
Professor:

Dr. Shari Schwartz (email:) sharischwartz@ufl.edu

Virtual Office Hours: on Zoom, Mondays, 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

Course Purpose: In a “fake news” and “alternative facts” world it seems that individuals may be vulnerable to believe that pseudoscientific claims are based on credible, scientific evidence. This takes root by using social media and mass media to disseminate (dis/mis)information more widely than scientific findings. With the advent of social media platforms such as YouTube, LinkedIn, and others, self-proclaimed experts can spread misinformation with confidence and flair making it a challenge for the average person to distinguish actual science from pseudoscience. This course will examine pseudoscience from a variety of perspectives, through case studies, analyses, and personal accounts that show how to recognize pseudoscience, why it is so widely accepted, and how to advocate for real science. As this is a psychology course, there will be a focus on pseudoscience in the field of psychology. However, we will touch on pseudoscience in a variety of disciplines.

This course confers General Education credit for Social Science (S). Social and behavioral science courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and underlying theory or methodologies used in the social and behavioral sciences. Students will learn to identify, describe and explain social institutions, structures or processes. These courses emphasize the effective application of accepted problem-solving techniques. Students will apply formal and informal qualitative or quantitative analysis to examine the processes and means by which individuals make personal and group decisions, as well as the evaluation of opinions, outcomes or human behavior. Students are expected to assess and analyze ethical perspectives in individual and societal decisions.

Course Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of this course, students will:

- Analyze a broad set of features that one might use to determine where an idea or movement falls along the science—pseudoscience continuum;
- Distinguish scientific skepticism from cynicism or denialism
- Explain the state of empirical evidence concerning several popular belief specimens (e.g., ESP, alternative medicine, astrology);
- Critique bogus claims when you see them (e.g., in the news or on social media);
- Distinguish science from pseudoscience
- Identify pseudoscientific practices/research in discipline of psychology

Required Textbooks: *These ebooks are free in the UF Library online – please don’t pay for them

Kaufman, A.B., & Kaufman, J.C. (2019). *Pseudoscience: The conspiracy against science*. Guilford Press.

Lilienfeld, S.O., Lynn, S.J., & Lohr, J.M. (2014). *Science and pseudoscience in clinical psychology*. MIT Press

Course Requirements and Expectations: Keeping up with this online course is the student's responsibility (i.e., not mine). You can expect this class to be demanding but hopefully personally and intellectually fulfilling. The course requires you to read, think, write, and apply what you are learning. Class lectures, assignments, and additional required readings are only accessible through the course website. Assignments must be submitted electronically through the course website as well. I will **NOT** accept your assignment via email. In anticipation of technical difficulties, make sure you turn in assignments early and double check that they have uploaded. If you experience technical difficulties, you must contact (call or chat. Don't email) the UF help desk immediately to explain to them your technical difficulty (and send me your incident number via Canvas Inbox). I must have the case number for follow up, but note that this does not automatically extend the deadlines.

All deadlines are in Eastern Standard Time (EST).

- 1) Extensions or make-ups will not be given for students based on technical difficulties on any course material. **This includes but is not limited to:**
 - a. Forgetting to hit the submit button on any of the course material.
 - b. Accidentally not including all the files or uploading the wrong file.
- 2) Do not wait until the last minute to complete course materials as this is an online course and things happen.
- 3) Students are responsible for all course announcements posted on Canvas. Therefore, you must check Canvas on a daily basis so that you do not miss any course announcements.
- 4) For course assignments it is **your** responsibility to make sure that the correct file is uploaded and that all the files needed for the assignment are uploaded and in the correct format.
- 5) It is **your** responsibility to make sure that you are visible and audible on all video presentation assignments.
- 6) We will communicate with you via Canvas Inbox, therefore, you are responsible to check your Canvas Inbox every 24 hours.

The instructor and TA(s) are here to help you learn. Make use of office hours and Canvas Inbox to communicate with me and the graduate TA(s). Online office hours are held via Zoom and details are posted in Course Announcements. For questions sent through Canvas Inbox, the TAs and/or I will typically reply within 48 hours of receiving the email during a normal week. Please allow more time for emails sent on official holidays, Fridays, or over the weekend. **All interactions with instructors and class members are expected to be professional and appropriate.**

NO MAKE-UPS WILL BE GIVEN ON ANY MATERIAL FOR THIS COURSE, except for university excused absences with adequate documentation (i.e., doctor's note).

Documentation must be provided before the course material is due unless there are verifiable

extenuating circumstances.

Late Work: All class work must be turned in on time in the manner outlined in the assignment instructions. Failure to do so will result in a zero on that assignment. Therefore, it is critical that you start your work early in the week each week as waiting until the end of the week may cause you to miss deadlines.

Course Structure

Class Activities (40% of overall grade): In most modules, you will complete an activity online that may consist of written interactive discussions, video discussions, and reflective essays. These are designed to help reinforce content learned throughout the semester. You will be provided with detailed instructions regarding each assignment. There are 10 activities in total. Only 8 of these activities will count toward your final grade as I drop the two lowest grades. The activities are designed to get you thinking critically about identifying pseudoscience and why pseudoscience can present a problem in real world scenarios.

Pseudoscience Quizzes (40% of overall grade): There will be a total of four quizzes this semester and all will count toward your overall course grade. For each quiz, you will create one portfolio entry that demonstrates your ability to apply what you are learning about pseudoscience by finding one current event/item and writing about it in accordance with instructions in Canvas. You can use news articles, editorials, advertisements, advice columns, news videos, photographs, websites, cartoon strips, social media posts, etc. Basically, you can use any item that you can effectively argue may be pseudoscientific in nature such that the information being disseminated lacks scientific authority (and support your assertions with credible science). You must find a different item for each quiz, and you **may not use ANY of the items shared by you, me, or your classmates anywhere else in the course such as discussion boards, assigned readings, etc.** Detailed instructions are provided in our online classroom.

