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Course Description

Psychological researches are expanding in a breath-taking pace and can be a rich source of information for anyone seeking answers to personally relevant questions. However, it takes lifelong learning to be a savvy consumer of this rich source of information, let alone to become a contributor to it. A crucial part of the learning is to understand where scientific questions come from and how they are related to and distinct from just any questions anyone can ask. Accordingly, the goal of this course is to help students to learn how to raise meaningful questions and frame them in scientifically approachable ways. We will start by reviewing certain guiding principles in conducting scientific research, followed by surveys and discussions of a sample of research topics that promise to offer insights into the human nature. The majority of those select topics are concerned with various aspects of consciousness, a issue that absorbs much contemporary research interests, and arguably the nexus of all personal questions any conscious human being can raise.

Reading material

No textbooks are required. Most of the reading material will be accessible in pdf files that can be downloaded either from the Blackboard or directly from the internet. In exchange for the cost of the textbook, you have to defray the cost of printing the reading material yourself. You may also have to purchase a book from amazon.com (most of them available as used books and cost less than $20) at your own expense.

Class organization and reading/writing requirements

This course will be conducted like a seminar. There will be very little formal lecturing. Instead, the course will be structured around reading and discussion of original journal articles, book chapters and books. Much of the time will be spent on discussing how to raise good meaningful questions and make them scientifically testable.

There will be seven focal topics, around which the class discussion, debates and exploratory writing assignments will be organized. Each of these focal topics will consume about two weeks, or six class sessions (except for the first topic). While there is room for change, the two-week schedule for each focal topic will be structured in the following way:
Session 1 (mostly on Monday of the first week): Introduction to the focal topic; raising questions of personal relevance; narrowing down to a 3-4 scientifically tractable questions; exploratory writings aimed at finding paths to answering the questions

Sessions 2 & 3 (mostly on Wednesday and Friday of the first week): Discussing the 4-5 assigned articles on the focal topic; trying really hard to help each other understand the main points of each article, and most importantly, see the connections between these articles and the questions raised in Session 1.

Session 4 (mostly on Monday of the second week): A two-page draft (about 1000 words) of mini research paper is due. Please turn it in on the Blackboard before the class, and bring a printout to the class. In the article, you 1) raise and clarify your questions, 2) describe how the articles discussed in class are relevant to your questions, 3) consider different approaches for scientifically answering the questions, and 4) propose how you would proceed collecting evidence to test your ideas. Your draft paper will be discussed and evaluated in the class, and you will receive feedback from both your peers and/or me.

Session 5 (mostly on Wednesday of the second week): Two students will present summaries/overviews on two books closely related to the focal topic. They are responsible for answering questions and leading class discussions on issues raised in the book. The purpose is to broaden the scope of discussion on related issues.

Session 6 (mostly on Friday of the second week): A revised and extended mini research paper (about 1200 words) is due. The revised paper should demonstrate your effort to incorporate the feedback as well as the information/messages from the two books presented in the last class session. Discussion continues. To wrap up the discussion, there will be an in-class writing assignment or an alternative activity designed to capture and highlight the main points discussed in class,

To sum up, you are required to complete 7 mini research papers over the semester. Each paper will be focused on a specific topic discussed in class and will go through one major revision by incorporating the feedback and content information of the class. In addition, I may give in-class writing assignments anytime, especially in the last class session for each focal topic. To satisfy the writing requirements, you must read and understand quite well the four or five journal articles assigned for each topic. You must attend the class regularly and be engaged in class discussion. You must also read an assigned book closely to be able to answer questions from your peers, and read at least the excerpts of the books presented by other students.

In addition, you are also highly encouraged to use the discussion board of the Blackboard both before and after the class every week for raising your questions and replying your peers' questions. You will earn extra credit of up to 15 points for using the discussion board, depending on the number and quality of your posts.

There will be a final take-home exam that consists mainly of short-essay questions covering all the material discussed in class. There will be no midterm exams.
Grade Distribution

Your final grade will be based on following components:

1) 7 Bi-weekly journals: 20 points each = 140 points
2) Book presentation = 30 points
3) Final exam = 60 points
4) Attendance and class participation = 40 points
5) In-class assignments: = 40 points
6) Discussion Board postings = up to 15 points of extra credits

Total= 310 points + 15 extra credit points

Your total points will be converted to scores in percentage, and your final letter grade will then be determined according to the following percentage scale:

A= 93-100; A- = 89-92; B+ = 86- 88; B = 82-85; B- =79-81; C+ = 76-78;
C=72-75; C- = 68-71; D+ = 64-67; D = 60-63; F= 0-59

Schedule
(Subject to change, please check BB frequently)

1/11: Course overview

1/13, 1/15, 1/20, 1/22: Topic One (Scientific methods)

(1/18: MLK Memorial Holiday, no class)

Journal articles:


1/25 – 2/5: Topic Two (biological foundation of Mind and behavior)

Journal articles:


Books:

Patricia Churchland (2013). Touching a nerve, W. W. Norton
Keith Stanovich (2010). What intelligence tests miss: The psychology of rationality. Yale University Press

2/8—2/19: Topic Three (Perceptual and cognitive unconscious)

Journal articles:

Rensink, R., O'Regan, K., & Clark, J. J. (1997). To see or not to see: The need for attention to Perceive changes in scenes, Psychological Science, 8:5, 368-373


Books:


2/22 – 3/4: Topic Four (Self and motivation)

Journal articles:


**Books:**

Alison Gopnik (2009). The philosophical baby: What children’s minds tell us about truth, love and the meaning of life

3/6-3/13: Spring Break, no class

3/14-3/25: Topic Five (Stereotypes and social perception)

**Journal articles:**


**Books:**

Marco Iacoboni (2009). *Mirroring People: the science of empathy and how we connect with others.*
Michael Kaplan & Ellen Kaplan (2009). Bozo Sapiens: Why to err is human

3/28-4/8: Topic Six (Consciousness and culture)

**Journal articles:**


Books:

Jerome Kagan (2010). *The temperamental thread: How genes, culture, time and luck make us who we are*. Dana Press
Susan Cain (2013). *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*

4/11-4/22: Topic Seven (Consciousness and well-being)

Journal articles:


Books: