

PSYCHOLOGY 225 (20303) PARAPSYCHOLOGY/ OCCULT SPRING, 2011

PROF. HINES

TU 12:20-2:10 TH 1:25-2:25

LEINHARD 302

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

A paradox in modern society is that while society more and more depends upon science, more and more members of that society are coming to accept various pseudoscientific and paranormal beliefs. Claims for all sorts of paranormal and pseudoscientific phenomena are widely treated in the media as if they were as real as, say, gravity. There is very little critical examination of these claims. Gullibility is the watchword. This course will examine a wide range of such beliefs and claims, as noted in the class calendar below. One focus will be on the nature of the evidence for these beliefs. A second focus will be on the psychology of belief – what causes people to believe, often very strongly, in a claim of phenomenon that, the evidence shows, is false.

#### COURSE OBJECTIVES:

There are several course objectives. At a general level, students should learn the characteristics of pseudoscientific claims and how to critically examine such claims. This will involve an understanding of basic logic and scientific methods, as well as some statistical reasoning. In addition, the student should come away from the course knowing the cognitive factors that lead to acceptance of claims and ideas which the evidence shows are incorrect. At a more specific level, students will learn the facts about the various topics covered in the class and the readings and become conversant with the arguments for and against the reality of the phenomena that will be covered.

#### COURSE CALENDAR:

Week 1. Jan. 25 & 27.

Chapter 1. Nature of Pseudoscience.

Additional reading:

Chabris, C. & Simons, D. (2010). Fight 'The Power'. *New York Times*, Sept. 24.

Week 2. Feb. 1 & 3.

Chapter 2. Psychics and Psychic Phenomena.

Additional reading:

Raz, A., Hines, T. Fossella, J. & Castro, D. (2008). Paranormal experience and the COMT dopaminergic gene. *Cortex*, 44, 1336-1341.

Week 3. Feb. 8 & 10.

Chapter 3. Life After Death.

Additional readings:

Haunted Stairs. The ghost at Mackenzie house. Chapter 2 in Nickell, J. (1988). *Secrets of the Supernatural*. Chapter 2. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus. Pp. 17-27.

Hines, T. (2008). Zombies and tetrodotoxin. *Skeptical Inquirer*, 32 (3), 60-62.

Nickell, J. (2009). Demons in Connecticut. *Skeptical Inquirer*, 33, (3), 25-27.

Week 4. Feb. 15 & 17.

Chapter 4. Laboratory Parapsychology.

Additional readings:

Galak, J. & Nelson, L. D. (2010). A replication of the procedures from Bem (2010) and a failure to replicate the same results. Unpublished manuscript, Carnegie Mellon University.

Moulton, S. T., & Kosslyn, S. M. (2008). Using neuroimaging to resolve the psi debate. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 20, 182-192.

Wiseman, R. (2010). Heads I win, tails you lose. How parapsychologists nullify null results. *Skeptical Inquirer*, 34, (1), 36-39.

Week 5. Feb. 22 & 24.

Chapter 5. Pseudopsychology.

Additional readings:

Beyerstein, B. (1997). Why bogus therapies seem to work. *Skeptical Inquirer*, 21, (5) 29-34.

Hines, T. (2003). Clear, sharp view of the fuzzy inkblot test. *Skeptical Inquirer*, 27 (5), 53-56.

Hines, T. (2005). Ill effects of the self-help movement. *Skeptical Inquirer*, 29, (3), 58-60.

Week 6. March 1 & 3.

Chapter 6. Astrology, the Lunar Effect and Biorhythm Theory.

**PAPER / PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE MARCH 1.**

Week 7. March 8 & 10.

**MID-TERM EXAM MARCH 8.**

Chapter 7. UFOs I: Close Encounters of the First Kind.

Clancy's "Abducted"

Week 8. March 22 & 24.

Chapter 7 continued.

Chapter 8. UFOs II: Photographs, Physical Evidence and Abductions.

Clancy's "Abducted"

Additional readings:

Hines, T. (1996). Cattle mutilations. In G. Stein (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Paranormal*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. Pp. 143-146.

Nickell, J. (1996). Crop circles. In G. Stein (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Paranormal*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. Pp. 181-186.

Week 9. March 29 & 31.

Chapter 9. Alien Astronauts, Cosmic Collisions and the Bermuda Triangle.

Week 10. April 5 & 7.

Chapter 10. Faith Healing.

**FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER OR PROGRESS REPORT ON PROJECT DUE  
APRIL 7.**

Week 11. April 12 & 14.

Chapter 11. Alternative Medicine.

Week 12. April 21.

Chapter 12. Collective Delusion, Mass Hysteria and Environmental Health Scares.

Week 13. April 26 & 28.

Chapter 13. Creationism, and other topics.

Week 14. May 3.  
Chapter 13 continued.

#### EXAMS AND TERM PAPER:

There will be two exams, a midterm and a final. Each will count 27% of the final grade. A term paper or term project will also count 27% of the grade. Additional shorter writing assignments will be given during the course. These will count 19% of the final grade. After the first short paper, GRAMMAR WILL COUNT and points will be taken off for grammatical errors. The details of the paper/project will be discussed in class. However, a paper must be at least 15 pages long and the project of comparable difficulty. A one page proposal outlining the topic or project must be turned in on or before March 1. If the student decides to do a term paper, a first draft of that paper must be turned in on or before April 7. The draft will not receive a letter grade but will be edited for style and content and returned to the student within one week. **I WILL NOT READ DRAFTS OR FINAL PAPERS WITH GRAMMATICAL ERRORS.** Students are free to submit additional drafts if they wish. The final version of the paper, and all projects, will be due the day of the final exam

#### TEXT AND READINGS:

Hines, T. (2003). *Pseudoscience and the Paranormal*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

The additional readings will be found on-line by going to the Pace Library Home Page and clicking on course reserves. Under "Electronic Reserves" search for this course.

GRADING SCALE: A 90-100%; B 80-89%; C 70-79%; D 60-69%; F 0-59%.

NOTE: If you have a disability for which you are, or may be, requesting an academic accommodation, you must register with the Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities. You can contact the Coordinator at (914) 773-3710.

OFFICE HOURS: My office is Marks 31, ext. 33659. Office hours: MN 2:30-5:00 & WED 3:00-5:30 or by appointment.