

APHI 416/516 – Philosophy of Mind

Instructor: Alessandra Buccella (abuccella2@albany.edu)

Class time and place: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1.30-2.50 PM, Humanities 258A.

Office hours:

In person: Wednesdays, 9 -11 am, Humanities 253.

On zoom: by appointment

Course description

How do our minds work? Is the mind simply a ‘software’ running on the brain’s hardware? And what exactly is a mind ‘made of’? All these questions do not have single, objectively right answers, because facts about the mind are not facts in the traditional sense of the term, and minds are not traditional objects, either. To have a mind means to have a wide array of incredibly complex and diverse abilities, including abilities to interact with different environments and with other minds, human and otherwise. In this course, we will try to understand what it means to *be* minded creatures, with all its incredible abilities and its, just as incredible, limitations. We will explore the role of the brain, the environment, and society in bringing about consciousness and intentionality, challenging intuitions and debunking myths in the process.

Readings

Required book: Schear, J. (2013). *Mind, reason, and being-in-the-world: The McDowell-Dreyfus debate*. Routledge.

All the other readings are available on the Brightspace page of the course, divided by week. You are responsible for downloading/printing the material and for reading everything carefully **before** each class.

What you need to do to succeed in this course:

- Do the readings. Readings will be challenging at times, but I expect you to read carefully and come to class prepared.
- Come to class, be on time, don’t leave early unless it is an emergency. If you must miss a class or part of a class, please let me know in advance.
- Actively participate and engage. This can be done in many ways; you don’t have to raise your hand and speak up in class if you don’t feel comfortable doing it.
- Complete the assignments on time (for my extension policy, see below).
- Respect the teacher and your classmates. Hateful or discriminatory speech/behavior will not be tolerated.
- Communicate and be responsive. If something I say in class isn’t clear, ask. If you are falling behind, do not be afraid to reach out. If I email you, reply promptly (I will do the same!). If you have doubts about how to complete an assignment or have questions about what’s expected of you, share those with me right away.
- Take care of yourself. Semesters are long and taxing, and you will naturally have ups and downs. If you notice your mental health isn’t great at any point in the semester, try your best not to isolate yourself: keep coming to class, and communicate with me so I can help you stay on track with your coursework.

Assignments and grading

Undergraduates (416):

- Attendance & participation: 15%
- 10 Reading responses (0-5 points/each): 25%
- Individual research project (written report, video, or podcast): 30%
- Final oral exam: 30%

Graduates (516):

- Attendance & participation: 10%
- Class presentation: 15%
- 10 Reading responses (0-5 points each) + 5 replies (0-5 points/each): 30%
- Individual research project (written report, video, or podcast): 25%
- Final oral exam: 20%

Extensions and late assignment policy:

I grant extensions only in well-documented exceptional circumstances. Please, communicate with me in a timely fashion if you are in need of an extension: do not allow yourself to have to scramble at the last minute!

If you submit an assignment past the deadline *and* you did not ask for an extension, I will take away points proportionally to how late you submit the assignment.

Religious Commitments

If you think your religious commitments may impact your course work at any point during the semester, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss the best strategy for accommodating your needs.

Academic Integrity

All forms of academic dishonesty, including but not limited to cheating and plagiarism (i.e. using the words of other people or AI bots as your own), will not be tolerated and will result in failing the course. As UAlbany students, you make a commitment to respecting the Standards of Academic Integrity Policy. You should familiarize yourselves with the policy and its subsections at <https://www.albany.edu/dean-students/community-standards/standards-academic-integrity> and take advantage of the resources offered by the University Libraries regarding cheating, plagiarism, and how to properly cite your sources.

A note about Generative AI use (ChatGPT etc.)

Generative AI bots like ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc. *do not* replace your own ability to think. Indeed, extensive use of ChatGPT has been recently linked to declining academic performance, increased procrastination, and memory loss (<https://tinyurl.com/2byaafxh>).

In this course, using the words of AI bots like ChatGPT as your own on *any* assignment is considered cheating. As such, it will result in being failed for the course and reported to the appropriate UAlbany authorities.

