

# Minds Brains & Machines - Fall 2025

**Primary Instructor:** Spencer Ivy

**Email:** [spencer.ivy@umsl.edu](mailto:spencer.ivy@umsl.edu)

**Class Time/Location:** Monday & Wednesday 9:30am - 10:45am | Clark Hall, 305

**Office Hours:** Via Zoom OR in person (always by appointment)

**Office Location:** Lucas Hall, 557

## COURSE OUTCOMES

By the end of this course and successful completion of all course requirements, the student will be able to do all of the following:

- Be conversant in the major concepts in Mind, Identity, and AI
- Be equipped to identify, construct, and levy arguments in writing
- Be equipped to respectfully and critically engage with peers

## COURSE MATERIALS

**Reading:** All readings will be available online in Canvas. THERE IS NO TEXTBOOK FOR THIS CLASS.

**Canvas:** Several homework assignments and assignments will be available through the canvas page ONLY. You are responsible for keeping up with the assignments that you choose to complete. Some assignments and discussions are liable to change, but there will always be ample prior notice given in the event of any changes.

**Help:** I am *always* available to you for help with class content and learning. Please feel welcome to email me any questions you have as they arise. I want to see you succeed and believe that it is my job to help you get there. Help me help you by letting me know when you need help.

**Grading:** Every point you earn is 1% of your grade. You may earn points in any number of ways – attendance, exams, discussion boards, reading-write-ups, and a term paper. No assignment is ‘necessary’ to complete or ‘required.’ You may choose to earn the grade you deserve however you like in the way that is best for you to learn and meet the course objectives. If you don’t want to take a test, earn your grades elsewhere. If you don’t want to or cannot attend any classes, complete other assignments. You are the author of your own grade – earn it well!

## **COURSE GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS**

To earn a 100% in the course, you must earn 100 total points. There are MANY ways to do this and you may 'choose your own grading adventure.' You may earn points by completing any of the tasks outlined below in any combination that you choose. Choose to complete assignments in whatever combination works best for you. All assignments will be graded, so you may not earn full points for just completion. **You may only earn up to 50 points before the midterm.** There are NO due dates for any assignment (except exams).

**Attendance: Up to ~25 points** (Contingent on class schedule)

*In Person Attendance: 1 point per class*

- You may show up to class in person. If you do, you will earn the point (test days do not count)

**Exams: Up to 100 points**

*How My Exams Work*

- One week before the test you will receive a handout with 4 prompts. Each of the prompts is about a paragraph worth of questions on a particular topic. On the day of the test, 3 of the 4 prompts will appear on a new handout. You will be required to answer 2 of the 3 prompts. For online classes, the exam period lasts 1 week.

*Midterm Exam: 50 points*

*Final Exam: 50 points*

**Discussion Board: Up to 65 points** (5 points possible per board)

- *Ask a Question About the Reading: up to 3 points*
  - o Up to 2 points for a well formulated question that expresses a genuine problem with the reading. Good questions earning both points will be both original and able to stimulate a discussion (think in the vicinity of 100+ words).
  - o 1 EXTRA points for a well formulated response to an answer from another student. Robust and well-formulated responses will earn the point.
- *Answer a Question: Up to 2 points*
  - o For a full 2 points, answer your classmate's question like a professor would – with clarity and a full grasp of the reading & concepts in play. A good response will stimulate further conversation.
    - 1-point answers satisfy the original question but do not stimulate further conversation.

**Reading Write-Up: Up to 130 points** (10 points per week)

- Write a 500–800-word summary of a week's readings and the lessons you've learned from it in the context of that week's lecture. Full points will be awarded to papers that are more than 500 words, though not exceeding 800, and that express a strong grasp of the conceptual relationships between both readings in that week's course content.

**Extra Credit: Up to 25 points** - *You may also write a 5-8 page paper on a topic of your choice. Topics must be approved by me before you begin writing. If you would like to pitch your own creative project for extra credit, I am willing to work with you on associated point values, outcomes, and expectations.*

## GRADING POLICY

Points translate to grades as follows:

95 and above = A

90-95 = A-

88-89 = B+

83-87 = B

80-82 = B-

78-79 = C+

73-77 = C

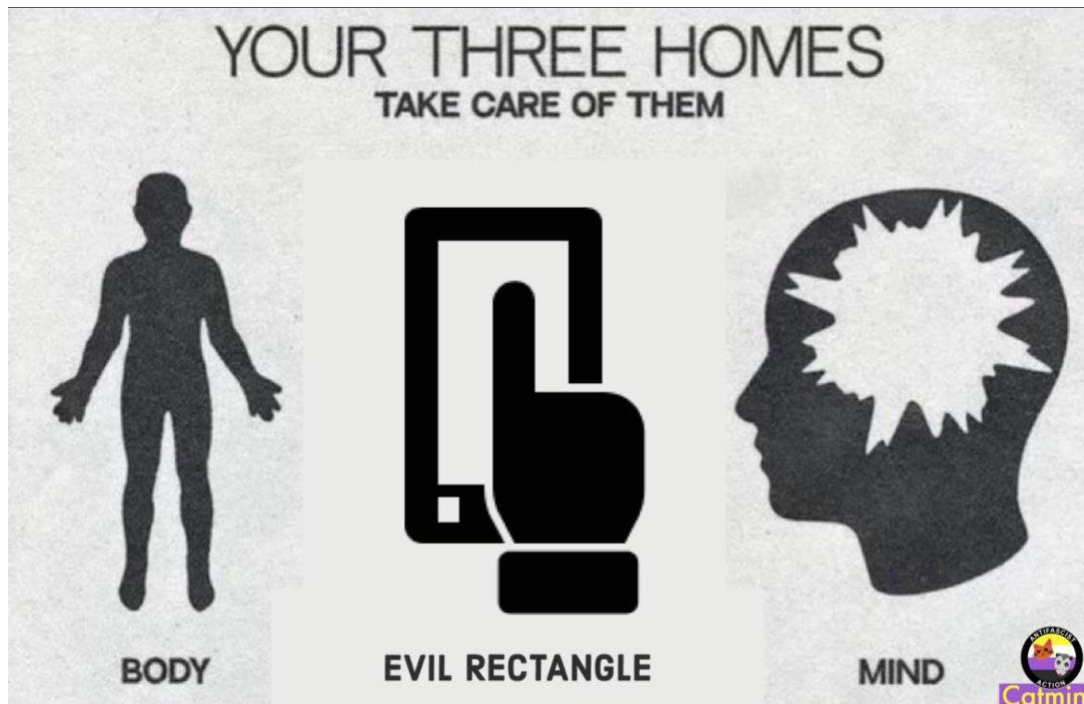
70-72 = C-

etc.

Below 60 = E

In this class, you'll learn the value of philosophy (and a major in it!) beyond just taking up space... like the meme on this page of the syllabus.

Philosophy majors score higher than any other category of study on *all* post-graduate exams (except the MCAT), and have a higher-than-average mean salary post-graduation.



# Course Schedule

## Unit 1: Identity

### Week 1:

Aug 25<sup>th</sup> – Syllabus day & introduction

- *Dennett Where am I*

Aug 27<sup>th</sup> – The great AI debate!

- *No reading*

### Week 2:

Sept 1<sup>st</sup> – HOLIDAY

Sept 3<sup>rd</sup> – Psychological Identity

- *Locke*

### Week 3:

Sept 8<sup>th</sup> – Bodily Identity

- *Williams*

Sept 10<sup>th</sup> – No Identity

- *Hume*

### Week 4:

Sept 15<sup>th</sup> – Does Identity Matter?

- *Parfit*

Sept 17<sup>th</sup> – Multiple Identity

- *Nagel (1)*

## Unit 2: Minds

### Week 5:

Sept 22<sup>nd</sup> – Minding the Meditations

- *Descartes*

Sept 24<sup>th</sup> – Minding the Meditations

- *Descartes (again)*

### Week 6:

Sept 29<sup>th</sup> – Identity Theory

- *Smart*

Oct 1<sup>st</sup> – Problems with Identity Theory

- *Smart (same as last time)*

### Week 7:

Oct 6<sup>th</sup> – Functionalism

- *Putnam*

Oct 8<sup>th</sup> – Phenomenology

- *Nagel (2)*

### Week 8:

Oct 13<sup>th</sup> – NO CLASS

- *No reading*

Oct 15<sup>th</sup> – Consciousness & Hard Problems

- *Chalmers*

### Week 9:

Oct 20<sup>th</sup> – MIDTERM

Oct 22<sup>nd</sup> – FALL BREAK

## Unit 3: Machines

### Week 10:

Oct 27<sup>th</sup> – The Imitation Game

- *Turing*

Oct 29<sup>th</sup> – Bad People, Important Ideas

- *Searle*

### Week 11:

Nov 3<sup>rd</sup> – Social Media

- *Dreyfus (1)*

Nov 5<sup>th</sup> – Echo Chambers

- *Nguyen*

## Unit 4: AI & Art

### Week 12:

Nov 10<sup>th</sup> – What Machines Can't Do

- *Dreyfus (2)*

Nov 12<sup>th</sup> – AI & Creativity

- *Boden*

### Week 13:

Nov 17<sup>th</sup> – Art and Beauty

- *Gaut (art as a cluster concept)*

Nov 19<sup>th</sup> – AI Art & Creativity

- *Brainard*

### Week 14:

Nov 24<sup>th</sup> – THANKSGIVING

Nov 26<sup>th</sup> – THANKSGIVING

### Week 15:

Dec 1<sup>st</sup> – STUDENT PICK !!!!!!!

- *You decide (sort of)*

Dec 3<sup>rd</sup> – STUDENT PICK !!!!!!!

- *You decide (sort of)*

### Week 16:

Dec 9<sup>th</sup> – Final Review Session

Dec 11<sup>th</sup> FINAL EXAM

## COURSE POLICIES

Attendance & Punctuality: While attendance is not strictly mandatory, showing up can earn you points.

Food & Drink: If you bring drinks to class, please tidy up and be respectful of your classmates. Eating is not allowed in class.

Electronic Devices in Class: You may use a laptop or tablet to take notes on the lecture in class. Otherwise, no electronic devices may be used in class. If you use your laptop or tablet to check Facebook etc., play games or engage in other non-class activities you will be asked to turn those applications off. Repeat offenders will be asked to leave class.

Headphones: No headphones may be worn during the class period.

Canvas: All information about this class will be posted on Canvas. Please consult the class Canvas page regularly.

*Note: This syllabus is meant to serve as an outline and guide for our course. Please note that I may modify it with reasonable notice to you. I may also modify the Course Schedule to accommodate the needs of our class. Any changes will be announced in class and posted on Canvas.*

