

**UHON 3510-002 / 351S2-001: Better understanding opinions of others and your own to reduce discord  
Fall 2023**

**Instructor:** Dr. Mike Eichholz  
**Office:** Room 252 - Life Science II  
**Office hours:** Monday 12:00 - 3:00, Wed. 12:30 - 3:00  
**Phone:** Office 453-6951  
Home: call or text (**Before 9:00 PM**) (618) 201-2376  
**E-mail:** eichholz@siu.edu  
**Podcast:** This American Life <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/archive>

**Class description:** Many perceive the current level of discord in politics and throughout our society to be unnecessarily high. A primary contributor to this disagreement is likely our ability to silo ourselves by communicating with only like-thinking individuals through both in person and virtual socializing. This partitioning often leads us to vilify people with differing opinions than our own. What most people don't recognize is that thoughts and opinions are simply a chemical response to an external stimulus creating a reflexive reaction and based almost exclusively on our past experiences and memories. People often fail to realize that at age 2, because most humans are physiologically very similar and have very few experiences or memories to call upon, people respond and behave in relatively predictable patterns. As we age and gain experience and memories, however, our responses and behaviors diverge based on those experiences and memories, thus we may behave very differently or have very different opinions or responses to stimuli (information) based on those experiences and memories. When others have differing opinions than our own, most of the time it is not because they are "bad" people, it's because their past experiences have led them to respond differently to the stimuli, i.e., form a different opinion or response than our own. To be better at accepting people with differing opinions than our own and form consensus among and within groups, we first must understand the basics of how opinions are formed, then understand how past experiences can lead to very different, but valid opinions. In this class, students will learn that an opinion is simply a response to an external stimulus for which we have very little control. Additionally, our response to that stimulus (our opinion) can change with additional experience and memories i.e., rational or emotional reasoning.

The first week of class will be dedicated to the first objective, understanding how opinions are formed. Through 2 readings and a short lecture, we will learn the basics of how humans perceive information and form thoughts and opinions. We will discuss the basics of the human evolutionary response to external stimuli and how that influences our current process of thinking and forming opinions. The remainder of the semester will address objectives 2 through 5 using the podcast *This American Life* (<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/archive>). Student are required to listen to 2 episodes of the podcast for each class then answer the following 3 questions in writing:

- 1) How were the stories similar to your own experiences?
- 2) How did the stories differ from your own experiences?
- 3) How might the experiences of the individuals in the stories reinforce or change your opinion on a current controversial topic.
- 4) Should we keep these episodes?

Answers to these questions will be discussed in class.

Objective:

- 1) Learn the basics of how and why opinions form.
- 2) Increase the ability of the students to think critically.

- 3) Better understand how one's own memories and experiences lead to the formation of their own opinion.
- 4) Better understand how the memories and experiences of others lead to opinions different from their own.
- 5) Be subjected to other experiences and memories to see how those experiences could lead to an opinion other than their own.

Grading:

Each of 30 written reflections will be worth 10 points each

300 total points

Class participation and discussion (- 10 points for every unexcused absence)

100 total points

Grading scale:

90-100% - A

80 – 89% - B

70 – 79% - C

60 – 69% - D

> 59% - F

Date	Topic
Aug. 20	Introduction
Aug. 22	Perception and Thought – Be ready to discuss handouts: <i>Introduction to consumer behavior Chapter 3 – Perception</i> <i>Psychology Today – What is a thought? And how is information physical?</i> <i>The Atlantic – Free Will</i>
Aug. 27	Episodes 111- Adventures in the simple life; 494 – Hit the road; Episodes 630 – Things I meant to know
Aug. 29	Episodes 424 – kid politics; 211 – naming names; 276 – swing set
Sep. 3	Episodes 671 – Anything can be anything; 670 Beware the Jabberwock be anything (724, 614 – the other mister president*)
Sep. 5	806 – I can't quit you baby; 265 – Fake science; 363 – Enforcers
Sep. 10	Episodes; 665 – Before things went to hell ; 632 and 633 – Our town parts 1 and 2 and our town economists report;
Sep. 12	Episodes 645 - My effing first amendment; 81 – Guns; 722 – The unreality of now
Sep. 17	Episodes 704 – Our Pulitzer-winning episode; 621 – Fear and loathing in Homer and Rockville; 179- Cicero
Sep. 19	Episodes 562 – The problem we all live with (part one); 563 – The problem we all live with (Part two); 538 – Is this working;
Sep. 24	615 – The beginning of now; Episodes 600 – Will I know anyone at this party; 272 – Big tent
Sep. 26	Episodes 391 – More is less; 392 Someone Else's money; 262 – Miracle cures
Oct. 1	Episodes 84 – Harold; 478 – red state blue state; 723 – Squeaker
Oct. 3	Episodes 163 – Can you fight city hall...if you are city hall; 210 – Perfect evidence; 437 – Old boys club
Oct. 8	Episodes 46 – Sissies; 220 – Testosterone; 27 – The cruelty of children
Oct. 10	Episodes 495 – Hot in my backyard; 762 – Apocalypse creep (748 – the end of the world as we know it)
Oct. 15	Episodes 756 – But I did everything right; 795 - Nine months later; 774 – The pink house at the center of the world
Oct. 17	Episodes 68 – Lincoln's 2 <sup>nd</sup> Inaugural; 708 – Here, again racism; Episodes 219 – High speed chase
Oct. 22	Episodes 143 – Sentencing; 547 – Cops see things differently

Oct. 24	Episodes 759 and 760 – A couple walk into a house; Episodes 105 – Take a negro home
Oct. 29	Episodes 197 - Before I had a name; 52 - Edge of sanity; 385 – Pro Se
Oct. 31	Episodes 267 – Propriety; 290 – Godless America
Nov. 5	Episodes 275 – Two steps back; 474 - back to school; 555 – The incredible rarity of changing your mind
Nov. 7	Episodes 158 – Mob mentality; 482 – Light, Camera, Christmas 601 – Master of her Domain
Nov. 12	Episodes 783 – Kids these days; 659 – Before the next one; 608 – the revolution
Nov. 14	Episodes 320 – What’s in a number - 2006 edition; Episodes 177 – American Limbo
Nov. 19	Episodes 375 – Bad bank; 365 Another frightening show about the economy; 390 – Giant pool of money
Nov. 21	Episodes 217 – Give it to them; 570 – the night in question; 232 – The real story
Nov. 26	<b>Thanksgiving Break</b>
Nov. 28	<b>Thanksgiving Break</b>
Dec. 3	Episodes 803- Greetings, people of earth; 797- What was I thinking as we were sinking
Dec. 5	Episodes 612 – Ask a grown-up; 5 – Anger and forgiveness
Dec. 9- 13	Finals week