AI bots can however be used to *assist* you in completing certain assignments *only in specific ways defined by me*. The description of each assignment on this syllabus includes its specific AI policy: you are responsible for reading it and conforming to it. Ask questions if something is not clear *before* you complete the assignment!

(Dis)ability and Learning

Students with disabilities who would like to request accommodations should get in touch with Disability Access and Inclusion Student Services (DAISS) at <https://www.albany.edu/dean-students/disability>. All information and documentation you provide is confidential.

Even if you do not require specific accommodation, please let me know if there is anything I can do (within reason) to make the course more accessible and facilitate your learning.

Use of electronics in the classroom

You are allowed to use computers or tablets in the classroom to take notes if you so choose, but they can be sources of distraction and interfere with your ability to follow what's going in class. You are not as good at multitasking as you might think: <https://time.com/4737286/multitasking-mental-health-stress-texting-depression/>

You are encouraged to take notes by hand, if you can.

Communications

You are expected to read emails sent to your university account (username@albany.edu) regularly. I will try to answer your emails within 24 hours (excluding weekends): if you don't receive an answer from me by then, feel free to reach out again!

Assignments Descriptions/Instructions

Reading responses and replies

Each week (starting in week 2), you are *required* to write a short critical comment (150-200 words) about the readings on Brightspace ("Discussions" section, as 'new threads' under the appropriate week's topic). The comment should be original (i.e. expressing your own reaction to an idea you read about in your own words). A critical comment can also be in the form of a question about something you didn't quite understand. To get full credit for this assignment, you must submit a total of 10 reading responses if you are enrolled in 416, and 10 responses + 5 replies to other students' posts if you are enrolled in 516. Any additional reading response or reply will be counted as *extra credit*. I will sometimes use particularly insightful or well-argued reading responses as prompts for discussions in class.

Assignment-specific AI policy

You are allowed to consult AI bots (ChatGPT etc.) to compose reading responses but the final version of the response should be *in your own words* (see general note about cheating). If you do use AI to help you craft your reading responses, you **MUST**:

- (1) Save as a separate document, then upload as an attachment to your response *all prompts entered and all answers received by the AI* you used while crafting your response.
- (2) Specify in the same document which AI bots you consulted and for what purposes (name and version number required).

Think about this document as a ‘scientist’s journal’ in which all phases of a research project are recorded and explained.

Failing to disclose AI use in the ways specified above will result in *zero* points being credited for the response.

Presentations (516 only)

Each student will pick a paper among those selected by me (see schedule below) and prepare a presentation for the class.

Each presentation will last about 20 minutes, and will include:

- a brief summary of the main ideas and arguments in the article as well as a critical evaluation of them;
- a sketch of the broader context in which the paper and its author(s) can be placed;
- 1-2 open questions for discussion.

Assignment-specific AI policy

You are allowed to consult AI bots (ChatGPT etc.) while preparing the presentation. However, the final version of the presentation (including the language on the slides and the discussion questions) should be *in your own words* (see general note about cheating). If you do use AI to help you craft your presentation, you **MUST** disclose this use by submitting a *separate document* containing:

- (1) A paragraph-long description of how AI was used during the preparation of the presentation (e.g. slide design, summarizing the article, suggestion of discussion questions, etc.).
- (2) A record of *all prompts entered and all answers received by the AI* used while preparing the presentation, including the dates of interaction and the *name and version number* of the specific AI you used.

Think about this document as a ‘scientist’s journal’ in which all phases of a research project are recorded and explained.

Failing to disclose AI use in the ways specified above will result in *zero* points being credited for the presentation.

Individual research project

This project is your chance to dive deeper into one of the topics discussed during the course and produce something original, which expresses the views on this topic you developed throughout the semester. The project *can* be a traditional academic paper, but it does not *have to* be. Other options are a video, a podcast, a work of art, or more. I am open to a variety of project formats, as long as you discuss your idea with me *before* you begin.

Assignment-specific AI policy

You are allowed to consult AI bots and image generators in your research project. However, the final product should be *fully your own* (see general note about cheating). If you do use AI at *any* stage of the research project, you *MUST* disclose this use by submitting a *separate document* containing:

- (1) A paragraph-long description of how AI was used in the research project.
- (2) A record of *all prompts entered and all answers received by the AI* (including screenshots of any AI-generated image) used during the project, including the dates of interaction and the *name and version number* of the specific AI you used.

