

Course number: IDH 3931
Neurotheology: The Interface between the Brain and the Divine
Gen Education: H
Gordon Rule: Comm (6000)
Instructor Name: Louis Ritz and Gene Thursby
Time: W 10-E1
Location: Room 19, Anderson Hall
Section Number: 1256

Description:

Are religious and spiritual experiences brain-based? If they are, what are the implications to understanding brain circuitry? If they are not, what are the implications to our understanding of who we are? Our course - Neurotheology -will investigate the neural correlates of religious and spiritual experiences and the implications of such relationships.

The course will consist of weekly presentations and discussions led by the course instructors. Student group dialogue and exchange will be emphasized. Topics to be explored include: organization of higher cortical function in the human brain; effects of cortical brain lesions on our perception of reality; the variety of religious experiences; modern brain imaging; meditation and spiritual experiences; brain correlates of meditation; eastern and western views of the mind; how the brain constructs reality; attention and awareness; mind-body medicine; psychedelics and mystical experiences; the neurobiology of emotions; the God gene - the genetic basis of spiritual experiences.

The instructors are founding members of the University of Florida Center for Spirituality and Health, and co-teach a well-received Honors course in Spirituality and Health Sciences. (For more information, see <http://www.spiritualityandhealth.ufl.edu>).

Students will write six 3 page papers, chosen from the 7 different class topics. In addition, a final paper (5 pages) and a final class presentation (10 minutes) will reflect your understanding and appreciation of the relationship between the brain and experiences of the divine.

Instructor Bios:

Dr. Lou Ritz is an Associate Professor of Neuroscience, within the College of Medicine and the McKnight Brain Institute. His research interests, funded by the National Institutes of Health, are concerned with spinal cord injury and repair. He is the course director for Medical Neuroscience, taken by all first year medical students, and of Functional Human Neuroanatomy, taken by a diverse group of graduate students. Dr. Ritz is a co-director of the John Templeton Spirituality and Medicine Award, for incorporating spirituality, cultural diversity, and end-of-life issues into the UF medical school curriculum.

Dr. Gene Thursby is an Associate Professor of Religion in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. He has been a Fulbright Fellow in India and has participated in several international seminars and teaching institutes sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities. He teaches courses on theories of religious experience and new religious movements.

Questions about the course can be sent to: ritz@mbi.ufl.edu