

SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY
Psychology Department
Fall 2026

HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY (PSYC 117EL)

Instructor:	Thomas G. Plante, Ph.D., ABPP
Office:	Alumni Science 203
Contact Info:	408-554-4471 (Office), tplante@scu.edu , www.scu.edu/tplante , Zoom – 358-201-2190
Office Hours:	Typically, after class or by appointment
Course Meeting Room:	Lucas 309
Course Meeting Times:	Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays 1pm – 2:05pm

Required Texts:

Taylor, S. E., & Stanton, A .L. (2021). *Health Psychology, 11th edition*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
 ISBN: 9781266378423

Plante, T. G. (2024). *Health Behavior Change: Proven Strategies for a Longer and Healthier Life*. San Diego, CA: Cognella. ISBN: 979-8-8233-2413-7

Additional readings may be provided during the class.

Course Evaluation:

Midterm Quest 1:	End of Week 3
Midterm Quest 2:	End of Week 6
Midterm Quest 3:	End of Week 9
Final Quest:	Due when assigned during exam week
Arrupe Reflection Paper:	Last day of class
Behavior Self-Change Paper:	Last day of class

Class Participation, Behavior, Scholarly Enthusiasm, and Attendance: +/- can improve or decrease your course grade.

Pass everything, get an "A." Fail any one of assigned tasks and get a "B." Fail two of the tasks and get a "C," etc. Two low passes equal one fail. Additionally, you are expected to take and attend class with integrity (at least 80% of the time unless you have a documented excused absence due to sports, sickness, and so forth). Only those who meet the attendance requirement will be eligible for an "A" in the class. Less than 60% % attendance will result in a double fail (i.e., two letter grade reduction) while less than 50% will result in a failing grade. Also, only pass minuses can be earned for late assignments after the offered grace period ends on Camino.

Course Description:

Health psychology involves the discipline and principles of psychology and human behavior in understanding how the mind, body, and behavior interact in health and disease. Class topics include health promotion and primary prevention of illness, health enhancing and health damaging behaviors, psychosomatic illness, stress and coping, faith and health, pain management, and a variety of specific behavior-related medical illnesses (e.g., COVID-19, heart disease, eating disorders, cancer, AIDS). Prerequisites include PSYC 1, 2, 50, 51, 52. The course is primarily designed for psychology and public health sciences majors. This course satisfies the Gerontology Certificate Program requirement.

- Course Goals:** (1) To provide a basic and broad-based overview of the field of health psychology from a biopsychosocial perspective.
 (2) To provide a practical and experiential understanding of the challenges involved in health behavior change.
 (3) To provide the foundation for students taking additional courses and advanced training in health psychology.

Learning Goals for Experiential Learning for Social Justice

Social Justice: Developing a disciplined sensibility toward the causes of human suffering and misery, and a sense of responsibility for addressing them.

Civic Life: The roles, rights, and responsibilities of citizens and institutions in societies and in the world.

Perspective: Seeking out the experience of different cultures and people, striving to view the world through their eyes.

Civic Engagement: Addressing major contemporary social issues, including environmental sustainability and peaceful resolution of conflict, by participating actively as an informed citizen of society and the world.

Learning Objectives for Experiential Learning for Social Justice

- 1.1 Recognize the importance of life-long responsible citizenship and civic engagement in personal and/or professional activities in ways that benefit underserved populations. (Civic Life, Civic Engagement, and Social Justice)
- 1.2 Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the formal and informal knowledge, wisdom, and/or skills that individuals in these communities possess, showing awareness of own and at least one other perspective/worldview. (Perspective)
- 1.3 Recognize, analyze, and understand the social reality and injustices in contemporary society, including recognizing the relative privilege or marginalization of their own and other groups. (Social Justice)

Sequence of Topics and Readings:

Week 1:	Intro to Health Psych, Biopsychosocial Model	Taylor 1 & 2**
	BE SURE TO SIGN UP FOR YOUR ARRUPPE PLACEMENT!	
Week 2:	Health Behaviors	Taylor 3; Plante 1, 2
Week 3:	Health Promoting Behaviors	Taylor 4; Plante 3, 6, 7
Week 4:	Health Compromising Behaviors	Taylor 5; Plante 4, 5
Week 5:	Stress and Coping	Taylor 6, 7; Plante 8
Week 6:	Use of Health Services	Taylor 8; Plante 9
Week 7:	Patients, Providers, and Treatments and Pain	Taylor 9 & 10
Week 8:	Chronic and Terminal Illness	Taylor 11 & 12
Week 9:	Cardiovascular Disease, Diabetes, Cancer, AIDS, etc.	Taylor 13 & 14
Week 10:	Future Directions, Ethics, Career Issues and Conclusions	Taylor 15

Arrupe Reflection Paper and Behavior Self-Change Paper Due: Last Class Day

Final Quest due during exam week.