Think about this document as a ‘scientist’s journal’ in which all phases of a research project are recorded and explained.

Failing to disclose AI use in the ways specified above will result in *zero* points being credited for the project.

Oral exam

The exams will be held in alphabetical order starting from a randomly extracted letter.

For example, if the letter extracted is “L”, the first person to take the final exam will be the first person on the class roster whose last name starts with “L”, followed by all others in alphabetical order. This implies that people whose last names start with “K” (i.e. the letter that immediately precedes “L” in the alphabet) would therefore be the last ones to take the exam.

Letter extraction will happen publicly during class on 12/03, and the exams will be held in the same room where the class meets on Saturday, 12/14 between 1.00 and 3.00 pm.

Grading systems and conversions

- Individual reading responses and replies will be graded on a 5-point scale. The specific 5-point rubric can be found on Brightspace (Content > Rubrics & other materials > 5-point rubric).
- Attendance & participation, presentations, research projects, and oral exams will be assigned a letter grade and then converted to a numerical score in Brightspace following this conversion table:

A: 93-100
A-: 90-92
B+: 87-89
B: 83-86
B-: 80-82
C+: 77-79
C: 73-76
C-: 70-72
D+: 67-69
D: 63-66
D-: 60-62
E: < 60

Tentative schedule and readings

Week 1 – Introductory concepts

08/27 Course introduction

08/29 Levin, “Could love be like a heatwave?”

Week 2 – Mental Representations/1

09/03 Levin continued

09/05 Von Eckardt, “The representational theory of mind” (up to section 2.6 included)

Week 3 – Mental Representations/2

09/10 Horgan & Tienson, “The Intentionality of phenomenology and the phenomenology of intentionality”

09/12 Chemero, “Anti-representationalism and the Dynamical Stance” *

Week 4 – Mental Representations/3

09/17 Neander, “Teleological Theories of Mental Content” *

09/19 Millikan, “Pushmi-pullyu representations” *

Week 5 – Representation & Action

09/24 Springle & Humphreys, “Anti-intellectualism, instructive representations, and the intentional action argument” *

09/26 Wu, “Confronting Many-Many Problems” *

Week 6 – The evolution of minds

10/01 Sterelny, “Fuels for Success: The Social Intelligence Hypothesis”

10/03 Froese & DiPaolo, “Sociality and the life–mind continuity thesis” *

Week 7 - Animal Minds

10/08 Glock, “Animal rationality and belief”

10/10 Knoll & Rey, “Arthropod Intentionality?”

Week 8 – The Bayesian Mind

10/15 *Fall break*

10/17 Drayson, “Direct perception and the predictive mind” *

Week 9 – Consciousness/1

10/22 Brogaard, “The status of consciousness in nature” *

10/24 Schellenberg, “Perceptual Consciousness as a Mental Activity” *

Week 10 – Consciousness/2

10/29 Frankish, “Illusionism as a Theory of Consciousness”

10/31 Humphrey, “The Invention of Consciousness”

Kammerer, “Can you believe it? Illusionism about consciousness and the illusion meta-problem”

Week 11 – Rationality and Embodiment

11/05 *No class (Election day)* - - - > **VOTE!**

11/07 Sachs, "Discursive and Somatic Intentionality: Merleau-Ponty contra "McDowell or Sellars"

Week 12 – The McDowell-Dreyfus debate/1

11/12 McDowell, "Avoiding the Myth of the Given"

11/14 Dreyfus, "The Myth of the Pervasiveness of the Mental"

Week 13 - The McDowell-Dreyfus debate/2

11/19 McDowell, "The Myth of the Mind Detached"

11/21 Rouse, "What is conceptually articulated understanding?"

Week 14 – *Thanksgiving break*

Week 15 - The McDowell-Dreyfus debate/3

12/03 Schear, "Are we essentially rational animals?" + extraction of oral exam letter

12/05 [TBD]

Deadline for Individual research project: Monday, 12/09, 11.59 PM (file submission on Brightspace).

Oral exam: Saturday, 12/14 1.00 – 3.00 PM, HU 112

[* *Available for student presentation*]