Theoretical and Philosophical Foundations of Behavior Analysis
Department of Applied Psychology
Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology (GSAPP)
Rutgers University, New Brunswick
18:820:537:01, Fall 2025

Instructor:	Robert W. Isenhower, Ph.D., BCBA-D (he/him)
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	Hours: M 4:15-4:45 PM, W 2:15-3:15 PM, and by appointment
	***The instructor will make every reasonable effort to meet with students whenever necessary. Meetings may be held over Zoom or in person. Please email me to schedule.

Purpose: This course emphasizes the theoretical foundations, philosophical framework, scientific principles, and fundamental concepts of applied behavior analysis (ABA) and contrasts the worldview of behavior analysts with other perspectives inside and outside psychology. Students will demonstrate competence in articulating the philosophical tenets of behaviorism and the theoretical approaches to understanding behavior, as well as the ability to interpret behavior through the lens of behavior analytic concepts and principles. Practical applications to behavior analytic problem solving and case conceptualization in applied settings will be emphasized.

Outcomes: This course satisfies the BACB Course Content requirements for Section A of the 6th Edition Task List (45 hours). By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Identify the goals of behavior analysis as a science (i.e., description, prediction, control) (A-1)
2. Describe the philosophical assumptions underlying the science of behavior analysis (e.g., selectionism, determinism, empiricism, parsimony, pragmatism) (A-2)
3. Explain behavior from the perspective of radical behaviorism (A-3)

4. Distinguish among behaviorism, the experimental analysis of behavior, applied behavior analysis, and professional practice guided by the science of behavior analysis (A-4)
5. Identify and describe dimensions of applied behavior analysis (A-5)

Text/Readings: Johnson, J. M. (2021). Talking about behavior: Radical behaviorism for ABA practitioners (2nd ed.). Sloan.

Behavior Analyst Certification Board Test Content Outline 6th ed (2022)

Each week, you are responsible for approximately one chapter of the book and 2 additional journal articles. The readings are available on Canvas (See reading list at the end of the syllabus).

Assessments: *Exams*

There are two exams in this course, one in Week 7 and another in Week 15. Exams will mainly be composed of **multiple-choice** (to simulate the BACB exam) as well as **short-answer** questions. Test material will be based on the assigned readings and the lectures. Any make-up exams must be scheduled in advance of the exam date and may follow a different format.

Objective Questions

Each week, you will receive a set of objectives outlining key terms to define, explain, and discuss, as well as important concepts from the assigned articles. These objectives are meant to guide your reading and focus your attention on essential ideas. You are responsible for completing the assigned readings and working through the objectives **individually** before each class. The questions are designed to prepare you for class discussions and count as homework, so they must be completed **before** the start of class. I will drop the lowest grade or one missing assignment.

In-class Activities

Most weeks we will engage in an in-class activity to help bring some of the course concepts to life. Most activities will be in a group format. You **must be present** to earn credit for each in-class activity.

Interteaching

Interteaching is an active learning approach that combines peer discussion, guided preparation, and instructor feedback to enhance engagement and understanding (Boyce & Hineline, 2002). One of our first tasks in each meeting will be engaging in Interteaching for ~30 min.

How It Works in This Course:

1. **Prep Guide (Objectives):** The weekly objectives serve as your prep guide. Complete them before class, using the assigned readings to answer each question or prompt.
2. **Peer Discussion:** In class, work in pairs or small groups (2-3) to discuss your answers and explore key concepts.
3. **Instructor Facilitation:** The instructor will circulate and provide feedback. After interteach, I will address challenging topics with a brief lecture.
4. **Interteach Record:** After the discussion, submit a short record identifying concepts that were unclear or difficult, which will serve as the permanent product for this overall assignment. In addition, this feedback will help shape the next class session.

   You **must be present** to earn these points. I will drop the lowest grade or one missing assignment.

ABA and Contemporary Social Issues: Paper

Each student will be required to complete a 5–7-page paper (double-spaced) outlining a theoretical/philosophical conceptualization of an issue in contemporary society. Issues can include, but are not limited to the domains listed in this paper:

Heward, W. L., Critchfield, T. S., Reed, D. D., Detrich, R., & Kimball, J. W. (2022). ABA from A to Z: Behavior science applied to 350 domains of socially significant behavior. *Perspectives on Behavior Science*, *45*(2), 327-359.

