

**FALL 2020 Syllabus**  
**Consciousness and Cognition (HON 308-01), Mon/Wed 5:30-6:45pm**

**Professor:** Jessica Walker, Ph.D. (email: [jewalker@chapman.edu](mailto:jewalker@chapman.edu))

**Office Hours:** I will have Zoom office hours every Tues & Thurs from 3-5pm PST. Follow this link to enter my office waiting room and then I will let you in to my "office": <https://chapman.zoom.us/j/95747092836>

For a one-on-one Zoom meeting, make an appointment through [Calendly](#) (confirmation email will have Zoom link).

**COURSE MATERIALS**

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

**Required technology:** for remote instruction you will need WiFi and a computer or tablet with a camera and speaker or headphones.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In a universe made of mindless atoms following physical laws, where does consciousness fit? Where does the first-person, subjective, *conscious experience* of the world come from? How can a hunk of biological tissue produce an "inner life" of thoughts, perceptions, and feelings? In short, how does mindless matter become mind? The existence of consciousness is a profound scientific mystery and our inability to explain it is arguably the biggest gap in our scientific understanding of reality.

In this class, we will use first-person (introspection) and third-person (objective study) approaches to studying consciousness. Our investigation will be interdisciplinary, drawing on material from philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, cognitive science, and artificial intelligence. The course is organized around these big questions:

- 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 a conscious, free will?
- Ethics: What role does consciousness play in determining right and wrong? To what extent do ethical principles depend on the existence and/or nature of consciousness?
- Psychology and neuroscience: How do my conscious experiences of thinking, perceiving, feeling, and remembering to relate to the physical processes going on in my brain and nervous system? To what extent are we conscious of our actions and decisions? Can consciousness exist without a "self"?
- Cognitive Science: What is the relationship between cognition and consciousness? Is consciousness a function of information processing? Is consciousness necessary for intelligent behavior?
- Artificial Intelligence: Is consciousness a feature of biological matter or is it "substrate independent"?

**GENERAL EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES**

This course is approved to satisfy *Social Inquiry* and *Values and Ethical Inquiry* general education requirements, the learning outcomes of which are copied below.

- **SI:** Students identify, frame and analyze social and/orr historical structures and institutions in the world today.
- **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 the ontological, epistemological, and ethical issues surrounding the creation of artificial minds (e.g., robots and machine consciousness).
- Become better acquainted with your consciousness through first-person reflection and discussion.
- Develop your own views on consciousness.

## COURSE FORMAT AND GRADES

**Course Format.** This course will begin online (remote instruction) so it is important that you familiarize yourself with our course's Canvas website. The Modules tab is where most of the course-related documents will be posted so that is always a good first place to look for something. I have organized the modules so that the readings, CS Labs, and RQ Assignments will be posted in the module for the week that they were assigned.(see course schedule). Other important modules include the Presentation module and Final Project module. ( I recommend updating your Canvas notification settings so you can find out about important course-related things right away.)

The format for remote instruction will be "live", synchronous class meetings over Zoom. These Zoom classes will be mainly discussion-based but I will do some lecturing occasionally. Class attendance and participation is required for maximum learning and enjoyment for all.

Note that the course format may be subject to change with little to no notice, depending upon state, local, and University guidelines. If the course shifts to on-campus instruction, please inform me if you are unable to attend in-person and I will approve you to continue attending the course remotely.

Late submissions: I will accept reasonably late submissions without penalty, but please do not abuse the privilege. If you think you will have trouble getting an assignment(s) in on time I encourage you to contact me, preferably before it's due, so we can talk about it and come to an agreement. ☺

**Course Grades.** Your final grade in the course will be determined out of 1000 total points. The grading scale and point values of each assignment are in the tables below.

| Assignment category       | Points      | % of final grade |
|---------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| <u>Participation</u>      | <u>250</u>  | <u>25%</u>       |
| <u>Presentation</u>       | <u>200</u>  | <u>20%</u>       |
| <u>Consciousness Labs</u> | <u>150</u>  | <u>15%</u>       |
| <u>Reading Q's</u>        | <u>200</u>  | <u>20%</u>       |
| <u>Final Project</u>      | <u>200</u>  | <u>20%</u>       |
|                           | <b>1000</b> | <b>100%</b>      |

