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:

   Chapter 1. Nature of Pseudoscience.
   Additional reading:

Week 2. Feb. 1 & 3.
   Chapter 2. Psychics and Psychic Phenomena.
   Additional reading:
Chapter 3. Life After Death.

Additional readings:


Week 4. Feb. 15 & 17.
Chapter 4. Laboratory Parapsychology.

Additional readings:


Chapter 5. Pseudopsychology.

Additional readings:


Week 6. March 1 & 3.
   Chapter 6. Astrology, the Lunar Effect and Biorhythm Theory.
   **PAPER / PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE MARCH 1.**

   **MID-TERM EXAM MARCH 8.**
   Chapter 7. UFOS I: Close Encounters of the First Kind.
   Clancy’s “Abducted”

   Chapter 7 continued.
   Chapter 8. UFOs II: Photographs, Physical Evidence and Abductions.
   Clancy’s “Abducted”

   Additional readings:

   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.

Week 12. April 21.
   Chapter 12. Collective Delusion, Mass Hysteria and Environmental Health Scares.

   Chapter 13. Creationism, and other topics.
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:


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.