

Module Title and Code

PS3454 Social Neuroscience

Lecturer(s)

Dr. Redmond O'Connell

Contact Hours

One semester: 11 lectures; 114 hours independent study

ECTS Value

5 ECTS (=125 student hours)

Rationale and Aims

Description: Social Neuroscience is one of the newest fields in Psychology and explores the neural systems underlying social behavior. Emerging from a synthesis of ideas and methods from social psychology and the neurosciences, social neuroscience seeks to broaden our understanding of human brain function beyond basic motor, perceptual and cognitive processes by elucidating the brain's fundamental role in governing interpersonal relations. This endeavour has the potential to greatly improve our understanding of how the brain works and, at the same time, to refine theories of social processes. The course will outline the theoretical origins of the field, basic neuroanatomy and core methodologies including brain imaging techniques and behavioural paradigms. In addition, key areas that will be covered include self awareness, emotional and motivational processes, social cognition, social interaction, person perception and neuroeconomics. In so doing, the course will highlight prominent disorders of social function, such as autism, and how limitations in seemingly 'non-social' cognitive abilities can greatly influence our social behavior.

For whom is the module intended?

Psychology Junior & Senior Sophister SH/TSM students and Higher Diploma in Psychology Years 1 & 2 students.

How does it fit in to the academic programme?

This module provides advanced coverage of material in some of the essential aspects of the discipline of psychology and is required to be covered by the professional accreditation body, Psychological Society of Ireland.

Is it mandatory or optional?

Optional

Are there prerequisites?

Cognate foundation modules.

From a teaching point of view, what are the intentions of the lecturer?

To provide students with an insight into current knowledge of the neural underpinnings of social behaviour.

Course Content

1. The Emergence of Social Neuroscience
2. The Brain Imaging Revolution
3. Self Awareness and Self Regulation
4. Neural Substrates of Social Cognition
5. Theory of Mind
6. Motivation and Reward
7. Disorders of Motivation and Reward
8. Emotions
9. Person perception, prejudice and stereotyping
10. The Social Neuroscience of Cognitive Dysfunction
11. Neuroeconomics.

Indicative Resources

Decety, J. and J. T. Cacioppo (2011). *The Oxford Handbook of Social Neuroscience*, Oxford University Press.

Cacioppo, J. T. and G. C. Berntson (2005). *Social Neuroscience: Key Readings*, Psychology Press.

As this is an advanced sophister research-led taught module, state-of-the-art and up-to-date journal articles from the relevant research literature will be made available throughout the module.

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- understand the structure and function of brain systems underlying social processes and human interaction (PO1)
- understand and critically evaluate the principles and methods involved in doing research in this area (PO4,5,6)
- discuss and evaluate prominent principles, models and theories within social neuroscience (P02,4,6)
- discuss and evaluate social neuroscience's contribution to our understanding of the brain and of social psychology and how it synthesises these two sources of knowledge (PO1,3)
- evaluate the distinction between uniquely social brain processes and general cognitive function and their interaction (PO1,6)
- evaluate what disorders and disruptions reveal about the representation of social processes in the brain (PO1,4)

Methods of Teaching and Student Learning

The format of lectures is conventional but students are encouraged to ask questions and to engage the lecturer in discussion where practicable. Both the reduced numbers in these optional modules and the fact that the module is based in the lecturer's own area of research expertise and interest facilitates increased class discussion and debate.

Inclusive curriculum: Each lecture and any supporting and accompanying documentation is posted on our school website to facilitate independent study and self-paced learning.

Methods of Assessment

This module is assessed by continuous assessment of one report (2,500 words, 32%) and one written examination (68%) in the annual session. The exam is 2 hours 30 minutes in duration and students are required to answer two questions discursively.

It is expected that:

- (i) a range of areas should be covered in addressing each question. A poor mark will be awarded to essays/answers that do not integrate a majority of the relevant topics covered in the lectures; and
- (ii) responses should be critical, original and synthetic and should be based on reading beyond the lecture notes.

Students are given very detailed guidelines in their handbook as to grading criteria for degree classes.

Evaluation

All modules are evaluated by students by means of CAPSL survey requested by the School and all feedback is noted and incorporated in module design where appropriate for delivery of the module in subsequent years.

Feedback is also delivered via student representatives at the School's once a term staff-student meetings, at School Committee meetings and at the Committee for Undergraduate Teaching & Learning meetings.