragedy of the commons • Conflict between short-term individual interests and long-term collective interests • Managing common-pool resources • Understanding depletion of natural resources through game theory **Reading:** • Hardin, G. (1968). The tragedy of the commons. Science 162, 1243–1248. • Watch: "What is the Tragedy of the Commons?": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxC161GvMPc • Spiliakos, (2019) Tragedy of the Commons: What is it and 5 examples: https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/tragedy-of-the-commons-impact-on-sustainability-issues **Assignments/deadlines:** • Debate #5: Can people transcend self-interests to solve global problems? • Research Presentations
Session 13 Dec. 10	**Topic: Practical applications, research presentations** **Description:** • Strategies for sustaining cooperation • Implications for public policy and business • Implications for private life • Digital tools to improve cooperation • Presentations of experimental research findings **Reading:**

	• Recommended: Grant, ch. 8 "The Scrooge Shift" **Assignments/deadlines:** • Experimental Research Paper • Research Presentations

6. **Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)**

Assignment	Workload (hours)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Class participation and supporting the learning community	42	20%	Ability to openly and honestly discuss with others, listening skills, ability to provide & receive feedback.	1,3
Experimental Research Paper and Presentation	40	30%	Information digital skills, Using Google Scholar to find relevant sources, Presentation skills, ability to explain the studied topic to peers, ability to receive and implement feedback	1,2,3
Debate leadership	20	20%	Ability to understand scientific literature and critically apply knowledge to practical issues. Ability communicate clearly and effectively.	2,3
Reflective Synthesis Papers (3)	48	30% (10% per paper)	Knowledge and ability to apply learned information and critical thinking and propose their constructive application in a real situation.	1,2
TOTAL	**150**	**100%**		

*1 = Critical thinking; 2 = Effective communication; 3 = Effective and responsible action

7. **Detailed description of the assignments**

More details about requirements/instructions will be provided in the class.

1. *Class participation and supporting the learning community*

Attendance and participation is a grade that includes active engagement during class, showing you've done the reading, short assignments, putting cell phones away (not on the table), and being on-time for class. *Being distracted by phones or laptop use will affect this grade*. Your participation grade will depend, in large part, on your active participation each class per the areas below:

> **For online students, class participation will be more challenging. You will need to show your active engagement during class each time.** This means:
> 1. Keeping your camera on during class
> 2. Participating at least twice for each class live, in <u>chat</u> on Teams, or raising your hand through Teams.
> 3. Actively participating in group conversations and activities
> 4. Asking thoughtful questions (through chat or during class)

The following are some general expectations for class participation that are inspired by the approach of Aristotle in finding the ideal mean of the virtue. An ideal—perhaps even virtuous—student will substantively improve the learning of the group by doing some or all of the following:

1. **Curiosity:** Ask questions that uncover confusion or contradiction, probe the depths of an idea, or appropriately apply concepts from the texts to the real world.
    o The excessive student will ask too many questions or frequently interrupt the flow of the conversation. An excessive student might dominate the conversation to take it in a direction that is more about personal interest than improving learning in the group.
    o The deficient student will not add to the group, will be reluctant to share his or her own confusion, questions, or insights. If the class were to be dominated by deficient students, then the class's learning would depend on the performance of the authority figures only, rather than on collective learning.

2. **Collaboration:** In small groups, the virtuous student would help the group learn by keeping on task, exploring new ideas, listening, and appropriately adding their own questions and insights.
    o The excessive student will dominate the small group with his or her own agenda, not listen deeply to the ideas of others, consider his or her own needs and not the needs of the group to learn collectively.
    o The deficient student will not actively participate, will allow others to take charge and lead the way, will not offer insights to further the learning of the group.

