

Sponsored by The University of Arizona Center for Consciousness Studies

Consciousness: The WebCourse

Sponsored by the
Center for Consciousness Studies
Department of Psychology - The University of Arizona
www.consciousness.arizona.edu

CONSCIOUSNESS: THE WEBCOURSE

SEPTEMBER 24 - DECEMBER 14, 2007

COURSE SYLLABUS FOR FALL 2007

INSTRUCTORS:



Bernard J. Baars, PhD

www.nsi.edu/users/baars
www.bernardbaars.pbwiki.com

Professor Katharine A. McGovern

California Institute for Integral Psychology
San Francisco, California
<http://www.ciis.edu/faculty/psyd.html>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

We can explore our own consciousness (from the First Person perspective); share our experiences with others (the Second Person); and look at conscious beings from the outside (the Third Person or public point of view). These three basic perspectives organize our course.

Weekly *Phenomenology Labs* will adopt the First Person perspective, using personal consciousness diaries and experiential demonstrations. Our *Lectures* will add new scientific findings about everyday consciousness, and explore what we know about altered conscious states. We expect to supplement the printed Lectures with audio files, powerpoints, and demonstrations.

The Second Person emerges in ethical relations to others, interpersonal experiences, and in the brain regions involved in romantic love and parent-child attachment.

The three basic perspectives on consciousness are compatible with Global Workspace Theory, a well-known framework for thinking about consciousness. Other theoretical views will also be included. We will not settle the philosophical question "what is consciousness?" but we will gain a better understanding of consciousness in modern science as well as in the great wisdom traditions.

We will do our best to make *Consciousness: The WebCourse* fun and exciting for you, as well as thought-provoking.

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WEBCOURSE DETAILS.

You will receive information about the WebCourse platform and resources as soon as you register. Address questions to center@u.arizona.edu

Lectures will be posted online. About one-half hour of audio file will also be available each week. *Phenomenology Labs* (or “P-Labs”) are designed to explore our own experiences. All participants are encouraged to explore their ideas and experiences in small online *Discussion Groups*, led by graduate students and post-docs.

Most Discussions will be held online on weekends, to encourage live participation. Off-line Discussions will also be available to those in different time zones.

Readings will include the textbook (below), as well as posted readings, powerpoint presentations, demonstrations, and more.

OUR TEXTBOOK:

Bernard J. Baars, *In the Theater of Consciousness: The Workspace of the Mind*. (NY: Oxford University Press, 1997). Online handouts will supplement the book.

OTHER SOURCES:

William James, *Psychology: Briefer Version*. (1894) Free on the web.

Science & Consciousness Review, www.sci-con.org

www.bernardbaars.pbwiki.com

... and more as we go along.

On Tuesdays the Phenomenology Lab will be posted for the week. You are encouraged to keep a Consciousness Diary, and to base your own observations and ideas on your Diary.

We hope you will join in Online Discussions as much as possible. Don't be shy! (And if you feel shy at first, just keep exploring your thoughts about that in your Diary!)

QUESTIONS? PLEASE DIRECT QUESTIONS TO:

CENTER FOR CONSCIOUSNESS STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA, center@u.arizona.edu

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COURSE OUTLINE

(Tentative: we may add or change some content.)

WEEK 1.

First, second and third person: Approaches to the evidence.

Explorations of consciousness are very ancient. Science is a late-comer!

How can we explore our own experience without first solving metaphysical questions that nobody has been able to find a consensus on?

Reportability as the standard for 2nd and 3rd person explorations of consciousness. What if you can't describe your experience? Psychophysics and contrastive analysis.

The Theater of Consciousness: A helpful metaphor. Metaphors are not facts!

What do we lose when consciousness is lost or reduced? The puzzle of the Minimally Conscious State (MCS): Terry Schiavo.

Meditation and higher or altered states. Other ways of altering conscious experience.

READINGS:

Baars (1997), Prologue and Chapter One.

James (1890). Chapter on The Stream of Thought.

Online readings: John Searle, 2004. A classic piece of introspection. Martin Buber.

PHENOMENOLOGY LAB I:

How to keep a Consciousness Diary. Cultivating mindful self-observation. Gathering information about our own consciousness. Meditation, noting, and the stream of consciousness. Data to be gathered: what happens when you try to focus consciousness? Twilight states of consciousness.

DISCUSSION GROUPS:

Your first thoughts on your personal experiences. Meeting other conscious people via the web versus meeting each other in person. Your thoughts on our encounters.

WEEK 2.

In the Theater:

The bright spot of consciousness has limited capacity from moment to moment.

Why multi-tasking has limits. Some interesting implications.

READING: Baars, Chapter 2.

PHENOMENOLOGY LAB 2: Your Consciousness Diary: What happens when you are loading your mental capacity? Slips and automatisms during mental tasks. The convergence between personal experience and scientific studies.

DISCUSSION GROUPS. Your Consciousness Diary. Exploring variations of multitasking in everyday life. Do you notice slips, automatisms and speed changes when you are multitasking? What else do you notice?

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WEEK 3:

In spite of its limited capacity from moment to moment, consciousness enables vast access in the mind-brain.

The astonishing amount of knowledge that we can access by way of conscious experiences. Brain evidence for conscious contents. The thalamo-cortical brain core as the basis of global broadcasting. Why this part of the brain is believed to underlie conscious experiences.

READING: Baars (1997). Chapter 2.

Baars (1997) summary article in Journal of Consciousness Studies

Baars (2002). The conscious access hypothesis. Trends in Cognitive Science.

PHENOMENOLOGY LAB 3:

Your Consciousness Diary: Exploring personal memories --- true ones, false ones and creative, reconstructions. Taste preferences or aversions --- one kind of powerful learning in everyday life.

