

Intention and Acts of Meaning

CUNY Graduate Center | Spring 2016 | Thursdays, 6:30–8:30 | Stephen Neale & Daniel Harris

Course Description

Intentionalism seeks to explain semantic and pragmatic phenomena ultimately in terms of humans capacity to recognize one another's communicative intentions.

Our goal in this course will be to answer some open questions about how to implement the intentionalist program. Here are some of the questions we'll be addressing:

- What are the empirical predictions that intentionalism makes about human psychology? Are those predictions borne out by the available evidence?
- How should an intentionalist explain the properties of different kinds of illocutionary acts?
- How can Grice's theory of implicature be generalized to explain non-assertoric indirect speech acts?
- How should intentionalists think about reference?
- How do intentionalist theories compare to Stalnaker's influential model of communication?
- How can an intentionalist construct a compositional semantic theory?

Website

The schedule and readings are on the course website:

danielwharris.com/teaching/spring16/

Readings

Electronic versions of all the readings will be available on the website. Make sure to read all of the required readings for each week. The website also includes some background readings; they may be discussed in class, but it won't be assumed that you've read them all.

You may want to get copies of these books, which we'll read substantial parts of:

H. P. Grice: *Studies in the Way of Words*

Thom Scott-Phillips: *Speaking our Minds*

Course Requirements

Participation: 10%

Weekly Short Essays: 30%

Term Paper Draft: 10%

Comments on Others' Drafts: 10%

Term Paper, Final Draft: 40%

Weekly Short Essays

Each week, write a brief response to something in the required readings. Criticize an argument, suggest a modification to a theory, give an argument for the author's thesis that they didn't think of, point out some relevant empirical stuff, etc. Ideally, these essays will pitch ideas that could be incorporated into a term paper.

Short essays should be short—just about a page long.

Email your weekly essay to us by midnight on the Friday after the class whose readings you're responding to.

Only your ten best short essays will count toward your grade.

Draft

Your term-paper draft should be a ~4000 word essay on some topic that we've covered in the class. Since you'll be sharing the draft with other students, it should be relatively polished.

The draft will be due on May 12.

Comments On Others' Drafts

You'll write comments on two other students' drafts. These should be at least 500 words each, including a brief summary and some constructive criticism.

Your comments on others' drafts are due on May 19.

Term Paper, Final Draft

The term paper should be under 7500 words (including footnotes and references). If this is your first year in the program, aim for 5000 words.

The term paper is due on May 26.