

PHILOSOPHY 340: MINDS AND MACHINES (FALL 2025)
Professor Eric Swanson

We'll discuss minds, machines, the relationships between them, and the relationships they encourage and discourage. We'll compare human minds and brains to machine 'minds' and 'brains,' considering questions like: Could a machine have a mind? Could a machine be conscious, or think in the ways that people do? What can human brains teach us about artificial brains, and vice versa? What are some ethical and political ramifications of artificial intelligence?

LECTURE

Mondays and Wednesdays, 10–11:18, **2500 SKB**. Please attend! But if you're sick, please watch on **Lecture Capture**. **Canvas Phil 340-001** (<https://umich.instructure.com/courses/790437>) is course-wide; separate sites for sections.

SECTIONS

002: Thursdays 4–5 with Nyla Welch, in **3330 MH**
004: Fridays 9–10 with Nyla Welch, in **1449 MH**
005: Thursdays 5–6 with Alison Weinberger, in **3437 MH**
006: Thursdays 6–7 with Alison Weinberger, in **2462 MH**
008: Fridays 10–11 with Lorenzo Manuali, in **2080 SKB**
009: Fridays 11–12 with Nyla Welch, in **2024 DANA**
010: Fridays 12–1 with Alison Weinberger, in **180 TAP**
011: Fridays 1–2 with Lorenzo Manuali, in **1448 MH**
012: Fridays 2–3 with Lorenzo Manuali, in **3347 MH**

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Piazza (on the **lecture's Canvas site**) is the online place to ask any course-related questions and to start course-related chats. If you have a question that isn't specific to you, please use a public post! This helps everyone, especially because in this course we all have different strengths and areas of expertise. Use a private post on Piazza, addressed to both your GSI and me, for questions specific to you. When you're struggling, feel free to ask questions anonymously!

My office hours are 11:45–12:45 on Mondays and Wednesdays, in **2259 Angell Hall**. You don't need to make an appointment to drop by at these times. I'm also happy to chat after lecture, and by appointment.

BUY OR BORROW

These Strange New Minds: How AI Learned to Talk and What It Means, by **Christopher Summerfield**.

GRADING

20%: participation (*especially* in section and on Piazza; but lecture and office hours also help!)

20%: your 10 highest scores on at least 18 short quizzes, in lecture (occasionally) and in section (very frequently).

15% each: paper exams in lecture on Wednesday, October 8 and Wednesday, November 19.

30%: paper final exam, 4–6 on Monday, December 15.

The use of laptops, phones, etc. is forbidden during quizzes and exams. *No makeups for quizzes* because we will be ignoring so many low / missed scores. Missed exams can be made up *only* with appropriate documentation.

Percentage	Letter Grade
96.67%–100.00%	A+
93.33%–96.66%	A
90.00%–93.32%	A-
86.67%–89.99%	B+
83.33%–86.66%	B
80.00%–83.32%	B-
⋮	⋮
<60.00%	E

SCHEDULE OF READINGS, VIEWINGS, LECTURES, AND EXAMS

Mon., Aug. 25	Organizational meeting
Wed., Aug. 27	Watch before lecture: <i>Black Mirror</i> , “Be Right Back” (49 minutes)
Wed., Sep. 3	Read before lecture: Introduction and Chapters 1–3 of <i>These Strange New Minds</i>
Mon., Sep. 8	Watch before lecture: <i>Her</i> (126 minutes)
Wed., Sep. 10	Read before lecture: Chapters 4–6 of <i>These Strange New Minds</i>
Mon., Sep. 15	Read before lecture: Chapters 7–10 of <i>These Strange New Minds</i>
Wed., Sep. 17	Read before lecture: Chapters 11–14 of <i>These Strange New Minds</i>
Mon., Sep. 22	Watch before lecture: <i>Star Trek: The Next Generation</i> , “Darmok” (46 minutes)
Wed., Sep. 24	Read before lecture: Chapters 15–18 of <i>These Strange New Minds</i>
Mon., Sep. 29	Watch before lecture: <i>Arrival</i> (116 minutes)
Wed., Oct. 1	Read before lecture: Chapters 19–22 of <i>These Strange New Minds</i>
Mon., Oct. 6	Exam 1 review; bring your exam prep questions
Wed., Oct. 8	Exam 1 in lecture; no sections this week
Wed., Oct. 15	Watch before lecture: <i>Black Mirror</i> , “Nosedive” (63 minutes)
Mon., Oct. 20	Watch before lecture: <i>Black Mirror</i> , “Joan Is Awful” (56 minutes)
Wed., Oct. 22	Read before lecture: Chapters 23–26 of <i>These Strange New Minds</i>
Mon., Oct. 27	Read before lecture: Chapters 27–30 of <i>These Strange New Minds</i>
Wed., Oct. 29	Read before lecture: Chapters 31–34 of <i>These Strange New Minds</i>
Mon., Nov. 3	Watch before lecture: <i>The Truman Show</i> (103 minutes)
Wed., Nov. 5	Read before lecture: Chapters 35–38 of <i>These Strange New Minds</i>
Mon., Nov. 10	Watch before lecture: <i>The Matrix</i> (136 minutes)
Wed., Nov. 12	Read before lecture: Ruha Benjamin, “Default Discrimination”
Mon., Nov. 17	Exam 2 review; bring your exam prep questions
Wed., Nov. 19	Exam 2 in lecture; no sections this week
Mon., Nov. 24	Read before lecture: Chapters 39 and 40 of <i>These Strange New Minds</i> ; no sections this week
Mon., Dec. 1	Watch before lecture: <i>Black Mirror</i> , “Hang the DJ” (51 minutes)
Wed., Dec. 3	Read before lecture: Chapters 41–43 and Afterword of <i>These Strange New Minds</i>
Mon., Dec. 8	Final exam review; bring your exam prep questions
Mon., Dec. 15	Final exam, 4–6, location TBD

COURSE-WIDE EXPECTATIONS

Things may change. It is your responsibility to pay attention to lecture, section, and Canvas and Piazza announcements.

Be sure to bring a pen or pencil to lecture and section, both to take notes and to take quizzes!

The use of laptops in class can distract the user, other students, and teachers. Lots of research has shown that many students learn better if they take notes by hand. See, for example:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>

However, some students absolutely have to use laptops, and do benefit from them. *If you need to use a laptop in lecture, please sit to the left as you face the front of the room.* If laptops distract you like they distract me, please sit in the center or on the right. No phones, texting, etc. in class.

Keep up with the readings and viewings, and do them *before* lecture. They demand careful, patient thought and attention. If you fall behind you’ll miss much of what’s going on for the rest of the semester.

We’ll be discussing controversial issues in this course, and challenging our beliefs throughout. Be polite, respectful, and generous in discussion with your classmates and teachers.

If you might need an accommodation for a disability, please let us know right away.

Students must understand the **College of LSA’s standards of academic integrity**; if you need help understanding them contact your GSI. Findings of cheating or plagiarism result in a 0 for that assignment and disciplinary action by the University. Although all work you turn in must be your own, please discuss the material with your classmates!