\Fall 2023

COURSE OUTLINE

POT 4320-0001 (85800)
Conspiracy Theories and Democracy

School of Politics, Security, and International Affairs
College of Sciences, University of Central Florida
3 credit hours

Instructor: Dr. Daniel Marien, Daniel.Marien@ucf.edu
Teaching Assistant: Wael Benali. Contact via course email.

CLASS TIME AND LOCATION: Tu./Th. 9 am to 10:20 am, in BA1 room 147.

OFFICE HOURS (in HPH 302 N)

Wednesdays	1-5 pm
Thursdays	3-5 pm.

Or by special appointments setup via email. I am flexible. Do not skip class or working hours to make an appointment for consultation. Zoom appointments on weekends are possible as well. If you cannot show up at an appointment, please email me ahead of time to postpone.

IN ADDITION TO THE TEXTBOOKS, we will also use an electronic platform called *Yellowdig* to facilitate discussion on issues of evaluation among participants (Part B assignment). This platform presents advantages over Webcourses for that purpose.

I. Books to Buy and Other Materials We Will Consult

You will need to have ready access to the following:

Joseph Uscinski and Joseph Parent, *American Conspiracy Theories*, Oxford University Press, 2014. ISBN: 978-0199351817.

Bethany Kilcrease, *Falsehood and Fallacy: How to Think, Read and Write in the Twenty-First Century*. University of Toronto Press, 2021. ISBN: 978-1487588618.

Jennifer Kavanagh and Michael Rich, *Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life*. Rand Corporation, 2018, ISBN9780833099945.

II. Basic Course Expectations

Students are expected to: (1) always have a working connection to the internet; (2) to promptly procure the textbook; (3) to take quizzes and submit assignments in due time in normal circumstances. (Extensions are possible under certain conditions. See course policy.); (4) to respect the rules of academic honesty, never to present text not their own as their own wording. (5) In most cases to paraphrase contents from the textbook rather than use direct quotes (Ten or twenty percent of quotes is acceptable but nothing beyond that.) (6) To avoid generating assignments from Artificial Intelligence (I.A.).

IV. Student Learning Outcomes

LO-1: Students will be able to describe with a high degree of accuracy the classical concept of conspiracy theory as articulated by Joseph Uscinski and Joseph Parent. Of particular interest are the following issues: What is and is not a conspiracy theory? Who tends to believe in conspiracy theories and for what reasons? How and by whom are conspiracy theories used in politics and under what conditions?

LO-2: Students will be able to describe with a high degree of accuracy the impact of conspiracy theories on democracy as conceptualized by Joseph Uscinski and Joseph Parent.

LO-3: Students will be able to describe with a high degree of accuracy the contrasting concept of the new conspiracism as articulated by Muirhead and Rosenblum. Of particular interest are the following issues: How the new conspiracism differ from classical conspiracy theory described by Uscinski and Parent? How the new conspiracism disorient citizens and undermines a shared sense of reality?

LO-4: Students will be able to describe with a high degree of accuracy the impact of the new conspiracism on democracy as conceptualized by Muirhead and Rosenblum.

LO-5: Students will be able to apply in concrete situations Uscinski/Parent's test for distinguishing false from grounded conspiracy theories and falsehoods ("fake news", misinformation, disinformation) from genuine information.

LO-6: Students will be able to apply in concrete situations Kilcrease's methods to distinguish falsehoods ("fake news", misinformation, disinformation) and fallacies (error in informal logic) from genuine information.

LO-7 Students will be able to describe with a high degree of accuracy the concept of truth decay as articulated by Kavanagh and Rich, what causes promote truth decay and what are its consequences for democratic self-government.

L0-8 Students will be able to summarize the broad contours of the public debate about reforming or not reforming the current system of mass information such as legacy media and social media.

V. Assessment Overview

NOTE: The semester unfolds in 15 weeks.
Week 1 starts on Monday 8/21 and ends on Sunday 8/26.
Week 2 starts on Monday 8/27 and ends on Sunday 9/3 and so on for the rest of the semester.

