

PSEUDOSCIENCE AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Psych 310: Sec 1
Fall 2007

Office Hrs: Tu (1:00-2:00), W (12:00-1:00)
(or by appointment)

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Course Materials:

Hines, T. (2003). *Pseudoscience and the paranormal*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books.

Frazier, K. (1986). *Science confronts the paranormal*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books.

Course Objectives:

This class offers students the opportunity to explore topics that fall under the title “pseudoscience” (i.e. topics that pretend to be scientific, but simply cannot be true based on our current scientific understanding). Being able to distinguish between “pseudoscience” and real “science” is extremely important. We are living in a time when people are exposed daily to claims promising them happier, healthier, more fulfilling lives. Although the credibility and potential danger of these claims varies greatly, most (if not all) involve some aspect of psychology. Consequently, it is particularly important that psychologists examine them critically.

In that vein, this course has two general goals. The first is to help students become critical consumers of material related to psychological topics. This will be achieved through a fundamental understanding of skepticism and the scientific method. Armed with these skills, students will be able to distinguish between topics that are considered legitimately “scientific” by the psychological community and those that are not. This brings us to the second goal which is to more clearly define what psychology truly “is” and what psychologists actually “do.” Unfortunately, too many laypeople are misinformed about the nature of our discipline and this misunderstanding undermines psychology’s credibility as a social science.

By the end of the semester, each student should be able to:

- 1) *Identify the characteristics often associated with pseudoscientific claims.*
- 2) *Explain the basic steps of the scientific method and appreciate the advantages (and limitations) to using this method to understand the world.*
- 3) *Evaluate an argument or claim using critical thinking skills related to learning goals 1) and 2).*
- 4) *Identify topics that are generally regarded as mainstream within the field of psychology from those that are generally considered either “fringe” topics or outside the discipline altogether.*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Schedule & Readings: This syllabus contains a tentative course schedule which outlines the lecture topics and selected readings for each day. *Students are expected to read the assigned readings before coming to class and be prepared to discuss that material.* Every effort will be made to adhere to this schedule, but changes may be made if more/less time is needed to cover certain topics.

Exams: There will be *7 exams* given during the course of the semester. The dates of these exams are outlined on the attached course schedule. These dates are tentative and subject to change if additional time is required to cover certain topics. ***Please note the scheduled time for the final exam in the course (Tuesday, Dec. 11, 3:10 P.M.)***. The scheduling for all exams during finals week is done by the Registrar's Office. No student is allowed to take the final exam at an earlier date or time, so make sure that you arrange your traveling plans for the semester break appropriately.

Each exam will be worth **35 points** and each exam will encompass only the material covered in its respective time block (i.e. classes since the previous exam). Exams will be comprised of any combination of multiple-choice, definitions, short-answer and/or essay questions. Particular emphasis will be given to material presented in class, but there will also be questions over information covered in the book. Study guides will be provided to help you prepare for each exam.

Make-Up Exams: Make-up exams will only be allowed if I decide that your absence is excusable. There are three general reasons why an absence may be considered excusable: 1) participation in a school-sanctioned athletic event; 2) an extended or short-term illness that is severe enough to prevent you from attending class; and 3) a death in the family.

Note that make-up exams must be taken within 1 week of the scheduled exam. Students will only be allowed to take make-up exams in the Psychology Department's main office (Johnson Tower 233) on Fridays between 1:00-3:00 p.m. If you know ahead of time that you will have a scheduling conflict for one of the exams, please contact me as soon as possible before the day of the exam and we will discuss your options.

Discussion of Selected Articles:

For each section of the course (i.e., each exam), the class will be assigned a primary article to read for class discussion the last class session before the exam for that section (see schedule). Students will have the opportunity to summarize the general information about the article on a 4 x 6 index card prior to meeting in class the day the article will be discussed.

Index cards will be turned in to me at the beginning of the class period. ***I will not accept cards from student arriving late to class.*** Each completed index card will be worth ***1 extra credit point***. In addition, ***students who complete their card summaries prior to class will be allowed to use those summaries during the exam.*** There will be no penalty for failing to complete the index card.

SPECIFIC CLASS POLICIES

Cheating and Plagiarism: It should go without saying, but cheating and plagiarism are strictly prohibited in this course. If a student is caught doing either, he/she will receive a 0 on the exam and/or assignment and an F in the course. The incident will also be reported to Student Affairs.

