

Theory & Philosophy

Department of Behavior Analysis

University of North Texas

Spring 2026

Thursdays 6:00 p.m. – 8:50 p.m.

Chilton, Room 363

Instructor & Contact

Instructor: Daniele Ortu, PhD

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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description & Objectives

This course explores theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of behavior analysis.

Topics include:

- Selectionism as an overarching life-science principle.
- Behaviorism as Philosophy: readings from B. F. Skinner and others who shaped our field's worldview.
- Conceptual & Empirical Foundations: works by Donahoe, Palmer, Neuringer, Marr, Schaal, and others.
- Special Topics such as behavioral cusps, variability, and the social construction of knowledge.

Our goal is to develop a deeper understanding of philosophical assumptions, conceptual analyses, and historical influences guiding the practice and science of behavior analysis.

Required Readings

All weekly readings (journal articles or book chapters) will be posted on Canvas by the instructor.

Learning Activities & Evaluation

1. Weekly Quizzes (13 total)

- Each short quiz is taken at the start of class.
- 35 points each, totaling 455 points for 13 quizzes.

2. Inter-teaching PPTs (13 total)

- After a lecture, you will form small groups to discuss the reading(s).
- Each group compiles a short PowerPoint summarizing key takeaways.

- One group presents to the entire class each week; all groups must submit a PPT.
- 35 points each, totaling 455 points for 13 PPTs.

3. Final Paper

- Worth 90 points (graded in a "peer-review style"):
 - No Revisions = 90
 - Minor Revisions = 80
 - Major Revisions = 65
 - Reject, Resubmit = 45
 - Reject (<45 pts)
- There is no strict page limit, but it should be "publication-ready" in style.
- Due on the last class (April 30) unless otherwise specified.

4. Final Presentation about Final Paper:

100 Points

Total Points & Grades

Total Points = 1,100

Letter Grades (percentage of total points):

- A = 90–100%
- B = 80–89%
- C = 70–79%
- F = 69% or below

Course Policies

Attendance & Participation

Attendance is expected for optimal learning. If you must miss a class, please email Dr. Ortu in advance. There are no make-up quizzes, so an absence on a quiz day will result in lost points for that quiz.

Academic Integrity

All work submitted must be your own. Group study is encouraged, but copying from others or from AI tools is prohibited. Any suspected violations (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) will be referred to the Office of Academic Integrity per UNT policy.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

Acceptable Use: You may use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) only as a study aid or to generate practice questions, clarify concepts, etc.

Unacceptable Use: Submitting text generated entirely or partially by AI as your own written work. We will use Turnitin or similar detection methods to check for AI-generated text, and any discovered content will be treated as plagiarism.

Office of Disability Accommodation

UNT is committed to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you have a disability requiring accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) and provide the necessary documentation. Visit <http://www.unt.edu/oda/> or call (940) 565-4323 for more information.

Spring 2026 Schedule

Important Notes:

- No class on March 12 (Spring Break) and April 9 (TxABA).
- 13 total quiz + PPT sessions (Weeks 2–14).

Week	Date	Topic	Reading Reference(s)	Assignments
1	Jan 15	Course Introduction	Syllabus & Course Overview	No quiz, no interteach PPT
2	Jan 22	Tensions in Science Between Essentialism and Selectionism	Palmer, D. C., & Donahoe, J. W. (1992). Essentialism and selectionism in cognitive science and behavior analysis. <i>American Psychologist</i> , 47(11), 1344–1358.	Quiz #1; Interteach PPT #1
3	Jan 29	VB Analysis of Psychological Categories	Skinner, B. F. (1945). The operational analysis of psychological terms. <i>Psychological Review</i> , 52(5), 270–277.	Quiz #2; Interteach PPT #2
4	Feb 5	Empiricism	Marr, M. J. (2003). Empiricism. In K. A. Lattal & P. N. Chase (Eds.), <i>Behavior theory and philosophy</i> (pp. 63–81). Springer.	Quiz #3; Interteach PPT #3
5	Feb 12	Explanatory Reductionism in Behavior Analysis	Schaal, D. W. (2003). Explanatory reductionism in behavior analysis. In K. A. Lattal & P. N. Chase (Eds.), <i>Behavior theory and philosophy</i> (pp. 83–102). Springer.	Quiz #4; Interteach PPT #4
6	Feb 19	A Deeper Dive on Selectionism	Donahoe, J. W. (2003). Selectionism. In K. A. Lattal & P. N. Chase (Eds.), <i>Behavior theory and philosophy</i> (pp. 103–128). Springer.	Quiz #5; Interteach PPT #5
7	Feb 26	Levels of Analysis/Philosophy of Science	Bechtel, W. (2005). The challenge of characterizing operations in the mechanisms underlying behavior. <i>Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior</i> , 84(3), 313–325.	Quiz #6; Interteach PPT #6
8	Mar 5	Behaviorism and Development	Rosales-Ruiz, J., & Baer, D. M. (1997). Behavioral cusps: A developmental and pragmatic concept for behavior analysis. <i>Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis</i> , 30(3), 533–544.	Quiz #7; Interteach PPT #7
–	Mar 12	No Class – Spring Break	–	–
9	Mar 19	Behaviorism and Creativity	Neuringer, A. (2003). Creativity and reinforced variability. In K. A. Lattal & P. N. Chase (Eds.), <i>Behavior theory and philosophy</i> (pp. 323–346). Springer.	Quiz #8; Interteach PPT #8
10	Mar 26	A Verbal Behavior Analysis of Logic and Math	Palmer, D. C. (2013). Some implications of a behavioral analysis of verbal behavior for logic and	Quiz #9; Interteach PPT #9; Submit Final Paper Outline

			mathematics. <i>The Behavior Analyst</i> , 36(2), 267–276.	
11	Apr 2	Behaviorism and Flexible Units of Analysis	Skinner, B. F. (1935). The generic nature of the concepts of stimulus and response. <i>The Journal of General Psychology</i> , 12(1), 40–65.	Quiz #10; Interteach PPT #10
–	Apr 9	No Class – TxABA	–	–
12	Apr 16	The Operant as a Population	Catania, A. C. (1973). The concept of the operant in the analysis of behavior. <i>Behaviorism</i> , 1(2), 103–116.	Quiz #11; Interteach PPT #11
13	Apr 23	The Concept of the Repertoire	Palmer, D. C. (2009). Response strength and the concept of the repertoire. <i>European Journal of Behavior Analysis</i> , 10(1), 49–60.	Quiz #12; Interteach PPT #12
14	Apr 30	Social Construction of Knowledge	Guerin, B. (1992). Behavior analysis and the social construction of knowledge. <i>American Psychologist</i> , 47(11), 1423–1432.	Quiz #13; Interteach PPT #13
15	May 7	Final Presentation	All students present their Final Paper to the class	Final Paper Due