

HON 267 Culture & Consciousness Syllabus

Spring 2025

3 credit hours

This is a Model representing one way in which an instructor might develop a syllabus for this course. Other instructors might choose different materials, assignments, etc. consistent with the course description, course learning objectives, and LAC/gtP syllabus standards. Every teaching syllabus must also include a policy for determining final grades in the event that the campus is forced to close during the final exam period.

This is one example of how an individual instructor might develop a teaching syllabus. Guidelines for instructors are highlighted in grey. Variations are acceptable so long as the sections and / or content highlighted in yellow appear on all teaching syllabi. If in the future the wording of required sections such as the Liberal Arts Curriculum & GT Pathways is changed by the LAC committee or others, the updated language will replace that shown here.

Instructor Name: Michael Kimball

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Instructor Student Drop-In Hours: Mondays 2:00-3:00 pm (Zoom); Wednesdays 1:00-3:00 pm (in person)

Course Catalog Description: This course examines the relationship between culture and consciousness, exploring how various contexts shape human perceptions and experiences through interdisciplinary study, discussions, and research, culminating in cross-cultural investigations of consciousness.

Course Description: In addition to the course catalogue description, we recommend that instructors also include a more detailed course description, as in the following example.

This course explores relations between culture and consciousness, emphasizing how different cultural, social, historical, and philosophical contexts influence human perceptions and subjective experiences. It aims to deepen students' understanding of these relationships through interdisciplinary readings, discussions, and practical research. Through lectures, videos, engaging in-class and online discussions, scholarly readings, oral presentations, and first-, second-, and third-person investigations, students advance their knowledge by, first, interrogating and challenging their own assumptions about and tacit definitions of consciousness, then complicating their emerging understanding through a critical examination of the history of Western scientific materialism and its strengths and limitations for explaining and exploring consciousness. The last third of the semester is focused on rigorous cross-cultural research into the role of culture in mediating the experience and possibilities of consciousness.

Important Dates: Wednesday, May 7, final project presentations

Course Goals/Learning Outcomes

- 1. Critical Analysis of Cultural and Consciousness Theories:** Analyze and critically respond to diverse ways of understanding consciousness in Western and non-Western philosophical systems.
- 2. Integrative Knowledge Application:** Utilize interdisciplinary approaches to explore cultural, psychological, and philosophical aspects of consciousness.
- 3. Effective Communication and Inquiry:** Demonstrate effective written and oral communication skills

in discussing complex topics related to culture and consciousness.

4. **Cross-Cultural Competence and Ethical Reasoning:** Develop a comprehensive understanding of cultural differences in the conception of consciousness.
5. **Creative and Reflective Thinking:** Employ contemplative practices to introspectively examine personal and cultural constructs of consciousness.

Liberal Arts Curriculum & GT Pathways

The course mapping provided here is just one example. An individual instructor may develop different assignments and content to meet the course learning outcomes and competencies. The instructor should edit the columns “relevant assignments” and “explanations” as necessary.

This course is a part of the Liberal Arts Curriculum at UNC and fulfills 3 credit hours of the Arts & Humanities: Ways of Thinking category. The Colorado Commission on Higher Education has approved HON 267 for inclusion in the Guaranteed Transfer (GT) Pathways program in the GT-AH3 category. For transferring students, successful completion with a minimum C– grade guarantees transfer and application of credit in this GT Pathways category. For more information on the GT Pathways program, go to <http://higherred.colorado.gov/academics/transfers/gtpathways/curriculum.html>

UNC’s LAC outcomes in Arts & Humanities: Ways of Thinking are aligned with the State of Colorado’s GT Pathways student learning outcomes, competencies, and content criteria for AH3. This includes CDHE competency and student learning outcomes in Critical Thinking.

