

## FIRST YEAR SEMINAR COURSE PROPOSAL

UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON

Use this form to submit **FSEM 100 topics** courses for review **or any other existing course** that you wish to have designated to meet the first year seminar requirement.

<b>COURSE NUMBER:</b>	FSEM 100R		
<b>COURSE TITLE:</b>	A QUESTION OF MIND		
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Roy Smith	<b>DATE:</b>	9/5/08
<i>This course proposal has the department's approval. (Put a check in the box to the right.)</i>			<b>X</b>

**NOTE:** Click on the link for “first year seminar” at [www.jtmorello.org/gened](http://www.jtmorello.org/gened) to see the criteria used to evaluate courses proposed to meet the first year seminar requirement. See the report entitled “General Education Curriculum as Approved by the Faculty Senate” for additional details.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION.** In the space below, provide a one to two sentence description of this class. The description will be entered in Banner, and will also be used in other publications about the first year seminar program (such as the “Eagle Essentials” booklet).

This course introduces students to one of the core subjects of intellectual inquiry, a problem spanning both the sciences and the humanities. Equally important, the class asks students to consider different methodological approaches to the study of a single question: *What is the nature and function of Mind?*

**RATIONALE.** Using only the space provided in the box below, **briefly** state why this course should be approved as a first year seminar course.

On the one hand, the facts of mental life are self-obvious, perhaps even self-proving. On the other, there is no more lively discussion across all the disciplines of liberal learning than that centering on the nature of the individual mind. This course addresses several important questions: In what different ways might we study the mind? How might different approaches influence the answers we can discover? What do the various answers tell us about our own experience of mind?

The basic format for the course involves discussions of readings from both original sources and reviews by scholars in the disciplines covered: Linguistics, Neuroscience, Philosophy, Psychology, and Religion. Students write several short pieces and a final paper. Several classes are devoted to group presentations and semi-formal debates on suitable topics - for example, “Can a strictly empirical description of mind ever be satisfying?”

Based on past iterations I can say that the students find the course stimulating, challenging, interesting and infuriating depending on the topic, their preparation and the activity of the day. They have never reported being bored.

**SYLLABUS.** Attach a course syllabus.

**SUBMIT** this form and attached syllabus **electronically as one document** to Warren Rochelle ([wrochell@umw.edu](mailto:wrochell@umw.edu)) or Maya Mathur ([mmathur@umw.edu](mailto:mmathur@umw.edu)). All submissions **must** be in electronic form.

Smith  
FSEM 100R  
**A Question of Mind**  
Spring, 2008

Chandler 323, x1554  
mwf 9-10; tr 9:30-10:45  
or by appointment  
[rhsmith@umw.edu](mailto:rhsmith@umw.edu)

This course introduces you to one of the core subjects of intellectual inquiry, a problem spanning both the sciences and the humanities. Equally important, the class asks students to consider different methodological approaches to the study of a single question: *What is the nature and function of Mind?*

## Objectives

After completing the course, a student should: 1) appreciate the contrast between argumentative and empirical approaches to inquiry, including the strengths and weaknesses of each, 2) be able to trace changes in the understanding of the nature of mind based on models used to explain its workings 3) understand the impetus for the current convergence of cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and computer modeling in exploring mental operations and 4) be able to construct an argument in support of a clearly stated thesis.

## Texts

Humphrey, Nicholas (2006) *Seeing Red: A Study in Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard. [H]  
Vemans, Max & Schneider, Susan (Eds.) (2007) *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. [V]  
Wilson, Tim (2002) *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard. [W]

## Syllabus

	Date
Jan	15
	17
	22
24	

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<sup>1</sup>Available on BlackBoard.

## II. A Little Philosophy

29

31

Feb

5

7

## III. Some Science

14

12

26

28<sup>3</sup>

19

21

## **SPRING BREAK**

## IV. Levels of Consciousness

Mar

13

11

20

18

27

25

Apr 1

3

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<sup>2</sup> Available on BlackBoard.

