You, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.... No longer need one spend time...[enduring] the tedium of philosophers perpetually disagreeing with each other. Consciousness is now largely a scientific problem.

Francis Crick

The brain –that particular body organ– is certainly critical to understanding how we work.... But if we want to understand how the brain contributes to consciousness, we need to look at the brain's job in relation to the larger nonbrain body and the environment in which we find ourselves. I urge that it is a body –and world– involving conception of ourselves that the new best science as well as philosophy should lead us to endorse.

Alva Noë

Important Notice Re: Prerequisites/Antirequisites

Please Note: You are responsible for ensuring that you have successfully completed all course prerequisites, and that you have not taken an antirequisite course. Lack of prerequisites may not be used as a basis for an appeal. If you are found to be ineligible for a course, you may be removed from it at any time and you will receive no adjustment to your fees. This decision cannot be appealed. If you find that you do not have the course prerequisites, it is in your best interest to drop the course well before the end of the add/drop period. Your prompt attention to this matter will not only help protect your academic record, but will ensure that spaces become available for students who require the course in question for graduation.
Office of the Dean, Faculty of Social Science
Rationale

Over the past three decades, cognitive science – the interdisciplinary study of mind and intelligence – has radically improved our understanding of the way in which we perceive, represent and understand reality. The knowledge generated by this relatively new field of science can no longer be ignored by political science. After all, as Mark Turner points out, social science is a mental activity that deals with human actions conditioned by individual and collective mental processes.

Social science in general, and political science in particular, must critically acknowledge and confront the impact that cognitive science is having on many of the fundamental ontological and epistemological arguments and positions that have shaped our discipline’s intellectual history. It is difficult, if not impossible, to talk today about the nature of political reality, perception, representation, concept formation, recognition, causality, objectivity, ethnocentrism, and language, without taking into consideration what cognitive science is saying about these topics.

This course has been designed as a first point of contact between students of political science and cognitive science. In this sense, the course does not require any academic background on any of the disciplines that integrate cognitive science. It will be predominantly based on academic literature that explicitly bridge cognitive and social sciences.

Course Learning Objective

The objective of this course is to introduce students to key ideas and debates in cognitive science that have a bearing on the ways in which we study and explain political phenomena.

Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, successful students will be able to explain and assess:

- The debate about mental representations and its implications for the study of politics.
- The debate about the extended mind and its implications for the study and understanding of social and political institutions.
- The debate about self/other consciousness and its implications for the study and understanding of empathy, recognition and morality.
Content and Organization

The course will be divided into five interconnected sections:


II. The debate about mental representations and its implications for the study of politics.

III. The debate about the extended mind and its implications for the study and understanding of social and political institutions.

IV. The debate about self/other consciousness and its implications for the study and understanding of empathy and recognition.

V. Conclusions: Political Science and Cognitive Sciences.

Prerequisites:

Political Science 2237 or 2245

Student Assessment

The overall grade for the course will be determined as follows:

- Participation........................................20%
- Essay..................................................50%
- Book Review/s.....................................30%

Participation

Students in this course will be expected to master the assigned readings and to actively participate in the discussions that will take place every week. Moreover, they will be required to post a critical assessment of the assigned readings on the Cognitive Dimensions of Politics Bulletin Board that has been created for this purpose. Critical assessments must be posted each week by Monday at noon. One or two students will formally introduce the assigned readings each week having read the other students’ critical comments on the bulletin board. Additional guidelines for these presentations will be provided by the instructor in class.

To visit the Cognitive Dimensions of Politics Bulletin Board on the web, go to:

https://ca.groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/cognitivedimensions/info
Essay

A research essay (15-17) double-spaced page will be due on December 3, 2014 IN CLASS. Guidelines for this assignment will be provided by the instructor in class.

Book Review/s:


Undergraduate students will review the following book:


This book review (undergraduates) is due on October 15, 2014, IN CLASS.

Graduate students will review the following two books:


The first book review (graduates) is due on October 15, 2014, IN CLASS.

The second book review (graduates) is due on November 12, 2014, IN CLASS.

Guidelines for this assignment will be provided by the instructor in class.

Note: A penalty of 5% per day (including week-ends and holidays) will be imposed on any written assignment that is not handed in on time, IN CLASS.

Books Recommended for Purchase:


Movies Recommended: Consult the Cognitive Science Movie Index: https://www.indiana.edu/~cogfilms/
Support Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

OUTLINE AND READING MATERIAL

I. Introduction: Nature, Nurture, and the Brain

September 10: Introduction to the course: Political Science: The Case of the Absent Brain.

September 17: Nature, Nurture, and the Brain (I)


Optional:


September 24: Nature, Nurture, and the Brain (II)


Optional:


II. Nurture/Nature: The Debate About Mental Representations and its Implications for Political Science

October 1: Mental Representations: Basic Definitions/Interpretations


October 8: Mental Representations: Models, Schemas and Concepts


Optional:


October 15: Emotions and Mental Representations


Optional:

**III. Nurture/Nature: The Debate About the Extended Mind and its Implications for the Study and Understanding of Culture and Institutions**

**October 22: The Extended Mind**


**October 29: Culture, Institutions and the Brain**


Optional:


**November 5: The Scaffolded Mind**


Optional:


**IV. The Debate About Self/Other Consciousness and its Implications for the Study and Understanding of Morality and Justice.**

**November 12: Self/Other Consciousness**


Optional:


**November 19: Morality**


Optional:


November 26: Empathy, Recognition, and Justice


Optional:


V. Conclusions

December 3: The Social and Neurobiological Construction of Reality


Optional:

Statement of Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf