

Course Syllabus

“252: Exploring Our Hidden Brain: How Emotions Shape Our Decisions” OLLI at American University (Spring 2024)

Zoom Virtual Classroom (Wed. @ 1:45-3:15 pm ET on Mar 20 thru May 1)

Study Group Leaders: Carl Weichel & Kim Weichel

Course Abstract:

How do our emotions influence our behavior and life choices? How does our “hidden brain” make important decisions in our lives without our awareness? In this course we'll explore topics ranging from roles of social conformity to snapshots of our prejudices. Data-driven research has shown that most human decisions are triggered unconsciously through over 135 emotions, from falling in love to following a career path to nations going to war. The book and NPR radio series “The Hidden Brain” by Shankar Vedantam draw intriguing arcs from social psychology to our embedded cultural norms. And while social cues influence interactions, they also can create hazards. We'll listen to podcasts, review research, and have interactive discussions.

Lecturers:

Carl Weichel has held various positions over his career in marketing, design, and advertising in Australia, South Africa, Canada, and San Francisco. Carl has led OLLI study groups on Political Polarization, The 1960s Decade, Our Hidden Brain, Exploring Eastern Thought, The NY Times Book Review, David Brooks' Writings, and Exploring Our Cultural Complexities

Kim Weichel is a social entrepreneur and nonprofit leader in the fields of women's leadership, cross-cultural dialogue, citizen diplomacy, and peacebuilding, and is a published author and public speaker. In addition to Our Hidden Brain, she has co-led OLLI courses on The U.N., The 1960s Decade, and Exploring Our Cultural Complexities.

Since 2015, the Weichel's have lectured and lead study groups at OLLI-American Univ. (D.C.), OLLI-Yavapai College (AZ), OLLI-Dominican Univ. (CA), LLP-College of Marin (CA), LLP- Univ. of Cape Town (RSA), and LLP-San Miguel (MEX)

Course Overview:

Our seven-session course on Zoom begins Wednesday, Mar 20 (1:45-3:15 pm ET) and concludes May 1. These weekly classes will include readings, listening to radio podcasts, watching short videos and class discussions.

We will send you in advance an “Our Hidden Brain” Study Guide (pdf) that details each of our seven weekly (90-min.) sessions. We encourage you to read the articles for each class, but it is optional. We'll also post the Study Guide on Dropbox for easy access from any

devise. (NOTE: Should we have a large number of students enrolled limiting more individual discussions, we will plan two one-hour open discussions on Zoom. We'll discuss this option in Class One on Mar 20)

We've compiled the course's reading materials from leading journals and publications to help support the range of videos and podcasts. Each weekly session's course content has been designed into two components:

Part One - Exploring our Emotions & Behavior Patterns

It is understood that everyone has a *set of basic universal emotions* in common, no matter where or how we were raised. Awareness of our own emotions means understanding how they are triggered, what they feel like, and how we respond. We will explore how our in-built emotional system can be better understood (emotional intelligence) and how emotions influence many rational decisions we make in our lives. We will also explore new studies of *visible/invisible behavior patterns* and systems that leading neuroscientists, psychologists, sociologists and social philosophers have recently identified.

Part Two - Listen to edited NPR's "The Hidden Brain" radio podcasts and discuss.

The NPR radio series "The Hidden Brain" by Shankar Vedantam draws intriguing arcs from social psychology to our embedded cultural norms. While social cues influence interactions, they also can create hazards. We'll explore human behavior topics ranging from roles of social conformity to snapshots of our prejudices. We encourage you to explore over 500 podcasts in their archives since 2014:

HB Podcast Archives (2014-21): (<https://www.npr.org/series/423302056/hidden-brain/archive>)

HB Podcast Archives (2021-24): (<https://hiddenbrain.org/category/podcast/>)

Recommended Reading (optional):

We suggest reading a current best-selling book, *Atlas of the Heart* (Random House), by professor, researcher and popular author Brené Brown, who in her fluid style cites her research that creates her *Theory of 87 Emotions*. Here is its essence: "Forming meaningful connections with ourselves and others requires learning the language of emotions and human connection. Having a nuanced vocabulary around labeling our emotions can be transformative. Usually, we look outside ourselves for solid ground, but emotions are internal and always available to anchor us wherever we are. The matter is complex because human emotions and experiences are studied from the perspective of philosophy, sociology, neuroscience, medicine, mental health and more."