In the paper, students should thoroughly describe the socially significant issue using existing literature, conceptualize it in behavior analytic terms, and present one specific problem in this domain and how the application of behavior analysis can be used to address it.

APA Citation Style: All papers MUST be written using the APA style (7 ed.).

Important Note: Plagiarism essentially means that you cannot use the words and ideas of another person without giving them credit. Therefore, "quotation marks" should be used to indicate the exact words of another. That said, exact quotes should be kept to a minimum. Rather, each time you paraphrase another author you will need to credit the source in the text. If you have any questions about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please see me. Students who plagiarize any material will earn a grade of F for the course.

ABA and Contemporary Social Issues: Oral Presentation

Each student will deliver a 7-minute presentation summarizing their application paper for the class. Students should use PowerPoint slides for the presentation and be prepared to discuss. Presentations will occur primarily during Week 14 of the course. We may have time for a few presentations in Week 13.

Grading:

Assessment Tool (Category)	Percentage
Exams (x2)	40%
Objectives	10%
Interteaching	10%
In-class Assignments	10%
Application Paper	20%
Oral Presentation	10%
Total	100%

Standards:
The following grading standards will be used in this class.

Grade	Description	Numerical Equivalent
A	Outstanding	89.5-100 (4.0)
B+	Intermediate grade	86.5-89.4 (3.5)
B	Good	79.5-86.4 (3.0)
C	Grades of C do not count toward graduation	69.5-79.4 (2.0)
F	Failing	69.4 or below (0.0)
INC	Incomplete	

Standards:
All MABA students must achieve a grade of B or better and maintain a GPA of 3.0, or academic remediation will be enforced.

Timeliness:
Be sure to pay close attention to deadlines. Late work may be accepted with a serious and compelling reason and approval. However, assignments submitted after the due date may be subject to a 10% penalty per day (with a 24-hour grace period).

Technology: If students expect to send or receive urgent emails, texts, or calls during class, their needs should be communicated to the instructor before class. All cell phones should be turned off or placed in silent mode. All computing devices should be used only for class-related activities.

Email: Prompt communication is essential. I will try my best on weekdays to respond to emails within 18 hours. Over the weekend, please allow 24-36 hours for a response.

GSAPP Diversity: The Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology (GSAPP) at Rutgers University-New Brunswick is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We view individuals from a variety of backgrounds, lived-experiences, identities, and perspectives across our community members as critical to our threefold mission of world-class education, scholarship, and public service. We aim to honor diversity through a variety of means, such as inclusive groups, events, initiatives, curricula, and our organizational composition. We strive to create and maintain a safe space in which all voices are heard and valued, consistent with Rutgers University's Beloved Community. GSAPP acknowledges the current, historical, and systemic practices that have been used to marginalize and oppress some identities and give power and privilege to others in and beyond the United States. Additionally, we are keenly aware of the destructive effects, including on mental health and personal well-being, of prejudice, stigma, microaggressions, and violence in all its forms. We engage in a critical examination of our own biases and behaviors, both past and present. We utilize evolving methods to address, incorporate, and celebrate DEI through our scholarship, service, and training of future health service professionals.

Accessibility: Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where they are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form https://webapps.rutgers.edu/student-ods/forms/registration

Integrity: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers/

Generative AI: **Restricted and Cited Use of Generative AI**: Generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemeni, etc.) may be allowed under specific conditions that support student learning outcomes (SLOs), provided its use enhances rather than substitutes for learning. To ensure transparency and accurate assessment of SLOs, students must disclose any Generative AI assistance, allowing evaluations to reflect both their knowledge and the extent of generative AI usage. Students who misuse ChatGPT and similar programs are seeking to gain an unfair advantage, which means they are committing academic dishonesty (see above). That said, I encourage the use of Grammarly when writing, which Rutgers gives you for free.

Resources: https://gsapp.rutgers.edu/current-students/important-links

Title IX: http://compliance.rutgers.edu/resources/resources-for-facultystaff

Counseling: Students often experience personal problems or difficulties during the term that may interfere with learning and daily activities. If you or someone you know needs to talk to someone regarding such personal issues, the University provides free counseling services through the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), and their information can be found at http://psychologicalservices.rutgers.edu.There are also helpful workshops for general stress management and techniques for promoting mental health. If you have any questions about CAPS or other services, I am happy to speak with you privately.

