

INTS 455

CONSCIOUSNESS AND TRANSFORMATION IN ACTION

Spring 2017
Fridays, 10:30 to 1:10 pm
Location: Aquia 219

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 10:30 am to Noon, and by appointment

Welcome to this required course for students completing the undergraduate minor in Consciousness and Transformation. The course is also open to students who are not declared minors, but any enrollee must have previously completed INTS 355 (or NCLC 355 as it was previously coded). The course has a restricted enrollment, and so you will need to ask the instructor to process an override for you.

The course is a learning community designed to help you consolidate what you have learned in other courses about well-being, mindfulness, consciousness and transformation, and to build your understanding of how principles and practices of consciousness and transformation relate to your major/concentration and the career pathway that it represents.

The course will include students from a variety of undergraduate majors/concentrations, and therefore it will provide a rich opportunity for each student to examine how integrative studies and practices can enhance understanding. A central aspect of this course will be a project, which can take a variety of possible forms – a senior thesis, a community service project, an artistic or creative enterprise, etc. In the latter portion of the course, students will be making presentations to the class in regard to their projects and leading a class discussion about its content.

Many sessions of the course will have a seminar-approach for exploring the materials we are studying. We will especially focus on the process of self-exploration, self-awareness, and building capacity for well-being (personal and collective). To this end, the course will include theory and practices for deepening the student's own experience with mindfulness, self-understanding, finding meaning in our dreams, and contemplative approaches to inquiry.

LEARNING COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Describe through reflective writing a broad and deep understanding of self which emerges from theoretical study and personal practices related to consciousness and transformation.
- Demonstrate a capacity for approaching problem-solving from a whole person perspective, which engages analytical thought synthesized with imagination, mindfulness, and intuitive reasoning.
- Exhibit greater self-awareness about values, priorities, and expanded ways of thinking about a flourishing life.
- Describe the characteristics of transformational change and ways that can potentially find expression in the student's chosen major or career pathway.

- Demonstrate enhanced communications skills through presenting one’s project and leading a class discussion.

INSTRUCTOR BIO

Mark Thurston, Ph.D. is director of educational programs at George Mason University’s Center for the Advancement of Well-Being (formerly the Center for Consciousness and Transformation). Dr. Thurston has been a part of the Center staff since its founding in January, 2009. He serves as director for Mason’s undergraduate minor in Consciousness and Transformation, and he teaches required and elective courses for the minor. He is an affiliate faculty member of the School of Integrative Studies. He has also served as an affiliate faculty member of Mason’s School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR) where he has taught the course “Conflict Transformation from the Inside Out.” With an academic background in psychology, Dr. Thurston worked for 35 years before coming to Mason in adult education related to mindfulness, holistic health, and personal transformation. He is author of numerous books related to personal spirituality, dream psychology, meditation, and the transformation of consciousness.

COURSE RESOURCES AND TEXTS:

1) Schwartz, Stephan (2015) *The 8 Laws of Change: How to Be an Agent of Personal and Social Transformation*. Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press.

This is a new book by consciousness researcher Stephan Schwartz. For those students who took NCLC 355 or INTS 355 with me, you will recognize this name as the author of the Smithsonian Magazine essay about George Mason, the man. The book articulates a series of principles and practices that can support our efforts to put “consciousness and transformation into action.”

2) de Laski, Donald (2010) *Letting Life Happen: A Personal Story of Guidance, Opportunity and Abundance*. Virginia Beach, VA: ARE Press.

This autobiography illustrates the creative tension we will be exploring in this course: the polarity between being and doing. The author has made available a free electronic copy of the book for each student in the course. You will be able to download the entire book via our Blackboard web site.

3) Tart, Charles (1987) *Waking Up: Overcoming the Obstacles to Human Potential*. Boston: Shambhala Press.

Although this book is somewhat dated, much of the content about the process of human change and self-awareness is based on timeless wisdom. Dr. Tart was a psychology professor at the University of California, Davis, as well as a dedicated student of ancient wisdom traditions of mindfulness and consciousness transformation. This book will be a primary source of material for the personal transformation aspects of the course.

Plus, a selection of articles and book segments available 1) at designated web pages on-line, and 2) articles in pdf format posted to Blackboard.