** When two chapters are assigned during a week, the first chapter listed is due on Monday while the second chapter is due on Wednesday of that particular week.

This class is approved as an ELSJ Core course. To meet the learning objectives of ELSJ, reflection on the placements will occur during part of our class sessions. We'll check in with you about your Arrupe placements and discuss how the experiences enliven and enrich the class topics being discussed. We will discuss how the Arrupe placement has illustrated the health psychology theories and practices for class topics. The Arrupe Partnership Reaction Paper is a 5-7 or so page reaction paper to your experience with partner clients and staff and should incorporate one or more of the ELSJ learning objectives noted above. The papers should well integrate the learning you have experiences in both the class and the Arrupe placement in a thoughtful way. The paper is due at the beginning of the last class. Papers won't be accepted after the scheduled final.

The behavior self-change project. You are asked to do a "self-change project" to enhance an adaptive health behavior for yourself (or for someone else). For example, appropriate topics may include increasing the use of seat belts, practicing safe sex, decreasing alcohol, cigarette, or high fat food consumption, increasing aerobic exercise or sleep, or increasing dental care such as flossing. How to design such a project will be discussed in class. The paper should be 5-7 pages long with peer reviewed references.

In keeping with the mission of the university, relating the course material to the "greater glory of God and to the common good" as well as helping to educate leaders with *competence, compassion, conscience, and community* will be integrated into class material where appropriate.

Please Read

How and Why I Teach Class as I Do

As Polonius states in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, "*Though this be madness, yet there is method in't*".

I teach my classes a bit differently than perhaps most other classes that you have taken at SCU or elsewhere but I do so for intentional and carefully thought out reasons. So, there is actually a "method to the madness" and I will explain why I teach as I do and give you a brief rationale in the hopes that you not only understand why I teach as I do but also give you full informed consent as we proceed. There are four principles that I keep in mind as I design and implement my classes.

Principle 1: Class should be stress free, fun, engaging, and all about learning with practical implications

There is plenty of quality empirical evidence that anxiety, depression, and stress among your generation of college students is very high (e.g., Haidt, 2024; Lipson et al., 2022; Sheldon et al., 2021). Even the US Surgeon General issued an unprecedented advisory report in 2021 about this issue. I try to make my classes stress free, fun, engaging, and all about learning with plenty of "news you can use" focused on practical implications. I design classes so that you can control your own grades and deadlines to assist in this more stress-free approach

Principle 2: You are adults and will be treated as such

I'm here to provide you with course content and material that I have expertise in while it is up to you to fully engage and absorb it. I will not micromanage you with assignment rubrics, points for this and that, and many class rules. If you were raised in the USA you likely had assignment rubrics throughout your educational career. While they make sense for elementary school they don't always make sense in college (in my humble view) as they can stifle creatively, challenge individual learning experiences and differences, and do not help with some of the complexities and nuance of learning (Ling, 2025; Swierczek & Bechter, 2024). However, I do ask you for 80% of attendance since you can't take the class with integrity unless you are actually ["in the room where it happens."](#)

Principle 3: I tell stories

There is plenty of research evidence that speaks to our ability to better learn and retain information through narrative (e.g., Alterio & McDrury, 2003; Lawrence & Paige, 2016; McNett, 2016). I take this seriously and you'll hear a lot of stories from me that illustrate or provide examples of the concepts I am trying to teach and help you understand and appreciate. Since I've been in clinical practice as a licensed psychologist for almost 40 years, I have plenty of clinical experiences in both inpatient and outpatient settings that well illustrate the issues that we are trying to learn and understand. Of course, to maintain patient confidentiality, I will not provide any identifying information of patients under my care and may tweak a fact or two in

order to do so.

Principle 4: OAE accommodations are normalized in class

Since many students (typically about 25-30% of all students in class) have OAE approved learning accommodations that must be provided and considered confidential, I try to provide a class environment where most of these typical accommodations are normalized for the entire class. This includes the use of laptops, take home rather than in-class exams, and coming and going as needed.

