Philosophy 5331
Seminar in Philosophy of Mind:
The Character of Consciousness
Spring 2012, Prof. Clark

Introduction


Office Hours

Wednesday 1:05-2:30; or by appointment. My office extension is 6-0393.

Rationale

Train the way you work; work the way you train. Chalmers' recent book is a very hot topic right now, and my goal is to get everyone in the class comfortable with the process and the prospect of writing and submitting a paper about it to an APA convention or to a journal. We'll do that by practicing both formats.

Requirements

Almost weekly notes on a "question of interest". These are two or three paragraphs (max 2 pages) on some specific question that interests you in the readings for that week, due the night before the class, for any class during which we do not have an APA style contributed paper session.

Participation in two APA style contributed paper sessions ("colloquia"), once as contributor, once as commentator.

One “contributed paper” (maximum 3000 words, about 20 minutes reading time).

Two “commentary papers” (maximum 2400 words).

A 5000-7000 word final paper, due at the end of the semester. This can and for most people should just be a longer version of your contributed paper, in a form suitable for submission to a journal. You can though work up something entirely distinct from that contributed paper.

Class participation.

Note: a 3000 word paper printed with one inch margins in Courier 12 point is about 12 pages long. The APA limits a colloquium paper presentation to 20 minutes, commentaries to 10. We will concentrate on the written submissions, so worry about word count, not presentation time. Commentaries in this seminar will be longer than in the APA. 5000 words is the limit for an APA symposium paper; often authors will submit both colloquia and symposia papers simultaneously. Speakers have a 50 minute limit for symposia papers. 7000 words is a typical limit for article submissions to major journals.

Some details

I'll post two zip files of 20-40 papers recently submitted to the APA Program Committee, in two categories: those that were thought to be excellent by both raters, and a second set of those that where thought to be bad by both raters. It is useful to have some examples of what we're aiming at (and what we're not aiming at!).
The "questions of interest" are basically notes on some particular claim or argument in the readings for that week that caught your interest or made you think "that can't be right!". These are the first seeds of real papers, and they're meant to help you pick a topic to write more extensively about. It is useful to learn how to watch for them.

The notes on the "questions of interest" can be rough-hewn (I'll just grade them as check, check plus, check minus), but should at least identify a particular passage or claim that caught your eye and explain what you think is problematic about it. The explanation should be full enough that you can later use it to remember what you were thinking at the time. They should just be emailed to me the night before our class. (I'll read them early Monday morning, so anytime before dawn will do.) Note that these aren't required for any week that has a contributed paper session.

The contributed paper sessions begin with someone presenting a paper following the APA "contributed paper" submission guidelines (e.g. a limit of 3000 actual words). This should take roughly 20 minutes to present. You will be asked to "comment" on two of the contributed papers. This is a paper of no more 2400 words. One you will present.

Actual word counts for every paper you do should be indicated on the cover page. Papers which exceed the maximum or which do not indicate a count will be returned unread. (This is how journals and the APA divisions work, so you might as well get used to it!)

We will also observe APA-like protocols about sharing papers and commentaries. The contributor should get the paper to the commentators no less than the Monday before the session (e.g., one week earlier). The commentator should make comments available to the contributor no less than the night before the session.

Grades decoded

I will accept late papers only if you are the blameless victim of some incapacitating circumstance--illness or family trauma that renders you incapable of the cognitive activity required. If such a thing threatens please let me know in advance.

Here is what I understand the big grading categories to mean in the UConn Graduate Philosophy program.

A Work of such quality as to justify reasonable confidence in your ability to become a productive professional philosopher. Another translation: Keep on producing work of this quality and you should have no problem completing a dissertation in a reasonable amount of time. Such work should manifest analytic acuity and accuracy about the argument described, as well as some original or creative response to it.

B Good work--work that is more than sufficient to continue as a graduate student, and get a Master's degree--but something less than expected for this stage of progression towards a Ph.D. Perhaps mistakes are made in the description of the argument, the analysis is imprecise, or nothing new is said about it. If you are planning to go for a Ph.D., B's are warning signs.

C Work that is not of sufficiently high quality for continued membership in the UConn program. (You need a B average to retain graduate status.)

The final paper has an official due date on the first day of final exams. By "official due date" I mean that is the day you must turn it in if you want a grade other an "Incomplete" on your transcript at the end of the semester. Incompletes are pesky and bad, and I have found that unless they are completed within the first month, they often never go away. So the "real" due date for a longer paper is four weeks after the first day of final exams. By "real" I mean there is no penalty for lateness up until that point. But if you miss that date, penalties start to apply: 1/3rd of a letter grade off. If you don't hand it in by the first day of classes of the next semester: another
1/3rd of a letter grade off. If you don't hand it in by the first day of exams of that next semester: another 1/3rd off. And so on.