

Existential Psychology and the Search for
Meaning
Psychology 339



Dr. Micah Sadigh
Cedar Crest College
Syllabus

The Essence of Existentialism

“We have made you neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal or immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though maker and moulder of yourself, you may fashion yourself in whatever shape you shall prefer. You shall have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. You shall have the power, out of your soul’s judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine” (From Pico della Mirandola’s *Oratio de Hominis Dignitate*, 1486).



Cedar Crest College *Syllabus*

Title: Existential Psychology and the Search for Meaning (PSY-339)
(3 credits)

Class Meeting Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30-3:45 PM

Faculty: Dr. Micah R. Sadigh

(Prerequisites: PSY-100 & 351 or by permission of Dr. Sadigh)

Office: Curtis 135

Office Hours: Mondays (1-3:30PM; & 5:30-6:30 PM); Tuesdays (1-2); Wednesdays (10-11 AM); Thursdays (4-5 PM); or by appointment (610-606-4666, Ext. 3715)

E-mail: micasa@cedarcrest.edu

Description: This course explores the contributions of existentialism to the field of clinical psychology. Central to existentialism are concepts such as freedom, responsibility, anxiety, suffering and search for meaning. These and other existential concepts will be explored through the close examination of the works of authors such as Kierkegaard, Kafka, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Frankl and May. Two tests, three reaction papers and class attendance and participation will constitute the final grade for the course.

Goals:

1. Students will gain an in depth knowledge of existentialism and its impact on the discipline of clinical psychology.
2. Students will be able to apply existential concepts in the process of meaning-creation
3. Students will gain an appreciation on how existentialism has contributed to modern literature, particularly that which explores human behavior
4. Students will gain an appreciation of how classical literature has contributed to the development of certain key concepts in existentialism.

Course Objectives:

Upon the completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Describe the fundamental concepts in existentialism
2. Demonstrate knowledge of the application of existential concepts in clinical psychology
3. Describe how the various concepts and ideas in existentialism can help a person find meaning in life
4. Describe the importance of certain literary works in exploring some of the key existential themes

Course Outline and Assigned Readings:

Week 1

- Why a course in existential psychology?
- Introduction to existentialism (Part I) (pages 1-10 and handouts)

Week 2

- **First assignment is due on 1/27**
- Introduction to existentialism (Part II) (Chapter 2)
- The basic premises of existentialism

Week 3

- The concept of the absurd: When life does not make sense! (Chapter 3)
- Sisyphus, Ixion and Tantalus: Are we them?

Week 4

- Franz Kafka's **Metamorphosis**
- Is self-consciousness a curse? (Paper due)

Week 5

- **Test # 1 (2/17)**
- Rollo May and Existential Psychology (pages 89-107 and handouts)

Week 6

- Søren Kierkegaard on modes of living and how to find meaning in life.
- (Begin reading Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. Also, review pages 57 and 58 in the textbook)

Week 7

- Tolstoy on the meaning of life (**Paper due**)

Week 8

- Psychotherapeutic applications: What is suffering? (Chapter 5)
- Is there meaning in death?

Week 9

- A brief introduction to the works of Fredrick Nietzsche

Week 10

- From death camp to existentialism: The story of Viktor Frankl
- What is Logotherapy? (**Paper due**)

Week 11

- Applications of existential concepts in a clinical setting (Chapter 6)
- Selected clinical case studies (**Written Assignment**)

Week 12

- Contributions of Dostoevsky
- French existentialists: Sartre and Camus

Week 13

- The reemergence of existential psychotherapy and existential analysis
- Special presentation (Movie)

Week 14

- **Final exam (4/30)**

Textbook:

Schneider, K.J., & May, R. (1995). *The psychology of existence: An integrative, clinical perspective*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Additional Required Books:

Frankl, V. E. (1984). *Man's search for meaning*. New York: Simon & Schuster

Kafka, F. (1972). *The Metamorphosis*. New York: Bantam Books.

Tolstoy, L. (1981). *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. New York: Bantam Books.

Assessment: The main objectives of the course will be assessed via the administration of two tests. The test will consist of essay questions, which require students to reflect upon the assigned readings and the material discussed during each class. Additionally, students will be graded on their reaction papers and class participation.

Grades: The final grade for the course will be calculated based on the following percentages:

TEST # 1: 25%

TEST # 2: 25%

Papers & Written Assignments: 50%

Instructions for the Paper: For each of the assigned books, write a concise reaction paper that captures the essence of the book from your point of view. Please note that I am not expecting you to write a book review, nor do I want you to write a critical review of the book. **In your paper, try to capture what the book is “saying” to you.**

Assignments: From time to time, I will be asking you to reflect on and comment about certain passages in our textbook, *The Psychology of Existence*. I will announce when these assignments are due.