We have assignments every week, except for week 9. Week 9 will have no new assignments. It is programmed as a period for recapitulation, catch-up, and rest. Class will meet, but only to review and recapitulate what has been seen since the start of the semester. **Attendance is expected in Week 9**. Though we have no mid-term exam in this course, students oftentimes have mid-terms exams in other courses. Thus, I also design Week 9 in this course as a sort of mini "Fall Break." Take advantage of it to get some rest, recharge your batteries, catch-up on missed assignments in this class, and focus on the mid-term exam in your other courses. **Note that this pause week might be rescheduled or cancelled altogether in case of disruption provoked by extreme weather events.**

Before Course Perception of Ideologies **is due on Thursday 8/24 at noon.** (This also counts as the Activity Verification to free up financial aid. It may be submitted as late as Friday 9/1, but students are encouraged to submit it by Thursday 8/24, noon and the Registrar Office wants to see it in by Friday 8/25)

The Quiz and Part A Questions are normally due on Sunday nights in Webcourses.

Part B tasks are normally due on Sunday nights in Yellowdig.

In Week 14 (Thanksgiving) and Week 15 the schedule of deadlines also changes somewhat to accommodate the holiday.

Why Using Two Electronic Platforms?

Webcourses for the weekly quiz and for answering Part A questions. The quiz is where you demonstrate your understanding of the assigned material. Part A questions in Webcourses provide an opportunity for you to:

1. Signal to the instructor an aspect of the reading you may find confusing or unclear. The instructor will clarify the issue in a subsequent email.
2. Articulate in your own words a meaningful idea from the readings and explain why you found it meaningful. This is conceived as a starting point for the more searching tasks executed in Part B in Yellowdig.

Part B Tasks in Yellowdig is where you “make meaning” out of the materials by:

Why Yellowdig?
Packback facilitates student’s engagement with other students and instructor’s monitoring of class progress by (1) generating curiosity scores; (2) evaluating posts for grammatical correctness, and (3) alerting students that their questions have been answered by another students, inviting dialogue. **Webcourses cannot do these functions.**

Assessment Overview

WHAT? Description	WHEN? Deadlines	WORTH Course Points	WHY? Purpose
Before Course Perception of Conspiracy Theories	Thursday 8/24 noon Attach file labeled: LASTNAME_Before (Accepted until Friday 9/1.	**1**	Free up your financial aid, assist in starting class discussion on the subject and prepare your After-Course Statement.
Weekly Quiz Average Each quiz is over 48 points. An average is used to compute the final course grade.	By Sunday evenings, 11:58 pm	**53**	Verify mastery of subject matter with multiple choice questions.
Weekly Discussion Post Average **Part A** Each set of weekly post is over 20 points. An average is used to compute the final course grade.	By Sunday evenings, 11:58 pm	**20**	Articulates a personal response to the readings.
Weekly Discussion Post Average **Part B** **Evaluation** **In Yellowdig** Each set of weekly posts is over 20 points. An average is	By Sunday evenings, 11:58 pm	**20**	Develop critical evaluation of ideas through exchange with other class participants.

used to compute the final course grade.			
After Course Perception of Conspiracy Theories	**Monday 12/4** 11:59 PM Upload file labelled: LASTNAME_After	**1**	Students reflect on and evaluate their learning throughout the semester.
Attendance (see scale below)	**Throughout**	**5**	To reward regular attendance and participation.
TOTAL		**100**	

Attendance Point Scale

With	You earn:
Zero to three absences	= 5 points.
Four absences	= 4 points.
Five absences	= 3 points.
Six or more absences	= 0 points.

NOTES:
The first week of the semester does not count for attendance.
Absences are recorded as such whatever the reason motivating them.

Grading Scale (%)	
94-100	A
90-93	A-
87-89	B+
84-86	B
80-83	B-
77-79	C+
74-76	C
70-73	C-
67-69	D+
64-66	D

Grading Scale (%)	
60-63	D-
0 - 59	F

VI. Course Prerequisites

Course prerequisites include an open mind and a readiness to reflect on the subject matter. There are no prerequisites in the sense of having completed specific previous courses beyond English Composition.