Weekly Schedule

Meetings	Topics/ Readings	Assignments/ Activities
Week 1 **9/3**	**Course Overview & Historical Antecedents**	Introduction
Week 2 **9/10**	**Concepts and Dimensions** Talking About Behavior (TAB): Preface Baer, Wolf, & Risley (1968). Some current dimensions of applied behavior analysis.	Objectives 1 In-class: Record of Interteaching 1 In-class: Seven Dimensions of ABA
Week 3 **9/17**	**Free will & Determinism** TAB Ch 1 Marr, J. (1982). On Terms: Determinism. *The Behavior Analyst,* 5(2), 205-207.	Objectives 2 In-class: Record of Interteaching 2

	Slife, B. D., Yanchar, S. C., & Williams, B. (1999). Conceptions of determinism in radical behaviorism: A taxonomy. *Behavior and philosophy*, 75-96.	In-class: Determined to Feel Free
Week 4 **9/24**	**Mentalism, Mechanism, and the Mind-Body Problem** TAB Ch 3 Moore, J. (2010). What do mental terms mean? *The Psychological Record,* 60, 705-707 Pérez-Álvarez, M. (2009). The four causes of behavior: Aristotle and Skinner. *International Journal of Psychology and Psychological Therapy, 9*, 45-57.	Objectives 3 In-class: Record of Interteaching 3 In-class: From Mentalism to Measurement
Week 5 **10/1**	**Verbal Behavior** TAB Ch 2 Chomsky N. (1959). A review of B. F. Skinner's Verbal Behavior. *Language. 35* (26–58). MacCorquodale, K. (1970). On Chomsky's review of Skinner's Verbal behavior. *Journal of the experimental analysis of behavior, 13*(1), 83.	Objectives 4 In-class: Record of Interteaching 4 In-class: Talking about Talking
Week 6 **10/8**	**Public vs. Private** TAB Ch 4 Baum, W. M. (2011). Behaviorism, private events, and the molar view of behavior. The Behavior Analyst, 34, 185-200. Moore, J. (2013). Methodological behaviorism from the standpoint of a radical behaviorist. *The Behavior Analyst, 36*, 197-208	Objectives 5 In-class: Record of Interteaching 5 In-class: Talking about Private Events
Week 7 **10/15**		**Exam 1**
Week 8 **10/22**	**Cognition, Knowledge, & Understanding** TAB Ch 6	Objectives 6

		In-class: Record of Interteaching 6
	Gross, A.C., & Fox, E.J. (2009). Relational frame theory: an overview of the controversy. *Analysis of Verbal Behavior, 25*(1):87-98. Skinner, B.F. (1977). Why I am not a cognitive psychologist. *Behaviorism, 5,* 1-10	In-class: Deriving Relations
Week 9 **10/29**	**The Deep Nature of Reinforcement** TAB Ch 5 Adams, M. A. (2000). Reinforcement theory and behavior analysis. *Behavioral Development Bulletin, 9*(1), 3–6. Klatt, K. P., & Morris, E. K. (2001). The Premack principle, response deprivation, and establishing operations. The Behavior Analyst, 24(2), 173–180.	Objectives 7 In-class: Record of Interteaching 7 In-class: Predicting What Will Work
Week 10 **11/5**	**Selection by Consequences: Society and Culture** TAB Ch 9 Leão, M. F. F. C., Laurenti, C., & Haydu, V. B. (2016). Darwinism, Radical Behaviorism, and the role of variation in Skinnerian explaining behavior. *Behavior Analysis: Research and Practice, 16*, 1-11. Skinner, B. F. (1981). Selection by consequences. *Science, 213* (501-504).	Objectives 8 In-class: Record of Interteaching 8 In-class: Three Levels of Selection
Week 11 **11/12**	**Behavioral Responsibility** TAB Ch 7 Biglan, A. (2003). Selection by consequences: One unifying principle for a transdisciplinary science of prevention. *Prevention Science, 4*, 213-232. Reed, D.D. (2015). Applied behavior science goes to scale: A review of Biglan's *The Nurture Effect. The Behavior Analyst,* 38, 309-320.	Objectives 9 In-class: Record of Interteaching 9 In-class: Paper Peer Review
Week 12 **11/19**	**Ethics, Rights, & Values**	

