

First Year Seminar

A State of Denial: Recognizing, Understanding and Responding to Science Denial

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Class meetings: Monday/Thursday 3:00-4:15

Office Hours: Thursday 9-11 and by appointment as needed
Norman M. Eberly Multilingual Writing Center
Writing Program Admin Office, Waidner-Spahr Library (first floor)

Course Description

First-Year Seminar, the first tier of the Dickinson Writing Program, is designed to help students make the transition to college-level academic culture. The First-Year Seminar teaches students the habits of mind that will enable them to enter a community of inquiry. The seminar emphasizes the critical analysis, writing and information literacy skills that are essential to learning in a liberal arts curriculum.

Throughout the seminar we will be critically examining the phenomenon of *denialism*, which can be described as persistent denial of the validity of scientific or empirical claims on the basis of ideological or financial interests and in contradiction to the expert scientific consensus. Although the origins of contemporary denialism can be traced to efforts from the 1950's by large tobacco companies to obscure the health effects of smoking, science denialism has since come to take a major role in political debates over climate change, as well as the public health response to vaccine efficacy and safety. In this seminar, we will examine some of the reasons why these kinds of post-truth arguments have come to dominate the public discourse: the rise of political polarization, a changing media landscape, cognitive biases in human psychology, and the very nature of scientific inquiry itself. We will also learn and practice strategies for recognizing the characteristics of denialist arguments while also building skills to engage in effective dialogue with individuals across different "epistemic niches" (Ben-Perath, 2023), to promote clearer scientific understanding in both public and personal spheres.

Course Objectives

As a First-Year Seminar (FYS), this class introduces you to Dickinson College as a "community of inquiry" by developing habits of mind essential to learning and study in the liberal arts. Through the critical examination of public discourse on scientific information and misinformation, along with reflection on our own habits of listening to those with whom we disagree, students will learn how to:

- critically analyze information and ideas in the texts we discuss;
- examine issues from multiple perspectives;
- discuss, debate, and defend ideas, including your own views, with clarity and reason;
- learn to find, evaluate, and correctly incorporate outside sources so as to avoid plagiarism;
- create clear academic writing.

Required Materials

Writing Analytically, 8th edition by D. Rossenwasser & J. Stephens. Cengage.
Cranky Uncle vs Climate Change, by J. Cook, Citadel Press.
The Madhouse Effect, by M. Mann and T. Toles. Columbia University Press.

Texts (physical copies or e-books) can be purchased through the Dickinson bookstore or online.

Additional required readings throughout the semester will be posted on the course Moodle site.

Course Requirements

Class Attendance/Preparation (15% of the final course grade)

Attendance in the course is required. Students who miss class consistently will not be able to complete many of the course requirements such as mini-presentations and peer reviews. Students who miss more than three class meetings must make an appointment to meet with me to create a plan for improving their attendance and making up missed work.

You must complete *all* readings and task in advance of the class in which they will be discussed. Please refer to the course schedule (to be provided on Moodle) to know what you need to prepare. Additional tasks may be assigned as we proceed through the course and the schedule will likely be updated periodically to best accommodate our learning.

Courageous Contribution (5% of final course grade)

Given the nature of the course material, in which you are being asked to engage in deep and ongoing reflection about difficult political and social issues, it is important that everyone in the class shares perspectives honestly and openly, even if expressing these perspectives is difficult or the perspectives are contrary to what other students or the instructor has expressed. These “courageous contributions” to our class conversation may occur inside or outside class (for example, sharing something courageously during office hours, by email, or in an assignment). Students should strive to identify and share at least two “courageous contributions” during the course, although it is my expectation that such contributions will be common.

Entrance Tickets (20% of the final course grade)

An important part of preparation for this course will be completing low-stakes entrance tickets prior to class. These are short writing assignments that generally do not require extensive revision and are meant to help students digest readings, prepare for class discussions, or do pre-writing work for graded assignments. Although not assigned a letter or numerical grade, entrance tickets will be evaluated on the basis of whether the entrance ticket addresses the question or task posed in the prompt in a way that “exceeds expectations”, “meets expectations”, or “does not meet expectations”. As entrance tickets are generally “first thoughts” and do not go through extensive revision, they will *not* be evaluated on the basis of grammatical correctness or development of an argument, although the ideas presented in these assignments do need to be clear to the reader.

