Consciousness has been described as the last great mystery. In this course we will read philosophers who attempt to clarify why it seems so mysterious, including some who argue that we will never be able to explain consciousness scientifically. On the positive side, we will consider philosophical approaches to understanding consciousness in terms of mental representations. We will also examine how cognitive science has re-conceptualized the role of consciousness in our brains. And we will look at several interesting scientific discoveries about consciousness and discuss their philosophical significance.

Texts (available at UMB bookstore)
*The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, Velmans and Schneider eds. (Blackwell: 2007). (BCC on reading list)
A few additional reading/links will be available on Blackboard (BB) on reading list

Reading Quizzes It is important that you do the readings so that you can ask questions that help you learn, make worthwhile comments, and write papers of reasonable quality. To encourage you to keep up with the readings, at the start of some classes there will be an unannounced (“pop”) quiz on the reading assigned for that class. Quizzes will be about 10-15 minutes at the start of class—**no make-ups**; if you arrive after the quiz is over, you’ve missed it. I will typically ask you to answer 1-2 short essay questions on the reading(s). I may announce some of the quizzes in advance at the end of the previous class. One or two of the quizzes may also be at the end of the class, where you will be allowed to use any notes you’ve taken, but not any readings—this will serve as an evaluation of your comprehension of the lectures and of your note taking ability. There will be 10 total quizzes; I’ll drop the lowest 3 quiz grades, including misses—which otherwise count as “F”—when I total the quiz grade.

Papers You will be required to write three papers, about 4-5 pages each (see schedule). Each assignment will involve questions that focus on several of the readings. Normally, you will be able to choose from several topics. You must complete all the papers in order to pass the course. Your papers should clearly and coherently present the views and arguments in question, thus demonstrating a good understanding of them; your ability to achieve this will be the primary basis for paper grades. Other relevant insights and meaningful critical evaluations of the arguments and issues, while harder to accomplish, are also desirable.

Small Group Exercises In order to evaluate and develop your philosophical views you must engage in critical discussion with others. In order to facilitate this, I will occasionally have each of you work on questions with about two other students in small groups (different people each time). Grades on the exercises will be effort based.

Grading  
(percentages are weights for the course grade)
Quizzes (best 7 of 10) 35%
Papers 20% each = 60%
Small Groups 5%

This course fulfills the HU (Humanities) distribution requirement (Pending). It will immerse you in critical, philosophical thinking, which is an important cornerstone of the Humanities. The assigned readings will involve some philosophically challenging material that will require careful study. The reading quizzes will test your ability to understand the main views and arguments and will thus provide you with feedback on how well you are achieving this. And you will write three (shorter) papers that each involve content from two or more of the course readings. Your writing on these papers should be well-focused, without filler. With quality work, you should thus produce at least one paper that is suitable for the Writing Proficiency Portfolio.

**Students with Disabilities** If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please contact the Ross Center for Disability Services. The Ross Center for Disability Services is located in the Campus Center, UL 211. You can contact them by calling: 617-287-7430 or sending an email to: ross.center@umb.edu. Once you have received your accommodation letters, please meet with me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations as soon as possible.

**Disciplinary matters:** Any type of plagiarism (copying writing without attribution from other from other sources or other students—either published or electronic/internet) will result in course failure; this includes cheating on quizzes. The Code of Student Conduct has information about academic dishonesty; it is available online at: http://www.umb.edu/life_on_campus/policies/community/code

**Topics and (main) readings**

[Note: this is master-plan; my syllabus for each semester will have a full calendar that schedules these topics and readings.]

**Physicalism and subjectivity (approx. 1.5 weeks)**

(lecture) dualism vs. physicalism
Nagel “What is is like to be a bat?” NC
Rowlands “Mysterianism” BCC

**The Knowledge argument (1.5wks.)**

Levin “Could love be like a heatwave?” NC
Jackson “Epiphenomenal qualia” NC
Excerpts of replies to Jackson, and Jackson’s responses. BB

**The scientific study of consciousness (1.5wks.)**
Chalmers “The hard problem of consciousness” BCC
Churchland “The hornswaggle problem” NC
(lecture) the neural correlates of consciousness
Flanagan “The natural method” BB

First paper assigned

Unconscious processing (2wks.)
Merikle “Preconscious processing” BCC
Baars “The global workspace theory of consciousness” BCC
Weiskrantz “The case of blindsight” BCC
Banks and Pockett “Benjamin Libet’s work on the neuroscience of free will” BCC

First paper due

Qualia (2wks.)
(lecture) the inverted qualia argument
Dennett “Quining Qualia” NC
Seager and Bourget “Representationalism about consciousness” BCC
Block “Mental paint” BB

Second paper assigned

The stream of consciousness (1.5 wks.)
James “The stream of consciousness” NC
Dennett “The Cartesian theatre and ‘filling in’ the stream of consciousness” NC
Flanagan The robust phenomenology of the stream of consciousness” NC
Mangan “Cognition, fringe consciousness, and the legacy of William James” BCC

Second paper due

Higher Order Thought (1.5wks.)
Armstrong “What is consciousness?” NC
Rosenthal “A theory of consciousness” NC
Carruthers “Higher-order theories of consciousness” BCC

Third paper assigned
(In)attention blindness (1 wk.)
Lavie “Attention and consciousness” BCC

The unity of consciousness (1 wk.)
Dainton ”Coming together: the unity of conscious experience” BCC

Third paper due

Sample Reading Quizzes:

Does Nagel think that we can know what it is like to be a bat? Why or why not?

Present any two main points that James makes about the stream of consciousness.

What is the example that Armstrong presents in the middle of the reading? Why does he think that it is important for explaining consciousness?

Sample paper assignment:
Write a paper on one of the following two topics. This should take roughly 4-5 double-spaced pages.

1. Briefly explain the physicalist (= “materialist”) view of consciousness. Then present and explain each of the following arguments that raises problems for physicalism: i) Nagel’s bat example, ii) Chalmers’ zombie argument, iii) Jackson’s “Fred” thought experiment (or one of the variants that I gave in lecture) and iv) Jackson’s “what Mary doesn’t know” thought experiment. Make sure that for each one, you explain why the argument/example challenges physicalism. Then evaluate (using other course material, if you like)—is each argument convincing, why or why not?

2. Present and explain Chalmers’ distinction between the “hard problem” of consciousness and the “easy problems”. Include several examples. Does the distinction make sense? Then apply Chalmers’ view to (either) one of the two examples from the Flanagan reading—summarize the example, and then evaluate: is this explanatory progress on the “hard” problem, or on an “easy” problem? Finally, provide a summary of Baars’ “global workspace” theory, and then apply Chalmers’ view to it—does this theory tackle the “hard” problem, or an “easy” problem?

Sample group discussion
Think of the odor and taste of one of your favorite foods. Do you like it because of the inherent way it tastes and smells—because of the inherent features of the taste and odor qualia?

Now consider someone who doesn’t share your like of the food in question. (Perhaps someone in your group). Are they receiving the same qualia as you, but responding differently? Or are they receiving different qualia from the same food? Is there any way to determine where the difference lies?