

Department: Philosophy

Course number: PHIL 256W

Title: Philosophy of Perception

Credits: 3

Contact Person: John Troyer

Catalog Copy: Philosophy 256 and 256W. Philosophy of Perception.

Either semester. Three credits. Prerequisite: Psychology 210, 215, 254, or 256; or at least one 200-level, three-credit philosophy course or consent of instructor.

Conceptual problems in contemporary models of perception. Topics may include the nature of color perception, direct perception and its alternatives, computation and representation in perception, and the connections between perception and awareness.

Course Information: a. Goals and Objectives. This course is intended to serve as a 200 level W course for Psychology and Philosophy majors, but open to other students who meet the prerequisites. Its goal is to introduce such students to rigorous philosophical analysis about the nature of perception and the structure of contemporary models of perception. There are some extremely contentious disputes within psychology on the topic of how such models ought to proceed.

b. Course Requirements. Each week's reading assignments will focus on some set of arguments pro and con about some contentious conceptual issue. Each student will pick three such topic areas, and for each of those three, write a short paper (5-6 pages) analyzing some portion of the argumentation about that topic, and presenting their own critical response to the premises and inferences analyzed. Comments will focus on inadequacies in the student's analysis of the argument, but will also note stylistic and mechanical problems. Each paper must be revised and resubmitted so as to patch up those inadequacies and respond to any objections. These writing assignments will count for 60 to 66% of the final grade; students cannot pass the course without passing the writing component. In addition, for one of the three topics the student will present their argument in class, and every other student in the class will hand in a written question on some aspect of the arguments pro or con for the topic that week. Weekly presentations and questions are also graded. There is also a comprehensive final exam.

c. Major themes. The nature of color perception, direct perception and its alternatives, computation and representation in perception, and the connections between perception and awareness.

How Meets Goals of Gen Ed.: This course will engage students in the critical probing of assumptions, definitions, and inferences in some contemporary models of perception. It will also oblige students to respond to criticisms of their own analyses. As such, we believe the course will help students to become more articulate; and to acquire: intellectual breadth and versatility, critical judgment, and a better

working understanding of the processes by which they can continue to acquire and use knowledge. These are four of the seven goals of General Education at the University of Connecticut.

W Criteria : A key skill in the analysis of argument is learning how to respond to objections: to adjust premises, definitions, and inferences so as to avoid counter-examples and patch up other holes in the argument. This is best done by assigning three, short papers; but then requiring revisions of each paper to address the substantive inadequacies in the analysis presented in the first draft. In this course the content learning really could not be conveyed without requiring at least fifteen pages of *revised* writing.

The course will require three papers of at least five pages each; comments will include substantive criticisms of the argument the student presents; and the course will require each paper to be revised to address those criticisms and patch up the argument. These papers and revisions will count for 60 to 66% of the final grade, and the student will not be able to pass the course without passing the writing component.

The course is focused on some contemporary instantiations of conceptual questions that have been of interest since ancient times. The writing and revising component is integral to the learning objectives of the course. Learning how to think clearly about difficult conceptual issues cannot readily be separated from learning how to write clearly about them. (Perhaps it is logically possible to think perfectly clearly about philosophical arguments without being able to write clearly about them, but we have yet to meet such a person.) Furthermore, one learns the most about argument analysis when it comes time to revise one's own argument after it has been criticized. In these ways writing and revising are central to what the students will learn in this course.

Role of Grad Students: -None

Supplementary Information: - As noted this course proposal is pending before the CLAS C&C committee. Anne Hiskes, former chair of GEOC, strongly urged us to submit the proposal to GEOC prior to the September 20 deadline, noting that it is pending before CLAS.

We expect that two different members of the philosophy faculty will share the teaching of this course (Clark and Ryder). It will be offered at least once every other year; more often if demand warrants it.

We have been working with the Psychology department on this proposal. It is part of a package of three new courses (Philosophy of Psychology, Philosophy and Neuroscience, and Philosophy of Perception, plus revisions to Philosophy 250, Philosophy of Mind, to turn it into a W course for the first time.) The course has been submitted to the Psychology department C&C committee for listing as a 200 level W course for the Psychology major. We have received enthusiastic feedback from members of the department, but as of the date of submission their C&C committee has not yet considered the proposal.