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 methods of assessment

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. You will have to complete a two-part writing assignment (summaries and reflection) every week based on your reading, thinking and class discussion. I see myself as a moderator/coach to your inquiries into the issues that concern you or of potential interests to you.

Each of the first 9 weeks starting from Week Two you will be assigned to read 4-5 articles that are broadly connected to a topic related to consciousness. You are required to have finished
reading those articles before coming to the class. As the first part of your weekly assignment, you are required to write a summary of about 200 words for each article you read. You must use your own words to capture the Main ideas of the article (For empirical articles: theory, hypothesis, how they are tested, what is found, what conclusions they reach; for theoretical articles: what the issue is, different theories on the issue, how evidence favor one theory more than the other, what is the main arguments, what issues remain resolved etc.)

There are total of 38 articles over the 9 weeks. Although every student should be prepared to present the main ideas of each article in class, you will be assigned to be the main presenter for two articles (or one exceptionally long article). In addition to the presentation, be prepared to answer question from your peers and me, raise questions about or related to the article you present, and summarize whatever understanding/conclusions reached in class discussion. I will be the moderator for class discussion. At the end of each class session, we will focus on one or two questions related to the article and discuss how to answer the questions by reading published studies or designing new studies. In no cases will you be required to actually collect data by yourself.

After the class, you are required to write a short essay of about 800 words. The post-discussion short essay has two parts. In the first part (about 300 words), you reflect on the topic (not on each article) discussed in class, evaluate evidence/arguments from the articles and arguments you hear in class, and reach your own conclusions. In the second part, you write about your answers to a question we focused on at the end of the class by reading more papers or your ideas of how to conduct a study to finding answers. I may comment on your answers and ask you to elaborate/revise your answers in your next post-discussion essay, or I may ask your peer student(s) to review your answers and ask you to do the same.

To sum up, your nine weekly formal assignments for Week 2 through Week 10 include two parts: 1) Article summaries (about 800-1000 words total) 2) post-discussion essay, which should be about 800-word long. The first part of the formal assignment (summaries) is due at 3:00 am on Monday. The second part of the formal assignment is due midnight on the Thursday of the same week. All assignments must be turned in electronically through the BlackBoard Journal (the Journal allows every student to read every other student’s work). Late work will be penalized by a 20% deduction of points per day delayed.

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.

In addition, each of you will be required to write a 7-10 page review of a book selected from the list appending the syllabus (subject to change). Some of you may want to pick a book yourself, in which case you must get my approval for its match to the themes of this class. A more detailed instruction for writing the book review will be posted on the Blackboard. For the last 3 weeks, each of you will have a chance to give a 15-minute oral presentation of your book review.
There will be a final 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) 9 Weekly formal writings: 20 points each (10 for part 1 and 10 for part 2)= 180 points
2) Book review: = 70 points (50 points for writing and 20 points for oral presentation)
3) Final exam = 70 points
4) Attendance = 24 points (2 points for each class session, no excuse whatsoever)
5) Article presentations = 15 points
6) Discussion participation = 12 points (1 points for each class session)
7) Discussion Board postings = up to 15 points of extra credits

**Total= 371 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:

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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)

**1/5: Course overview**

**Week 2 (1/12): Scientific methods**


**Week 3 (1/19): MLK Memorial holiday, no class**

**Week 4 (1/26): Mind, brain, body, and genes**


Peter K. Hatemi et. al. (Forthcoming) Genetic Influences on Political Ideologies: Genome-Wide
Findings on Three Populations, and a Mega-Twin Analysis of 19 Measures of Political Ideologies from Five Western Democracies. Behavior Genetics – Lindon Eaves Festschrift


**Week 5 (2/02): Attention and perceptual awareness**

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


**Week 6 (2/09): Conscious and unconscious actions**


**Week 7 (2/16): Self and motivation**


**Week 8 (2/23): Stereotypes and social perception**


**3/1-3/8: Spring Break**

**Week 9 (3/09): Consciousness and culture**


**Week 10 (3/16): Consciousness and well-being**


**Week 11 (3/23): Sex differences in minds and behaviors**


Weeks 12-13 (3/30 & 4/06): Book review presentations
Week 14 (4/13): Book review presentation continues; Written book review due
Week 15 (4/20): Final exam

Recommended books for review

**Biological Foundation**
Lise Eliot (2010). *Pink Brain Blue Brain*
Mike Dowd (2008). *Thank God for evolution*. Viking

**Perception, Cognition, Rationality and Beliefs**
Daniel Kahneman (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux
Alexandra Horowitz (2014). On looking: Eleven walks with expert eyes
Bruce M. Hood (2009). Super sense: Why we believe in the unbelievable

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

**Emotion and Motivation**
Marco Iacoboni (2009). *Mirroring People: the science of empathy and how we connect with others*. Picador

**Personality and individual differences**
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*

**Social Psychology**
Mahzarin R. Banaji & Anthony G. Greenwald (2013). *Blindspot*
Michael Kaplan & Ellen Kaplan (2009). *Bozo Sapiens: Why to err is human*

**Psychopathology**
Steven Pinker (2011). *The better angels of our nature: Why violence has declined*. Viking Adult