

Spring 2024: Consciousness and Cognition (HON308) M/W 2:30 – 3:45pm in Doti 105

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Office hours: in-person (Crean 109) on Wednesdays 11:30a-12:30p and [virtual by appointment](#)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Modern science tells us that *everything* in the universe – ourselves included – is made of physical stuff that follows physical laws (“matter in motion”). However, the universe also contains *consciousness*. For example, all of us reading this right now are conscious – we have a subjective experience of the world that includes (but is not limited to) sense perceptions (e.g. seeing things), emotions, thinking and understanding, feeling pains, etc. The existence of consciousness is a profound scientific mystery, widely considered to be the biggest gap in our current understanding of reality. If we are supposed to believe that the universe is made of mindless atoms following physical laws, where does consciousness fit? How does mindless matter become the subject of experiences? Where does our “inner life” of thoughts, perceptions, and feelings come from?

The study of consciousness is interdisciplinary at its core. In this class, we will tackle the big questions related to consciousness from the fields of philosophy of mind, ethics, neuroscience, and AI. We will use both “third person” methods (objective observation) and “first-person” methods (introspection) to answer these questions, comparing and contrasting the role that each kind of approach should play in consciousness investigations.

Philosophy: What *is* consciousness, and why is it a problem? How should we view the relationships between physical reality, matter, and consciousness? Do we have free will?

Ethics: Can morality exist without consciousness? What role does consciousness play in defining ethical principles of right/wrong or good/bad?

Psych/Neuroscience: How do conscious experiences of thinking, perceiving, & feeling, relate to physical processes in the brain? What role does consciousness play in decision-making? Can consciousness exist without a “self”?

Cognitive Science: Is consciousness a function of information processing? Is it necessary for intelligent behavior? What is the difference between conscious and unconscious processing?

Artificial Intelligence: Is consciousness a feature of biological matter or is it “substrate independent”?

COURSE MATERIALS

Required Book: Blackmore, S. & Troscianko, E. (2018). *Consciousness: An Introduction, 3rd Ed.* (ISBN 1138801313)

COURSE FORMAT AND GRADES

Course Grades. This course employs a point-based grading system. The total number of points it is possible to obtain (including all course assignments) is 100. Your final grade will be determined by tallying up all points you obtained out of the 100 possible, using the grading scale below.

Points obtained	Final Grade	Points obtained	Final Grade
94 – 100	A	77 – 79	C+
90 – 93	A-	73 – 76	C
87 – 89	B+	70 – 72	C-
83 – 86	B	60 – 69	D
80 – 82	B-	< 59	F

Assignment category	Points
Participation	30
Presentation	30
Consciousness Labs	8
Reading Q's	12
Final Project	20
	100

Participation (30 points)

This course employs a dialectical approach, meaning we examine the issues together by engaging in an active exchange of ideas. You will be graded on how often you contribute and how pertinent and insightful your contributions are to the conversations at hand. I want our classroom to be an environment in which everyone feels comfortable thinking out loud and sharing their ideas, so please let me know if there is anything I can do to help you in this regard. The success of the class relies on student participation, so let's make it ~~good~~ great!

Presentation-Discussion Lead (30 points)

You and a partner will give a brief presentation and then lead a class discussion on a consciousness topic of your choosing (within the current unit). Your goal is to present the key issue(s) and guide the class in critically evaluating the arguments/evidence. Signups will occur within the first few weeks of the semester. More details TBA.

Consciousness Labs (1 points each x 8 CS Labs = 8 points total)

Consciousness Labs (CS Labs) employ a first-person approach to studying consciousness. Each CS Lab exercise will prompt you to observe aspect(s) of your conscious experience and write up your findings, integrating course content from the readings/discussions. We will discuss the labs as a class. You will have about a week to complete each Lab. Labs will be graded holistically:

Reading Question Assignments 2 points each x 6 RQs = 12 points total)

Each RQ assignment is 2-4 questions about the readings assigned for the week, designed to help you hone in on the important points and make connections to course themes. Answers should aim to be no longer than a paragraph (be concise!). RQ's will be submitted on Canvas before class so I can review them and determine if there are any topics of confusion or particular interest to focus on in class. There will be 7 RQA's but you are only required to turn in 6 for a grade (i.e., your lowest RQ assignment grade will be dropped).