VII. Course Credits

3 credits

VIII. Course Schedule

Always check your course email for updates, general feedback, and other useful information. Changes are not likely, but, if they occur, they will be announced via course emails. Not paying attention to course mails hurts your grade.

The Weekly Discussion Board updates the Course Outline: in case of a discrepancy between the Course Outline and the weekly Discussion Board, the Weekly Board is correct.

Video documents and/or Instructor's Remarks will regularly be assigned on any given week. Follow the instructions given in the Weekly Discussion Board. Video assignments cannot be known for sure a long time in advance since availability varies without warning the instructor.

Note that the schedule below might be modified to adapt to emergencies, including extreme weather events.

Week 1, Presentation of course .

Quiz, Part A and Part B Discussion Posts: Sunday 8/27 at 11:58 pm.

Read:
Course Outline to familiarize yourself with the course structure.
Senator Danforth et al, *Lost, Not Stolen*, pp, 1-6 and pp. 29-35.
Tim Naftali, "After Trump's Indictments, Can America Protect the Peaceful Transfer of Power?" *Foreign Affairs*, August 18, 2023.

Week 2:

Deadline:
Quiz, Part A Posts: Sunday 9/3 at 11:58 pm.
Part B Post: Monday 9/4 at 11:58 pm.

Read:
Senator Danforth et al, *Lost, Not Stolen*, pp, 1-6 and pp. 29-35.
Tim Naftali, "After Trump's Indictments, Can America Protect the Peaceful Transfer of Power?" *Foreign Affairs*, August 18, 2023.
Uscinski and Parent, chapters 1-2.

Week 3:

Deadline:
Quiz and Discussion Posts: Sunday 9/10 at 11:58 pm.

Read:

Uscinski and Parent, chapters 3-4.

Week 4:

Deadline:
Quiz and Discussion Posts: Sunday 9/17 at 11:58 pm.

Read:

Uscinski and Parent, chapter 5.
Kilcrease, Introduction, chapters 1-2

Week 5:
Deadline:
Quiz and Discussion Posts: Sunday 9/24 at 11:58 pm.

Read:

Uscinski and Parent, chapters 6-7.
Kilcrease, chapter 3.

Week 6:

Deadline:
Quiz and Discussion Posts: Sunday 10/1 at 11:58 pm.

Read:

9/11 truther's conspiracy

Muirhead and Rosenblum, "Conspiracy in America: Recognizing and Confronting Assaults on Our Democracy," *American Educator*, Fall 2022.

Kilcrease, chapters 4-5.

Kavanagh and Rich, chapter 1.

Week 7:

Deadline:
Quiz and Discussion Posts: Sunday 10/8 at 11:58 pm.

Read:

Kilcrease, chapters 6-8.

Kavanagh and Rich, chapters 2-3.

Week 8:

Deadline:

Quiz and Part A Discussion Posts: Sunday 10/15 at 11:58 pm.
Part B Yellowdig Monday

Read:

Kavanagh and Rich, chapter 4, pp. 79-132.

Week 9: Pause, Recapitulation and Catch-Up

- Class will meet to recap what has been learned thus far. There will be no new material to read and no new assignments to submit for this week.
- Students with outstanding work should also take advantage of this period to catch up.
- Attendance to class is expected during this week as in any other week.
- **Note that this pause week might be rescheduled or cancelled altogether in case of extreme weather events.**

Week 10:

Deadline:
Quiz and Discussion Posts: Sunday 10/29 at 11:58 pm.

Read:

Kavanagh and Rich, chapter 4, pp. 133-189.

Week 11:

Deadline:
Quiz and Discussion Post: Sunday 11/5 at 11:58 pm.

Read:

Kavanagh and Rich, chapter 5.

Week 12: Reforming Traditional and Social Media?

Deadline:

Quiz and discussion posts: Sunday 11/12 at 11:58 pm.

Read: TBA

Week 13: Reforming Traditional and Social Media?

Deadline:
Quiz and discussion posts: Sunday 11/19 at 11:58 pm.

Read: TBA

Weeks 14-15 Reforming Traditional and Social Media?