3. **Contribution:** The virtuous student would come to class not only having done the reading, but having given it thought. The virtuous student is willing to express confusion and questions and offer theories of explanation.
    o The excessive student might read the texts only to show off his or her learning. The excessive student might hijack the conversation by only wanting to discuss the reading that most spoke to him or her.
    o The deficient student would not have done the reading or have done it sparingly or without thoughtfulness. The deficient student would have trouble adding to the learning of the group because they have no knowledge of the shared texts.

2. *Experimental Research Paper and (Group) Presentation:*

Students will design and conduct a social experiment of their choice. They can either replicate a finding from a study (professor will provide a list) or test their own hypothesis relative to the topic they choose. A hypothesis should not be a wild guess, it should be supported by previous research and theories. Students can choose a research question as a topic from the list or propose a topic with a research question, justified to the professor in 1-2 paragraph proposal. This proposal must be approved and the professor will give feedback and guidance on each over midterm break. In class we will learn about how psychologists conduct research in reciprocity and cooperation so that you will become acquainted with their methods, data gathering, and interpretation. Students will conduct these experiments in pairs/groups and write up their findings in a final paper. In the

last two class meetings student groups/pairs will present their research findings and interpretations to class.

Sample topics (from past groups):
o Is being a foreigner more conducive to helping?
o Are more empathetic people more generous?
o What is the relationship between religiosity and interpersonal trust?

Assessment Breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Hypothesis and experimental design are informed by good research on the topic (scholarly articles)	25%
Evidence of execution and documentation of experimental methods.	25%
Findings are analyzed and reported in a detailed and accurate manner.	25%
Well-organized and professional writing; follows all instructions	25%

3. **Debate Leadership:**

In groups students will research and prepare an engaging 40 minute (max) debate and thoughtful discussion led by each group member in a small group in class. Each member can have a common plan for the debate, but each individual will have to be prepared to lead a discussion on the topic. The debate must incorporate the readings due for class and provide further information for and against to topic question to encourage classmates to think critically about the topic and apply the readings. Groups will be assigned during the first class by order of student preference for the topic and each student will turn in their plan and materials.

Assessed area	Percentage
Plan is detailed with good questions and talking points. Each individual in the group shows evidence of collaboration and preparation.	25%
Uses readings effectively and brings in additional readings, videos, short case studies or examples.	25%
Debate and discussion is well-led and stays within the time limits	25%
Group and individuals engage good debate rather than presenting for a majority of the time.	25%

4. **Reflective synthesis papers (3)**

Since students are expected to do the readings and keep notes in a notebook on key points, these papers provide a way for students to reflect on the readings in relation to one another and the student's own experience. There will be three reflective syntheses on the readings and each paper will use the readings to respond to questions posed in class.

The readings should be cited in the paper and the length will be 2-3 pages double spaced.

Assessed area	Percentage
Well-organized, proofread and following instructions	25%

Makes meaningful connections in the readings in observations, insights, or applications	25%
Evidences deeper engagement with the readings, shows detailed understanding	25%
Cites readings and provides examples.	25%

General Requirements and School Policies

Written Assignment Format:
All submitted assignments should be typed in Times New Roman 12pt. and double-spaced. Assignments should have a cover page with a title, course name and code, student name(s), instructor's name and date. Pages should be numbered and have one inch margins. Written assignments will be submitted electronically in a single file on NEO.

Course specific requirements

Students who are absent for more than SIX classes will be administratively withdrawn from the class and will receive FW on their transcript. Please monitor your absences carefully.

General requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU's academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work.

Electronic communication and submission

The university and instructors shall only use students' university email address for communication, with additional communication via NEO LMS or Microsoft Teams.
Students sending e-mail to an instructor shall clearly state the course code and the topic in the subject heading, for example, "SOC 101-2 Mid-term Exam. Question".
All electronic submissions are through NEO LMS. No substantial pieces of writing (especially take-home exams and essays) can be submitted outside of NEO LMS.

Late work: *No late submissions will be accepted – please follow the deadlines.* In the event of a family or medical emergency, please contact me to discuss an assignment extension.