<sup>3</sup> By class time you will turn in a topic for your term paper.

Apr 8<sup>4</sup>  
10

15

17 **NO CLASS - VPA**

22

24

Apr 29<sup>5</sup> Final Exam, noon - 2:30

VI.

### Course Stuff

**Class Meetings:** The basic format for the course will involve discussions of readings from both original sources and reviews by scholars in the various disciplines we will include in the course. I imagine discussions will take up at least one of the two weekly meetings of the course. On at least a couple of occasions we will devote a class to a semi-formal debate on a suitable topic. For example I might ask you to consider whether a strictly empirical description of mind could ever be satisfying. Or we might argue about whether or not a specific model of mind has been a help or a hindrance in our understanding of mental activity. I will provide both topics for these debates and a format for them. As you can see below, class participation and discussion is a significant part of your grade. Although I do not have a formal attendance requirement, if you do not attend class, your participation grade will be lowered.

**Grading:** I will use several different measures of student performance to arrive at a final evaluation of your performance.

Class/Discussion Participation	25%
Periodic Argumentative Writings	50%
Final Paper	25%

**Readings:** If we are to have an informed discussion about mind we need to start by exploring the current thinking of recognized explorers of and writers about our subject. It is much easier, but much less useful to expound on our personal ideas. So I want to introduce you to the good stuff from the very beginning of our time together. It may not be easy, but I guarantee it will be interesting - and even fun at times. I have thought long and hard about how to organize the readings and topics in my courses. Of course I could have a highly structured outline of ideas presented in an immutable order. This would impress you with

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<sup>4</sup> A complete draft of your term paper is due by class time.

<sup>5</sup> Your final term paper is due by the beginning of your exam time.

how organized and knowledgeable I am and how well I know the area. Unfortunately it would also give the impression that an organized reading will lead you to immediate insight and understanding. It also implies that if you don't get everything as we go along you never will. **NOT SO!** The careful organization of class syllabi is after the fact. I didn't learn the material that way and neither did your other professors. We discover ideas here and there, backfilling the stuff we didn't get the first time, as we go over the same material many times. So I am going to present material from your texts according to our discussions rather than in the order listed in the table of contents. Of course you are welcome to read ahead or re-read material we have already covered. I will also provide some other excerpts via BlackBoard as we go along. The only proviso is that you do read the assigned material before class so that you will be ready for class discussions and short writings.

**Special Accommodations:** The Office of Disability Services has been designated by the University as the primary office to guide, counsel, and assist students with disabilities. If you receive services through the Office of Disability Services and require accommodations for this class, make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss your approved accommodation needs. Bring your accommodation letter with you to the appointment. I will hold any information you share with me in strictest confidence unless you give me permission to do otherwise. If you have not made contact with the Office of Disability Services and need accommodations, (note taking assistance, extended time for tests, etc.), I will be happy to refer you. The office will require appropriate documentation of disability. Their phone number is 540-654-1266.

**Term Paper:** You will also be writing a term paper. Like the shorter pieces (Writings) this will be an argumentative paper organized around a clear thesis. We will talk about the specific requirements of the paper in class, but it will definitely include use of appropriate sources and their documentation. You must provide a topic for your paper in writing by February 28<sup>th</sup>. On April 8<sup>th</sup> you will turn in your completed term paper. I will read these and we will meet in individual tutorials during the week of April 14-18<sup>th</sup>. You will then revise your paper and turn in a final version for a grade by the beginning of your exam on April 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Writings:** The class is writing intensive, so you will be doing a lot of writing. The actual writing will count and we will talk about just how to write effective argumentative essays. But more than that, the discipline of writing is very useful in organizing our thoughts and allowing us to examine just what we understand and what is still difficult for us to think about. You will be writing several short pieces - call them essays, quizzes or short papers as you wish. Some will be during class and some will be assigned over a day or two. The idea is for you to synthesize as you go along, and also to allow me to check on how well that synthesis is going. I will divide these between assigned and self-selected topics.