In order to accomplish these principles, we do the following:

1. All exams (which I call “Quests” as they are something between a quiz and a test) are take home and graded pass/fail.
2. All power point slides are provided for your use via Google Docs. While I expect you to read the assigned materials in the text (and I know that so many students of your generation don’t read books or other material of length very often) I don’t micromanage or check your reading.
3. If you pass all assignments, you get an A. If you fail or select not to complete an assignment you lose a letter grade. If you perform marginally on assignments you get a pass minus that reduces your grade by a half letter grade for each pass minus. Thus, you are in control of your grade.
4. Higher education is ridiculously expensive. Someone in your life (i.e., parents, donors, you) are paying almost [100K](#) a year for your education. I want you to make the most of it. I’m here to help you learn but you have to do your part too. I expect you to take your education seriously and see me as a resource for you in doing so. I’ve been in this field for a very long time and am happy to share my expertise with you. I will do my part and hope that you will do yours to maximize your educational learning experience.

References

Alterio, M., & McDrury, J. (2003). *Learning through storytelling in higher education: Using reflection and experience to improve learning*. Routledge.

Haidt, J. (2024). *The anxious generation: How the great rewiring of childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illness*. Penguin.

Lawrence, R. L., & Paige, D. S. (2016). What Our Ancestors Knew: Teaching and Learning Through Storytelling. *New directions for adult & continuing education*, 2016(149).

Ling, J. H. (2025). A review of rubrics in education: Potential and challenges. *Indonesian Journal of Innovative Teaching and Learning*, 2(1), 1-14.

Lipson, S. K., Zhou, S., Abelson, S., Heinze, J., Jirsa, M., Morigney, J., ... & Eisenberg, D. (2022). Trends in college student mental health and help-seeking by race/ethnicity: Findings from the national healthy minds study, 2013–2021. *Journal of affective disorders*, 306, 138-147.

McNett, G. (2016). Using stories to facilitate learning. *College Teaching*, 64(4), 184-193.

Sheldon, E., Simmonds-Buckley, M., Bone, C., Mascarenhas, T., Chan, N., Wincott, M., ... & Barkham, M. (2021). Prevalence and risk factors for mental health problems in university undergraduate students: A systematic review with meta-analysis. *Journal of affective disorders*, 287, 282-292.

Swierczek, F. W., & Bechter, C. (2024). Against Rubrics. *Journal of Educational Thought/Revue de la Pensée Educative*, 57(2).

What to Expect in your SCU Psychology Courses

1. **Mutual Respect.** The faculty in the psychology department are committed to an environment of mutual respect. Please be courteous in your communications with us and your fellow students, get to class on time, do not pack up your belongings when class is still in session, and if possible, use the restroom before coming to class. It's our intent to show you similar levels of respect!

2. **Cell Phones and Other Devices.** Please turn off or silence your cell phone during class. If you need to take an important call, e.g., you have a family member in surgery, please let your professor know at the start of class. Not all professors allow use of laptops in classes—please ask!

3. **In Person Classes.** Almost all of our classes in psychology are scheduled as fully In Person classes. This means that there will be no way to participate via Zoom. If you have to miss a class, refer to your professor's policies for details on how to handle that.

4. **Responses to Email.** In the interest of valuing work-life balance, and respecting that your professors have both professional and personal responsibilities beyond your class, faculty may not reply to your emails during certain hours of the day. This depends on the course time and your professor, of course. Please ask us what our policies are!

5. **The Final Exam.** When a final exam is required in a course, you must take it on the day and time it is scheduled. The [schedule is established by the University](#) and we as professors do not control it. If you know in Week 1 that you will not be able to attend the final exam in a course, you should consider taking a different course or discussing your conflict with your professor.

6. **Late Policies, Extensions, and Incompletes.** Please check with your professor about their policies on late work and requests for extensions. For Incomplete grades, keep in mind that these are typically only given when you have missed a single major assignment due to

circumstances beyond your control and do not have time to make it up before the course grading period ends.

7. **Absences due to Illness.** Please consult the [University policy](#) on what to do if you test positive for COVID. If you have to miss class due to illness or an emergency beyond your control, please consult with your individual professor for their policies on what to do.
8. **Extra Credit.** Extra credit will not be awarded to make up for missed assignments or to increase scores on completed assignments.
9. **Equity in Course Policies and Grading.** Your Psychology professors are making every effort to make sure that course policies and grading are implemented the same way for all students. Some students may be used to asking for exceptions, believing “It can’t hurt to ask.” But granting such exceptions would violate the principle of equity and the transparency of our syllabus statements. Please think twice before asking for exceptions, showing us that you value these principles too!
10. **Enjoy the Ride!** You are here to learn and grow as a whole person! We expect you to make mistakes and to struggle with learning from time to time. If you weren’t doing that, you wouldn’t grow very much over the course of your college experience. And remember that you are more than your grades.

