



PSY480H1 S: Seminar in Perception

Visual Aesthetics

Winter 2025

Course Meetings

Section	Day & Time	Delivery Mode & Location
LEC0101 Visual Aesthetics	Thursday, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM	In Person: BF 214

Refer to ACORN for the most up-to-date information about the location of the course meetings.

Course Contacts

Course Website: <https://q.utoronto.ca/courses/372498>

Instructor: Claudia Damiano

Email: claudia.damiano@utoronto.ca

Office Hours and Location: By appointment

Additional Notes: Please include the course code in the subject line of the email. You can also contact me via Quercus Discussions and Quercus Inbox.

Course Overview

Why do we like certain visual stimuli over others? Specific artworks may evoke strong emotions and leave us in awe while others may not move us at all. Even our everyday surroundings have the power to stress us or to calm us. In this seminar, we will explore the how and why behind our aesthetic experiences. Brief lectures and interactive discussions will complement the weekly assigned readings. We will explore the research in this field with the goal of writing a novel project proposal.

Course Learning Outcomes

1. To have a broad overview over the literature on visual aesthetics.
2. To develop skills for comprehending, summarizing, and communicating scientific literature.

3. To develop the skills to generate novel research questions and formulate testable hypotheses.

Class meetings will be used for discussing papers as well as for developing skills and working on the final projects. Students should expect to work on the class assignments at home for 2-3 hours per week.

Course Materials

The reading list and course material will be shared on Quercus.

Marking Scheme

Assessment	Percent	Details	Due Date
Participation	20%	0-2 points each week, with a maximum of 20 points	Every class
Paper Presentation	10%	Each student will present one paper each	Various dates
Reflections	15%	3 reflections about in-class activities; 5 points each	Various dates
Scaffolded Writing Assignment	15%	5 points outline, 10 points peer-review	2 deadlines to be announced
Final Writing Assignment	20%		2025-04-04
Final Video Presentation	20%		2025-04-17

Late Assessment Submissions Policy

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

Course Schedule

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

Date	Topic	Activity/Skill Development
January 9th	Introduction & History	Getting to know you; 'What is Aesthetics?'
January 16th	Theories, Methods, & Models	Techniques for literature search; Reading scientific papers
January 23rd	Visual Features I	Brainstorm final paper topics; Paper presentations
January 30th	Visual Features II	Brainstorm final paper topics; Paper presentations
February 6th	Neuroaesthetics	Using AI responsibly; Paper presentations
February 13th	Expertise & Culture	Paper presentations
February 20th	<i>Reading week - no class.</i>	
February 27th	Facial Attractiveness	Editing & Peer review; Paper presentations
March 6th	Architecture	Paper presentations
March 13th	Museum Studies	Paper presentations
March 20th	Nature & Well-being	Paper presentations
March 27th	<i>To be determined</i>	Work period
April 3rd	Wrap-up & Conclusions	Work period

Policies & Statements

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.

Late/Missed Assignments

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

Missed assignments, without documentation, will receive a grade of 0.

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.

Religious Accommodations

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 cultural and religious traditions. 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 (such as 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.

Students with Disabilities or Accommodation Requirements

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have an acute or ongoing disability issue or accommodation need, you should register with Accessibility Services (AS) at the beginning of the academic year by visiting <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/departments/accessibility-services/>. 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 assess your 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 needs or condition with any instructor, and your instructors will not reveal that you are registered with AS.

Mental Health and Well-Being

Your mental health is important. Throughout university life, there are many experiences that can impact your mental health and well-being. As a University of Toronto student, you can access free mental health and wellbeing services at Health & Wellness (<https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/departments/health-wellness/>) such as same day counselling, brief counselling, medical care, skill-building workshops, and drop-in peer support. You can also meet with a Wellness Navigation Advisor who can connect you with other campus and community services and support. Call the mental health clinic at 416-978-8030 ext. 5 to book an appointment or visit <https://uoft.me/mentalhealthcare> to learn about the services available to you.

You can also visit your College Registrar to learn about the resources and supports available: <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/college-registrars-offices>

If you're in distress, you can access immediate support: <https://uoft.me/feelingdistressed>

Academic Integrity

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019) (<https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019>). If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, please reach out to me. Note that you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from me or from other institutional resources. For example, to learn more about how to cite and use source material appropriately and for other writing support, see the U of T writing support website at <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca>. Consult the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters for a complete outline of the University's policy and expectations. For more information, please see [A&S Student Academic Integrity](https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/student-academic-integrity) (<https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/current/academic-advising-and-support/student-academic-integrity>) and the [University of Toronto Website on Academic Integrity](https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca) (<https://www.academicintegrity.utoronto.ca>).

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.

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>

Quercus Info

This Course uses the University's learning management system, Quercus, to post information about the course. This includes posting readings and other materials required to complete class activities and course assignments, as well as sharing important announcements and updates. New information and resources will be posted regularly as we move through the term. To access the course website, go to the U of T Quercus log-in page at <https://q.utoronto.ca>. SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT GRADES POSTED ONLINE: Please also note that any grades posted are for your information only, so you can view and track your progress through the course. No grades are considered official, including any posted in Quercus at any point in the term, until they have been formally approved and posted on ACORN at the end of the course. Please contact me as soon as possible if you think there is an error in any grade posted on Quercus.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The University of Toronto is committed to equity, human rights and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves, engage with each other, and respect one another's differences. U of T does not condone discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities.