bullshit, fake news & argumentation

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Prince Lucien Campbell Hall #319
TR 11:30am—1:00pm

ENG 335: Inventing Arguments
Winter 2022
347 MCK
TR 2:00pm – 3:20pm

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:

- Create a community of learners
- Cultivate metacognitive strategies for writing
- Compose arguments, drawing upon primary and secondary texts
- Define and develop a practice of rhetorical analysis
- Define “argument” and produce arguments
- Define and identify bullshit

Texts
Required texts for this course will be available on Canvas.
Grading and Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BS Detection kit</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading summaries</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term argument</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion posts</td>
<td>40%</td>
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</tbody>
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**BS Detection kit**
40% of your final grade will be determined by your grades for one cumulative project: a Bullshit Detection Kit. Refer to the assignment 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 will be loosely graded as good, good enough, or not good enough. Reading summaries are due at the beginning of class. To receive full credit, your summary needs to:

1) address the reading  
2) be at least 300 words  
3) unpack least 1 passage from the text  
4) offer a question for class discussion

**Mid-term argument**
20% of your grade will be determined by your grade on a mid-term argument. Refer to the assignment on Canvas for additional prompting.

**Discussion posts**
20% of your final grade will be determined by 5-8 discussion posts, which will be written collaboratively, in class.

Course Policies

**Pandemic disclaimer**
We are living through unprecedented times of disaster, dispossession, and isolation. Your ability to self-actualize right now is likely diminished. Please be good to yourself. Remind yourself that you are smart, that you give a strong effort, and that you are strong. We are all grieving still. We’ll do this together. Also: you may be okay. If you are not okay, though, please reach out to me. I cannot fix everything, but I am connected to resources and I will do my best to help you reach those resources.

**Class Climate**
Returning to campus again is likely to be difficult. We now live in a world we have yet to fully understand. We have all lost so much, and we know not of the burdens each of us carries around now. Each of us will make
mistakes this quarter, as we learn how to learn together all over again. Please be kind to each other. May we rebuild a community of learners, and may we support each along the way.

Content
This course will openly engage texts and discussion about topics that you are likely to experience major disagreements about. This is the point, though. One of the learning objectives is to learn how to make public arguments over sensitive topics. I will not offer alternative arrangements for content, so please consider whether this is the right course for you.

Deadlines
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).

Accessible Education
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.

Academic Misconduct
Don’t do it. Please! Collaboration and cooperation are encouraged, but cheating is legally and morally wrong. If you do not know the difference, please see me immediately. Should the need arise, I will determine the appropriate response to academic dishonesty, or suspicion thereof, on a case-by-case basis. I may elect to act at the university level, and I may impose consequences up to or including a failing course grade.

The University Student Conduct Code (available at conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students’ obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism.

Mandatory Reporting
I am a designated reporter. For information about my reporting obligations as an employee, please see Employee Reporting Obligations on the Office of Investigations and Civil Rights Compliance (OICRC) website. Students experiencing any form of prohibited discrimination or harassment, including sex or gender-based violence, may seek information and resources at safe.uoregon.edu, respect.uoregon.edu, or investigations.uoregon.edu or contact the non-confidential Title IX office/Office of Civil Rights Compliance (541-346-3123), or Dean of Students offices (541-346-3216), or call the 24-7 hotline 541-346-SAFE for help. I am also a mandatory reporter of child abuse. Please find more information at Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect.

COVID-19
To prevent or reduce the spread of COVID-19 in classrooms and on campus, all students and employees:

- Must comply with the vaccination policy
• Must wear **face coverings** in all indoor spaces on UO campus
• Complete weekly testing if not fully vaccinated or exempted
• Wash hands frequently and practice social distancing when possible
• Complete daily self-checks
• Stay home/do not come to campus if feeling symptomatic
• Complete the UO COVID-19 case and contact reporting form if you test positive or have been in close contact with a confirmed or presumptive case.

The University of Oregon defines “Good Classroom Citizenship” as:

• Wear your mask and make sure it fits you well
• Stay home if you’re sick
• Get to know your neighbors in class, and let them know if you test positive
• Get tested regularly
• Watch for signs and symptoms with the daily symptom self-check
• Wash your hands frequently or use hand sanitizer

**Academic Disruption due to Campus Emergency**

“In the event of a campus emergency that disrupts academic activities, course requirements, deadlines, and grading percentages are subject to change. Information about changes in this course will be communicated as soon as possible by email, and on Canvas. If we are not able to meet face-to-face, students should immediately log onto Canvas and read any announcements and/or access alternative assignments. Students are also expected to continue coursework as outlined in this syllabus or other instructions on Canvas. In the event that the instructor of this course has to quarantine, this course may be taught online during that time.”

**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. Please use the email listed on this document. I do not respond to messages on Canvas.

**Please do not message me on Canvas!**

**Contact me by email!**
# Course Schedule

## Week 1
- **t** 01/04 — Introductions
- **r** 01/06 — Introductions

## Week 2  
**Defining bullshit**
- **t** 01/11 — Frankfurt: “On Bullshit”
- **r** 01/13 — Frankfurt: “On Bullshit” (RS #1 due)

## Week 3  
**Defining truth**
- **t** 01/18 — Nietzsche: “On Truth & Lies in a Non-Moral Sense”
- **r** 01/20 — Nietzsche: "On Truth & Lies in a Non-Moral Sense” (RS #2 due)

## Week 4  
**Defining argument**
- **t** 01/25 — *Open 2010*. Chapter 4: "Claim Type and Argument Pattern” (pg 53.);
- **r** 01/27 — Hart: “Analyzing Argument”; In-class assignment: rhetorical analysis

## Week 5  
**Baloney**
- **t** 02/01 — Sagan: *The Fine Art of Baloney Detection*; Cook & Lewandowsky: "The Debunking Handbook" (RS #3 due)
- **r** 02/03 — Hart: “Analyzing Lexicon”; In-class assignment: rhetorical analysis

## Week 6  
**Finalizing the mid-term**
- **t** 02/08 — TBA
- **r** 02/10 — **Mid-term argument due**
**Week 7**

**Fake News**

- **t 02/15** — Weiskott: "Before Fake New Came False Prophecy"; Kiely & Robertson: "How to Spot Fake News"; Higgins, McIntire, & Dance: "Inside a fake news sausage-factory" (RS #4 due)

- **r 02/17** — Donath: "Why fake news stories thrive online"

**Week 8**

**Redefining argument**

- **t 02/22** — Corder: "Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love"

- **r 02/24** — Corder: "Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love" (RS #5 due)

**Week 9**

**Genres of bullshit**

- **t 03/01** — TBA

- **r 03/03** — TBA (RS #6 due)

**Week 10**

**How to look ahead**

- **t 03/08** — hooks: "Theory as Liberation" (RS #6 due)

- **r 03/10** — Debrief

**Finals Week**

- **NO CLASS**

- **r 03/17** — BS detection kit & mid-term argument revisions due