Syllabus

Neural Science: The **Neurobiology of Ancient Wisdom** Course number *4 points*

Instructor: Prof. André Fenton (afenton@nyu.edu)

People who are wise appear to have a deep understanding and awareness of themselves and the world to the extent that they can efficiently and consistently make decisions and choose actions that promote optimal outcomes. This course will consider the neurobiological evidence that does and does not support tried and true concepts of human understanding and prescriptions that promote wisdom, including, attentiveness, emotional control, mental exercise, mindfulness, and the Buddhist notion of emptiness. The goal of the course is to promote a neurobiological understanding of whether and how these practices and concepts can promote wisdom. Students should not expect the course to answer deep questions about the human condition. Instead, students can expect to learn how the intellectual framework provided by established neurobiological knowledge can lead to a better understanding of wisdom and wisdom-promoting practices.

The course is organized around lectures and group discussions, and is thus limited to 15 students. The course format and style will emphasize critical reading skills and discussion. Each meeting will be organized around a particular concept and the meeting will be structured by critical, scholarly evaluation of readings from the primary scientific literature and chapters from books that may include:

Critique of Pure Reason by Immanuel Kant The Mindful Brain by Daniel J. Siegel The Varieties of Religious Experience, by William James Understanding the mind by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso Wisdom by Stephen S. Hall

Prerequisites:

Cellular and Molecular Neuroscience Behavioral and Integrative Neural Science

Grading:

Final grade for the course will be based on multiple factors: class attendance, class participation, quality of the term paper, and exam score