

Youth Scholars Institute

2010 Program

TITLE: Life's Big Questions: The Psychology of the Self

INSTRUCTOR: Michael Kitchens, PhD, Assistant Professor of Psychology

DESCRIPTION: Life is full of big questions that are important for normal and healthy psychological development. In this program, we will examine three of these questions: (1) Who am I? One of the most important psychological steps we make is to figure out who we are and convey that message to others. How do we develop ideas about ourselves? Do others see us as we see ourselves? Does our personal identity differ from our public identity? (2) What does it all mean? People want their life to be meaningful and to feel a sense of purpose in life. People can do this by developing close relationships or by accomplishing great things, but people can also get caught up in cults and even well-meaning people can commit evil actions. (3) How can I be happy? At the most fundamental level, people want to be happy. Psychologists have developed a science of happiness that identifies who is happy, what makes us happy, and why we are so bad at knowing the secrets of happiness. In short, this course examines some of life's big questions from a psychological perspective. We will engage in class discussions, watch films, complete personality tests, and conduct research projects to examine topics related to identity (e.g., personality, "identity detectives," & detecting lies), meaning (e.g., self-esteem, cults, & greed), and happiness (e.g., the happiest people, myths of happiness, & what makes us happy).