Class Notes: As mentioned earlier, students are expected to attend class regularly and take notes. Students are expected to attend class regularly and take notes. If a student is unable to come to class on a given day and wishes to get the notes for that day, she/he must contact me ***before*** her/his absence and explain why she/he will be unable to attend class. ***If that absence is deemed acceptable, I will share the class notes for the day.*** Such requests should be minimal and can be denied at any time if a student appears to be abusing this policy. ***I will not give notes to students who fail to provide a reasonable explanation for their absence or who come to me after their absence and request notes.***

Accommodations for Specific Students: University policy regarding students with specific disabilities stipulates the following: ***“Reasonable accommodations will be available for students who have a documented disability. Please notify the instructor during the first week of class of any accommodations needed for the course. Late notification may cause the requested accommodations to be unavailable. All***

accommodations must be approved through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) in Ad Annex 206, 335-1726.” If this applies to you, please come speak to me immediately so that we can make the necessary accommodations.

Extra Credit: Weekly index cards will be worth a total of 7 extra credit points. In addition, *students will be allowed to earn 5 extra credit points for this course by participating in experimental research conducted by members of the Psychology Department.* Each research credit earned will be worth *1 extra credit point* in this course. If you sign up for an experiment and fail to appear at the scheduled meeting time and location, you will have **1 point subtracted** from your extra credit total.

GRADING

You can receive a total of **245 points** (not including extra credit). Grades will be based on following scale. Note that there will be no grade curves in this course.

228-245	(93%) A	179-188	(73%) C
221-227	(90%) A-	172-178	(70%) C-
213-220	(87%) B+	164-171	(67%) D+
203-212	(83%) B	147-163	(60%) D
196-202	(80%) B-	≤146	F
189-195	(77%) C+		

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Lecture Topic	Suggested Reading
Aug. 20	Introduction/Science versus Pseudoscience	Hines ch .1; Frazier #1
22	Characteristics of Pseudoscience	Frazier #5 & #6
24	Science & Skepticism	Frazier #5 & #6
27	Psychics	Hines ch. 2; Frazier #12 & #14
29	Psychics	Hines ch. 2; Frazier #12 & #14
31	Psychics <i>(Discuss Article #1)</i>	Hines ch. 2; Frazier #12 & #14
Sept. 3	Labor Day	NO CLASS
5	Exam 1	Hines ch. 1-2 Frazier #1, 5, 6, & 12 Article #1
7	Gone to Conference	NO CLASS
10	Near Death Experiences & OBEs	Hines ch. 3
12	Near Death Experiences & OBEs	Hines ch. 3
14	Psi: ESP, Precognition & Remote Viewing	Hines ch. 4 Frazier #11, #14 & #15
17	Psi: ESP, Precognition & Remote Viewing	Hines ch. 4 Frazier #11, #14 & #15
19	“Secrets of the Psychics”	Movie
21	“Secrets of the Psychics” <i>(Discuss Article #2)</i>	Movie
24	Exam II	Hines ch. 3-4 Frazier #11 & # 15 Article #2
26	Astrology	Hines ch. 6; Frazier #22 & #23
28	Astrology	Hines ch. 6; Frazier #22 & #23
Oct. 1	Lunar Effects, Biorhythms	Hines ch. 6; Frazier #24 & 25
3	Lunar Effects, Biorhythms	Hines ch. 6; Frazier #24 & 25
5	Numerology <i>(Discuss Article #3)</i>	
8	Exam III	Hines ch. 6; Frazier #22-#25 Article #3
10	Psychoanalysis	Hines ch. 5
12	Psychoanalysis	Hines ch. 5
15	Psychoanalysis	Hines ch. 5
17	“The Search for Satan”	Movie
19	“The Search for Satan” <i>(Discuss Article #4)</i>	Movie

	22	Exam IV	Hines ch. 5 Article #4
	24	Alternative Medicine	Hines ch. 11
	26	Alternative Medicine	Hines ch. 11
	29	Alternative Medicine	Hines ch. 11
	31	Facilitated Communication	
Nov.	2	Facilitated Communication <i>(Discuss Article #5)</i>	
	5	Exam V	Hines ch. 11 Article #5
	7	Aliens	Hines ch. 7-8 Frazier #26-#29
	9	Peter Jennings: UFO Abductions	Movie
	12	Veteran's Day	NO CLASS
	14	Peter Jennings: UFO Abductions	Movie
	16	Peter Jennings: UFO Abductions	Movie
	19-23	Thanksgiving Break	NO CLASS
	26	Aliens <i>(Discuss Article #6)</i>	Hines ch. 7-8 Frazier #28-#29
	28	Exam VI	Hines ch. 7-8 Frazier #26-#29 Article #6
	30	Monsters	Hines pp. 413-418; Frazier #38
Dec.	3	Monsters	Hines pp. 413-418; Frazier #38
	5	Monsters	Hines pp. 413-418; Frazier #38
	7	Shroud of Turin <i>(Discuss Article #7)</i>	Frazier #36
Dec.	11	Exam VII (3:10-5:10 p.m.; in our regular classroom)	Hines pp. 413-418 Frazier #36 & #38 Article #7