

**PSC 211: Conspiracy Theories in American Politics**  
Fall 2020  
University of Rochester  
Tuesday and Thursday 2:00pm 3:15pm

**Course Email:** [psc211f2020@gmail.com](mailto:psc211f2020@gmail.com)

**Professor:** Scott A. Tyson

**Office Hours:** Thursday 1:00-2:00pm via Zoom or by appointment

**Teaching Assistant:** Agabek Kabdullin

**Office Hours:** Tuesday 10:30 11:00 and 12:30 2:00 via Zoom or by appointment

**Course Description**

Conspiracy theories are becoming an organizing principle in American politics. This09125s7.\*EMC /P AMCID 1

If you do not have an extension, and you turn in a paper late, you will be docked one third of one letter grade for every 24 hours that the paper is late, with late penalties accruing from the time the paper is due. For example, if your paper earned a B+, but you turned it in a few hours past the time it was due, you will receive a B; if you turned it in 30 hours past the time it was due, you will receive a B-.

### **Grade Disputes**

Grade disputes will not be accepted for 24 hours after receiving the assignment back. Grade disputes should be accompanied by a memo detailing the reasons that the student believes a higher grade is warranted. The grader who did not grade the assignment will be the grade dispute arbiter and the grade that he determines binds (if you get a lower grade on the regrade, this grade stands and vice versa).

### **Email**

Please direct your emails to the course email address ([psc211f2020@gmail.com](mailto:psc211f2020@gmail.com)) which will be accessed by both the instructor and TA. If, however, you would like to discuss something privately either with the instructor or TA, individual emails are:

Scott Tyson: [styson2@ur.rochester.edu](mailto:styson2@ur.rochester.edu)

Agabek Kabdullin: [akabdull@ur.rochester.edu](mailto:akabdull@ur.rochester.edu)

### **Participation**

The participation grade is comprised of attendance and active (and *respectful*) participation in seminar. We will be doing activities and discussing readings, and it is essential that all students contribute. Participation points will automatically be deducted for absences.

### **Academic Honesty**

All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with

<http://www.rochester.edu/college/honesty/index.html>

### **Disabilities and Accommodations**

This classroom respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities, and we encourage you to talk with us about any concern or situation that affects your ability to complete your academic work successfully. Students requiring accommodations should contact the Office of Disability Resources:

1-154 Dewey Hall [disability@rochester.edu](mailto:disability@rochester.edu) (585) 275-9049

### **Required Books**

You will need to purchase the books listed below. We will read substantial portions, so we cannot post these selections on Blackboard. The rest of the readings will be available on Blackboard. Throughout the semester, we will send newspaper articles and other short pieces that deal with topical issues. These are considered required reading and we will discuss them in class.

Anna Merlan. 2019. *Republic of Lies: American Conspiracy Theorists and Their Surprising Rise*

*to Power*. Metropolitan Books.

Carl T. Bergstrom & Jevin D. West. 2020. *Calling Bullshit: The Art of Skepticism in a Data-Driven World*. Random House

We will be drawing on several articles found at:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/shadowland/>

### **Course Outline**

The course outline appears below. You should complete the reading listed for the class meeting *before* the class meets. We will discuss the readings in class, so it is important to complete the readings in order to secure your participation points.





Thursday, October 8	Political Extremism II	Jon Ronson, <i>Them</i> , Selection TBD  Christopher Hare and Keith Poole, 2014. "The Polarization of Contemporary <i>Polity</i> 46(3)  <a href="https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/05/birtherism-and-trump/610978/">https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/05/birtherism-and-trump/610978/</a>
Tuesday, October 13	The Paranoid Style Conspiracies in US history	Hofstadter essay on the Paranoid style (PDF in Dropbox)  Jesse Walker, <i>The United States of Paranoia: A Conspiracy Theory</i> , Selections TBD  <a href="https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/08/03/joseph-mccarthy-and-the-force-of-political-falsehoods?mbid=social_twitter&amp;utm_medium=social&amp;utm_brand=tny&amp;utm_social-type=owned&amp;utm_source=twitter">https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/08/03/joseph-mccarthy-and-the-force-of-political-falsehoods?mbid=social_twitter&amp;utm_medium=social&amp;utm_brand=tny&amp;utm_social-type=owned&amp;utm_source=twitter</a>
Thursday, October 15	White nationalism	Merlan. Chapter 8.  <a href="https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/07/trumps-white-nationalist-attack-four-congresswomen/594019/">https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/07/trumps-white-nationalist-attack-four-congresswomen/594019/</a>  <a href="https://www.mediamatters.org/sean-hannity/baseless-smear-targeting-ilhan-omar-made-its-way-trump-thanks-fox-and-these-far-right">https://www.mediamatters.org/sean-hannity/baseless-smear-targeting-ilhan-omar-made-its-way-trump-thanks-fox-and-these-far-right</a>  <a href="https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/05/conspiracy-theories-civil-war/612283/">https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/05/conspiracy-theories-civil-war/612283/</a>
Tuesday, October 20	The role of the media	Brian Stelter, <i>Hoax: Donald Trump, Fox News, and the Dangerous Distortion of Truth</i> , Selections TBD







Tuesday, December 1	The state of affairs, what is to be done and causality	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/v7gz53/the-conspiracy-singularity-has-arrived">https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/v7gz53/the-conspiracy-singularity-has-arrived</a> Bergstrom & West, Ch. 1-4
Thursday, December 3	Role of statistics	Bergstrom & West, Ch. 5-7
Tuesday, December 8	Being a consumer of information in the age of big data  <b>FINAL PAPER DUE AT THE START OF CLASS (2PM).</b>	Bergstrom & West, Ch. 8-11