### GRADING SCALE:

|           | Points     |
|-----------|------------|
| <b>A</b>  | 950 – 1000 |
| <b>A-</b> | 900 – 949  |
| <b>B+</b> | 870 – 899  |
| <b>B</b>  | 830 – 869  |
| <b>B-</b> | 800 – 829  |
| <b>C+</b> | 770 – 799  |
| <b>C</b>  | 730 – 769  |
| <b>C-</b> | 700 – 729  |
| <b>D+</b> | 670 – 699  |
| <b>D</b>  | 630 – 669  |
| <b>D-</b> | 600 – 629  |
| <b>F</b>  | ≤ 599      |

**Participation (250 points)**

This course employs a dialectical approach to the study of consciousness. We will engage in an active exchange of ideas, examining the issues together, in discussion. Note that you will be graded not only on how often you contribute to the class discussions, but on 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 (200 points)**

In pairs of two, you will give a brief presentation and then lead a class discussion on a consciousness topic. You should aim to present the key issue(s) and guide the class in critically evaluating the arguments/evidence. Topic signups will occur during the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of the semester. See the *Presentation Instructions* document in the [Presentation Module](#) for more details.

**Consciousness Labs (15 points each x 10 CS Labs = 150 points total)**

Consciousness Labs (CS Labs) engage you in a first-person approach to studying the nature of consciousness. In each CS Lab you will be prompted to observe and reflect on aspect(s) of your conscious experience over the course of multiple days. You will turn in a write up that connects your observations to course content, integrating material from the readings and course discussions. We will discuss the CS Labs in class and you will be encouraged to share what you found most interesting about the exercise.

**Reading Questions (25 points each x 8 RQ assignments = 200 points total)**

An RQ assignment consists of 2-4 questions that are designed to help you hone in on the important points from the assigned readings and make connections to course content and help me identify any topics of confusion (or particular interest) to address in class. Each question can be answered in a few sentences or a paragraph (so be concise!). Effort is more important than correctness. The assigned readings will include chapters from Blackmore and supplemental readings that I provide (posted in the week's module). Occasionally you will find BONUS READINGS that go deeper into a topic; I post these purely for your intellectual pleasure and thus are not required reading. There will be a total of 10 RQ assignments over the semester (dates in the course schedule) but you only need to turn in 8 of them (so, essentially, your two lowest scores are dropped).

**Final Project (200 points)**

Produce an interdisciplinary scholarly or creative work 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. See the *Final Project Instructions* document in the [Final Project Module](#) for more details.

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

## POLICIES AND SUPPORT

**Academic integrity policy:** Chapman University is a community of scholars which 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 not be tolerated anywhere in the university.

**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: <http://tinyurl.com/CUHarassment-Discrimination>. Any violations of this policy should be discussed with the professor, the Dean of Students and/or otherwise reported in accordance with this policy.

**Students with disabilities 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 Disability Services Office (DSO). The DSO will work with the appropriate faculty member who is asked to provide the accommodations for a student based on the documentation and the individual student needs. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive & cannot jeopardize the academic standards or integrity of the course.

**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: <https://www.chapman.edu/students/health-and-safety/psychological-counseling/>. 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: <https://www.chapman.edu/students/health-and-safety/student-concern/index.aspx>. 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.

## COVID-19 Policies

**Class Recording.** In this class, software will be used to record live class discussions. As a student in this class, your participation in live class discussions will be recorded to assist those who cannot attend the live session, or to serve as a resource for those who would like to review content that was presented. These recordings will be made available only to students who are enrolled in the class, and only during the period in which the course is offered. All recordings will become unavailable to students in the class shortly after the course ends. Students who prefer to participate via audio only will be allowed to disable their video camera so only audio will be captured. Please discuss with me any issues you have with this.

**Safety Protocols for on-campus instruction.** In response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, Chapman U has developed the CU Safely Back program (CUSB) and mandatory safety measures: <https://news.chapman.edu/coronavirus/>. The University's mandatory safety measures may be stricter than local, state or federal guidelines and may be subject to change at any time. Students are expected to adhere to the

University's safety measures while attending classes, including when entering and exiting classrooms, laboratories, or other instructional areas. Individual faculty may choose to have requirements for their courses that are stricter than the University's. Safety precautions and procedures may change in response to emerging findings and the recommendations of scientific experts and authorities. Refusal to abide by the University's mandatory safety measures or to the safety requirements specific to this course will result in your being asked to leave the area immediately, and may result in an administrative dismissal from this course.