Deadline:
Quiz and discussion posts: Sunday 12/3 at 11:58 pm.

Read: TBA

Other Deadline:

After Course: Wednesday 12/4 at 11:58 pm in Webcourses.
(This is the last assignment in this course.)

IX. Course Policies

COVID-19 and Illness Notification
Students who believe they may have a COVID-19 diagnosis should contact UCF Student Health Services (407-823-2509) so proper contact tracing procedures can take place.

Students should not come to campus if they are ill, are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, have tested positive for COVID, or if anyone living in their residence has tested positive or is sick with COVID-19 symptoms. CDC guidance for COVID-19

symptoms is located here: (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html)

Students should contact their instructor(s) as soon as possible if they miss class for any illness reason to discuss reasonable adjustments that might need to be made. When possible, students should contact their instructor(s) before missing class.

In Case of Faculty Illness
If the instructor falls ill during the semester, there may be changes to this course, including having a backup instructor take over the course. Please look for announcements or mail in Webcourses@UCF or Knights email for any alterations to this course.

Course Accessibility and Disability COVID-19 Supplemental Statement
Accommodations may need to be added or adjusted should this course shift from an on-campus to a remote format. Students with disabilities should speak with their instructor and should contact sas@ucf.edu to discuss specific accommodations for this or other courses.

Make-up Exams and Assignments

Per university policy, you are allowed to submit make-up work (or an equivalent, alternate assignment) for university-sponsored events, religious observances, or legal obligations (such as jury duty). If this participation conflicts with your course assignments, I will offer a reasonable opportunity for you to complete missed assignments and/or exams. The make-up assignment and grading scale will be equivalent to the missed assignment and its grading scale. Please contact me ahead of time to notify me of upcoming needs.

Can't make the deadline for other reasons than those listed above? Contact the instructor with an explanation **and** a request for a specific deadline extension. I cannot accept open-ended extension requests. Note also that my flexibility on deadlines vanishes with the approach of the end of the semester.

NOTE: I do not control the schedule for Part B in Yellowdig. . I cannot give extensions in Packback, nor would it make sense since Yellowdig is a platform for exchange between participants. There is no point in joining a conversation that happened last week, since participants have already moved on to another theme.

Academic Integrity
Students should familiarize themselves with UCF's Rules of Conduct. According to Section 1, "Academic Misconduct," students are prohibited from engaging in:

- *Unauthorized assistance*: Using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information or study aids in any academic exercise unless specifically authorized

by the instructor of record. The unauthorized possession of examination or course-related material also constitutes cheating.

- *Communication to another through written, visual, electronic, or oral means*: The presentation of material which has not been studied or learned, but rather was obtained through someone else's efforts and used as part of an examination, course assignment, or project.
- *Commercial Use of Academic Material*: Selling of course material to another person, student, and/or uploading course material to a third-party vendor without authorization or without the express written permission of the university and the instructor. Course materials include but are not limited to class notes, Instructor's PowerPoints, course syllabi, tests, quizzes, labs, instruction sheets, homework, study guides, handouts, etc.
- *Falsifying or misrepresenting* the student's own academic work.
- *Plagiarism*: Using or appropriating another's work without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student's own.
- *Multiple Submissions*: Submitting the same academic work for credit more than once without the express written permission of the instructor.
- *Helping another violate* academic behavior standards.
- ***Marien's addition to UCF policy:*** the listing of works cited but not materially used in a post or essay also constitutes a breach of academic honesty. It misrepresents the depth of research done.
- The use of ChatGPT for the composition of your posts is forbidden.

For more information about Academic Integrity, students may consult The Center for Academic Integrity.
For more information about plagiarism and misuse of sources, see "Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism: The WPA Statement on Best Practices".

Responses to Academic Dishonesty, Plagiarism, or Cheating

Students should also familiarize themselves with the procedures for academic misconduct in UCF's student handbook, The Golden Rule. UCF faculty members have a responsibility for students' education and the value of a UCF degree, and so seek to prevent unethical behavior and when necessary, respond to academic misconduct. Penalties can include a failing grade in an assignment or in the course, suspension, or expulsion from the university, and/or a "Z Designation" on a student's official transcript indicating academic dishonesty, where the final grade for this course will be preceded by the letter Z. For more information about the Z Designation, see http://goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/zgrade.

Turinitin.com:

In this course the instructor may utilize turnitin.com, an automated system which instructors can use to quickly and easily compare each student's assignment with billions of web sites, as well as an enormous database of student papers that grows with each submission. The instructor submits your texts to Turnitin at his discretion. Students found guilty of plagiarism will receive a failing grade for the entire course and may incur additional penalties.

Course Accessibility Statement
The University of Central Florida is committed to providing access and inclusion for all persons with disabilities. Students with disabilities who need disability-related access in this course should contact the professor as soon as possible. Students should also connect with Student Accessibility Services (Ferrell Commons 185, sas@ucf.edu, phone (407) 823-2371). Through Student Accessibility Services, a Course Accessibility Letter may be created and sent to professors, which informs faculty of potential access and accommodations that might be reasonable. Determining reasonable access and accommodation requires consideration of the course design, course learning objectives and the individual academic and course barriers experienced by the student.

Campus Safety Statement
Emergencies on campus are rare, but if one should arise in our class, everyone needs to work together. Students should be aware of the surroundings and familiar with some basic safety and security concepts.

- In case of an emergency, dial 911 for assistance.
- Every UCF classroom contains an emergency procedure guide posted on a wall near the door. Please make a note of the guide's physical location and consider reviewing the online version at http://emergency.ucf.edu/emergency_guide.html.
- Students should know the evacuation routes from each of their classrooms and have a plan for finding safety in case of an emergency.
- If there is a medical emergency during class, we may need to access a first aid kit or AED (Automated External Defibrillator). To learn where those items are located in this building, see http://www.ehs.ucf.edu/workplacesafety.html (click on link from menu on left).
- To stay informed about emergency situations, sign up to receive UCF text alerts by going to my.ucf.edu and logging in. Click on "Student Self Service" located on the left side of the screen in the tool bar, scroll down to the blue "Personal Information" heading on your Student Center screen, click on "UCF Alert," fill out the information, including your e-mail address, cell phone number, and cell phone provider, click "Apply" to save the changes, and then click "OK."
- Students with special needs related to emergency situations should speak with their instructors outside of class.
- To learn about how to manage an active-shooter situation on campus or elsewhere, consider viewing this video. You CAN Survive an Active Shooter

Deployed Active-Duty Military Students
If you are a deployed active-duty military student and feel that you may need special accommodation due to that unique status, please contact your instructor to discuss your circumstances.

Copyright
This course may contain copyright protected materials such as audio or video clips, images, text materials, etc. These items are being used with regard to the Fair Use doctrine in order to enhance the learning environment. Please do not copy, duplicate,

download or distribute these items. The use of these materials is strictly reserved for this online classroom environment and your use only. All copyright materials are credited to the copyright holder.

Third-Party Software and FERPA
During this course you might have the opportunity to use public online services and/or software applications sometimes called third-party software such as a blog or wiki. While some of these could be required assignments, you need not make any personally identifying information on a public site. Do not post or provide any private information about yourself or your classmates. Where appropriate you may use a pseudonym or nickname. Some written assignments posted publicly may require personal reflection/comments, but the assignments will not require you to disclose any personally identity-sensitive information. If you have any concerns about this, please contact your instructor.

Title IX

Title IX prohibits sex discrimination, including sexual misconduct, sexual violence, sexual harassment, and retaliation. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find resources available to support the victim, including confidential resources and information concerning reporting options at https://letsbeclear.ucf.edu and http://cares.sdes.ucf.edu/.

For more information on diversity and inclusion, Title IX, accessibility, or UCF's complaint processes contact:

- Title IX – OIE – http://oie.ucf.edu/ & askanadvocate@ucf.edu
- Disability Accommodation – Student Accessibility Services
- Diversity and Inclusion Training and Events
- UCF Compliance and Ethics Office & complianceandethics@ucf.edu
- Ombuds Office