IT BEGINS.

You’ve probably already watched this. If not, click the image above and meet your instructor.

FORMAL LEARNING OBJECTIVES

(I’m told that I need some—apparently “to tug at the surprisingly loose psychological threads that stitch together our perceptions of reality” doesn’t cut it.)

By the end of this definitely-not-too-ambitious expedition, you should be able to…

• delineate a broad set of features that one might use to determine where an idea or movement falls along the science—pseudoscience continuum;
• distinguish the philosophical position of “scientific skepticism” from a slew of ostensibly similar ways of knowing (like cynicism or denialism);
• explain the state of the evidence concerning several popular belief specimens (e.g., ESP, a handful of alternative medicines);
• critically appraise a new suspect or bogus claim when you meet one (e.g., in the news);
• communicate more effectively with the public—friends, family members, people you’d like to impress at parties—about science;
• and—here’s the big one—ably discuss the cognitive underpinnings and (adaptive) motivational functions of pseudoscientific beliefs (read: provide an intelligible answer the question, why do people believe weird things?).

Cake.
WHAT YOU’LL NEED

1. **Reliable Access to UF’s Canvas System**

   Our everything portal.

   If you aren’t already comfortable with the Canvas platform (http://elearning.ufl.edu; click the blue e-Learning button), I’d recommend carving out some time to poke around and torture-test the system early on (before the semester picks up steam). Quickstart Guide for the uninitiated: watch [this video](http://elearning.ufl.edu), then browse the rest of the Canvas Help module within the course site.

2. **One of These Books:**

   ![Book Covers]

   There’s no “textbook” out there for us—no single, comprehensive guide to the world of psychology, pseudoscience, and neuropsychological upheaval that we’re about to inhabit. There are, however, a vast array of brilliant and wonderful *trade books*—written for a general audience and published by a popular press—on the market, each focusing a narrow, piercing spotlight onto just one of the many fascinating topics that we could justifiably explore. This semester, I’ve whittled my favorites list down to ten.

   Choose wisely. I ask that you pick just one of these books to read during an interlude that we’ll take half-way through the course.

   On the next page you’ll find a full APA-style citation for each book, a paperback ISBN, and a link to each book’s Amazon.com page (where you can find a synopsis and reviews; most have fairly comparable page counts and used prices in the less-than-ten-dollars range). They’re arranged in loose order such that earlier entries tend to deal with topics we’ll tackle earlier on in the semester—by the time we’ve reached the half-way mark, you’ll probably have some intuition about whether you’d rather (a) take a deeper dive into stuff we’ve already hit (invisible influences) or (b) slingshot yourself forward into the abyss (searching for the science of self). Feel free to wait until closer to mid-semester to get your copy (I’ll post a reminder a couple of weeks before you’ll need it).
Don’t let bigger page-counts scare you—I’ll never test your memory on your book’s content. Instead, I’ll ask you to write up an Amazon-esque book review (one that I hope you’ll seriously consider actually posting on a site like Amazon). In other words, I’m betting that you won’t be able to put these books down even without a read-this—because-your-grade-depends-on-it mandate. If I’m wrong; if the reading ever feels like work, say so—I’ll help you to find another book that won’t.

***


***

\(^1\) Page-count imprecision stems from differences between editions and formats. (Scientists abhor imprecision—I literally couldn’t stop myself from writing this footnote.)
Canvas will calculate your final letter grade based on your performance in two domains:

1. **Weekly Quizzes** (80 points out of 200 = 40%)

Most weeks, you’ll find that our home-page to-do list (*This Week in Pseudoscience*) ends with a quiz. For the most part, these quizzes are non-cumulative—they’ll present you with a handful of **questions** (some multiple-choice, some short-essay) about *that week’s* content. But there’s definitely a progressive **feel** to them, such that questions tend to become increasingly more complicated, drawing often on ideas that we wrestled with earlier in the term. The **major** focus will always be on the topic at hand (e.g., placebo effects), though. 10 quizzes x 8 points apiece = 80 points total.

A few words on **cheating**: it is absolutely impossible to cheat on these quizzes. An elite team of proctors will monitor all of your activity in the Canvas quiz environment. Like most standard fraud-monitoring units, our squadron of IT professionals will surveil and log all of your activity—including your physical behaviors via webcam and your precise location via your smartphone’s GPS hardware—while you take the quiz (shifty eye movements will result in an automatic and irreversible course failure). They’re very good. You haven’t heard of them. You can’t detect them. They’re watching you. Right. Now.

No?

Fine. It’s impossible to cheat on these quizzes because I have no rules regarding what you can and can’t do when you take them. Anything goes: open notes, open book, open Google. You don’t even have to take them alone—I’d be perfectly happy knowing you’re taking them in pairs or in groups (sometimes, I’ll even ask you to). Personally, I’ve found the act of debating answers and ideas with friends and colleagues to be an intellectually rewarding experience. Whether you take them alone or in groups, I intend only for these quizzes to give you a chance to play with the ideas that we’ll tackle (rather than prompting you to memorize and regurgitate them). Scientific skepticism is about the process, not the product.

A few (genuine) words of quiz advice: quizzes are never timed, and you can open and close them as many times as you want (without submitting) before the due date passes. So, why not open the quizzes up before you read, watch, or listen to the stuff I’ve posted for that week? That way, the quiz acts as its own study guide, and you’ll get to see it—verbatim—a full seven days before it’s due. Sometimes, it’ll prompt you to do something that’ll take a bit of planning. Conduct, record, and upload an ESP test video, maybe. (No shocks.) Another very good reason to open up the quiz first-thing each week.

2. **A Book Review** (20 points out of 200 = 10%)

During the “Book Club” interlude that we’ll take mid-way through the course, I’ll ask you to write up a little book review (one that I hope you’ll seriously consider actually posting on a public forum). [Check out the full rubric here.](#)
3. **Candles in the Dark (A Term Paper)** (100 points out of 200 = 50%)

One-line summary: practice the art of communicating reasonable doubt to a believer without raising the believer’s defenses.

Slightly longer summary: Pick an idea, product, or practice that you’re pretty sure falls well to the right on the *science*——*pseudoscience* continuum. Write a (research) paper that convinces a scientifically-minded agnostic person—someone who doesn’t care much either way—that the object of your investigation is, in fact, bunkum. The catch: that same paper should *also* leverage best-practices for science communication (coming soon) in order to **convince a believer** to let in a little (seed of) skepticism. Give and receive a few peer reviews, then **try it out on a real, live human**. Try to explain yourself—your argument, your perspective—to someone (anyone) in your life. Then write a (very) brief epilogue to tell me how it went.

Big formal rubric available in the Week 2 module in Canvas.

(PS: There’s a secret-menu alternative to this term paper—one that’ll take more time and energy but one that just might deliver more change-the-world bang for your buck. Details soon.)

***

In the end, your final course grade will reflect how many total points (out of 200) you accumulate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Total Points</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>179-200</td>
<td>≥ 90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>175-178</td>
<td>88%-89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>159-174</td>
<td>80%-87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>155-158</td>
<td>78%-79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>139-154</td>
<td>70%-77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>135-138</td>
<td>68%-69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>119-134</td>
<td>60%-67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>118 and below</td>
<td>≤ 59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TL;DR (BLAH BLAH BLAH HOW DO I PASS?)**

Log into Canvas every Monday to find a new to-do list on our home page. It’ll outline the tasks you’ll need to complete before that week’s end (Sunday at 11:59pm) to keep up. Namely, I’ll ask you to (a) read handful of articles, watch a few videos, and/or listen to a few podcasts and (b) answer some quiz questions about the stuff you just read, watched, or listened to. During one anomalous week around the mid-point of the semester, I’ll ask you to read and review a popular and cheap paperback book from a list that I’ve provided (above). Quizzes + the Book Review = half of your grade. The other half? A term project (paper) that just might change the world.

That’s it. It’s all about raw course points—the more you end up with, the better your final letter grade will be.
I can’t do this alone. Thankfully, I’ve got a crack team of co-pilots:

**Questions about the Term Project?**

Reach out to **Vanille Rabeaux**.
*Post-Bacalaureate Teaching Fellow*
Email: SwanClasses@psych.ufl.edu
(Pronounce Va-knee. It’s French. She’s on the left, clearly blowing my mind with what’s written on her notepad. We’re about to record a video together. Revelations forthcoming 😊)

**Question about the Secret Menu Project?**

Kristen Madrid
*PhD Student*
*Counseling Psychology*
Email: k.madrid@ufl.edu

**Question about the Quizzes?**

Juliana Guitelman
*PhD Student*
*Counseling Psychology*
Email: jguitelman@ufl.edu

They’ll be grading quizzes and coordinating term projects, but they’re principally here for you.

(We share emails, so don’t be alarmed if Vanille, Kristen, or Juliana replies to a message that you’ve sent to me before I do.)

---

**The Fine Print (Text Required in All Syllabi)**

*Ken Hereby Certifies That…*

“…requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx


**Academic Honesty**

“Cheating is defined in the UF Handbook, and it is the student’s responsibility to be familiar with its many forms (including plagiarism). If a student is caught cheating, the first offense will result in a zero for that exam or assignment and a record of the event will be placed in a temporary file with the Office of Student Affairs. The second offense will result in an “E” for the course, and the student will go before the Honor Court. As a result of completing registration at UF, every student has agreed to the following statement: “I understand that UF expects its students to be honest in all their academic work. I agree to adhere to this commitment to academic honesty and understand that my failure to comply with this commitment may result in disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the University.”

PSY4625 Syllabus Page 6
Cheating behavior is fascinating. Dan Ariely wrote a great book about it. Absolutely worth the read.

Disability Accommodations

“Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.”

(If we’re missing something in the accommodations department, let me know how I can make it right.)

Late Work Policy

If we’re really going to change the world with those term projects (we will), we’ll have to stay on target (and on time). Behavioral incentive (they work): each late-day levels a 10% point deduction (e.g., a quiz submitted two days late can at best receive a 6.4/8).

Customer Satisfaction

“Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at https://evaluations.ufl.edu. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results.” (The scores you dole out on these evaluations can matter more for our—professor’s—careers than most people think. Rightfully so, I reckon. Never forget that your tuition dollars are paying for this class.)

Okay. Ready. Here’s Our Schedule 😊

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Assignments Due (Sunday @ 11:59M)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>01/08 - 01/14 (Mon) (Sun)</td>
<td>Welcomes and Warnings</td>
<td>Nope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>01/15 - 01/21 (Mon) (Sun)</td>
<td>Psychics</td>
<td>Quiz 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>01/22 - 01/28 (Mon) (Sun)</td>
<td>Believers</td>
<td>Quiz 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>01/29 - 02/04 (Mon) (Sun)</td>
<td>Bus Drivers</td>
<td>Quiz 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>02/05 - 02/11 (Mon) (Sun)</td>
<td>Invisibilia</td>
<td>Quiz 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>02/12 - 02/18 (Mon) (Sun)</td>
<td>Patients</td>
<td>Quiz 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>02/19 - 02/25 (Mon) (Sun)</td>
<td>Spin Doctors</td>
<td>Quiz 6 Term Paper Full Draft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>02/26 - 03/04 (Mon) (Sun)</td>
<td>Book Club Interlude (Part I)</td>
<td>Nada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>03/05 - 03/11 (Mon) (Sun)</td>
<td>Spring Break!</td>
<td>Zip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>03/12 - 03/18 (Mon) (Sun)</td>
<td>Book Club Interlude (Part II)</td>
<td>Book Reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>03/19 - 03/25 (Mon) (Sun)</td>
<td>Ghosts</td>
<td>Quiz 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>03/26 - 04/01 (Mon) (Sun)</td>
<td>Pseudoscientists</td>
<td>Quiz 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>04/02 - 04/08 (Mon) (Sun)</td>
<td>Magicians</td>
<td>Quiz 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>04/09 - 04/15 (Mon) (Sun)</td>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>Quiz 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>04/16 - (Mon) (Wed)</td>
<td>Epilogue: Unsinkable Ducks and Unclosable Doors</td>
<td>Final Term Paper (Due Weds 04/25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>04/25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>