PHIL 351
PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON COGNITIVE SYSTEMS RESEARCH

Term: Term 1, Winter 2026/27
Meetings: TTh 12:30-1:50pm
Method of Delivery: In person
Venue: LASR - Floor 1 - Room 102

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Office hours: Tuesdays 11:15-12:15pm and via Zoom by appt

1. Course description

This course is an advanced introduction to empirically-engaged philosophical work on cognition. Lots of academic fields often do empirical work on cognition (e.g., all of: psychology, linguistics, computer science, cognitive science, and neuroscience). So, we will study work that can variously be categorized as philosophy of psychology, philosophy of cognitive science, and so on. The biggest aim of this course is to spark students to think about various aspects of their mental lives and to do so in a way that is informed by research that is both philosophically incisive and empirically grounded.

Prerequisite: 3 credits selected from any of PHIL 211, 212, 220, 230, 235, 240, 250, 260, or COGS 200

2. Texts

We will just use journal articles and book chapters that will be linked to through Canvas.

3. Course requirements

The marking scheme is:
26.67% Test#1
26.67% Test#2
26.67% Test#3
10% Mini-papers (see below)
10% Attendance (see below)

Tests

There will be a test on Unit 1 on Thursday, October 15.
There will be a test on Unit 2 on Thursday, November 12.
There will be a test on Unit 3 during the scheduled exam period.

Mini-papers

Five mini-papers (each max. 250 words) are required. These are brief critical discussions of theses or arguments in the assigned readings.

You have some flexibility about when to hand in mini-papers. But this flexibility is only within the following framework:
(1) There are 8 separate Topics in the course (see the reading schedule). Each of your mini-papers must be on a different Topic. So, for example, you can only write one mini-paper in total on readings for Topic 1 (Topic 1: Are minds just functional systems?).

(2) You must hand in your mini-paper at the start of a class in which we are scheduled to address the course Topic that the reading that your mini-paper is about is part of. So, for example, if you wrote a mini-paper on Ned Block's "Troubles with Functionalism" (which is part of Topic 1 in the course), then you'd need to submit it at the start of one the classes that is part of Topic 1 - and once we move on to Topic 2, you can no longer submit a mini-paper on a reading from Topic 1.

Each mini-paper is worth 1/5th of the 10% Mini-Papers portion of the course grade. So, if you pass 5 mini-papers, you get the full 10%, and if you only pass 4 mini-papers, you get 8%, and so on.

Mini-papers will not be accepted electronically.

See the Canvas handout on mini-papers for this course for more information about them (e.g., their content, their structure, how they're marked, etc.).

Attendance

The attendance mark is *all or nothing*. The rubric is as follows:

There are 21 classes in the semester (and, additionally, the first ('meet and greet') class of the semester and the two days when in-class tests are held).
- If you attend at least 17 of those 21 classes, you get the 10% attendance mark.
- If you do not attend at least 17 of those 21 classes, you get 0% as your attendance mark.

If any class is cancelled, I will count everyone as attending that class.

4**. Academic misconduct**

There will be serious repercussions if I believe that you either cheated in any of the tests or either plagiarized or violated the course rules for GenAI resources in any of the writing assignments. Disciplinary proceedings will commence immediately and as per UBC's prescribed protocols. Make sure that you're familiar with UBC's standards for plagiarism and academic misconduct (https://vancouver.calendar.ubc.ca/campus-wide-policies-and-regulations/student-conduct-and-discipline/discipline-academic-misconduct)

5. Regarding use of GenAI resources

For mini-papers
- You may not use GenAI resources to write or edit either part or all of any of your mini-papers.
- You may confer with GenAI resources in the way that you might confer appropriately with another human: e.g., you could bounce your understanding of material or your opinions off of it/them as a sounding board, as you develop and refine your views.

For tests
- There aren't the same issues with potential abuse of GenAI resources here. I will give you some, but not all, of the questions for the tests ahead of time. But the tests are 'closed-book' - that is, you can't bring any notes into the test sitting. You may consult GenAI resources - just like you may consult any other external resources - as you prepare your answers and prepare for the unknown parts of the tests. But since you take the tests yourself and don't know major portions of the test ahead of time, it will be you and your work that is in the answer booklets.

6. Feedback

The university will ask for your feedback on this course at the end of the semester. That sort of feedback is important. But it doesn't help me change things on the fly - that is, in ways that will help you, as opposed to helping future students.

So give me feedback: after class, at office hours, via email, via text, whatever. Tell me that I should go faster or slower on certain material, that our discussion of such and such wasn't clear, etc. – or that you think we're going a good speed, our discussion of such and such topic was clear, etc. Either way, feedback is very welcome and encouraged!