GRADING (based on 500 points)

Learning Community Participation 25% of course grade (125 points)

Class attendance and participation is a highly significant aspect of this course. You earn points for Learning Community Participation each time you show up and fully engage in the classroom activities. Some of the 125 possible points for this segment of the grading rubric are not tied directly to attendance but rather to quality of engagement and sharing in the classroom – for example, demonstrating that you have carefully prepared for class and have thoughtful ideas, questions and insights to share. There will be a more detailed discussion in class about how the points are assigned for this part of the grading rubric.

Essays 30% of course grade (150 points)

There will be two papers for the semester. One is an extensive essay that will be a personal reflection about your own journey for self-understanding, using the lenses of the course materials. The other will be a briefer paper that reports on the learning and academic content of some conference that you choose to attend during the semester. You are encouraged to make that conference 1) the one-day Well-Being Conference sponsored by Mason LEADS and the Center for the Advancement of Well-Being on April 7 in Falls Church, or 2) the one-day conference “Contemplative Practices in the 21st Century University” on April 8 in Falls Church. But you can negotiate with Dr. Thurston for a replacement conference if the timing is not good for you or if you cannot afford the registration fee. Another option is the “Somatic Leadership Institute” one-day conference on Saturday, February 25th on campus. It has a modest registration fee.

Mid-semester Quiz 10% of course grade (50 points)

Multiple-choice questions about our reading assignments and classroom discussion content.

Project 35% of course grade (175 points)

The project will be graded in terms of four elements:

- 1) One-on-one meeting early in the semester with Dr. Thurston to discuss your plan
- 2) Mid-semester preliminary submission – this will likely be a portion of the overall final submission
- 3) Oral presentation to the class
- 4) Final submission which documents the entire project

FINAL GRADE ASSIGNMENTS WILL FOLLOW THIS FORMULA:

A+	(490-500 points)
A	(460-489)
A-	(450-459)
B+	(440-449)
B	(410-439)
B-	(400-409)
C+	(390-399)
C	(360-389)
C-	(350-359)
D	(349-300)
F	less than 300 points
IN	see below

IMPORTANT NOTE IN REGARD TO “INCOMPLETE” GRADE. In most cases a grade of “IN” or “incomplete” is not available. Work that does not get submitted will earn no points, and that will be reflected in the point tabulation by the instructor after the last class session of the semester. Please do not move through the semester with an expectation that you can simply “take an incomplete” if you cannot get everything done by the end of the semester. A grade of incomplete is possible in cases of illness or other severe circumstances, but only if you have stayed in communication with the instructor and have negotiated an extension on specific assignments.

COMPETENCIES FOR THIS LEARNING COMMUNITY

Using active and collaborative learning strategies and reflective practice, we shall address these learning community competencies:

- **Communication:** We will depend significantly on effective classroom oral discussions to shape our evolving understanding of consciousness and its role in different academic and professional disciplines. We will also hone our skills at making effective presentations of our creative work.
- **Group Collaboration:** The effectiveness of this learning community is directly related to students from different academic majors coming together and developing insights as a group in regard to how consciousness and transformation are relevant topics for today’s world and career paths.
- **Well-Being:** In this course we will continue to do self-exploration work around questions of what gives my life meaning and how I can flourish in my chosen field of study/work.

ACADEMIC POLICIES AND INFORMATION

SIS COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

The School of Integrative Studies is an *intentionally* inclusive community that celebrates diversity and strives to have faculty, staff, and students who reflect the diversity of our plural society. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, class, linguistic background, religion, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, or physical ability.

LEARNING DIFFERENCES

If you have a learning or physical difference that may affect your academic work, you will need to furnish appropriate documentation to the Disability Resource Center. If you qualify for accommodation, the DRC staff will give you a form detailing appropriate accommodations for your instructor.

In addition to providing your professor with the appropriate form, please take the initiative to discuss accommodation with him at the beginning of the semester and as needed during the term. Because of the range of learning differences, faculty members need to learn from you the most effective ways to assist you. If you have contacted the Disability Resource Center and are waiting to hear from a counselor, please tell your instructor or the GTA.

POLICY FOR LATE AND MISSING ASSIGNMENTS

You are responsible for completing assignments on time. This includes assigned postings on the

course web site. Essays are due on the dates listed on rubric and must be submitted electronically. **Late assignments may be marked down DAILY as much as 10% of the possible points for that assignment.** Unless arrangements are made otherwise with the instructor, no assignments will be accepted more than one week after the original due date.