Applied Pseudoscience Project Presentation: (20% of overall course grade): For your final course project, you will prepare a video recorded presentation that illustrates your ability to effectively critique pseudoscientific items. Detailed instructions are provided in our online classroom.

Turnitin.com: Turnitin.com is a plagiarism detection service (and use of AI detection service) available to the faculty at UF. The website searches your paper for instances of plagiarism (from previously turned in papers, internet resources and publications) as well as the use of AI chatbots. Examples of plagiarism include cutting and pasting. Students who plagiarize or otherwise engage in academic misconduct via use of AI chatbots may receive a “zero” (E) for the entire course. Please make sure you read the sections on plagiarism in your Student Handbook and the APA manual. It is your responsibility to understand what plagiarism is and any misunderstandings on your part may not be used as excuses. **I submit all of your work through Turnitin.com**

Attendance and Participation Policy: Successful completion of this course requires **regular and active participation** in class activities and assignments on Canvas. Lectures and activities will clarify and expand upon information provided in your textbooks. Requirements for class

attendance and related work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

Grading

Your final grade will be calculated as described below. Letter grades will be assigned according to the grading scale below. **I do not round up grades.**

Online Activities – 40% of overall course grade

Pseudoscience Quizzes - 40% of overall course grade

Applied Pseudoscience Presentation – 20% of overall course grade

Total: 100%

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|----|---|------------|----|---|------------|
| A | = | 93 – 100% | C- | = | 70 – 72.9% |
| A- | = | 90 – 92.9% | D+ | = | 67 – 69.9% |
| B+ | = | 87 – 89.9% | D | = | 63- 66.9% |
| B | = | 83 – 86.9% | D- | = | 60 – 62.9% |
| B- | = | 80 – 82.9% | E | = | 0 – 59.9% |
| C+ | = | 77 – 79.9% | | | |
| C | = | 73 – 76.9% | | | |

Grade Dispute Policy: It is your responsibility to stay on top of your grades in the course. As such, you will have three days (3) after a course grade has posted to dispute the grade. Please note that the three-day timeframe includes weekends and holidays and will not be extended for any reason. The exception to this policy is the Applied Pseudoscience Presentation grade because there will not be enough time to complete disputes and turn grades in by the university-imposed deadlines. Disputes will NOT be accepted after the last day of classes. If you want to dispute a grade, you must write one paragraph explaining the dispute and one more paragraph explaining why your work is correct, with references to the course material, for each aspect of the work you are disputing (for a total of two paragraphs). Then send a private email to me with this information via Canvas Inbox.

Academic Misconduct: 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.*” So...don’t cheat.

Disabled Student Policy: The university provides accommodations to students with disabilities that may affect the ability to participate in activities or to meet course requirements. If you are a student with a disability and would like to request disability-related accommodations, please

contact the Disability Resource Center (and me) as early in the semester as possible. The DRC is located in 001 Building 0020 (Reid Hall). Their phone number is 392-8565. Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester. ***Be sure to contact me as soon as possible and be assured these conversations will be held in strict confidence.***

U Matter, We Care: Your well-being is important to the University of Florida. The U Matter, We Care initiative is committed to creating a culture of care on our campus by encouraging members of our community to look out for one another and to reach out for help if a member of our community is in need. If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu so that the U Matter, We Care Team can reach out to the student in distress. A nighttime and weekend crisis counselor is available by phone at 352-392-1575. The U Matter, We Care Team can help connect students to the many other helping resources available including, but not limited to, Victim Advocates, Housing staff, and the Counseling and Wellness Center. Please remember that asking for help is a sign of strength. In case of emergency, call 9-1-1.

Course Evaluations:

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Canvas:

This entire course is administered via the Canvas platform (<http://lss.at.ufl.edu>; click “**Canvas Login**”). Each student must become familiar with this software and ***check the course web site on a regular basis*** because important class updates and announcements will be posted regularly. **You are responsible for all information posted in Canvas Course Announcements made throughout the semester.**

**PSY 4625 Pseudoscience – Spring 2025
Class Schedule**

| Class Date | Topic | Canvas |
|--------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Week of January 13 | Basics of Pseudoscience | Complete Start Here Module and Module 1 |
| Week of January 20 | Cultural Factors | Complete Module 2 |
| Week of January 27 | Illusion of Causality | Complete Module 3 |

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| Week of February 3 | Pseudoscience in the Courtroom 1 | Complete Module 4 | |
| Week of February 10 | Pseudoscience in the Courtroom 2 Quiz 1 | Complete Module 5 | |
| Week of February 17 | Dissociative Identity Disorder | Complete Module 6 | |
| Week of February 24 | | Complete Module 7 | |
| Week of March 3 | Unsupported vs. Evidence Based Therapies Quiz 2 | Complete Module 8 | |
| Week of March 10 | Anti-Vax and ADHD | Complete Module 9 | |
| Week of March 17 | SPRING BREAK – ENJOY! | | |
| Week of March 24 | Vulnerability and Self-Help | Complete Module 10 | |
| Week of March 31 | Publishing Pseudoscience Quiz 3 | Complete Module 11 | |
| Week of April 7 | Integrative Medicine | Complete Module 12 | |
| Week of April 14 | Herbal Remedies | Complete Module 13 | |
| Week of April 21 | Hypnosis and Intelligence Test Abuses | Complete Module 14 | |
| | *Quiz 4 *Applied Pseudoscience Presentation *Last day of class = April 23 | Complete Module 15 | |
| Week of April 26 | FINAL EXAMS WEEK | | |