

ATTENTION, DISTRACTION, SHOCK, AND BURNOUT

We spend a lot of our time distracted, shocked, overwhelmed, and burned out. There are constant demands on our attention, and some people have strong incentives to keep us shocked or distracted. Why are we in this situation, and how can we respond to it? This course covers recent work on the nature and ethics of attention, including the attention economy, the politics of shock, addiction, burnout, attention disorders, and norms and virtues of attention. The course will emphasize opportunities for students to develop and defend their own views on these topics.

Instructor: Eugene Chislenko, chislenko@temple.edu

Office hours: Mazur Hall 750, Tu 2:30-4:30pm or by appointment

Course requirements: (1) Required reading each week (all on course website)
(2) Active class participation (20%)
(3) Two 3-page papers (15% each)
(4) 2-page peer feedback assignment (10%)
(5) 6-8 page final paper (40%)

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND READINGS

I. The Attention Economy

1. Tu 1/14: **Introduction: The Importance of Attention**

2. Th 1/16: **What is an “Attention Economy”?**

Reading: Tim Wu, *The Attention Merchants*, through p.23

3. Tu 1/21: **Holding Everyone’s Attention**

Reading: Tim Wu, *The Attention Merchants*, pp. 108-22, 303-7

4. Th 1/23: **Commodifying Attention**

Reading: Katharine Browne and Sebastian Watzl, “What is Wrong with Commodifying Attention?”

5. Tu 1/28: **Engineering Addiction**

Reading: Vikram R. Bhargava and Manuel Velasquez, “Ethics of the Attention Economy: The Problem of Social Media Addiction”

6. Th 1/30: **Open Discussion**

No new reading.

II. The Nature and Norms of Attention

7. Tu 2/4: **Priority Structures**

Reading: Sebastian Watzl, *Structuring Mind: The Nature of Attention & How it Shapes Consciousness*, pp. 1-3, 70-79, and 105-10

8. Th 2/6: **Passive and Active Attention**

Reading: Watzl, *Structuring Mind*, pp. 114-22, 133-35, and 138-52
First paper due Friday, 2/7 by 11:59pm.

9. Tu 2/11: **Character**

Reading: Nicolas Bommarito, “Modesty as a Virtue of Attention”

10. Th 2/13: **Responsibility**

Reading: Eugene Chislenko, “Blame as Attention”

11. Tu 2/18: **Injustice**

Reading: Ella Whiteley, “‘A Woman First and a Philosopher Second’: Relative Attentional Surplus on the Wrong Property”

12. Th 2/20: **Ethics of Attention Symposium**

Reading: No new reading

13. Tu 2/25: **Friendship**

Reading: Anna Brinkerhoff, “The Cognitive Demands of Friendship”

14. Th 2/27: **Open Discussion**

No new reading. **Second paper due Friday, 2/28 by 11:59pm**

[No class 3/4 or 3/6. Happy spring break!]

III. Breakdowns and Pathologies

15. Tu 3/11: **Distraction**

Reading: Gloria Mark, *Attention Span*, pp. 48-64

16. Th 3/13: **Shock**

Reading: Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, pp. 29-58

17. Tu 3/18: **Burnout**

Reading: Cynthia Cordes and Thomas Dougherty, “A Review and an Integration of Research on Job Burnout”

18. Th 3/20: **Attention Disorders**

Reading: Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, Laura Soter, and Jesse Summers, “Mental Disorders as Failures of Attention”

IV. Reclaiming Attention

19. Tu 3/25: **Resisting Distraction**

Reading: James Williams, *Stand Out of Our Light: Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy*, pp.xi-xiii and 87-95; Nir Eyal, *Indistractable*, pp. 33-50 and 81-91

20. Th 3/27: **Resisting Shock**

Reading: Naomi Klein, *No is Not Enough*, pp. 189-208; *Doppelganger*, pp. 226-7

21. Tu 4/1: **Resisting Burnout**

Reading: Eugene Chislenko, “Virtues of Willpower”

22. Th 4/3: **The Mindfulness Debate**

Reading: Ronald Purser, “The Mindfulness Conspiracy”; Bhikku Anālayo, “The Myth of McMindfulness”

23. Tu 4/8: **Focus and Balance**

Reading: Gloria Mark, *Attention Span*, pp. 261-83; Wu, *The Attention Merchants*, pp. 248-53

24. Th 4/10: **Community**

No new reading. Peer interviews during class.

V. Developing Our Own Views

25. Tu 4/15: **Students’ Choice**

Reading: TBD

26. Th 4/17: **Open Discussion**

No new reading. **Final paper draft due Thursday, 4/17 by 11:59pm.**

27. Tu 4/22: **Writing Workshop**

Reading: Your feedback partner’s draft.

Peer feedback due Tuesday, 4/22 by 11:59pm.

28. Th 4/24: **Open Discussion**

No new reading.

Final paper rewrite due Wednesday, 4/30 by 11:59pm.

COURSE POLICIES

Class Participation: You will get much more from the course if you participate actively in class! Active participation means showing up prepared, having done the readings more than once and coming in with questions and reactions. But it also means taking responsibility for the class going well for everyone, including you. That can include: pointing to an interesting passage; asking a clarificatory question; emphasizing the importance of someone else's comment; raising a problem; directing discussion in a productive direction; contributing readings, media, or other optional resources to share with the class; and making suggestions that help the class go well, either in class, in office hours, or over email. You are expected to not only attend class consistently, but also participate actively. If you are struggling to participate, please talk to your instructor.

Office Hours: Come to office hours often! Talking one-on-one or in small groups is one of the best ways to get a handle on the material and methods of the course. You'll probably get more out of it if you come with specific questions, but coming to talk about the issues in a more general way is fine too. If you have friends in the class, feel free to come as a small group. If you want to meet but have a schedule conflict, let me know and we can find a different time.

Electronic Devices: Electronic devices tend to interfere with student engagement. Please do not use laptops or other electronic devices in class! If you need to text or call, please step outside. In return, handouts will be provided for most lectures, so that you do not have to take extensive notes.

Plagiarism: *All* written work for the course must be your own. Be sure to cite any works you use, including web sites, books, and articles. Presenting *anyone* else's work, or the work of AI, as your own is considered plagiarism. Please follow this link to see Temple University's Policy on Student Conduct Code, which includes academic honesty: policies.temple.edu/PDF/398.pdf. The Philosophy Department Plagiarism Policy mandates an "F" grade, and reporting to the Chair and the CLA Undergraduate Affairs Office, for plagiarized work.

Disabilities: Any student who has a need for accommodations based on the impact of a documented disability or medical condition should contact Disability Resources and Services (DRS) located in the Howard Gittis Student Center South, 4th Floor at drs@temple.edu or 215-204-1280 to request accommodations and learn more about the resources available to you. If you have a DRS accommodation letter to share with me, or you would like to discuss your accommodations, please contact me as soon as practical. I will work with you and with DRS to coordinate reasonable accommodations for all students with documented disabilities. All discussions related to your accommodations will be confidential.

Statement on Academic Freedom: Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The University has a policy on Student and Faculty Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy #03.70.02) which can be accessed at policies.temple.edu.