Introduction

Consciousness is paradoxically a common experience to all humans, yet it remains a mystery. The nature of consciousness has interested philosophers, psychologists, and, in the past century, neuroscientists. However, fiction remains the oldest and most reliable technology to explore it.

The goal of this course is to give students a solid foundation on our current understanding of consciousness as well as the writing techniques used to represent it. To accomplish this, we will read selected texts on the nature of consciousness, which we will use in turn to read significant works of fiction and poetry. This dual approach will help us see that the representation of consciousness depends on the writer’s introspection as much as their contemporary ideas on the mind.

Students will be required to read analytically an average of one book of either theory or fiction per week in order to participate in our discussions and complete the course assignments. Students will also be required to write a long-form analytical essay exploring how consciousness is represented in a particular work of fiction or poetry.

Given that this class is oriented towards writers, students will also be required to create short works of fiction (sketches or self-contained pieces) exploring the ideas about consciousness and the narrative techniques we have discussed in class.
Course Goals

• Give students a historical understanding of the theories of consciousness
• Give students a solid background on how consciousness is represented in writing
• Give students the opportunity to experiment and develop techniques to represent consciousness
• Allow students to develop their own philosophy of consciousness as part of their evolving poetics

Required Texts

The following texts are required to complete the class assignments and to participate in our discussions. Make sure that you have access to the required texts, or make arrangements to buy them in advance.

Theory

• Short excerpts of theoretical works will be available through Blackboard under the week in which they will be discussed.
• Antonio Damasio: Self Comes to Mind (Vintage ISBN 978-0307474957)

Fiction

• Virginia Woolf: Mrs. Dalloway (ebook)
• Patricia Highsmith: The Talented Mr. Ripley (Norton & Company ISBN 978-0393332148)

Films

• The Wachowski Siblings: Matrix (1999)
• James Cameron: Avatar (2009)
• Wally Pfister: Transcendence (2014)

Communication Channels

Most of our interaction will happen in class. Nevertheless, if you need help outside the classroom, consider the following options:

• OFFICE HOURS: Tuesday from 3:00 to 5:00 PM @ University Towers 510D. I encourage you to make an appointment in class or by email. I schedule appointments from 3:00 to 4:00 PM, and take walk-ins after 4:00 PM. If the posted hours conflict with other classes, contact me.
• EMAIL: jdepierola@utep.edu. I reply to emails daily on business days, starting at 5:00PM, in order of reception. IMPORTANT: Emails received after 5:00PM will be answered the next day.
• If all else fails, call the Creative Writing Department during business hours at (915) 747-5713.

Suggested Writers

These are the suggested authors for your research project: James Joyce • Marcel Proust • Patricia Highsmith • Paul Auster • Jorge Luis Borges • Javier Cercas • Umberto Eco • Ha Jin • Cormac McCarthy • Toni Morrison • Orhan Pamuk • Mario Vargas Llosa • Francine Prose • Jumpha Lahiri • José Saramago • Milan Kundera • Ismail Kadare • Joyce Carol Oates • Alice Munro • Julio Cortázar • Vladimir Nabokov • Gustave Flaubert • Jane Austen • T.C. Boyle • Haruki Murakami • César Vallejo • T.S. Eliot • Margaret Atwood

“Human consciousness is just about the last surviving mystery.”
—Daniel Dennett
“To perceive the world differently, we must
be willing to change our belief system, let
the past slip away, expand our sense of now,
and dissolve the fear in our minds.”
—William James

Guidelines

- GENERAL: There are no lectures in this class. Your
  learning will depend on carefully reading texts, re-
  sponding critically to them, and engaging with
  your classmates’ ideas in the classroom.
- EMAIL: Students are expected to follow the email
  etiquette for an academic setting (see “Commu-
  nication Channels” above). My email filters out
  emails that don’t address me personally. Keep in
  mind that I reply to emails once a day (see “Com-
  munication Channels”).
- ZOOM: Some sessions in this class will be held syn-
  chronously via Zoom. Make sure you have the
  link handy and log into the session on time.
- ATTENDANCE: Students are expected to attend
  every class. Students cannot miss more than two
  (2) classes, unless there are provable impediments.
  In the final grade, I will subtract half a grade for
  each additional unexcused absence.
- TARDINESS: Two late arrivals equal one absence.
- PARTICIPATION: You are expected to participate
  in our class discussions. Come prepared to com-
  ment on the texts of the week; ideally, bringing a
  discussion question relevant to you.
- READINGS: Students are expected to read each
  week’s selection in advance (see Program).
- ASSIGNMENTS: Most assignments will be turned
  in as a PDF document. Read the guidelines for
  each assignment carefully. If your assignment
  does not follow the guidelines, it will not be ac-
  cepted.
- WORKSHOP: For the workshop section of our
  class (Weeks 8 and 15), you will need to make
  copies of your work for all of your classmates. If
  possible, use double-sided printing on renewal-
  sourced paper.
- CLASS ETIQUETTE: This is a seminar class; there-
  fore, you are required to be an active participant
  in all of our discussions. If you engage in parallel
  conversations with your classmates, browse the
  Internet, text, keep track of a website, or other dis-
  ruptive behavior, I will mark you as absent and
  ask you to leave the class.
- ON GUIDELINES: Detailed guidelines for each as-
  signment are available through Blackboard. Make
  sure you read the corresponding guidelines be-
  fore you submit your assignment.