LAC Ways of Thinking Learning Outcomes + GTP Competency & SLOs	Course Mapping
<p>Critical Thinking: Competency in critical thinking addresses a student’s ability to analyze information and ideas from multiple perspectives and articulate an argument or an opinion or a conclusion based on their analysis.</p> <p>Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) <i>Students should be able to:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain an Issue <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Use information to describe a problem or issue and/or articulate a question related to the topic. 2. Utilize Context <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Evaluate the relevance of context when presenting a position. b. Identify assumptions. c. Analyze one’s own and others’ assumptions. 5. Understand Implications and Make Conclusions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establish a conclusion that is tied to the range of information presented. b. Reflect on implications and consequences of stated conclusion. 	<p>The following assignments are designed to encourage and train critical thinking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Packback discussions • Final reflection paper <p>The following assignments are designed to address SLO 1a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response papers • Packback discussions <p>The following assignments are designed to address SLO 2a, b, c:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response papers • Mindful marginalia presentations • Cross-cultural research project <p>The following assignments are designed to address SLO 5a, b:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemplative research project

Content Criteria for Ways of Thinking (GT-AH3)	Course Mapping
<p>Respond analytically and critically to ways of thinking, by addressing one or more of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Logic b. Ethics c. The different questions dealt with by leading philosophers and/or theologians and their position on those questions 	<p>The following assignment is designed to address (a) Logic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-cultural research project <p>The following assignment is designed to address (b) Ethics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response papers

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindful marginalia presentations • Contemplative research project • Cross-cultural research project • Final reflection paper |
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Required Text/Course Materials:

The following are example resources that may be modified by the instructor.

- Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. (2020). *Indigenous Contemplative Science: An Ethics of Belonging and Reconnection* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJNNKLeB57g&t=1102s>.
- Chalmers, David. (1995). Facing up to the problem of consciousness. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 2(3):200-209.
- Institute for Cross-Disciplinary Engagement at Dartmouth. (2017). *The Nature of Reality: A Dialogue Between a Buddhist Scholar and a Theoretical Physicist* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/pLbSlC0Pucw?si=SFJ0ZvQPygwe7ljd>.
- Kogonada. (Director). (2021). *After Yang* [Film]. A24.
- Lumpkin, Tara W. (2001). Perceptual diversity: Is polyphasic consciousness necessary for global survival? *Anthropology of Consciousness* 12 (1-2): 37-70.
- Nagel, Thomas. (1974). What is it like to be a bat? *The Philosophical Review* 83 (4): 435-450.
- Wallace, B. Alan. (2004). *The Taboo of Subjectivity: Toward a New Science of Consciousness*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0195173109.

Course Policies:

Instructors must include their specific procedure for determining final grades if the university is forced to close during the scheduled final exam period.

- Policy for determining final grades in the event that a university closure occurs during the class's final exam period: Students will record their final presentations and submit them to Canvas for assessment instead of presenting them in class.

We strongly encourage instructors to include the syllabus statements recommended by the university, either within the syllabus or accessed by web links, as listed below.

- To read the statements pertaining to Disability, Title IX, Psychological Services, and other important resources, please scan the QR code or visit https://www.unco.edu/center-enhancement-teaching-learning/teaching-resources/syllabus_statements.aspx



Course Assessment Method and Grading Scheme:

Student work will be assessed based on the instructor's evaluation of its (1) alignment with assignment instructions; (2) alignment with associated LAC Ways of Thinking Learning Outcomes, GTP Competency & SLOs, and GT-AH3 content criteria; and (3) demonstration of understanding and application of associated course concepts.

Letter Grade	Range		
A	100% to 94%	C	< 77% to 74%
A-	< 94% to 90%	C-	< 74% to 70%
B+	< 90% to 87%	D+	< 70% to 67%
B	< 87% to 84%	D	< 67% to 64%
B-	< 84% to 80%	D-	< 64% to 60%
C+	< 80% to 77%	F	< 60% to 0%

Course Assignments:

Instructors may determine appropriate assignments to evaluate student achievement of course learning outcomes. Possible examples are listed below.

Response papers (RPs; 20% of final grade; include first-, second-, and third-person investigation). These short writing assignments provide students opportunities to engage with and explore the perspectives of philosophers, religious scholars, anthropologists, and artists, summarize and synthesize them, and present their own perspectives based on what they've read or viewed.