The COVID-19 pandemic requires all of us to accept the possibility that changes in how this course is taught may be required and that some changes may occur with little or no notice. For example, some or all of the in- person aspects of a course may be shifted to remote instruction. If this occurs, you will be given clear instructions as to how to proceed. The uncertainty of the situation is not ideal for any of us. We must all try to approach this situation with good-will, flexibility, and mutual understanding.

### COURSE SCHEDULE

*Subject to change with notice.*

| Week<br>Date of Class | Readings to Be Discussed<br><i>Readings are listed on their due date.</i>   | Due dates<br>for CS Labs + RQs    |
|-----------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Week 1<br>8/31        | Introductions   |                                   |
| Week 1<br>9/2         | Blackmore Ch 1<br>Descartes – <i>The Meditations on First Philosophy</i> (excerpts)                                       |                                   |
| Week 2<br>9/7         | Blackmore Ch 2<br>Searle – <i>Minds, Brains, and Science</i> (excerpts)   | <b>RQ1</b><br><b>CS Lab 1 due</b> |
| Week 2<br>9/9         | Nagel – <i>What is it like to be a bat?</i><br>Chalmers – <i>Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness</i> (sections 1-2) |                                   |
| Week 3<br>9/14        | Churchland – Hornswaggle Problem<br>Chalmers' <i>Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness</i> (sections 3-6)             |                                   |
| Week 3<br>9/16        | Blackmore Ch 3  | <b>RQ2</b>                        |
| Week 4<br>9/21        | Blackmore Ch 4  | <b>CS Lab 2 due</b>               |
| Week 4<br>9/23        | Blackmore Ch 4  | <b>RQ3</b>                        |
| Week 5<br>9/28        | Ramachandran – selections from <i>Phantoms in the Brain</i><br>Blackmore Ch 5   |                                   |
| Week 5<br>9/30        | Blackmore Ch 5  | <b>CS Lab 3 due</b>               |
| Week 6<br>10/5        | Blackmore Ch 6<br>Crick & Koch (A Framework for Consciousness)  | <b>RQ4</b>                        |

|                               |   |                                     |
|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Week 6<br>10/7                | Tononi (Integrated Information Theory)  |                                     |
| Week 7<br>10/12               | McQueen – <i>Does Consciousness Cause Quantum Collapse?</i>                             |                                     |
| Week 7<br>10/14               | Dennet – Illusionist theories (short video)   | <b>CS Lab 4 due</b>                 |
| Week 8<br>10/19               | Blackmore Ch 8  |                                     |
| Week 8<br>10/21               | Blackmore Ch 8<br>Velmans – <i>How could Conscious Experience Affect Brains?</i> (2002) | <b>CS Lab 5 due</b>                 |
| Week 9<br>10/26               | Blackmore Ch 9<br>Libet – Can Conscious Experience Affect Brain Activity? (2002)        | <b>RQ6</b>                          |
| Week 9<br>10/28               | Blackmore Ch 9<br>Libet’s classic BBS article   |                                     |
| Week 10<br>11/2               | Blackmore Chs 10 and 11   | <b>CS Lab 6 due</b>                 |
| Week 10<br>11/4               | Star Trek The Next Generation: Measure of a Man (watch at home)<br>Blackmore Ch 11      | <b>RQ7</b>                          |
| Week 11<br>11/9               | Searle – <i>Minds, Brains, and Science</i> (excerpts)<br>Blackmore Chs 11 and 12        |                                     |
| Week 11<br>11/11              | Blackmore Ch 13   | <b>RQ8</b><br><b>CS Lab 7 due</b>   |
| Week 12<br>11/16              | Blackmore Ch 14   |                                     |
| Week 12<br>11/18              | Blackmore Ch 15   | <b>CS Lab 8 due</b>                 |
| Week 13<br>Thanksgiving Break | Damasio TED talk video (watch at home)  |                                     |
| Week 14<br>11/30              | Blackmore Ch 16   | <b>CS Lab 9 due</b><br><b>RQ9</b>   |
| Week 14<br>12/2               | Blackmore Chs 16 and 17   |                                     |
| Week 15<br>12/7               | Blackmore Ch 17<br>Sam Harris – <i>Waking Up</i>  |                                     |
| Week 15<br>12/9               | Blackmore Ch 18   | <b>CS Lab 10 due</b><br><b>RQ10</b> |
| Week 16 (Finals)<br>12/16     | Final Exam – project presentations and PARTY!<br><b>4:15-6:45 PM</b>                    |                                     |