REQUIRED SYLLABUS STATEMENTS

Required Policy Information for all Course Syllabi
Last Reviewed December 2025

All Santa Clara University syllabi must refer students to the following policies.

Academic Integrity

The Academic Integrity pledge is an expression of the University’s commitment to fostering an understanding of—and commitment to—a culture of integrity at Santa Clara University. The Academic Integrity pledge, which applies to all students, states:

I am committed to being a person of integrity. I pledge, as a member of the Santa Clara University community, to abide by and uphold the standards of academic integrity contained in the Student Conduct Code.

Academic integrity is part of your intellectual, ethical, and professional development. I expect you to uphold the principles of this pledge for all work in this class. I will clarify expectations on academic integrity—including the use of AI tools such as ChatGPT and course sharing sites for all assignments and exams in this course. If you have questions about what is appropriate on any assignment, please let me know before you hand in work. For more resources about ensuring academic integrity in your work, see this [LibGuide on Academic Integrity](#).

Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct (Title IX)

Santa Clara University is committed to providing all students with a safe learning environment free of all forms of discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual violence.

Please know that as a faculty member, California law and University policy require me to report any information brought to my attention about incidents of sexual harassment or misconduct to the SCU [Office of Equal Opportunity and Title IX](#) (408) 551-3043. This includes, but is not limited to, disclosures in writing assignments, class discussions, and one-on-one conversations.

Should you need support, SCU has dedicated staff trained to assist you in navigating campus resources, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and filing a formal complaint with the University or with law enforcement. Please see the [Student Resources](#) page for more information about reporting options and resources.

If you or someone you know has experienced sexual harassment or sexual violence and wishes to speak to a **confidential** resource who is not required to report, please contact one of the following SCU resources for support:

- [SCU Wellness Center](#)
- [CAPS](#)
- Any individual (clergy, counselors) acting in a professional capacity for which confidentiality is mandated by law.

I am happy to help connect you with any of these resources.

Accommodations for Pregnant and Parenting Students

Santa Clara University is committed to creating and maintaining a non-discriminatory learning environment for all students, including students who are pregnant or parenting. Absences due to medical conditions relating to pregnancy and childbirth will be excused for as long as deemed medically necessary by a student's doctor, and students will be given the opportunity to make up missed work. Students needing accommodations can often arrange accommodations by working directly with their instructors, supervisors, or departments. Students needing accommodations can also seek assistance with accommodations from the [Office of Accessible Education](#) (OAE) or from the [Office of Equal Opportunity and Title IX](#). This [resource page](#) from the Title IX Office provides information regarding support for students and employees who are pregnant or parenting.

Office of Accessible Education

If you have a documented disability for which accommodations may be required in this class, please contact the [Office of Accessible Education](#) (OAE) as soon as possible to discuss your needs and register for accommodations with the University. If you have already arranged accommodations through OAE, please be sure to request your accommodations through the OAE portal and discuss them with me during my office hours within the first two weeks of class. To ensure fairness and consistency, individual faculty members are required to receive verification from the Office of Accessible Education before providing accommodations. OAE will work with students and faculty to arrange proctored exams for students whose accommodations include double time for exams and/or assistive technology.

Students who are approved for extended time or other exam accommodations should talk with me as soon as possible. The Office of Accessible Education must be contacted in advance (at least two weeks' notice recommended) to schedule proctored examinations or to arrange other accommodations. Students should continue to reach out to OAE (oea@scu.edu) regarding access barriers related to this course or content.

Academic Freedom

The University is dedicated to an uncompromising standard of academic excellence and a commitment to [academic freedom](#), freedom of inquiry, and freedom of expression in the search for truth. We are here to engage a set of ideas and research findings that often have long and complicated histories. Scholars may disagree on the topics we will be discussing. Assignment of and references to sources (readings, films, websites, etc.) are not an endorsement of the opinions or content contained in those materials. Students are expected and required to become familiar with the literature relevant to the topic of this course regardless of whether the professor, the University, or the students find this content agreeable. You are invited to introduce additional challenges in a serious and open-minded manner.