FORMAT FOR ASSIGNMENTS

For all written assignments in the course, word processing files are to be saved as a “doc,” or “docx” or “pdf” file and submitted electronically to the instructor via Blackboard. Please do not submit in any other file format, such as “wps” files. **The file name should BEGIN WITH your own last name – for example, Smith-autobiographical-essay1.docx**

Please use an 11- or 12-point standard font, and one-inch margins. All papers should include a title, your name and course number. Accurate spelling, clarity, and correct use of grammar and punctuation are expected and their absence can negatively affect your grade.

Each writing assignment will have specific guidelines in regard to whether or not you need to include references or citations. You are responsible for keeping a copy (electronic AND paper) of all major papers you hand in. Please save your work in multiple places.

ATTENDANCE AND IN-CLASS POLICIES

This course is a School of Integrative Studies “learning community” and classroom attendance and participation is vital to your learning and your grade. You are expected to be present (both body *and* mind) at all classes and actively participate in discussion and other activities. This includes not only speaking, but also listening carefully to others’ opinions and experiences with an open mind. You do not need to adopt another’s viewpoint, but you do need to extend to them the courtesy of trying to hear what they have to say. The more you can, through your comments and in-class writing, show that you have carefully read the assigned material, the higher your participation grade will be.

Please plan to have cell phones, Blackberries, iPhones, etc. turned off during class. We will be taking breaks, and you can check for messages then. For the most part you will not have use for a laptop in the class sessions themselves. Please do not plan to have a laptop open and functional during class unless that is your primary way of taking notes. If you have a laptop open and functional, the instructor will assume that it is only for note-taking purposes and not for accessing email, surfing the web, etc. This is a course about consciousness – so please plan to have your consciousness fully present for the class.

Much of the value you will receive from this course will come from your reactions to course materials and your interactions with your fellow students. Although there will be classroom lectures and video presentations, the class will be built around **your** reading, thinking, questioning, and exploration of course materials. As already mentioned in this syllabus, your attendance and participation is extremely important to the class and your learning process. You are expected to read assigned materials on time, to think critically about the readings, and to arrive on time to class, prepared to discuss and work with the topics.

ACADEMIC HONESTY AND COLLABORATION

The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. According to the University catalog, plagiarism includes the following:

- Presenting as one's own the words, the work, or the opinions of someone else without proper acknowledgment.
- Borrowing the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment.

Be particularly careful to credit work through citations or appropriate means of attribution. In addition to direct quotations, you must also provide an in-text citation and an entry in your list of works cited for paraphrases and summaries of opinions or factual information not formerly known to the writer. If you decide to use another person's ideas you must either quote the idea verbatim or completely rephrase the ideas in your own words and voice. Even when you paraphrase information, you still must cite the original source of the information. Please give credit where credit is due, even in our class discussions. For example, if you have had an interesting conversation about a text or your learning with a friend, family, or group member, then acknowledge their contribution to your learning.

Each essay writing assignment will have a specific rubric that includes directions regarding the audience you are writing for, as well as the way you will handle references to sources. Unless otherwise indicated, follow the principle that in academic work you should follow a standardized format for your in-text citations and lists of works cited (for example, the formats created by the Modern Language Association [MLA] or the American Psychological Association [APA]).

Assignments for this particular course are designed to be undertaken independently. **You may discuss your ideas with others and confer with peers or the Writing Center staff on drafts of the work** (e.g., getting feedback and critique on clarity, spelling and grammar); however, it is not appropriate to give your paper to someone else to revise. You are responsible for making certain that there is no question that the work you hand in is your own. If your name appears on an assignment, the instructor expects that you have done the work yourself. **Remember to carefully read the University's Honor Policy. It is your responsibility to understand it and abide by its provisions.**

STUDENT LEARNING RESOURCES

WRITING RESOURCES

Writing is an important component of this learning community and represents one facet of effective communication. You may wish to use the Writing Center to assist you with an assignment. Tutors at the Writing Center can help you brainstorm, structure, and revise your written work. The Writing Center has multiple locations on campus. See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu> or call 703-993-1200.

DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER

The staff members of the DRC assist students with learning differences or any other conditions that may impact academic performance. DRC is located in SUB I, Room 2500; 703-993-2474; <http://ods.gmu.edu/>

COUNSELING SERVICES

Professional counselors provide individual and group sessions for personal development and assistance with a range of emotional and relational issues. Counseling Services are located in

SUB I, Room 3129; 703-993-2380; <http://caps.gmu.edu/> Also, the Learning Services Program (703-993-2999) offers academic skill-building workshops as well as a tutor referral service.