OLLI at American University (Spring 2024)
“252: Exploring Our Hidden Brain: How Emotions Shape Our Decisions”

CLASS 1 - OUTLINE (Mar 20)

Overview: Review 76-part course

Part ONE: Emotions & Behaviors

Video 1: “Experts in Emotion” (1:10) - June Gruber Introduces Yale’s Experts in Emotions Series

Video 2: “The Science of Emotions” (+9:00) - Jaak Panksepp at TEDxRainier

Video 3: “Facial Expressions Reveal 6 Basic Emotions; Your Senses Help to Create Them” (10:12)

Reading 1: “Robert Plutchik’s Theory Chart of Eight Basic Emotions”

Reading 2: “Clinical Therapists List of our 160 Emotions”

Reading 3: “Hard Feelings: Science’s Struggle to Define Emotions” by Julie Beck

Reading 4: “Healing Power of Feeling” by Andy Kim

Class Discussion:

Part TWO: ‘HIDDEN BRAIN’ Podcasts

Topic A – THE BRAIN’S TWO MODES

HB Podcast 2: In “How The ‘Hidden Brain’ Does the Thinking For Us” (7:32) Science writer Shankar Vedantam explains in his ‘The Hidden Brain’ how our brains have 2 modes — conscious & unconscious; pilot & autopilot — and we switch between both. The problem arises when we switch without our awareness into autopilot, which can lead to making snap judgments. The mind is hard-wired to form associations between people and concepts at an early age, including racial categorization.

Topic B – NEW THEORY OF LEFT<->RIGHT BRAIN

HB Podcast 1: “One Head-2 Brains” (edited 16:48) For decades, pop psychology books and web videos have made dramatic claims about people who are left-brained and people who are right-brained. Psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist was intrigued by a question that has fascinated philosophers and scientists for centuries: Why is the human brain divided in half? (Original 51:22) <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/01/690656459/one-head-two-brains-how-the-brains-hemispheres-shape-the-world-we-see>

Class Discussion

OLLI at American University (Spring 2024)
“252: Exploring Our Hidden Brain: How Emotions Shape Our Decisions”

CLASS 2 - OUTLINE (Mar 27)

Part ONE: Emotions & Behaviors

Video 1: “How Our Brains Feel Emotion” (8:39) -
Antonio Damasio

Video 2: “The Brain is a Servant of the Body” (5:36) -
Antonio Damasio

Reading 1: “Feeling Our Emotions” by Julie Beck

Video 3: “Highlights of Atlas of the Heart” (3:35) – Brene Brown interview on NBC

Reading 2: “Excerpts from ‘Atlas of the Heart’” – by Brene Brown

Class Discussion

Video 2: “The Extended Mind” (3:51) by Annie Murphy Paul

Reading 3: “Where Does Great Thinking Come From?” by E. Balcells

Video 4: “Discussing Aspects of Emotional Intelligence (EQ)” (5:28)

Video 5: “What is Emotional Intelligence?” (4:41)

Reading 4: “Understanding Emotional Intelligence and Its Effects on Your Life” by Erin Gabriel

Class Discussion

Part TWO: ‘HIDDEN BRAIN’ Podcast Topic A - ENVY

HB Podcast: “What Happens When Envy Turns Ugly?” (18:00) (Feb. 2018) Envy can be both benign and malicious: it's an unflattering, miserable emotion. And it's universal. All of us, at some time or another, will experience that feeling of wanting what someone else has, and resenting them for having it. Envy has a purpose. It's a tool for social comparison, one that can alert us to imbalances in the social hierarchy and can prompt us to improve our lives. But envy can also turn malicious, causing us to feel resentment, rage, and a desire for revenge. We'll explore emotions that can inspire us to become better people, or to commit unspeakable acts.

