

Conspiracy Theories

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Office hours: Office appointments are available by appointment.

Texts: John V. Petrocelli, *The Life-Changing Science of Detecting Bullshit* (St. Martin's Press, 2021) ISBN-10: 1250271622

Additional Resource: Christopher R. Fee and Jeffrey B. Webb, *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theories in American History* (ABC-CLIO, 2019) -
<https://hal.weber.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&AN=2112877>

Class Description and Objectives: Why do people believe conspiracy theories? What are their origins? How can we avoid succumbing to conspiracy theories?

Class participation and discussion is expected.

Grading Policies: Grades will be determined on the following basis:

Quizzes	50%
Term Paper	20%
Conspiracy Presentation	20%
Class Participation	10%

Grades: A: 90 - 100% B: 80 - 89% C: 70 - 79% D: 60 - 69% E: 0 - 59%
(Grades at the high or low ends of these ranges will earn plus and minus grades.)

Readings: The readings for each day are available on Canvas or listed on the Schedule in this syllabus.

Quizzes: There will a short quiz every day at the beginning of class. Each quiz will be based on the readings that you were given for that day, or will be given on the content of the previous class's conspiracy presentations. There may also be a couple of questions from previous quizzes' content.

Term Paper: A twelve page paper on any topic covered in the course is required. You may turn in an early draft for the instructors to critique and we will return the critiqued draft one week later. The due date is on the class schedule. The content can be a personal essay or a research paper with citations.

Conspiracy Presentation: Each student will select a conspiracy theory (which must be approved by the instructors so that we don't have students picking the same conspiracy theory) and give a 30 minute presentation on that conspiracy theory.

The student must explain:

- what the conspiracy is
- who believes in it
- offer an argument of why the conspiracy is not true
- offer possible reasons for why people subscribe to such a theory

Religious topics as conspiracy theories will not be accepted.

Cheating Policy: Cheating and deceit are not accepted at Weber State University. Cheating on an quiz or assignment, or turning in someone else's work as your own, will result in an E for the class. You may work together on your assignments and papers, but you must turn in your own work. If you quote from a book, article, or web site, you must properly quote and cite your work. Avoid even the appearance of cheating or plagiarism.

Recording Classes: Video or audio recording of any portion of lectures is only permitted in this class upon my authorization. If you would like to request authorization to record, please contact me. Unauthorized recording is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct, for which a student may be subjected to disciplinary action under PPM 6-22, Student Code. Students who seek to record for purposes of accommodating a disability should contact the Disability Services Office at (801) 626-6413 or dsc@weber.edu. See more info at <https://www.weber.edu/disabilityservices>.

Cell Phones, Texting, and Laptops: Put your cell phones on vibrate. Try to avoid leaving class to take a call, but an occasional emergency is understandable. There will be NO texting in this class. Laptops or other personal digital tools may be used to take notes or look up material relevant to class discussions. No other uses of laptops will be tolerated.

Students with Disabilities: Any student requiring accommodations or services due to a disability must contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) in Room 181 of the Student Service Center. SSD can also arrange to provide materials (including this syllabus) in alternative formats if necessary.

Campus Closure: In the event of an extended campus closure, please look at your Weber State email in order for instructions on how we will continue the class via email and the Canvas online course system.

Covid-19 Considerations: The pandemic is still affecting our activities. Absent new developments, please do not come to class if you are feeling ill. The instructor will always make accommodations for illness or the consequences of illness in your living situation. Remember that WSU students are expected to be vaccinated unless they have an appropriate exemption. See also, "Student Expectations for Spring 2022," at <https://www.weber.edu/academicaffairs/student-expectations.html>.

Schedule: Look on Canvas for the daily reading and viewing assignments.

WSU Recycling Policy: Weber State University is dedicated to being a leader in sustainability to ensure present needs are met without compromising the ability for future generations to inherit a healthy planet, society, and economy. Part of this commitment includes sustainable waste management practices with the ultimate goal of becoming a zero-waste campus. In order to achieve this goal, it is up to the WSU community to be informed about the various recycling policies on campus. For more information on recycling at WSU, please reference Energy & Sustainability Office website.

Learning Outcomes:

- 1) Develop an understanding of conspiracy theories in the past and in the present, why they are formed, and how to analyze and refute such theories.
- 2) Learn different modes of learning and fact formation
- 3) Engage in critical thinking that is open-minded, objective, and as free as possible from prejudice and presupposition.
- 4) Develop discussion skills and writing skills.

Daily Schedule:

January 10 (Tuesday): Introduction to class

January 12 (Thursday): Readings: Fee and Webb, Introduction and First Three Thematic Essays (pages xix-xxix, 3-20)
<https://hal.weber.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&AN=2112877>

January 17 (Tuesday): Readings: Fee and Webb, Second Three Thematic Essays (pages 21-37)
<https://hal.weber.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&AN=2112877>

January 19 (Thursday): Readings: Shermer, *Conspiracy* (Apologia, Prologue, first two chapters, available on Canvas)

January 24 (Tuesday): Guest speakers

January 26 (Thursday): Readings: Petrocelli, Introduction

January 31 (Tuesday): Readings: Petrocelli, Chapter 1

February 2 (Thursday): Readings: Petrocelli, Chapter 2

February 7 (Tuesday): Readings: Petrocelli, Chapter 3

February 9 (Thursday): Readings: Petrocelli, Chapter 4

February 14 (Tuesday): Readings: Petrocelli, Chapter 5

February 16 (Thursday): No Class (LTUE)

February 21 (Tuesday): Readings: Petrocelli, Chapter 6

February 23 (Thursday): Readings: Petrocelli, Conclusion

February 21 (Tuesday): Watch documentary in class

March 2 (Thursday): Readings: TBA

March 7 (Tuesday): Spring Break

March 9 (Thursday): Spring Break

March 14 (Tuesday): Readings: TBA

March 16 (Thursday): Students #1 and #2 conspiracy presentations

March 21 (Tuesday): Students #3 and #4 conspiracy presentations

March 23 (Thursday): Students #5 and #6 conspiracy presentations

March 28 (Tuesday): Students #7 and #8 conspiracy presentations

March 30 (Thursday): Students #9 and #10 conspiracy presentations

April 4 (Tuesday): Students #11 and #12 conspiracy presentations

April 6 (Thursday): Students #13 and #14 conspiracy presentations

April 11 (Tuesday): Students #15 and #16 conspiracy presentations

April 13 (Thursday): Students #17 and #18 conspiracy presentations

April 18 (Tuesday): Summing up
Term Paper due

April 20 (Thursday): Spare day