Pseudoscience and Controversial Claims
Syllabus & Preassignment

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Timothy J. Lawson
Office Number & Hours: Room CL 12E; MWF 9:00-10:00 & 11:00-12:00
Phone Number: 244-4376  E-mail: tim.lawson@msj.edu

CLASS MEETS: Thursday, 6:30 - 9:20 (Meets only on 1/19, 2/12, 2/16, 3/2, 3/23, 4/6, & 4/20)


ARTICLES: Additional required articles and chapters will be provided in Blackboard for each class period. NOTE: Chapters labeled “Lawson” in the syllabus are chapters included in the following book: Lawson, T. J. (2007). Scientific perspectives on pseudoscience and the paranormal. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson. This book contains articles written by a variety of scientists. These chapters can be found in Blackboard.

COURSE DESCRIPTION & TEACHING METHODOLOGY:
We will examine a variety of controversial therapies, psychological tests, paranormal claims, and other psychological phenomena in this course. Pseudoscientific approaches to gathering evidence for these phenomena will be compared and contrasted with scientific approaches. This course will be taught in a "seminar" format (as opposed to a "lecture" format). This means that class time will be dominated by discussion rather than lecture. Thus, each of you will be responsible for being prepared for each class and being ready to discuss the material/issues you have read. In addition to class discussions, some class periods will include films and guest presenters.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

In the table below, I list the objectives of this course and indicate how they fit with the learning outcomes and performance indicators of the Mount's core curriculum.

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<tr>
<th>Course Objectives</th>
<th>Core Curriculum Learning Outcomes &amp; Performance Indicators</th>
<th>Activities and Assignments that Assess the Outcomes</th>
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| Describe how social, cultural, and cognitive biases contribute to pseudoscientific beliefs. | Ethics  
  • Ethical Self-Awareness: Discuss one’s core beliefs and their origins |  • Quizzes and reaction papers |
|                                             | Cultural Competence  
  • Cultural Self-Awareness: Articulate the norms and biases of one’s own culture |                                                |
Explain the difference between science and pseudoscience, and evaluate the scientific validity of pseudoscientific/paranormal claims. Evaluate the validity of a variety of specific therapies, psychological tests, and paranormal claims.

Critical Thinking
- Information Literacy: Use appropriate scholarly evidence to support a position
- Scientific Literacy: Apply scientific evidence or models to support a position

- Quizzes and reaction papers
- Class presentation

QUIZZES:
Six short-answer/essay quizzes covering the reading material, class, and films will be given throughout the semester. All of these quizzes will be “take-home” tests that will be available in the Blackboard site for this course at the end of the evening after class, and they will cover the assigned reading material for that class. Quizzes are due on the following Tuesday by 10:00 a.m. Late quizzes will be not be accepted.

REACTION PAPERS/DISCUSSIONS:
During each class session you will participate in an informal class discussion about the assigned readings, and this discussion will be led by YOU. For each class session, you will write a reaction paper (maximum of 2 pages, single-spaced & typed) on the chapters and additional articles you read for that class. You will hand in the reaction paper on the day that material is discussed in class, and you will be graded on the quality of the papers and your participation in class. Late reaction papers will not be accepted.

Your reaction paper must have the following sections:
1. Main Points: Write 2 brief paragraphs, in your own words, on what you thought were several of the most interesting main points, ideas, or concepts in the readings.
2. Your Reaction: Add your own thoughts about the readings. You might include personal examples, points of agreement/disagreement, sections you found confusing, etc.
3. Items for Class Discussion: Write at least six items designed to stimulate class discussion (see examples below). You may write questions that reflect your thoughts, insights, or examples (from your personal experience or from the media). Whatever you choose to write must reflect that you read and understood the material in the chapter(s), and it must be designed to stimulate discussion among the other class members. Each class discussion will involve class members sharing their thoughts & discussion items, thus each of you will be responsible for the class discussion.

   Poor Discussion Questions: (1). I thought that Ruscio’s statements about health food were interesting. What do you think? (NOTE: This question would not stimulate much discussion). (2). List 10 characteristics of pseudoscience. (NOTE: This question is too similar to an exam question. Try to write questions that you would ask someone in an informal discussion on a topic).
**Good Discussion Question:** Ruscio said that "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence," but why does the evidence have to be extraordinary? (NOTE: This question suggests that you carefully read and thought about the readings, and it is likely to stimulate some discussion among class members).

