

SYLLABUS

Four-Week Module: “Truthiness” and a Post-Fact World:

Challenging our Biases with Critical Thinking

Fall Semester 2016: August 31 – September 21

Wednesdays 6:30p – 930p, Room 311 A/B

Instructor: Dr. Diascro

Office: Room 324

Office Hours: By email or by appointment

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Instructor

I am an Associate Academic Director of the University of California’s Washington Program and a political scientist. I develop curriculum for UCDC and teach the General Research Seminar. I have a BA in political science from the University of California, San Diego (1990), where I grew up. I have a PhD in political science from the Ohio State University (1995), and was on the faculty at the University of Kentucky (1995-2002) and American University (2002-2010). In 2000-01, I was a Supreme Court Fellow at the US Sentencing Commission in Washington, DC. Most recently, I was a senior director at the American Political Science Association (2011-2015). I’ve authored or coauthored peer reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and books, on topics related to American judicial politics.

Description

[Stephen Colbert coined the term “truthiness”](#) to describe the tendency of people to “go with their gut” rather than facts and evidence in evaluating the world around them. Recently, and particularly in the context of the US 2016 presidential and UK Brexit campaigns, the phrase “post-fact world” has become a popular description of the state of public discourse in which beliefs – not facts or evidence – win the day.

We are all affected by biases that obstruct critical thinking; these biases influence how we hear and understand new information, whether we question assumptions, and how we disentangle opinion from fact. Challenging these biases is essential to making rational, evidence-based decisions. The stakes are high in American politics today, but they are also high in our own lives. In this four week session, we will lay the groundwork for your core seminars by honing our critical thinking skills and challenging the “truthy,” post-fact world around us.

Materials and Accessibility

Required book: *The Geek Manifesto: Why Science Matters*, by Mark Henderson (2012) (ISBN: 978-0552165433). I encourage you to add a copy to your personal library (paperback for \$16.95 on Amazon) but there are two copies available at the 4th floor desk for photocopying purposes.

Other required materials: available using links in the Weekly Schedule (next page) or a shared Google Folder (if necessary).

Responsibilities and Assignments

Attendance and participation are required. You will have weekly reading assignments, in-class individual and group work, and an analytical assignment. Greater detail about these requirements will be forthcoming.

<u>Homework</u>	25%
<u>In-Class Individual and Group Work</u>	35%
<u>Analytic Assignment: Infographic</u>	40%

Grading Standards and Measurement

The graded assignments for this course will be worth 100 points each such that an A=100-93%, A-=92-90%, B+=89-87, B=86-83, B-=82-80, etc. The grade you earn for this module will account for 15% of your final core seminar course grade. Your seminar professor will calculate and submit final course grades at the end of the semester.

Course Communication Tools

Email will be my primary method of communicating with you.

Weekly Schedule

I reserve the right to adapt the reading assignments as the term progresses

Session 1: Monday, August 29

Introduction to Module

- We will meet during Orientation at 2p as a group, at which time you will get a final syllabus and instructions for the following week.

Session 2: Wednesday, September 7

Biases and Assumptions

Reading (Required):

- Assigned chapters from *The Geek Manifesto* (by groups assigned in Session 1).

Reading (Suggested):

- Newman, Eryn 2014. "Psychology Explains Why People Are So Easily Duped: The Science of Truthiness." Washington Post. June 30, 2014.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/06/30/psychology-explains-why-people-are-so-easily-duped/?utm_term=.1eee31010fc4 (Accessed August 14, 2016)
- Frenda, Steven J. et al. 2013. "False memories of fabricated political events." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 49: 280-286.

https://webfiles.uci.edu/eloftus/Frenda_SlateStudy_ex_JESP2013.pdf?uniq=ei05tm (Accessed August 14, 2016)

- Kraft, Patrick W., Milton Lodge, Charles S. Taber. 2015. 'Why People "Don't Trust the Evidence": Motivated Reasoning and Scientific Beliefs.' *ANNALS, AAPSS*, 658: 121-133.
<http://ann.sagepub.com/content/658/1/121.full.pdf+html> (Accessed August 14, 2016)
- Ball, Philip. 2015. "The Trouble With Scientists." *Nautilus*, May 14, 2015.
<http://nautil.us/issue/24/error/the-trouble-with-scientists> (Accessed August 14, 2016)

Due:

- Homework:
 - *Geek Manifesto*: Examination of Assigned Chapters, #1 (details forthcoming)
 - List of internship issues or topics (at least 3) (details forthcoming)
- In Class:
 - Notes from in-class exercise
 - Group Transcriber Notes, due 5p on Thursday, 9/8, by email

Session 3: Wednesday, September 14 Evidence: Distinguishing Fact from Opinion

Reading (Required):

- Revisit *Geek Manifesto* Assigned Chapters
- How to Make an Infographic in 5 Steps (<https://venngage.com/blog/how-to-make-an-infographic-in-5-steps/>)
- Infographic Creation Guidelines (<http://science-infographics.org/resources-for-making-infographics/infographic-creation-guidelines/>) **See citing sources**
- 10 Steps to Creating a Perfect Infographic (<http://www.creativeblog.com/design/10-steps-creating-perfect-infographic-3145672>)
- 16 Useless Infographics (<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/gallery/2013/aug/01/16-useless-infographics>)
- Infographics as an Assessment (<http://www.schrockguide.net/infographics-as-an-assessment.html>) **Use as a reference; don't need to read all**

Due:

- Homework:
 - *Geek Manifesto*: Examination of Assigned Chapters, #2 (details forthcoming)
- In Class:
 - Notes from in-class exercise
 - Group Transcriber Notes, due 5p on Thursday, 9/15, by email

Session 4: Wednesday, September 21 Crafting Arguments

Reading (Required):

- None

Due:

- Draft of Infographic for Presentation and Peer Feedback (details forthcoming)

Final Infographic: Monday, September 26 Due by 10a via Email