



jcortez3@uoregon.edu



jmc\_rhet



541-346-0069



#319 plc hall  
mw 8:00am – 9:30am

# bullshit, fake news, & argumentation

Dr. José Manuel Cortez  
ENG 335  
Winter 2020  
Pacific Hall 16  
TR 12:00pm – 1:20pm

## Course Description

The practice of bullshitting (“speech intended to persuade without regard for truth”) is firmly sedimented into civic life in the 21st century. Examples are everywhere: fake social media accounts and highjacked elections, accusations of fake news, fake academic controversies, deepfake videos, etc. We are awash in a deluge of bullshit these days. So how do you identify bullshit? And how do you combat it? This course intends to teach you how to call bullshit in good faith by learning and applying theories of argumentation. It will help you develop metacognition in argumentation so that you will be able to successfully call bullshit across discourse communities—be it in your friend group back home or in your next groundbreaking scholarly intervention.

## Learning Outcomes

In addition to examining the work of others, you will be challenged to explore your own beliefs. You should become sufficiently familiar with the work of various scholars and theorists to articulate and assess their views. Ideally, you will also begin to engage in your own analysis by synthesizing compatible elements of different theories, entertaining original ideas, and adopting a theoretically viable account of bullshit for yourself. Finally, as with any course, you should continue to strengthen your clarity, coherence, and consistency of thought and expression. In this course, students will:

- Define and develop a rigorous practice of argumentation
- Cultivate metacognitive strategies for writing



jcortez3@uoregon.edu



jmc\_rhet



541-346-0069



#319 plc hall  
mw 8:00am – 9:30am

- Demonstrate a metacognitive understanding of the study of argumentation
- Develop working definitions of the category of bullshit
- Compose focused, analytical writing in clear prose, drawing upon primary and secondary texts

## Texts

Required for this course will be available on Canvas. **Please print and bring a copy of these readings to class on the day these readings are assigned.** Printing services are available at Knight Library.

## Grading and Assessment

<b>Researched argument</b>	50%
<b>Reading summaries</b>	20%
<b>Arguments</b>	20%
<b>Attendance</b>	10%

### Researched Arguments

50% of your final grade will be determined by your grades for two researched argument papers in which you advance an argument on a topic from the assigned readings. Refer to the guidelines on Canvas for additional prompting.

### Reading summaries

20% of your final grade will be determined by your 5 best (out of 6 possible) scores for weekly summaries of the assigned readings. Reading summaries should consist of a brief overview (at least 400) of the reading assigned for that class period, along with one or two questions for class discussion. Reading summaries will be loosely graded as good, good enough, or not good enough. Reading summaries are due at the beginning of class. If you are unable to attend, you can earn credit for reading summaries submitted prior to the beginning of the relevant class period, but you will not earn credit for late reading summaries. To receive full credit, your response paper needs to:

- 1) address the reading
- 2) be at least 400 words (unless otherwise indicated)
- 3) present a thesis or claim with at least two paragraphs that support this claim
- 4) synthesize at least 2 citations from the text

### Arguments

An additional 20% of your final grade will be determined by your best two (out of 3 possible) in-class argument assignments. Missed in-class assignments cannot be made up.

### Attendance

The remaining 10% of your final grade will be determined by your attendance and participation. Your attendance grade will be calculated as a straightforward percentage of the classes you attend. Your participation grade will reflect the degree to which you enhance the quality of the



jcortez3@uoregon.edu



jmc\_rhet



541-346-0069



#319 plc hall  
mw 8:00am – 9:30am

course by asking appropriate questions, offering relevant insights, and supporting your classmates in their efforts to learn the material.

## Course Policies

### Content

This course will openly engage texts and discussion about migration, gendered and racialized sexual violence, violence toward children, dispossession, death, institutional racism, colonialism, and other existentially horrifying conditions of political life. The course will engage these topics without censorship. I will not offer alternative arrangements for content, so please consider whether this is the right course for you.

### Attendance

Show up. Please. If you miss 6 or more class sessions this semester, you cannot pass the course. Because the success of this course depends upon the success of our interaction as a class, attendance is necessary. Expect your grade to suffer if you fail to fully participate. If you must miss a class, check with one of your classmates about what you missed before the next class.

### Deadlines

Please meet them. If you must miss class, your work will need to find its way there on time if it doesn't want its grade to suffer (one letter grade for each day it's late).

### Students with Disabilities:

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 360 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or [uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu).

### Plagiarism

Don't do it. Please! Cheating is morally wrong. Collaboration is morally good. If you do not know the difference, please see me immediately. I will determine the appropriate response to academic dishonesty on a case-by-case basis.

### Email

I will attempt to respond to individual emails as quickly as possible—meaning, within 48 hours. Please plan to send your emails with enough time for me to respond to your questions. Please also be aware that I do not read email past 7pm on weekdays, and I do not check email over the weekend. I do not respond to messages on Canvas— **please do not message me on Canvas!** Please use the email listed on this document.



jcortez3@uoregon.edu



jmc\_rhet



541-346-0069



#319 plc hall  
mw 8:00am – 9:30am

# Course Schedule

## Week 1

t 01/07 – Introductions  
r 01/09 – CLASS CANCELLED

---

## Week 2 Truth

t 01/14 – Frankfurt: “On Bullshit”  
r 01/16 – Frankfurt: “On Bullshit”

---

## Week 3 Lies

t 01/21 – Frankfurt: “On Bullshit”  
r 01/23 – Frankfurt: “On Bullshit” (RS #1 due)

---

## Week 4 Baloney

t 01/28 – Nietzsche: “On Truth & Lies in a Non-Moral Sense”  
r 01/30 – Nietzsche: “On Truth & Lies in a Non-Moral Sense” (RS #2 due)

---

## Week 5 Baloney

t 02/04 – In-class written assignment: comparing definitions of truth  
r 02/06 – Sagan: [“The Fine Art of Baloney Detection”](#) (RS #3 due)

---

## Week 6 Signifyin’

t 02/11 – Gates Jr. “The Signifying Monkey” (RS #4 due)  
r 02/13 – In-class written assignment: what’s the difference between signifyin’, lying, and bullshitting?

---

## Week 7 Fake News

t 02/18 – Weiskott: [“Before Fake News Came False Prophecy”](#); Kiely & Robertson: [“How to Spot Fake News”](#); Higgins, McIntire, & Dance: [“Inside a fake news sausage-factory”](#) (RS #5 due)  
r 02/20 – Donath: [“Why fake news stories thrive online”](#); **Researched Argument 1 due**

---

## Week 8 Models of Argumentation

t 02/25 – Toulmin; Aristotle (RS #6 due)  
r 02/27 – Cook & Lewandowsky: “The Debunking Handbook”



jcortez3@uoregon.edu



jmc\_rhet



541-346-0069



#319 plc hall  
mw 8:00am – 9:30am

---

**Week 9**      **Racist Bullshit**

t      03/03 – TBD

r      03/05 – **In-class written assignment**

---

**Week 10**      **Gendered Bullshit**

t      03/10 – Butler: “Doing Justice to Someone”

r      03/12 – **In-class written assignment**

**Finals Week**

w      12/11 – NO CLASS

**Researched Argument 2 due**