The mapping class group of an orientable surface is well-studied in low-dimensional topology. In this talk, I will discuss central extensions of the mapping class group, which play an important role in Topological Quantum Field Theory (TQFT). First, I will review how one constructs a central extension using the Maslov index of triples of lagrangian subspaces in the first homology of the surface. Then I will explain how one can get (in genus at least four) the universal central extension of the mapping class group explicitly as an index four subgroup of the Maslov extension. The key ingredient here is the definition of a 1-cochain on the mapping class group depending on a choice of lagrangian subspace in the homology of the surface. If time permits, I will end by explaining how this construction is useful in TQFT. (Joint work with P. M. Gilmer.)