

Ideas on Consciousness

Course Syllabus

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Course Introduction

Ideas on Consciousness is a student-run DeCal that transcends traditional boundaries and invites you to embark on a profound exploration of the mind. Remember the feeling of late night, deep, thought-provoking conversations with your friends about the meaning of life? This class expands a space to unravel both psychological and philosophical perspectives of what it means to be alive. This isn't just an academic pursuit; it's a journey into the depths of consciousness. Our discussions go beyond the surface, exploring the implications of these profound ideas on tangible phenomena. From the mysterious world of dreams to the intriguing dynamics of the placebo effect and the mind-expanding realm of psychedelics, we connect the dots between theoretical concepts and real-world occurrences.

The motivation behind constructing this DeCal stems from a recognition that traditional academic coursework in neuroscience, psychology, and cognitive science often provides rigorous empirical descriptions without delving into the philosophical questions surrounding experience. "Ideas on Consciousness" seeks to fill this gap by offering a more holistic understanding and an engaging approach to these philosophical inquiries.

Our DeCal aims to be a catalyst for those seeking to explore the profound questions underlying conscious experience in a way that neither random conversations with friends nor a lecture setting can facilitate. Join us in this intellectual endeavor where questions are as intriguing as the answers, and where the pursuit of understanding consciousness becomes a collective journey through the vast expanse of the mind. This is Ideas on Consciousness, where curiosity knows no bounds, and the exploration of the self is an ever-evolving conversation.

This course is **2 units (P/NP)** and split into four lecture-based modules: (1) **Introduction, History, and Philosophical Theory**, (2) **Intuitions On Subjective Consciousness**, (3) **Questioning and Investigating Philosophical Theory**, and (4) **the Edges of Consciousness**. The class will be mainly *discussion-based* with weekly readings, videos, podcasts, and discussion posts to complete outside of class. We expect students to come prepared to discover and dissect intriguing questions together and share their own experiences. By the end of the semester, students should have an understanding of popular theories of consciousness and their implications while also having developed theories and ideas of their own and applying their findings to both their academic studies and personal lives.

Key Learning Outcomes

Understand contemporary and historical approaches to consciousness studies, theories, and belief systems, as well as the philosophers, scientists, and cultures who were proponents of these ideas. Specifically, address the mind-body problem from several angles.

Identify and explain common thought experiments pertaining to consciousness, including Brain in a Vat, Mary's Room, Mental Mill, and Chinese Room, and how they apply to relevant ideas and innovations such as artificial intelligence.

Apply different views of consciousness to relevant real-world situations, e.g., comatose states, conscious phenomenon, networks structurally similar to brains, and artificial intelligence.

Evaluate new philosophical thoughts and ideas around consciousness in an empirical and critical manner.

Read, comprehend, and think critically about the assigned chapters or articles for each week of instruction.

Engage in academic and personal debates and discussion. Be able to articulate one's ideas about consciousness clearly and concisely.

Method of Instruction

Weekly synchronous class will be held on **Wednesdays, 6 - 8 pm, in ____**.

General class format will be as follows:

- 1) 5-10 minutes of grounding exercises
- 2) 90 minutes of lecture material and intermittent discussion/questions/comments/debate
- 3) 15-20 minutes of surplus time

Expectations & Communication

Come to each lecture prepared and ready to participate! Make sure you have reviewed the pre-lecture videos or readings prior to class as well as completed your weekly assignment thoughtfully in response to content from the previous week.

Check bCourses regularly for any announcements concerning assignments, lecture material uploads, reminders, etc.

Please direct all emails to ideasonconsciousnessucb@gmail.com with the subject title "[IOC Sp25] ...". Please do not hesitate if you have any questions or anything you would like to tell us – including feedback!

Grading

In order to receive a passing grade in this class, you must earn at least a **70%**. Four factors contribute to your final grade:

1. Attendance/Sticky Note Activity (10 points x 13 weeks = 130 points total)

Weekly attendance is mandatory and will be taken by submission of sticky note activity completed during each class session.

On a sticky note that will be handed out at the beginning of class, write down three questions or ideas that demonstrate active engagement during class. Submit the sticky note at the end of class to receive full credit for that week.

Up to 2 unexcused absences may be made up with (1) an email submission that includes three questions or ideas from the weekly reading material to make up for the sticky note engagement activity *and* (2) completion of the corresponding weekly assignment.

Punctuality is important, so make sure you notify the facilitators if you are going to be late to avoid being penalized. More than two unexcused tardies will result in one absence.

2. Weekly Assignments (10 points x 11 weeks = 110 points total)

After every lecture, choose a medium to further discuss thoughts on the week's content.

Examples: word entry (200 words or more), drawing, video, venn diagram, mind map

These will be graded for demonstration of knowledge, insightfulness, relevance to the course material, and on-time submission.

Upload on the corresponding bCourses discussion thread by Wednesday before the next class period.

3. Mid-Semester Reflection (40 points)

After Week 6, you will be asked to submit a 3-page, double-spaced reflection (12-pt font) on your evolving perspectives on consciousness. Reflect on how your ideas before the DeCal have shifted during the first half of the course. The assignment will be released after Week 6 and will be due before the Week 7 class.

4. Group Final Presentation (80 points)

At the end of the semester, groups for final presentations will be formed.

Presentation topics may range from expanding on material presented in class, analyzing a study, discussing implications in domains not touched upon in class, etc. They will be 15 minutes with a 5 minute discussion.

Scores will be determined principally by meeting the given expectations (which will be elaborated in the presentation instructions & rubric) and peer-evaluation.

More specific assignments/instructions will be given near the end of the semester.