Assignments

- WEEKLY RESPONSE: Due from Week 1 to Week
  13, each Tuesday at 6:00 pm, this is a two page
  (≈600 words) response to the text of the week
  (Program). CREATIVE responses must address
  the theory under discussion, and ANALYTICAL
  responses should focus on how consciousness is
  represented in the novel under consideration.
- IN-CLASS EXERCISES: Short meditation sessions
  followed by a writing exercise. You will turn in
  your IN-CLASS EXERCISES at the end of class.
- PRESENTATION: Due from Week 2 to Week 13.
  This is a 10 to 15 minute presentation on one of
  the texts of theory or fiction according to our Pro-
  gram. This is a professional-grade presentation,
  which uses additional visual-aids if needed.
- FICTION PIECE: Due Weeks 7 and 14. This is an 8
  to 10 page fiction piece in which you use at least
  one narrative device to represent the conscious-
  ness of characters. It will be discussed during the
  workshops on Weeks 8 and 15.
- RESEARCH PROJECT PROPOSAL: Due Week 12.
  This is a two page outline of your Research
  Project. It should include: your main argument,
  your paper’s outline and your tentative bibliogra-
  phy (including at least two external sources).
- RESEARCH PROJECT: Due Week 15. This is an es-
  say about 10 pages long (≈3,000 words) in which
  you discuss the representation of consciousness
  in a work of fiction by one of the authors sug-
  gested on Page 2.
**Program**

**Week 1—Aug 28**
- Descartes: *Meditations on First Philosophy*
- Creative response due

**Week 2—Sep 4**
- James: *The Principles of Psychology*
- "Does Consciousness Exist?"
- Creative response due

**Week 3—Sep 11**
- Merleau-Ponty: *The World of Perception*
- Chalmers: *The Character of Consciousness*
- Creative response due

**Week 4—Sep 18**
- Wright: "5. The Alleged Nonexistence of Your Self" & "6. Your CEO is MIA"
- Creative response due

**Week 5—Sep 25**
- Dennett: *Consciousness Explained*
- Blackmore: *Consciousness*
- Creative response due

**Week 6—Oct 2**
- Damasio: *Self Comes to Mind*
- Lodge: *Consciousness and the Novel*
- Creative response due

**Week 7—Oct 9**
- Cohn: *Transparent Minds*
- Creative response due

**Week 8—Oct 16**
- Rundquist: "Free Indirect Style and Consciousness Category Approach"
- Creative response due
- Fiction piece: draft 1

**Week 9—Oct 23**
- Woollf: *Mrs. Dalloway*
- Analytical response due

**Week 10—Oct 30**
- Highsmith: *The Talented Mr. Ripley*
- Analytical response due

**Week 11—Nov 6**
- Scorza: *Drums for Rancas*
- Analytical response due

**Week 12—Nov 13**
- Updike: *Terrorist*
- Analytical response due
- Research project proposal due

**Week 13—Nov 20**
- Oates: *The Tattooed Girl*
- Analytical response due

**Week 14—Nov 27**
- The Wachowski Siblings: "Matrix"
- Cameron: *Avatar*
- Pfister: *Transcendence*
- Analytical response due
- Fiction piece: draft 2

**Week 15—Dec 4**
- Workshop — Round 2
- Editorial review due
- Research project due

**Grading Policy**

- Creative & Critical Responses . . . 20%
- Attendance & Participation . . . . . 25%
- In-Class Exercises . . . . . . . . . . 10%
- Fiction Piece & Workshop . . . . . 10%
- Research Project . . . . . . . . . . . . 30%

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**University Policy Statements**

**Self Identity:** The Department of Creative Writing at UTEP supports students’ right to define their identity in terms of name, pronoun, and mode of address. This class will provide each student the opportunity to let their preference be known. Should you need to discuss this issue with your instructor in private, you are encouraged to make an appointment early in the semester.

**Plagiarism & Academic Dishonesty Statement:** Cheating is unethical and not acceptable. Plagiarism is using information or original wording from a paper without giving credit to the source of that information or wording, and it is also not acceptable. Do not submit work under your name if you did not do the work. If you are found to be cheating or plagiarizing, you will be subject to disciplinary action, per UTEP catalog policy. Refer to http://www.utep.edu/dos/academic.htm for further information.

**Disabilities Statement:** I will make any reasonable accommodations for students with limitations due to disabilities, including learning disabilities. If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (cass) at (915) 747-5148, or by email to cass@utep.edu, or visit their office located in UTEP Union East, Room 106. For additional information, please visit the cass@utep.edu website at https://www.utep.edu/student affine/cass.

**Copyright Statement:** All materials used in this course are protected by copyright law. The course materials are only for the use of students currently enrolled in this course and only for the purpose of this course. They may not be further disseminated in any form.

**Covid-19 Precautions:** If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, or are experiencing its symptoms, let me know as soon as possible, so that we can work on appropriate accommodations. In addition, you should report a positive test to COVID-19 to covidaction@utep.edu, so the Dean of Students Office can provide you with support as needed. The CDC recommends wearing face masks indoors in shared spaces in areas affected by COVID-19. For more information about the current rates, testing, and vaccinations, please visit epstrong.org.