- Assigned readings include chapters from Blackmore text and in some cases supplemental readings that will be posted in the Module for the week).

Final Project (20 points)

Produce an interdisciplinary scholarly work or creative piece about consciousness using whatever medium you prefer. If your project is a creative piece (e.g., fine art/performance/video/etc) you must submit with it a roughly one-page paper that describes your aims with the piece (you do not need to do this if you write a scholarly paper). The goal of this project is for you to get the opportunity to do a deeper dive into a consciousness topic that interested you and explore how to convey/explain/illustrate it. You may collaborate with other student(s) on the project, however each student must write their own one-page explanation and clearly indicate what their contributions were. And, all student collaborators must be listed on each students' paper. All students will give a brief (5 min) informal presentation of their project during our final exam meeting/partay. More Details TBA

There will be a ~ **SURPRISE!** ~ revealed towards the end of the semester, so stay tuned!

GENERAL EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Social Inquiry (SI): Students identify, frame, and analyze social and/or historical structures and institutions in the world today.

Values and Ethical Inquiry (VEI): Students articulate how values and ethics inform human understanding, structures, and behavior

COURSE CONTENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Develop an interdisciplinary understanding of consciousness that integrates knowledge from philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, and/or computer science/artificial intelligence.
- Critically evaluate scientific and philosophical theories of consciousness.
- Identify ways in which consciousness is involved in ethics, from the role consciousness plays in ethical theories to how consciousness factors into contemporary moral issues.
- Consider ontological, epistemological, and ethical issues surrounding AI (e.g., robots, machine consciousness).
- Become better acquainted with your consciousness through first-person reflection and discussion.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Go to the SYLLABUS TAB on Canvas for the COURSE SCHEDULE. It will be updated if/when anything changes during the semester.

POLICIES AND SUPPORT

Chapman University Academic Integrity Policy. Chapman University is a community of scholars that emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction by the instructor/administrator and referral to the University's Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions up to and including expulsion. Please see the full description of Chapman University's policy on Academic Integrity [here](#)

Chapman University Students With Disability Policy. In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to contact the [Office of Disability Services](#). If you'll need to utilize your approved accommodations in this class, please follow the proper notification procedure for informing your professor. This notification process must occur more than a week before any accommodation can be utilized. Please contact Disability Services at 714 516-4520 if you have questions regarding this procedure, or for info & to make an appointment to discuss &/or request potential accommodations based on documentation of your disability. Once formal approval of your need for an accommodation has been granted, you're encouraged to talk with your professor(s) about your accommodation options. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive and cannot jeopardize academic standards or integrity of this course.

Chapman University's Equity and Diversity Policy Chapman University is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity. Students and professors are reminded to show respect at all times as outlined in [Chapman's Harassment and Discrimination Policy](#). Any violations of this policy should be discussed with the professor, the [Dean of Students](#) and/or otherwise reported in accordance with this policy.

Student Support at Chapman University. Over the course of the semester, you may experience a range of challenges that interfere with your learning, such as problems with friend, family, and or significant other relationships; substance use; concerns about personal adequacy; feeling overwhelmed; or feeling sad or anxious without knowing why. These mental health concerns or stressful events may diminish your academic performance and/or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. You can learn more about the resources available through Chapman University's Student Psychological Counseling Services [here](#) . Fostering a community of care that supports the success of students is essential to the values of Chapman University. Occasionally, you may come

across a student whose personal behavior concerns or worries you, either for the student's well-being or yours. In these instances, you are encouraged to contact the Chapman University [Student Concern Intervention Team](#) who can respond to these concerns and offer assistance. While it is preferred that you include your contact information so this team can follow up with you, you can submit a report anonymously. 24-hour emergency help is also available through Public Safety at 714-997-6763.