**CLASS PRESENTATION:**
During the last class, you will give an in-class oral presentation, along with one other student, on a topic related to one of the major “class topics” in course schedule. You and your partner should find at least three articles related to your topic and base your presentation on those articles. At least two of the articles should be from a scientific journal or other scientific periodicals (e.g., *Skeptical Inquirer, Scientific American, etc.*). The presentation should last no more than 12 minutes, and each of you will do half of the presentation (make sure you practice your presentation to make sure it lasts only 12 minutes, because time will pass more quickly than you think). You should hand in copies of your articles along with a Powerpoint file that contains the content of your presentation. More specific presentation guidelines, grading criteria, and possible presentation topics can be found on the Blackboard site for this course.

**QUIZ AND FINAL GRADES:**
Your grade for a quiz will be based on the obtained percentage of the maximum score for that quiz (i.e., 90%=A, 80%=B, 70%=C, etc.). Final course grades will be based on a weighted average of the percentage points you obtained on the 6 quizzes, 6 reaction papers, and class presentation. The quizzes will be worth a total of 66% (11% each) of your final grade. The 6 reaction papers/discussions will be worth a total of 24% (4% each) of your final grade. The class presentation will be worth 10% of your final grade.

**CLASS ATTENDANCE:**
Because this is a seminar class that meets only seven times, class attendance is required of all students. A portion (25%) of the grade you receive for each reaction paper will be based on the extent of your class participation. Also, some of the quizzes will contain questions specific to the films we will see in class.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:**
You should become familiar with the Mount's policy on academic honesty that appears in the Student Handbook. I assume that students approach exams and assignments in an honest manner (i.e., all of your work is your own and not copied or paraphrased from someone else's work). In all of your papers, make sure you use your own ideas and words. Do not share your paper with other students prior to handing it in. Copying or paraphrasing the information or language of another source is considered plagiarism (unless you use a direct quote with quotation marks and cite the author, year of publication, and page number for the quote; however, quotes should be used very sparingly). For the exams, make sure you work independently from others to obtain and write your answers. You may use your books or other readings to help you answer the exam questions, but you should not obtain your answers by seeking input from other students. I take academic dishonesty very seriously, and I will follow the Handbook guidelines for penalties if I discover any dishonesty.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Class Topic</th>
<th>Reading Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 19</td>
<td>Science vs. Pseudoscience &amp; Methodological/Statistical Reasoning</td>
<td>Ruscio: p. xxiii-xxix &amp; Ch.1, 2, 8</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Lawson: Ch. 1, 7.2, 7.3</td>
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<td>See Additional Readings (below)</td>
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<td>Feb. 2</td>
<td>Controversial Therapies, Interventions, &amp; Disorders: Part I</td>
<td>Ruscio: Ch. 3, 5, 6, 7, 12</td>
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<td>Lawson: 3.3</td>
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<td>Feb. 16</td>
<td>Controversial Therapies, Interventions, &amp; Disorders: Part II</td>
<td>Ruscio: Ch. 4</td>
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<td>Lawson: 4.2, 5.1, 9.2</td>
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<td>See Additional Readings (below)</td>
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<td>Mar. 2</td>
<td>Controversial Psychological Tests, Interviewing Techniques, &amp; Criminal</td>
<td>Ruscio: Ch. 10, 13, 14</td>
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<td>Profiling</td>
<td>Lawson: 2.2, 8.1, 8.3</td>
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<td>See Additional Readings (below)</td>
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<td>Mar. 23</td>
<td>Consciousness, Repressed Memories &amp; Multiple Personalities</td>
<td>Ruscio: Ch. 15</td>
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<td>Lawson: 3.1, 6.2, 6.3</td>
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<td>See Additional Readings (below)</td>
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<td>Apr. 6</td>
<td>Paranormal Phenomena</td>
<td>Ruscio: Ch. 16</td>
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<td>Lawson: 5.3, 7.1</td>
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<td>See Additional Readings (below)</td>
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<td>Apr. 20</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
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**PREASSIGNMENT:**

Read the material assigned for the first class. Write a reaction paper (see earlier section on reaction papers) on these readings, bring your paper to the first class, and be prepared to participate in a class discussion on the readings.
Additional Readings (Tentative List)

Class 1: Science Versus Pseudoscience


Class 2: Controversial Therapies, Interventions, and Disorders (Part I)

No additional readings for Class 2

Class 3: Controversial Therapies, Interventions, and Disorders (Part II)

*Baby Einstein*


*Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)*


*Facilitated Communication*


*Therapeutic Touch*


Class 4: Controversial Psychological Tests, Interviewing Techniques, and Criminal Profiling


Class 5: Consciousness, Repressed Memories, and Multiple Personalities


Class 6: Paranormal Phenomena

**Extrasensory Perception (ESP)**


**Psychic Readings: Possible Tactics**