You will be in groups of 2-3 of your choosing.

Grade breakdown for presentations:

Component (Week Due)	Points
Outline (week 9)	10 pts
Draft (week 10)	10 pts
Final slides (week 11)	10 pts
Presentation (week 11) <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 1+ source from syllabus- 1+ empirical source- 1+ arts/humanities source- Insightful Q&A/discussion questions- Clear effort, preparation, and passion given towards presentation	50 pts

Plagiarism & Cheating

Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated and result in a “No Pass” grade in the class. The Department of Philosophy will additionally be notified.

Additional Note

If you require any disability-related accommodations or have personal/emergency information that you would like to share with us, please notify us via email.

Class Schedule*

**This outline is subject to change throughout the semester.*

**For all reading assignments, abstracts are linked here. Full papers can be found in bCourses.*

**All lecture slides will be uploaded to bCourses by the day of lecture.*

Please review all necessary material before coming to class!

Week 1: Introductions, What is Consciousness?

- [The Origin of Consciousness](#)
- [Brief Overview of Consciousness in the Scientific Community](#)
- Optional:
 - [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Consciousness](#)
 - Presti, D. E. (2016). *Foundational Concepts in Neuroscience: A Brain-Mind Odyssey*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton. — Chapter 22: Mind, Consciousness, and Reality
 - Gagliano, *The mind of plants: Thinking the Unthinkable*
 - Chalmers, [Consciousness and its Place in Nature](#)

Week 2: Dualism

- [Cartesian Dualism](#)
- [Descartes' Dualism of the Mind & Body](#)
- [How Descartes' philosophical endeavors led him to Dualism](#)
- Optional:
 - [Review the section \(1. The Mind-Body Problem and the History of Dualism\) of the Stanford encyclopedia](#)
 - [An East-Asian Perspective of Mind-Body](#)

Week 3: Non-Dualism & Monism

- [What is Non-Dualism? by Embodied Philosophy \(3min\)](#)
- [Daniel Dennett](#): Materialism
- [Idealism](#)
- Optional:
 - [The Unity of Being \(Wahdat al-Wujud\) \(24min\)](#) Non-Dualism in Sufism
 - [Taoism: Eastern Message of Non-Duality](#) by Tetiana Danylova

Week 4: History of Knowledge Frameworks

- [Panpsychism and Consciousness](#)
- Optional:
 - [From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation](#)
 - [Quantum & Consciousness within the Brain](#)
 - [Quantum Wavefunction](#)
 - [OR Can Quantum Physics Be Used to Explain the Existence of Consciousness?](#)

Week 5: Dreams

- [Anatomy of Dreams](#)
- [Swami Sarvapriyananda, Consciousness in Deep Sleep](#)
- Optional:
 - [White Dreams](#)
 - [Dream hacking:](#)
 - [Real time dialogue between experimenters and dreamers during REM sleep](#)
 - [New theory as to why we dream](#)
 - World Science Festival: [The Dreaming Mind: Waking the Mysteries of Sleep](#)

Week 6: Altered States: Psychedelics, Meditation, and the Placebo Effect

- [Psychedelics, Meditation, and Self-Consciousness](#) (only the introduction, another section of your interest, and conclusion; everything else is optional)
- [How Psychedelics And Meditation Affect The Brain](#)
- [Helping You Understand the Placebo Effect](#)
- Optional:
 - [Yanomami tribe & the world of their shaman](#)
 - [All the World's a Stage - Including the Doctor's Office](#)
 - [Measuring a Journey without Goal: Meditation, Spirituality, and Physiology](#) by Heather Buttle
 - [Dynamic change of awareness during meditation techniques: neural and physiological correlates](#)
 - [How do antidepressants work?](#)

Week 7: Thought Experiments

- [Dennett - Where Am I?](#)
- [Dennett - Where Am I? Explained](#)
- Optional:
 - Nagel - *What is it like to be a bat?* (this is one of the most renowned philosophy of mind reading, so we highly recommend reviewing it)

Week 8: Challenges to Materialism

- [What is Materialism?](#)
- [Are there Philosophical Zombies?](#)
- Optional:
 - [The Quantum Experiment that Broke Reality](#) PBS (13 mins)

Week 9: Near Death Experiences and Other Unexplained Phenomena

- [Fire Captain Dies & Sees the Illusion of Life](#)
- Optional:
 - [What NDEs Reveal about the Brain](#)
 - Presti, D., editor. (2018). *Mind Beyond Brain: Buddhism, Science, and the Paranormal*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
 - Chapter 2: Near-Death Experiences; Chapter 3: Reports of Past-Life Memories; Chapter 4: Mediums, Apparitions, and Deathbed Experiences

Week 10: Consciousness and Machines

- [What is Artificial Intelligence?](#)
- [10 differences between artificial intelligence and human intelligence](#)
- [Will AI Ever Become Sentient?](#)
- Optional:
 - [X.AI: Elon's New Company with the company mission being: to figure out "what the fuck is going on?"](#)
 - **More on Theories of Consciousness**
 - [More on integrated information theory](#)
 - [More on Predictive Processing Theory: Your Brain Hallucinates Your Conscious Reality](#)
 - PaLM: [Google's AI is something even stranger than conscious](#)

Week 11: AI and Ethics

- [Ethics of AI: Challenges and Governance](#)
- [Racial Discrimination in Face Recognition Technology](#)
- Optional:
 - Schneider, "Future Minds: Transhumanism, Cognitive Enhancement, and the Nature of Persons," pg. 1-4
 - "A Defense of the Rights of Artificial Intelligences" pg. 98-103; 107-111.

Week 12: Presentations

Week 13: Presentations