	TAB Ch 8 Moore, J. (2003). Behavior analysis, mentalism, and the path to social justice. *The Behavior Analyst*, *26*, 181-193. Saini, V., & Vance, H. (2020). Systemic racism and cultural selection: A preliminary analysis of metacontingencies. *Behavior and Social Issues, 29*, 52–63.	Objectives 10 In-class: Record of Interteaching 10 In-class: My Values *last day to share paper draft to get feedback*
11/26	**Thanksgiving Recess**	**No Class**
Week 13 **12/3**	**Behaviorism and Radical Behaviorism** TAB Ch 10 Araiba, S. (2020). Current diversification of behaviorism. *Perspectives on Behavior Science*, *43*(1), 157-175. Nuzzolili, A.E., & Diller, J.W. (2015). How Hume's philosophy informed radical behaviorism. *The Behavior Analyst*, 38, 115-125.	Objectives 11 In-class: Record of Interteaching 11 In-class: Presentation Peer Review
Week 14 **12/10**		**In-class Presentations**
Week 15 **12/17**		**Exam 2**

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NOTE: The dates assigned to each topic are approximate. Instructor reserves the right to modify aspects of the course (e.g., readings) during the semester to better serve the needs of the students.

Rutgers University Mission
As the premier comprehensive public research university in the state's system of higher education, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, has the threefold mission of:

- providing for the instructional needs of New Jersey's citizens through its undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education programs,
- conducting the cutting-edge research that contributes to the medical, environmental, social, and cultural well-being of the state, as well as aiding the economy and the state's businesses and industries, and
- performing public service in support of the needs of the citizens of the state and its local, county, and state governments.

Each component of the university's mission reinforces and supports the other two. As the University of New Jersey®, Rutgers is dedicated to teaching that meets the highest standards of excellence, to conducting research that breaks new ground, and to provide services, solutions, and clinical care that help individuals and the local, national, and global communities where they live.

GSAPP Mission

The mission of GSAPP is threefold: education, research/scholarship, and public service. Its goal is to prepare well-educated, qualified, and competent direct-service psychologists who have a special commitment to direct community involvement and to underserved populations--professionals who can integrate scientific knowledge with innovation in the delivery of psychological services to individuals, families, groups, and organizations. Professionals receiving a doctoral degree in psychology should be capable of extending psychological knowledge and exhibiting the high level of analytic skills and theoretical understanding needed to use existing and emerging psychological knowledge.

Core Values. We are guided by four core values that are apparent in our learning environment, centers, and clinics:
1. **Academic excellence** in preparing students for careers in clinical and school psychology.
2. Commitment to **social justice** and helping **underserved populations**.
3. **Diversity** of students trained, approaches used, theoretical orientations followed, and populations served.
4. **Knowledge generation and dissemination** using contemporary research approaches.

MABA Statement

The Master of Applied Behavior Analysis (MABA) Program in the Department of Applied Psychology at GSAPP trains students to become highly-skilled behavior analysts who apply evidence-based behavioral interventions that promote independence and address the behavioral challenges of individuals in need. This program perfectly aligns with Rutgers University's and GSAPP's mission to train professionals who can integrate scientific knowledge with innovation in delivering clinical care that helps individuals and the local, national, and global communities where they live. Students learn through coursework and real-world experiences in clinical, school, healthcare, and community-based settings. Graduates will be well-educated, qualified, and competent direct-service behavior analysts and clinical researchers with a special commitment to direct community involvement and underserved populations.

Students who enter our program will receive a 42-credit Master of ABA degree, which includes a strong *foundation* in conceptual knowledge alongside education and training in *applied* areas of behavior analysis.
- The **foundation** comprises the theory, philosophy, and science of ABA as well as our school's values--civic and global citizenship, social justice and helping the underserved, and cultural responsiveness. We expect that these values will become the lens through which students view human interactions and will be emphasized in their supervision groups.

- The **applied** emphasis of the program includes opportunities for students to receive training in socially significant areas of behavior analysis, participate in a practicum, and have opportunities to integrate their didactic and applied learning experiences. This program will prepare graduates to become BCBAs who can independently practice ABA or continue their education to obtain their doctorate in behavior analysis.