Reading 4: “Intergroup Schadenfreude: Motivating Participation in Collective Violence”
by Mina Cikara

Class Discussion

OLLI at American University (Spring 2024)
“252: Exploring Our Hidden Brain: How Emotions Shape Our Decisions”

CLASS 3 - OUTLINE (Apr 3)

Part ONE: Emotions & Behaviors

Podcast 1: “The Nocturnal Brain; Why We Sleep” (7:24) NPR’s Dave Davies with Dr. Guy Leschziner

Reading 1: “Mapping the Darkness: Unlocking the Mysteries of Sleep” by Samantha Harvey

Video 1: “Experts in Emotion: “GENDER & EMOTION” (9:06) Marianne LaFrance & June Gruber

Class discussion

Reading 2: “Chp. 3 – “Tracking the Hidden Brain: How mental disorders reveal...” by Shankar Vedantam

Reading 3: “She’s Never Felt Pain or Anxiety. Now Scientists Know Why” by Heather Murphy

Reading 4: “New ‘Brain Atlas’ Maps the Complex Organ In Dazzling Detail” by Carolyn Johnson

Class discussion

Part TWO: ‘HIDDEN BRAIN’ Podcasts Topic A - LONELINESS

HB Podcast 1: “Lonely American Male: How American Masculinity Creates Lonely Men” (Edited 17:47) (Mar 19, 2018) Boys get the message quickly: a man is supposed to be strong and independent. That message, researchers say, has widespread consequences for men's social lives and physical health. Suicide rates among middle-aged men in America have shown a sudden, distressing increase in the last decade. (Original 53:54)

Reading 5: a) ‘The Crisis of Masculinity’ & **b)** ‘Why Men Cry’ by Niobe Way

Reading 6: “Pandemic Lab: The Loneliest Americans Aren’t Reconnecting” by Christopher Shea

Class discussion

OLLI at American University (Spring 2024)
“252: Exploring Our Hidden Brain: How Emotions Shape Our Decisions”

CLASS #4 - OUTLINE (Apr 10)

Part ONE: Emotions & Behaviors

Video 1: “Compassion Why is It So Hard for Us?” (3:30) - T. Janpa

Video 2: “Empathy vs. Sympathy” (4:06) – Psych2go

Reading 1: “How Does Empathy Work?” by Mimi Swartz

Reading 2: “How Awe Can Improve Your Health” by Hope Rees

Class discussion

Video 3: ‘Happiness’ (8:03) June Gruber with Daniel Gilbert

Video 4: “The Science of Hope” (7:13) – Dr. Chan Hellman

Part TWO: ‘HIDDEN BRAIN’ Podcasts Topic A - TRUTH and DISHONESTY

Video 5: “The Truth About Dishonesty” (6:08) - Dan Ariely on Dishonesty.

HB Podcast 1: “Everybody Lies & That’s Not Always Bad” (14:00) Exploring the psychology of lying vs. telling truth across different relationships and cultural circumstances over our lives. Dan Ariely has found that what separates honest people from not-honest people is not necessarily character, it's opportunity. (Original 29:12 - Apr 4, 2018)

Reading 3: “Sampling the Cheating Life, in Bite-Size Pieces” by Janet Maslin

Reading 4: “Why Trump Supporters Don’t Mind His Lies” by Daniel Effron

Reading 5: “Truth Is, Everyone Lies All the Time” by Edward Reynolds

Class discussion

OLLI at American University (Spring 2024)
“252: Exploring Our Hidden Brain: How Emotions Shape Our Decisions”

CLASS #5 – OUTLINE (Apr 17)

Part ONE: Emotions & Behaviors

Video 1: “Experts in Emotions: PRIDE & EMBARRASSMENT” (15:03) – June Gruber

Class discussion

Video 2: “Mystery of Music (10:56) Netflix “Explained Series”

Video 3: “Former Ballerina with Alzheimer’s Performs ‘Swan Lake’” (1:40)

Reading 1: “How Music Heals Us, Even When It’s Sad” by Leigh Liby

Class discussion

Part TWO: ‘HIDDEN BRAIN’ Podcasts

Topic – MONEY, GIVING and PSYCHOLOGY of SCARCITY

HB Podcast 1: “How Scarcity Trap Affects Our Thinking, Behavior” (5:41) (Jan 2, 2014) A Harvard economist finds there are psychological connections between the bad financial planning of many poor people and the poor time management of busy professionals. In both cases, he finds the experience of scarcity causes biases in the mind that exacerbate problems.

HB Podcast 2: “As We Become Richer, Do We Become Stingier?” (5:43) (Sep. 3, 2013) A UCLA researcher says science shows that as people earn more money, they become more individualistic and less community oriented. As a result, they seem to donate less of their time and money, proportionally, than poorer people.

HB Podcast 3: “Research Suggests Generosity Is Hardwired Into Our Brains” (4:36) (Dec. 24, 2014) If generosity makes us happy, and lots of research suggests that it does, why do many of us find it difficult to be generous?

