

*Note: The syllabus will be available by the first day of class.  
This prospectus contains some information that you might wish to know beforehand.*

## **PSYC 3232-301**

### **Seminar in Cognitive Neuroscience: The Social Brain**

Spring 2024 Tuesdays 1:45-4:45pm Location TBD  
Professor: Anna Jenkins, Ph.D. Email: [acjenk@upenn.edu](mailto:acjenk@upenn.edu)

#### **What is this course about?**

Welcome! This seminar examines the cognitive and neural mechanisms that enable individuals to understand the minds of others and how those mechanisms drive behavior. We will be propelled throughout the course by fundamental questions about the human social brain. For example, why are humans so social? Are humans' social capacities unique to our species? Does the human brain have processes specialized for social thought? Are there large-scale consequences of how our minds process social information? What would it take for Artificial Intelligence to resemble a socially aware human? Consideration of these questions will involve advanced treatment of a range of topics, including the neural basis of impression formation and stereotyping, mind perception, and theory of mind; social thinking in autism; the social abilities of non-human animals; and the susceptibility of social thought and behavior to contextual and cultural influences.

#### **How is the course run?**

The class is primarily discussion based. With that said, it's also fairly structured. As past students will tell you, I incorporate a mix of mini-lectures, visits from special guests, interactive activities, and small-group exercises along with whole-class discussion. Three hours tends to go by more quickly than you'd think. Each week, you will complete readings (some of which everyone will do and some of which will be assigned to subsets of you); these are mainly scientific journal articles, but they occasionally include book excerpts or philosophical perspectives, especially toward the beginning of the term. In response to the readings, you'll post brief comments on the course website. During class, we'll work through the content the readings, and discuss ideas emerging from them, in a way that is guided by me but also open to your input.

#### **What are the graded components of the course?**

*Participation (30%).* Because the class is a discussion seminar, its success depends upon your participation. Your contributions to our weekly discussions will determine nearly one-third of your grade. You should arrive to every class meeting prepared to discuss all of the readings assigned to you, to answer questions about them—ranging from the specifics of study design to the theoretical implications of a finding—and to ask questions of your own. Your grade will reflect not just how frequently but especially how substantively you contributed. It's also important to me this course to be compatible with your well-being. You can miss up to two

classes with no penalty, no questions asked, as long as you let me know in advance. A third excused absence may be granted in cases of emergency.

***Discussion Comments (20%).*** Each week, everyone will post a brief discussion comment (approx. 3-5 sentences) in response to the week's readings on the course website. Comments are due by 9pm the night before class (Monday). If the website isn't working, email the comments to me and your classmates before the deadline. You may submit your comments late (or not at all) up to three times with no penalty, no questions asked.

***Final Paper Flash Talk (10%).*** At the end of the semester, you will give a flash talk (i.e., a ridiculously short presentation) on your final paper topic. This is an opportunity to share your work with the class and receive feedback on your ideas before submitting your final paper.

***Final Paper (40%).*** The capstone of the course is your final paper (7-8 pages, double-spaced, not counting the title page, abstract, figures, or references), in which you have an opportunity to make an original contribution to the science of the social brain. The paper will be broken down into three assignments with their own due dates: paper idea proposals, a draft, and the final version. Unless you prefer otherwise, I will collaborate with each of you to devise a custom final paper topic in an area that especially interests you.

### **What are the required materials?**

All of the required readings will be posted electronically on the course website.

You do not need to purchase any materials for this course.

### **What should you do for the first day of class?**

There are no assignments for the first meeting. Just show up to class and we'll be on our way! We will set important groundwork for the semester on the first day; you don't want to miss it.

### **What dates should you be aware of?**

First day of this class: Tuesday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>

No class: Tuesday, March 5<sup>th</sup> (Spring Break)

Last day of this class: Tuesday, April 30<sup>th</sup>