

The Life of the Mind
SAGES First Seminar: Fall 2008

Description:

How does an entire orchestra play a symphony together? What makes humans able to carry on a conversation, and why does it seem to be easier to converse than to lecture? How do we work together to construct interpretations of events? When do we get it wrong?

In this course, we will both study and engage in the life of the mind, focusing on the role of shared, coordinated thought and action in human cognition and communication. The readings in this course cover topics including intersubjectivity in infants and small children; joint attention; joint intentions; the joint activities involved in language use; coordination as a topic in game theory; and biases that affect our ability to coordinate our thoughts and intentions with another person.

Meanwhile, both in your writing and in the classroom, you too will be entering into a conversation. Seminars are a joint activity. Their structure capitalizes on our social cognitive skills. They foster spirit of shared inquiry and collaboration in which ideas emerge in a way quite different from solitary thought or listening to a monologue. We will also focus on the ways that the course readings are in conversation with one another, following threads of agreement, disagreement, and analyses worked out by multiple scholars over the course of many works. Finally, you will learn to write in a classic style, an effort that will lead you to articulate your thoughts more clearly to yourself and to your interlocutors.

Textbooks (available at the University Bookstore):

- Michael Tomasello, *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition*.
- Herbert H. Clark, *Using Language*.
- Francis-Noël Thomas and Mark Turner, *Clear and Simple as the Truth*.

Additional readings will be available through Blackboard, the McKeldin Library databases, and Cagnet.

Requirements:

- Attend every class and participate in discussions.
- Participate in 4th hour activities.
- Complete several writing assignments and a writing folder.

Grading:

- Participation in class, leading discussion, and 4th hour activities: **25%**
- Writing assignments: **50%**
- First Seminar Writing Folder: **25%**. The writing folder is to contain

- one paper of 1750 words, which you may work on all semester, rewriting and revising, and
- a 2-page (500 word) presentation of your development as a writer during SAGES First Seminar. This presentation should focus on your understanding of writing as an intellectual activity, your ability to recognize and analyze style, and your ability to adopt a style. The presentation should provide an assessment of your strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities as a writer, and the threats to your development as a writer. This presentation may of course touch upon the history of your ability as a writer before First Seminar and your thoughts and plans for development following First Seminar. The First Seminar Writing Folder is due by the beginning of class, Friday, 5 December 2008. Electronic submission required.

Place the content of your First Seminar writing folder in your SAGES Writing Portfolio, which accompanies you throughout your career at Case. For full information on the SAGES Writing Portfolio, see the link on the SAGES Web Site at <http://www.case.edu/sages/>. Be sure to place the contents of your First Seminar writing folder in your Filer account at <https://filer.case.edu>.

Writing assignments:

These are generally brief, frequent, and low-stakes. Each one is graded with a check, a check-plus, or a check-minus. (A zero is worth a lot less than a check-minus, so be SURE to turn something in every week!) At the start of the semester, assignments will usually be a response to the reading. Later, they will shift toward preparation for the final paper (e.g. 200 words presenting the essence of your paper). These must be .doc or .docx files, and must always be submitted through Blackboard, not in person or by email. In fact, your very first assignment is already available under Assignments--go take a look.

Final paper:

1700-1800 words. The object of the final paper is to write an extended, well-organized presentation of a topic to do with intersubjectivity, cognition, and communication--that is, taking one or more of our class readings as its starting point. You are not yet in a position to do the original research necessary to stake out a new position on open research questions in the field. Instead, you will produce a thoughtful and coherent review and discussion of what is at issue in the scholarly literature on a small, well defined question, method, or phenomenon. We will look at different examples of professional review articles to help you to get familiar with this genre of scholarly writing.

Weekly rhythms:

This seminar meets three times a week, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Our time will generally follow the same rhythm each week. Readings are assigned by the week, not by the class session.

Mondays: "Explaining day." Upcoming writing assignments are discussed in detail on Mondays, and new concepts in the week's readings are explained and discussed. This is also is the day for pure writing instruction.

Wednesdays: Faculty-led seminar discussion. You have done your reading and had opportunities to ask questions about confusing bits. (By Wednesday, all reading for the week should be complete.) Now you should be ready to have a full-class, open-ended discussion. On Wednesday, Professors Tobin and Turner provide the discussion prompts and guidance, while students provide the discussion.

Fridays: Writing and advising assignments due BEFORE class. Student-led discussion. At this point in the week, you will be ready to generate your own lively conversations about the week's readings and writings. Be prepared to be put on the spot on Fridays: always have at least one open-ended discussion question ready to pose to the class. Writing prompts are also designed to prepare you for this discussion.

Writing, advising, and research assignments for the coming week are posted on Blackboard by the end of the day Friday. Check the "Assignments" page regularly.

Schedule:

For details about weekly readings, fourth-hour activities, assignments, deadlines, and events, check the frequently-updated course schedule on the "Assignments" page of this site. A summary overview of the course is below.

Week #	Topics	Note
1	Introduction to Cognition, Communication, and Interaction	
2	The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition 1: Biological and Cultural Inheritance	Monday is Labor Day
3	The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition 2: Joint Attention and Language Acquisition	
4	The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition 3: Understanding and Sharing Intentions	No student-led discussion this week
5	Misrepresenting Other Minds	
6	Using Language 1: Language Use as a Joint Activity	
7	Decision Making as a Joint Activity	
8	Using Language 2: Communicative Acts	
9	Dialogic Meaning	Monday is Fall Break
10	Misunderstanding in Social Life	
11	Review Articles and How They Work	
12	Making Sense in a Shared Environment	
13	Understanding and Sharing Emotions	
14	Student Presentations	Friday is Thanksgiving Break
15	Student Presentations	Final paper due