- RP1. Watch Kogonada's film, *After Yang*, which explores interrelated themes of AI, consciousness, memory, ethical conduct, and cultural heritage and identity. As you view the film, consider the following questions: (1) How does Kogonada define consciousness? (2) What role does memory play in consciousness? (3) What role does memory play in cultural heritage and identity? (4) What is the relationship between ethical conduct and consciousness? When you have an insight or question related to these prompts, pause the movie to write it down. When the movie ends, pause to review and reflect on the notes you recorded, then write a paper in which you (1) write a one-paragraph response to each prompt and (2) respond to this final prompt: how has Kogonada's film influenced your understanding of the relationship between culture and consciousness?
- RP2. Read the classic paper, "What is it like to be a bat?," by the philosopher Thomas Nagel, and (1) Choose a quotation that stands out to you because it (a) inspires you, (b) makes you think differently, (c) confuses you, or (d) causes some other reaction. Cite the quotation and explain why you had this reaction; (2) Drawing on Nagel's argument, respond to the following question: "What is it like to be human?"
- RP3. Contemplative Practice Reflection. Write a paragraph in which you reflect on the contemplative practice workshop. What techniques did you try? Which ones were most impactful for you and why? How do you think contemplative practice be employed to investigate consciousness?

- RP4. The Hard Problem of Consciousness. (Includes second-person investigation.) In a 1995 paper entitled "Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness" (link below), philosopher David Chalmers presented what he famously coined the "hard problem" of consciousness. For this response paper, please do the following: (1) Carefully read Chalmers's paper, doing your best to understand the difference between the hard and easy problems of consciousness. (2) Pick a relative or friend that you can reach directly in person or remotely. (3) In one paragraph, describe that person's background and personality. (4) Now, meet up with them and try to explain the hard problem of consciousness to them in a way that you think they will understand. (5) In one paragraph, summarize what you said to them and why you said it that way. (6) In one paragraph, summarize how they responded. (7) Reflect on your conversation. What did you learn from this experience about yourself, the other person, and consciousness?
- RP5. Please review the six principles of scientific materialism presented in Wallace's book, then mindfully watch at least the first 46 minutes of the Nature of Reality video (you are welcome to watch the rest, too!) and write a minimum 250-word response in which you evaluate the conversation based on Wallace's six principles. Make sure to include a quotation from the video to support/illustrate your response. Come to class prepared to discuss how the principles show up in the video.
- RP6. Perceptual Diversity, Read the Lumpkin 2001 reading, paying special attention to the author's notion of the nature and value of "perceptual diversity." In addition, compare the definitions of "monophasic" and "polyphasic" cultures. What makes them different from each other and why might it be important to notice and appreciate these differences? What is the author's core argument, that is, what point is she trying to make through her rhetoric and examples? For this assignment, after mindfully reading the paper, please write a minimum 500-word essay in which you do the following: (1) Explain the significance of perceptual diversity as you have come to understand it. (2) Explain the difference between monophasic and polyphasic cultures and why this difference is important to understand. (3) While you read the paper, (a) highlight any quotations that jump out at you and mindfully notice your reactions to them; (b) choose your three favorite quotations, each coming from a different section of the paper; and (c) present your quotation and its citation, and describe your emotional, psychological and physical reactions. (4) In one paragraph, explain how the ideas in this paper are useful for our class's investigation of culture and consciousness.
- RP7. For this assignment, please try to find a place to watch the video and participate in the guided meditation that is relatively free of external distractions. While watching Yuria Celidwen's presentation, Indigenous Contemplative Science: An Ethics of Belonging and Reconnection, record three of your insights into or observations on (1) How Indigenous contemplative science differs from Western ways of studying consciousness. (2) How Indigenous contemplative science might complement or improve Western ways of studying consciousness. (3) Your own experience participating in her guided meditation.

Mindful Marginalia Presentations. (20% of final grade; Includes first- and third-person investigation.) This assignment trains students to mindfully read and reflect upon the philosophical content of a scholarly text and its ethical implications. Each of the eight assignments requires students to present and discuss one of their "mindful marginalia" examples in class.

- Based on my lecture on how to produce "mindful marginalia," for each chapter of Wallace's book, Taboo of Subjectivity, we discuss in class, submit at least three examples of mindful marginalia. Be prepared to discuss one of your examples in class. Your submission may consist of a pdf containing an annotated photo of your examples (similar to what I presented in class) or a Google slide or other online presentation format.

Contemplative Research (CR) Project. (15% of final grade; first-person investigation.) After an in-class contemplative practices workshop, students choose from a number of techniques and conduct their own rigorous, first-person inquiry into their subjective experience (consciousness), considering the role of culture in mediating their experience and observations and what can and cannot be discovered using this methodology.

- **CR Report.** Based on the results of conducting ten contemplative practice sessions and the information recorded on your Contemplative Research Data Form, write a minimum 500-word paper in which you: (1) Describe the purpose of the project. (2) Describe the meditation practices you used in as much detail as possible, including total duration of each type. (3) Summarize your observations on the practices. (4) Summarize your observations on the nature of mind that arose from your practices. (5) If your understanding of the nature of mind and consciousness has changed as a result of your research, explain how this is so. If it has not, use the results of your research to explain how they support your existing understanding. (6) Submit your completed Contemplative Research Form.
- **CR Presentation.** Before delivering this presentation, meet with your team member(s) and discuss the results of your research. Explore convergent and divergent results, making sure to try to understand why their respective similarities and differences. Prepare a powerpoint presentation in which: (1) Each presenter briefly summarizes their contemplative research reports. (2) Each presenter discusses what they learned from their dialogue about the contemplative practice and the nature of mind/consciousness. (3) The team presents and explains an image (photo, drawing, painting, etc.) that they agree expresses the nature of mind/consciousness as they now understand it.

Cross-Cultural Research Project. (25% of final grade; third-person investigation.) The electronic Human Relations Area Files (eHRAF) is a very large and fully searchable ethnographic database owned and maintained by Yale University's Human Relations Area Files. In this project, students receive training on how to conduct rigorous cross-cultural research using eHRAF. Using eHRAF, regionally-focused student teams attempt to answer a research question ("How does the concept of consciousness vary cross-culturally?") by gathering and interpreting qualitative eHRAF data. As part of their research, students discover and discuss the ethical dimensions of the ethnographies whose data they are examining.

- **eHRAF Introductory Exercise.** Following the instructions provided in a powerpoint presentation, (1) compare two cultures belonging to your team's assigned region (they must be different from those used as examples) and provide brief answers to the three questions on the last presentation slide and (2) create one slide on which you present the answers to these questions. Make sure to include some visuals that in some way represent the cultures you chose and/or their Altered States of Consciousness.
- **Preliminary eHRAF Project Results.** Submit your completed Preliminary analysis spreadsheet.
- **Final Project Presentation.** Your final eHRAF project presentation will be presented with your team member(s). To prepare, share and discuss the results of your research with each other and prepare a joint, 10-minute powerpoint presentation in which each presenter delivers their results. Your final presentation should consist of one slide show that shows not only the results of your research, but also those for your collaboration (i.e., what have you learned from discussing your results with each other?).

Packback Discussion. (15% of final grade; first- and second-person investigation.) Packback is a third-party discussion forum designed to encourage curiosity, open-ended question design and production, and the sharing and discussion of students' ideas related to course content. For each of ten installments across the semester, students are required to post one question and two responses to other questions. This assignment aids students in and rewards them for carefully constructing queries, thinking creatively and critically, examining the ethical dimensions of their own and others' research findings and philosophical positions, and applying and integrating their knowledge.

Final Reflection Paper. (5% of final grade; first-person investigation.) In this assignment, students critically review and construct thoughtful discussions of and explanations for their learning experience and the ethical, scientific, humanistic, and anthropological implications of the knowledge they have gained.

- Write a minimum 500-word paper in which you reflect on what you've learned this semester, about consciousness and how it is studied, about relations between culture and consciousness, and about yourself. To support your arguments, cite specific examples from sources such as readings, class discussions and other content, your contemplative practice, your research, and your own subjective experience.

Course Calendar/Schedule: Please see Canvas course site.

Instructors may determine appropriate topics, materials and tasks to facilitate student achievement of the course objectives. This should include a list of deadlines for accomplishment of assignments. The syllabus may point to the class's Canvas site or display this information as a list, chart, or other format.