Electronic devices

Electronic devices (e.g. phones, tablets, laptops) may be used only for class-related activities (taking notes, looking up related information, etc.). You will use your laptop or tablet to take the exams in this class on NEO during the scheduled exam dates.

Cheating, plagiarism and disruptive behavior

If a student engages in disruptive conduct unsuitable for a classroom environment, the instructor may require the student to withdraw from the room for the duration of the class and shall report the behavior to the student's Dean.

Students engaging in behavior which is suggestive of cheating will, at a minimum, be warned. In the case of continued misconduct, the student will fail the exam or assignment and be expelled from the exam or class. At minimum, plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment and shall be reported to the student's Dean. Intentional or repeated plagiarism always entail disciplinary hearing and may result in expulsion from AAU.

Use of Artificial Intelligence and Academic Tutoring Center

Per AAU policy, all written work must be submitted online in NEO. This permits review to prevent plagiarism and offers a record of your work submitted for major course grades. Please note, all submissions are reviewed by the software ***TurnItIn.com*** for potential matches to existing documents created by artificial assistance writing programs (e.g., *ChatGPT*). I would much prefer you write up your own report about your research findings than to have you turn in a submission which is generated by AI and shows little/no evidence of learning. Please consider carefully, if you use AI tools at AAU, you should use them to help improve any existing writing you have completed first. AI use is always a risk to you – if you cannot show your own conceptual understanding and application in writing, I cannot award you points for your work. Put simply, always use AI with care, or do not use it at all at the collegiate level. If unsure about technical aspects of writing, or to improve your academic writing, please consult with student tutors in the AAU Academic Tutoring Center.

For more information or to book a tutor, contact: http://atc.simplybook.me/scheduler

Use of Laptops in class: take handwritten notes if you want better outcomes!

While I do not prohibit the use of laptops in class, I strongly recommend that you take handwritten notes. There is strong evidence that suggests that using laptops to take notes (vs. taking handwritten notes) results in shallower processing and worse performance on conceptual questions (Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014). Note taking improves cognitive processing and forces students to summarize and process as they go along instead of copying verbatum as students tend to do with laptops. Laptops create a distracting environment from course material and active engagement. Evidence suggest this has detrimental effects on student learning (Dontre, 2021).

Class presentations, powerpoints, will be available on NEO for your review after class. Readings are meant to complement classroom lectures, activities and discussions so your notes will be critical along with the readings for full comprehension and your success in this class.

References on note taking:

Dontre, A. J. (2021). The influence of technology on academic distraction: A review. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, *3*(3), 379-390.

Mueller, P. A., & Oppenheimer, D. M. (2014). The pen is mightier than the keyboard: Advantages of longhand over laptop note taking. *Psychological science*, *25*(6), 1159-1168.

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage*	Description
A	95–100	**Excellent performance**. The student has shown originality and displayed an exceptional grasp of the material and a deep analytical understanding of the subject.
A−	90–94	
B+	87–89	**Good performance**. The student has mastered the material, understands the subject well and has shown some originality of thought and/or considerable effort.
B	83–86	
B−	80–82	
C+	77–79	**Fair performance**. The student has acquired an acceptable understanding of the material and essential subject matter of the course, but has not succeeded in translating this understanding into consistently creative or original work.
C	73–76	
C−	70–72	
D+	65–69	**Poor**. The student has shown some understanding of the material and subject matter covered during the course. The student's work, however, has not shown enough effort or understanding to allow for a passing grade in School Required Courses. It does qualify as a passing mark for the General College Courses and Electives.
D	60–64	
F	0–59	**Fail**. The student has not succeeded in mastering the subject matter covered in the course.

* Decimals should be rounded to the nearest whole number.

Prepared by: Joshua M Hayden
Date: 29 August 2025

Approved by: Karen Grunow-Harsta, Dean of the School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences