



PSY480H1 F LEC0101: Seminar in Perception The Neuroscience of Aesthetics

Fall 2023

Tuesdays, 1 pm – 3 pm, Sidney Smith Hall, room 1078

Contact Information

Instructor: Prof. Dirk Bernhardt-Walther

Contact: Quercus discussion, Quercus messengers, Email: dirk.bernhardt.walther@utoronto.ca

Office Hours: by request

Course Description

Why do we enjoy looking at certain objects, scenes, or paintings more than others? What kinds of perceptual, affective, and cognitive processes underlie our aesthetic experience? What are the neural processes underlying aesthetics? In this seminar, we will look for answers to these questions in research and review articles from neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy. We will explore readings in this field with the goal of collectively writing one or more review papers.

Objectives

- 1) To have a broad overview over the literature on the neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy of perception
- 2) To develop skills for comprehending, analysing, and synthesizing scientific literature.
- 3) To produce a major piece of scientific writing at a level ready for submission to a journal.

Class meetings will be used for discussing papers as well as for developing skills and workshopping the final writing project. Students should expect to work on the class projects at home for at least 3 hours per week.

If review papers turn out to be of sufficient quality to be publishable in a scientific journal, I will support the submission and review process, including payment of any publication fees. In case of publications, all students who worked on the paper will be authors. The order of authorship will be determined by me in consultation with all authors. I will be last author.

Reading Material

The reading list will be shared on Quercus.

Assessment

Students will reap the benefits of the inner reward and satisfaction that derive from exploring the literature on the neuroscience of aesthetics in detail, from working on a major piece of writing, and from obtaining skills for how to access a new scientific field. Nonetheless, I am required by the Faculty of Arts and Science to assign grades. I will do assign grades by the following criteria:

Grading Item	Percentage	Criteria	Due date
Participation	20%	0-2 points each week, with a maximum of 20 points	Every class
Two paper presentations	20%	2 x 10%	Various dates
Discussant for two papers	10%	2 x 5%	Various dates
Scaffolded writing project	15%	Three deadlines with 5% each.	To be announced
Final writing project	30%	Rubric	Dec. 3 rd , 11:59 pm
Personal Reflections	5%	Completion	Dec. 8 th , 11:59 pm

Course Policies

Grading Policy

I follow the official University of Toronto, Faculty of Arts and Science grading scheme:

<https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/general/grading-policy/>

Any requests for regrading must be made in writing no later than two weeks after a grade is released.

Penalties for Lateness

Late submission of homework assignments will be penalized with 1 point of the course grade deduction per day or fraction of a day.

Religious accommodation

As a student at the University of Toronto, you are part of a diverse community that welcomes and includes students and faculty from a wide range of backgrounds, cultural traditions, and spiritual beliefs. For my part, I will make every reasonable effort to avoid scheduling tests, examinations, or other compulsory activities on religious holy days not captured by statutory holidays. Further to University Policy, if you anticipate being absent from class or missing a major course activity (like a test, or in-class assignment) due to a religious observance, please let me know as early in the course as possible, and with sufficient notice (at least two to three weeks), so that we can work together to make alternate arrangements.

Specific Medical Circumstances

If you become ill and it affects your ability to do your academic work, consult me right away. Normally, I will ask you for documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances. This documentation can be an Absence Declaration (via ACORN) or the University's Verification

of Student Illness or Injury (VOI) form. The VOI indicates the impact and severity of the illness, while protecting your privacy about the details of the nature of the illness. If you cannot submit a VOI due to limits on terms of use, you can submit a different form (like a letter from a doctor), as long as it is an original document, and it contains the same information as the VOI (including dates, academic impact, practitioner's signature, phone and registration number). For more information on the VOI, please see <http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca>. For information on Absence Declaration Tool for A&S students, please see <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/absence>. If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

Accommodation for Personal Reasons

There may be times when you are unable to complete course work on time due to non-medical reasons. If you have concerns, speak to me or to an advisor in your College Registrar's office; they can help you to decide if you want to request an extension or other forms of academic consideration. They may be able to email your instructors directly to provide a College Registrar's letter of support and connect you with other helpful resources on campus.

Academic Resources

Ongoing Learning Disability or Accommodation Requirement

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have an ongoing disability issue or accommodation need, you should register with Accessibility Services (AS) (accessibility.utoronto.ca) at the beginning of the academic year. Without registration, you will not be able to verify your situation with your instructors, and instructors will not be advised about your accommodation needs. AS will then assess your medical situation, develop an accommodation plan with you, and support you in requesting accommodation for your course work. Remember that the process of accommodation is private: AS will not share details of your condition with any instructor, and your instructors will not reveal that you are registered with AS.

Writing:

As a student here at the University of Toronto, you are expected to write well. The university provides its students with a number of resources to help them achieve this. For more information on campus writing centres and writing courses, please visit <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/>.

If English is not your first language, you may want to consider the English Language Learning program of the Faculty of Arts and Science:

<http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/advising/ell>

Use of generative AI models (such as chat GPT):

We will explore the creative and ethical use of generative AI tools for scientific writing together in this class.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:

Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from the University of Toronto is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. As a result, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. The University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic dishonesty and the processes for addressing academic offences.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from your instructor or from other institutional resources (see www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity/resourcesforstudents.html).

Other Resources

Student Life Programs and Services (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/>)

Academic Success Services (<http://www.asc.utoronto.ca/>)

Counselling and Psychological Services (<http://www.caps.utoronto.ca/main.htm>)

Course Outline

The details of the reading list and the skill development activities are preliminary and subject to change.

Date	Topic	Skill development
Sept. 12 th	Introduction and course overview	Reading scientific papers
Sept. 19 th	History and Philosophy	Techniques for literature search
Sept. 26 th	Visual Features	Summarizing and synthesizing papers
Oct. 3 rd	Symmetry and Perceptual Organization	Planning review paper
Oct. 10 th	Emotional Response	Organizational outline
Oct. 17 th	Neural correlates, culture and self-relevance	Narrative outline
Oct. 24 th	Architecture	Writing narrative – rough draft
Oct. 31 st	Theoretical models	Writing narrative – detailed draft
Nov. 7 th	<i>Reading week – no class.</i>	
Nov. 14 th	To be determined	Opening paragraph, motivational lead-in
Nov. 21 st	To be determined	Editing
Nov. 28 th	To be determined	Peer review
Dec. 5 th	Wrap-up and conclusions	Final touches