Deadlines: Papers are due on the specific dates that will be announced in class. Late papers will lose 5 point for each day they are turned in late.

Honor Code: Students are expected to abide by the Cedar Crest College Honor Code. Acts of misconduct (e.g., cheating during an examination, copying material on your homework, or allowing someone to use your homework) will not be tolerated. Infringements will be handled according to college policy.

Special Accommodations: If you require assistance due to a disability, I will be more than happy to help you in any way possible to meet your needs. Please see me after class.

Make-up exams: There will be no make-up exams, **except** in cases of extreme emergencies.

Classroom Protocol: All Cedar Crest College students are expected to be familiar with and fully supportive of the college's policy regarding the honor code and academic integrity. See the Student Guide for more information regarding the enforcement of these policies. Appropriate classroom behavior is defined and guided by complete protection for the rights of all students and faculty to a courteous, respectful classroom environment. That environment is free from distractions such as late arrivals, early departures, inappropriate conversations and any other behaviors that might disrupt instruction and/or compromise students' access to their Cedar Crest College education.

Plagiarism: If plagiarism is suspected, I am bound to follow academic regulations. Plagiarism is the act of presenting the ideas, words or other intellectual property of another as one's own. The use of other people's work must be properly acknowledged and referenced in all written material. The use of material without acknowledgement is an offense.

Cheating: Bear in mind that allowing another to copy one's work is an academic offense just as is copying from someone. Furthermore, submitting the same paper for two courses without arrangement is also an academic offense.

Grades:

A	93.0-100%	C	73.0-76.6%
A-	90.0-92.9%	C-	70.0-72.9%
B+	86.7-89.9%	D+	67.0-69.9%
B	83.4-86.6%	D	60-66.9%
B-	80.0-83.3%	F	below 60%
C+	76.7-79.9%		

Psychology Department Attendance Policy

The Psychology Department is committed to the principle that regular and punctual class attendance is essential to the students' optimum learning and successful academic achievement. Regular class attendance is a student obligation, and students are responsible for all work, tests and written assignments. Therefore, students are expected to be present for all class sessions. The Psychology Department's attendance policy recognizes that there will be times when attendance at class is not possible. You may think of the policy as being similar to the type used in the corporate world where each employee is given a certain number of "personal/sick days." Based on the number of regularly scheduled class meetings, you will be allowed a certain number of absences (see below) with no consequences, no questions asked. In other words, there is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. You are of course responsible for anything covered during those missed classes, and for submitting assignments on time, regardless of whether or not you attend. Beyond the allowable number of absences, there are consequences that will adversely impact your grade, much as missing too many days of work can adversely impact your employment status. Above all else, you should carefully consider each decision to not attend class, as once your allotted absences have been used, they are gone. *It is important that students arrive for class on time. Late arrivals are very distracting, not only to the instructor, but also to fellow students. Repeated late arrivals are not acceptable and will be addressed on an individual basis.* It is each student's responsibility to understand this policy and to keep track of absences throughout the semester.

Application to this Class: Formal attendance will be taken during all class sessions. This class meets twice per week (28 class meetings). You may miss **3 classes** without penalty. If you miss **4 classes**, your final grade (cumulative percentage of points) will be lowered by 5%. That means that if you have earned 84% of the available points in the class, which is a B grade, you would be lowered to 79%, which is a C+. Likewise, if you have earned 77% of the points available, the penalty would take you down to 72%, which is a C-. As a reminder, a C grade (73%) is required in all Psychology courses. If you miss **5 classes**, you will be docked an additional 5% points off of your final grade (for a total of 10%). If you miss **6 classes**, you will receive a failing grade for the course. If you miss six classes, you have missed approximately 25% of the class meetings.

UNNECESSARY CONVERSATIONS

Unnecessary conversations during the lectures will be distracting to your fellow students as well as your professor. Those who engage in such conversations will be dismissed from class.

Assignment # 1

Choose one of the Following authors and write a concise paper about his/her contributions to existentialism

1. Heraclitus
2. Martin Buber
3. St. Augustine
4. Blaise Pascal
5. Søren Kierkegaard
6. Arthur Schopenhauer
7. Friedrich Nietzsche
8. Fyodor Dostoevsky
9. Jean Paul Sartre
10. Simone De Beauvoir
11. Gabriel Marcel
12. Rollo May
13. Irvin Yalom
14. Albert Camus
15. Ludwig Binswanger
16. Viktor Frankl
17. Franz Kafka
18. Martin Heidegger
19. R.D. Laing
20. Jose Ortega