Reading 2: “Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much” by Mullainathan & Shafir

Reading 3: “The Psychology of Scarcity” by Amy Novotney

Reading 4: “Why Having Too Little Means So Much” by Oliver Berkman

Reading 5: “Is There a Biological Basis for Generosity?” by Alison Escalante MD

Class discussion

OLLI at American University (Spring 2024)
“252: Exploring Our Hidden Brain: How Emotions Shape Our Decisions”

CLASS #6 - OUTLINE (Apr 24)

Part ONE: Emotions & Behaviors

Video 1: “Experts in Emotions: “SHAME & GUILT” (Edited: 18:04) - June Gruber

Class discussion

Reading #1: “Relationship Between Personality and Emotions” by Mukesh Kamar

Reading #2: “Relationship Between Culture and Emotions” by Mukesh Kamar

Reading #3: “How Emotions Shape Character” by RH Gardner

Part TWO: HIDDEN BRAIN Podcasts Topic – REGRET and NOSTALGIA

HB Podcast 1a: REGRET: “Look Back: Reflecting on the Past to Understand the Present” (Edited: 15:00.) Everyone has regrets. You probably have a few of them. By some estimates, regret is the most common negative emotion that we talk about, and the second-most common emotion mentioned in our daily lives. We wish we could go back and change our actions to have been kinder on our friends and families’.

Class discussion

Video 2: “Views on Nostalgia” (4:31)

HB Podcast 1b: NOSTALGIA: “The key element of nostalgia isn't about us retreating to the past. It's about us pulling the past forward to the present, and using it to mobilize us, to energize us, to take on new challenges and opportunities.” (Edited: 15:00.) Psychology professor Clay Routledge studies nostalgia, that gentle tug of longing you feel when you hear a favorite song from your high school days, or even recall moments of hardship and loss. (Original; 50:08 - Jun 14, 2018)

Class discussion

Reading 4: “Six Steps to Turn Regret Into Self-Improvement” By Jennifer Taitz

Reading 5: “What Is Nostalgia Good For?” By John Tierney

Class discussion

OLLI at American University (Spring 2024)

“252: Exploring Our Hidden Brain: How Emotions Shape Our Decisions”

CLASS #7 - OUTLINE (May 1)

‘HIDDEN BRAIN’ Podcasts

Topic A – MEANING and PURPOSE

HB Podcast 1: “Cultivating Your Purpose” (Edited: 18:00) Having a sense of purpose can be a buffer against the challenges we all face at various stages of life. Purpose is different than meaning and can boost our health and longevity. Cornell University psychologist Anthony Burrow explains why purpose isn't something to be found. (Original 57:04 – Jun 22, 2021)

Reading 1: “The Benefits of Having a Sense of Purpose” by Jackie Swift

Class discussion

Topic B – BIASES

HB Podcast 2: “When It Comes To Politics and 'Fake News,' Facts Aren't Enough” (Edited 10:00) (Dec 25, 2017) Facts aren't enough to get rid of our implicit biases: There are some topics about which it seems no amount of data will change people's minds: things like climate change, or restrictions on gun ownership. (Original; 24:31)

Reading 2: “The Influential Mind” by Tali Sharot, cognitive neuroscientist at University College London.

Reading 3: “Understanding Bias: Stereotypes, Prejudices, Discrimination” by F. Menzies

Reading 4: “If You Can Say It. You Can Feel It” by Melissa Dahl

Video 3: “Neuroscience of Unconscious Bias” (2:21)

Class discussion

Topic C – INFORMATION

AVOIDANCE

HB Podcast 3: “How We Use Strategic Ignorance” (3:32) (Dec 22, 17) Social science research explores how our minds push away information that gets in the way of our feelings & desires.

HB Podcast 4: “Why We Think Ignorance Is Bliss, Even When It Hurts Our Health” (4:53) (Jul. 28, 2014) Peoplesometimes avoid information because they're afraid of bad news. But this "information aversion" can lead people to avoid medical tests that could save their lives. (w/text)

Reading 4: “Why People Use Information Avoidance to Choose Their Own Reality”

Part ONE: Emotions & Behaviors

Video 1 “The Language Instinct” (8:23) – Steven Pinker and Richard Dawkins

Reading 6: “How the Mind Creates Language” by Steven Pinker