WEEK 4:

In the light of consciousness: Sensation, imagination and ideas.

Isaac Newton and the discovery of primary colors. The inner and outer senses. Input competition. Some imaging experiments. The compelling power of imagination. Metaphors and persuasive images. Emotions and heart-felt, experiences.

Plato's difficulty with abstract ideas. Plato as a psychologist. The Hindu-Buddhist psychology of subtle experiences. Semantic satiation and meditation.

Where in the brain does visual consciousness first become unified? Top-down and bottom-up processing: Cooperation in the creation of conscious contents.

READING: Baars (1997). Chapter 3.

PHENOMENOLOGY LAB 4:

Your Consciousness Diary: Exploring your imagination, through dreams, daydreams, evocative images and language. Jungian, Freudian, and other dimensions of dream contents. Notice ambiguities and multi-leveled meanings.

Life is full of ambiguities: Ambiguous and multiple meanings, figures and words. Feelings and fringe consciousness: The tip of the tongue and other feelings.

Connotation and allusion, meaningfulness and meaning.

Illusions of conscious continuity: The blind spot, reading in peripheral vision, and eye fixations in reading.

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WEEK 5.

Elsewhere on the theater stage: Working memory as extended consciousness.

How focal consciousness interacts with working memory. What is working memory? Inner speech and the visuospatial sketchpad. The magic number, 4 thru 9.

The front half of the brain: working memory and extended consciousness.

READING: Baars and Franklin (2003).

How consciousness and working memory interact. Trends in Cognitive Sciences.

PHENOMENOLOGY LAB 5:

Demonstrating the magic number to yourself. Working Memory load in everyday life. Is mental effort like a muscle?

The visuo-spatial sketchpad in everyday life: visual imagination.

Inner speech, inner humming, inner actions, and inner music.

WEEK 6.

Aiming the spotlight: Attention, absorption and the construction of reality.

Selective attention. Eye movements. Voluntary and spontaneous attention. Brain basis: Prof. Tutis Villis brain slideshow for eye movements. (On the web).

Selection biases in opinion formation, cults and indoctrination. The amazing stability of belief systems.

READING: Baars (1997). Chapter 4.

PHENOMENOLOGY LAB 6: Dan Simons' demonstrations of inattentive blindness.

"Absent minded" or "other-minded"? The Stanford Hypnosis Scale. Attention and absorption.

WEEK 7.

It is dark backstage: The unconscious context of conscious experiences.

The banks of the stream of consciousness. Egocentric brain maps and the self. Tip of the tongue and the prefrontal cortex. How am I doing? , appraisal and emotion.

Current concerns, and Unfinished business, as active contexts in the stream of consciousness.

Interpreting projection, in scientific terms. Unconscious activation of moods. Emotional trauma as an active context.

READINGS: Baars (1997). Chapter 5.

PHENOMENOLOGY LAB 7: Fixedness: being blind to the obvious. Priming conscious thoughts. Breaking rigid contexts for creativity. Unconscious contexts and interpersonal activities.

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WEEK 8:

Volition: Conscious goals can guide actions.

Errors of volition: thought and action. Errors of action and slips of the tongue.

Competing plans. Automatisms and mental effort.

Unconscious influences on our actions.

Paradoxes: Ironic effects. Inner conflict and the anterior cingulate cortex.

READING: Baars (1997). Chapter 6. Errors of speech and action.

PHENOMENOLOGY LAB 8: Your Consciousness Diary. What's free about free will? The devil made me do it! Counter-voluntary acts. Collecting errors of action and speech. Everyday dissociation: accidents, earthquakes. William James on fugue and hypnosis.

WEEK 9:

The Stage Director in the Theater of Consciousness.

Lecture. Split selves, fragmented selves, disordered selves. A theater or a parliament? Brain establishments, dominant coalitions, and revolutions. Our limited self-awareness. Split-brain personalities.

Reading: Baars (1997). Chapter 7.

Phenomenology Lab 9: Your Consciousness Diary: Marcel Proust waking up at night. Experimenting with a shifting sense of self. A dialogue with Buddhist psychology.

WEEK 10:

What is conscious about our emotions?

The interplay of conscious and unconscious processes in emotion. The controversy over Freudian repression: New brain evidence?

Feelings, emotions, and moods --- regulating the contents of consciousness. The mammalian core of the human brain.

Phenomenology Lab 10: Exploring unconscious moods. Anthony Greenwald, Banaji and unconscious stereotyping. Conscious and unconscious aspects of personal emotions.

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WEEK 11.

Sharing our consciousness with others.

READING: Baars, Chapter 8, 9, and Appendix.

Intersubjectivity. About age three or four, toddlers begin to share their experiences. “Look, Mommy, airplane!”, The origins of shared consciousness: developing empathy. Theory of Mind. Why doesn't your dog look to where you point? Do ravens have a Theory of Mind? Autism as a disorder of interpersonal empathy. Temple Grandin and Asperger's Syndrome. We need shared contexts of communication.

The ethical contract: Person-to-person relationships.

Consciousness at the beginning and end of life. When does a fetus become conscious?

Consciousness as a standard for ethical personhood. The growing evidence for animal consciousness.

PHENOMENOLOGY LAB 11:

Your Consciousness Diary. Imagining how the world seems to others. The pitfalls of mindreading. Take a look at your Consciousness Diary from Week 1 to Week 11.

WEEK 12.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

What is it good for? Functions and theories of consciousness.

The biological roots of the conscious brain. Some brain theories.

The brain evidence for consciousness in mammals.

Converging ideas about conscious experience.

How will consciousness develop in the future?

Your thoughts about the course and future courses.