RECOMMENDED SYLLABUS STATEMENTS

Safety Measures

In order to meet our learning objectives, we will adhere to the highest standards for safety and mutual respect. University policy allows faculty to request that students comply with University health and safety recommendations, including the use of face coverings occasionally or throughout the academic term. Failure to comply with my request is a violation of the [Student Conduct Code](#), which I will need to report.

Use of Classroom Recordings

Depending on the learning objectives and pedagogical approaches used in a lesson, some classes may be recorded and made available on Camino. However, as is stated in the [Student Conduct Code](#): "...Dissemination or sharing of any classroom recording without the permission of the instructor would be considered 'misuse' and, therefore, prohibited. Violations of these policies may result in disciplinary action by the University. At the instructor's discretion, violations may also have an adverse effect on the student's grade."

Copyright Statement

Materials in this course are protected by the United States copyright laws. I am the copyright holder of the materials I create, including notes, handouts, slides, and videos. You may make copies of course materials for your own use and you may share the materials with other students enrolled in this course. You may not publicly distribute the course materials without my written permission.

Technology Support

SCU can provide you with technical assistance, and you can also reach out to our providers directly for questions. For support with Camino (SCU's branded instance of Canvas), contact caminosupport@scu.edu or call 408-551-3572. You can also find support resources via the

help button within the Camino platform (on the left-hand navigation) to access after-hours support via email, chat, or phone.

For Zoom assistance, contact Media Services at mediaservices@scu.edu or 408-554-4520. You can also get support from the [SCU website](#) or the [Zoom Help Center](#) website.

For SCU network and computing support, contact the SCU Technology Help Desk at techdesk@scu.edu or 408-554-5700. They can provide support for MySCU Portal, Eduroam, Duo, hardware and software issues, and more.

Land Acknowledgment

Santa Clara University occupies the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ohlone and Muwekma Ohlone people.

Respect for All

It is my intent that students from all backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students of all backgrounds bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of all identities and perspectives. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you.

Gender Inclusive Language

This course affirms people of all gender expressions and gender identities. If you go by a name different from what is on the class roster, please let me know. Using correct gender pronouns is important to me, so please share your pronouns with me and correct me if I make a mistake. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. For more on personal pronouns see www.mypronouns.org

Wellness Statement

I know you will do the best you can in this class (and all of your classes); however, it should never be at the expense of your own mental and physical health and your overall well-being. Jesuit education is grounded in *cura personalis*, concern for the whole person—mind, body, and spirit. What does this mean for you? Be kind to others, and more importantly, be kind to yourself. Attend to your sleep (quantity *and* quality); drink lots of water; move; get outside; and pay attention to beauty that isn't coming to you on a screen. Eat good food, laugh, enjoy friends and family, look for opportunities to connect with others in new ways, pray, meditate, or otherwise attend to your spirit. And ask for help, even if you don't think you need it. Lots of folks, including me, are here to support you. It's never too late to reach out, and I am committed to helping you.

SCU has many resources and programs to support you. These resources may be especially helpful:

[Wellness Center](#)

The Wellness center provides resources to aid and promote student well-being across the eight dimensions of wellness, including student peer groups for healthful living, violence prevention, and recovery.

[CAPS](#)

Santa Clara students are provided confidential counseling sessions at no cost through Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). Students have access to clinically appropriate, short-term therapy; group therapy; and other resources for care. A new 24/7 support line is also available: **408-554-5220**.

[SCU Culture of Care](#)

If you are concerned for the mental or physical welfare of one of your peers, the Office of Student Life Culture of Care website provides resources for recognizing and helping someone in distress.

Academic Concerns

If you are concerned with your progress in this class, please contact me so that we can find solutions together. [Drahmann Center](#) can also offer support with issues regarding your academic progress more broadly.

SCU also has multiple options for free academic tutoring. Students can make appointments to discuss work in a range of courses:

- [Drahmann Tutoring](#) (for many courses in the College of Arts & Sciences including Natural Sciences, Modern Languages, Economics, and Computer Science)
- [The HUB Writing Center](#) (Writing and Public Speaking assignments across departments)
- [Mathematics Learning Center](#) (MATH 4, 6, 8, 11-14, 30-31, 35-36, 51, 53)

Grief Resources and Support

An important part of healing from loss is the support of others. The SCU community is committed to supporting you during this difficult time. If you need to miss class or foresee being late on upcoming deliverables due to bereavement, please let me know immediately so we can make appropriate arrangements. If you need additional support, you can contact the Dean of Students Office at (408) 554-4583 or email dso@scu.edu. Staff in DSO can notify other faculty and/or campus supervisors on your behalf and connect you with helpful campus resources.

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam