IT BEGINS.

You’ve probably already watched my awkward welcome video. If not, click the image above.

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.
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](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](#), 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.

***


Novella, S., Novella, B., Santa Maria, C., Novella, J., & Bernstein, E. (2018). The skeptics’ guide to the universe: How to know what’s really real in a world increasingly full of fake. Grand Central Publishing. (ASIN: B079L5FDHJ; about 300 pages.) Okay…I haven’t read this one. I’m just really excited about it. I’ve been following these authors’ work for more than a decade. This book will be great. Release date = 10/02/2018.


***

1 Page-count imprecision stems from differences between editions and formats. (Scientists abhor imprecision—I literally couldn’t stop myself from writing this footnote.)
HOW YOU’LL BE GRADED

We’re on the point system, with 100 up for grabs across two “assignment” categories:

1. **Weekly Quizzes** (80 points out of 100)

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 find 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 100)

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.](#)
In the end, your final course grade will reflect how many total points (out of 100) you accumulate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90—100</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88—89</td>
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<tr>
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<td>C+</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>68—69</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60—67</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>00—59</td>
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**UNLESS…**

…you think that your grade’s not a fair reflection of what you actually know. Maybe you had a rough semester and missed a few deadlines. Or maybe you just really hated my quiz questions—the idiosyncrasies in my wordings confounded you *despite* how well you really do in fact understand this shit (the psychology of pseudoscience). The odds that I’ve composed questions that *perfectly* measure *each* of your understandings of the readings/listenings/viewings are nil. Recourse: you can write a term paper to make your case. Your grade on that paper = your letter grade for the course. I’ll grade them myself. (With long-winded stream-of-consciousness feedback.) Shoot me an email (SwanClasses@psych.ufl.edu) for details. (I’ll remind you that you can write an *I Get It* term paper to usurp your course grade right before Thanksgiving Break. That’s about when you’ll know whether or not it’ll be worth your time.)

**TL;DR (BLAH BLAH BLAH I’M NOT READING SEVEN PAGES OF SYLLABUS HOW DO I PASS?)**

Log into Canvas every Monday to find a new to-do list on our home page. It’ll ask you to (a) read a handful of articles, watch a few videos, and/or listen to a few podcasts, then (b) answer some quiz questions about the stuff you just read, watched, or listened to. During two interlude weeks around the mid-point of the semester, I’ll ask you to read and review a popular paperback book from a list that I’ve provided (above). Quizzes + Book Review = your final letter grade for the course. If you don’t like that grade, you can write a term paper and ask me to grade that (and only that) instead.

**IT TAKES A VILLAGE**

I can’t do this alone. Thankfully, I’ve got a crack team of co-pilots:

- Janelle Bacotti  
  PhD Student  
  Behavior Analysis

- Nick Gensmer  
  PhD Student  
  Counseling Psychology

- Alexandra Weis  
  PhD Student  
  Counseling Psychology

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2 If your paper bombs, you can keep your old grade (quizzes-plus-book-review). In other words, **opting to write the term paper can’t hurt you.**
We share emails, so don’t be alarmed if Janelle, Nick, or Alexandra replies to a message that you’ve sent to me (at SwanClasses@psych.ufl.edu) 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.”

(Cheating behavior is fascinating. Dan Ariely wrote a great book about it. Absolutely worth the read. Cheating is human.)

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

Each late-day levels a 10% point deduction (e.g., a quiz submitted two days late can at best receive a 6.4/8). (I loathe these arbitrary penalties.)

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.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Assignments Due (Sunday @ 11:59M)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>08/22-08/26</td>
<td>Welcomes and Warnings</td>
<td>Nope</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>08/27-09/02</td>
<td>Psychics</td>
<td>□ Quiz 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>09/03-09/09</td>
<td>Believers</td>
<td>□ Quiz 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>09/10-09/16</td>
<td>Bus Drivers</td>
<td>□ Quiz 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>09/17-09/23</td>
<td>Invisibilia</td>
<td>□ Quiz 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>09/24-09/30</td>
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<td>□ Quiz 5</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>10/01-10/07</td>
<td>Spin Doctors</td>
<td>□ Quiz 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>10/08-10/14</td>
<td>Book Club Interlude (Part I)</td>
<td>Nada</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10/15-10/21</td>
<td>Book Club Interlude (Part II)</td>
<td>□ Book Reviews</td>
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<td>10/22-10/28</td>
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<td>10/29-11/04</td>
<td>Pseudoscientists</td>
<td>□ Quiz 8</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>11/05-11/11</td>
<td>Magicians</td>
<td>□ Quiz 8</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>11/12-11/18</td>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>□ Quiz 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>11/26-12/05</td>
<td>Epilogue: Unsinkable Ducks and Unclosable Doors</td>
<td>□ Quiz 10³</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

³ Optional I Get It term papers (see the “Unless…” section on page 5 of this syllabus) come due Weds 12/05.