Welcome to “Language, Thought, and Identity,” an Honors Seminar designed to offer you a better understanding of the way we construct and maintain social identities (“male,” “Muslim,” “adult,” “American,” “conservative,” “Asian,” “gay,” “vegetarian,” “good student,” “Southerner,” “feminist”). Drawing on major sociological and linguistic theoretical traditions, we will examine how we come to (a) define what is “normal,” (b) set our cognitive “defaults,” and (c) establish what we can take for granted.

There is one required book for this course: Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs by Wayne Brekhus (ISBN 0-226-07292-4). It has been ordered through the University’s bookstores. All the other required course readings are posted on the course website on sakai.rutgers.edu. Students are expected to read all the required material prior to the class for which it is assigned.

The course’s learning goals are to help you gain (a) an understanding of the way our social environment impacts the way we identify ourselves as well as others; (b) an improved understanding of major intellectual debates over “essentialism” and “constructionism”; and (c) an ability to communicate complex ideas effectively to a general audience. By the end of the course, students are expected to be able to articulate sociological theories, review disciplinary literature, synthesize information and ideas from multiple sources to generate new insights, produce a well-written paper, and present their work orally. In addition, they will also be able to demonstrate multicultural sensitivity as well as global awareness.

The course assignments include (a) a midterm exam on October 11, (b) a 10-page term paper (due on November 17), and (c) a final exam (on December 19). Each of these
assignments will count for one third of your final course grade, and no extra credit will be permitted. Late assignments will be penalized, so make sure that your work is submitted on time. No late papers or make-up exams will be permitted without a valid written excuse such as documentation from your doctor or dean.

Class attendance (including arriving on time and staying until the end of the class period) is required. Students are expected to attend all classes. If you expect to miss a class, please use the University absence reporting website [https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/](https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/) to indicate the date and reason for your absence. Poor class attendance will affect the grade.

It is acceptable to use other people’s ideas in your written work as long as you give credit to the original author. You act professionally and ethically when you do this, and it is considered dishonest to pass others’ ideas or words as your own. Such behavior constitutes plagiarism and can result in failure in the class and potentially dismissal from Rutgers. Students are required to follow current Rutgers’ Academic Integrity Policy as indicated in the website [http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI_Policy_9_01_2011.pdf](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI_Policy_9_01_2011.pdf). For further information on how to avoid plagiarism in your work, see [http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib_instruct/instruct_document.shtml](http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/lib_instruct/instruct_document.shtml). To give credit to the original author of ideas you present and protect yourself from charges of dishonesty, always cite in your text the sources you used and list all of them in a bibliography at the end of your written assignment.

The Department of Sociology encourages the free exchange of ideas in a safe, supportive, and productive classroom environment. To facilitate such an environment, students and faculty must act with mutual respect and common courtesy. Behavior that distracts students and faculty during class is therefore not acceptable. Such behavior includes cell phone use, surfing the internet, checking email, text messaging, listening to music, reading newspapers, and leaving early without informing your instructor beforehand. If a student engages in disruptive behavior, the instructor, following the University Code of Student Conduct, may direct the student to leave class for the remainder of the class period.

The Rutgers Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue. We have zero tolerance for violations of these principles.

The best way to reach me is by email. Please write “Language, Thought, and Identity” in the subject line so I can recognize your email quickly. Please remember to also sign your name in the email.
1. Introduction

September 6

2. Cognition and Identity

September 8


September 13


September 15


3. Markedness and Unmarkedness

September 20


September 22


**September 27**


**4. Norms, Traditions, and Conventions**

**September 29**


**October 4**


**October 6**


October 11

**MIDTERM EXAM**

5. Normality and Deviance

October 13


October 18


October 20


October 25


October 27

November 1


6. Semiotic Subversion

November 3


Zerubavel, *Hidden in Plain Sight*, pp. 82-85.

November 8

**GUEST LECTURE** (to be announced)

November 10


November 15

36-49, 53-55.


**November 17**


**TERM PAPERS DUE**

**November 22**


**November 29**


**7. Student Presentations**

**December 1**

Student Presentations

**December 6**

Student Presentations
8. Conclusion

  December 13
  Conclusion