There will be a total of twenty entrance ticket assignments over the course. The grade for entrance tickets is derived from the number of assignments completed that exceed or meet expectations.

18-20 entrance tickets meet or exceed expectations: 20 points

11-17 entrance tickets meet or exceed expectations: 10 points

10 or fewer entrance tickets meet or exceed expectations: 0 points

Extra credit up to 5% of the course grade will be earned for every 3 “exceeds expectations” tickets.

Graded Writing (60% of final course grade)

You will complete four graded written assignments in the course, which comprise the bulk of the total course grade. Each of these papers will be the product of a writing process that includes reading, reflection, drafting, peer review, feedback, revision, and editing. A fundamental goal for the course is to help you come to see writing as a recursive, rather than linear process.

For each paper, you will need to write a thoughtful first version and then revise after receiving peer and instructor feedback. Final drafts must be submitted on Moodle with a cover page (available for each assignment on Moodle). Papers need to be Microsoft Word documents, double-spaced, 12 pt font, and fully cited in APA style.

Graded written projects will include the following:

- *Reaction Paper: Ben-Perath (10% of final course grade)*
- *Sources in Conversation: Mann, Cook, Milloy (10% of final course grade)*
- *I-search Paper: Deep Dive into Denialism (20% of final course grade)*
- *Final Project: "Cranky Uncle vs..." (20% of final course grade)*

Further details for each assignment, along with a grading rubric for each paper will be provided on Moodle throughout the semester.

Grading Policy

Grading in this course will be criterion-based and mastery-oriented, rather than being based on ranking along an expected distribution. The focus of the course will remain squarely on the achievement and development of each student on their own learning trajectories, with the grade not intended to reflect rank-ordering of students.

That said, successful completion of the course will depend on consistent and wholehearted engagement with the course material. Assignments not turned in receive 0 points. Any assignments not turned in by the assigned due date will be considered "late." Late assignments will be accepted or given credit at the discretion of the instructor, with the primary consideration being whether the assignment was completed in a timely manner to contribute to student learning.

Grading Scale:

A	93.5	C	73.5
A-	90	C-	70
B+	86.5	D+	66.5
B	83.5	D	63.5
B-	80	D-	60
C+	76.5	F	59 and below

Academic Integrity

All first-year students and other students new to Dickinson College are required to complete our Academic Integrity tutorial by Monday, September 11 no later than 8 AM. The entire process takes most students less than an hour to complete. Students who do not complete this instruction by the deadline will have a hold placed on their accounts that prevents them from requesting courses during the

next registration period. Please direct questions about the Academic Integrity tutorial to the library's "Ask a Librarian" service at ask@dickinson.libanswers.com.

Please note that plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct at Dickinson. As it states on the Academic Misconduct webpage, "Plagiarism may take a number of forms but to plagiarize is to use without proper citation or acknowledgment the words, ideas, or work of another." This class is a safe place to learn how not to plagiarize. We will practice skills of summarizing, paraphrasing, and documenting sources through academic citation. If you are confused about the complex (and in some cases, culturally-specific) rules on citation, documenting sources, and academic honesty, please ask. Enrollment at Dickinson represents a commitment to abide by the College's principles of academic integrity. Please read Dickinson's plagiarism and academic integrity policy, available at: http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20273/dean_of_students/867/community_standards/2

Unauthorized use of AI tools such as ChatGPT on any assigned writing for the course will constitute academic misconduct.

Support for your learning

My Office Hours

I believe much learning about reading, writing, and critical thinking takes place during one-on-one and small group conversations, so I welcome students motivated to improve their reading and writing skills to make use of my office hours outside of class. If you need to meet with me outside of my regular office hours or our regularly scheduled meeting, feel free to email me to set up a time that works for both of us. Please note that I will generally respond to email within 12-24 hours.

The Norman M. Eberly Multilingual Writing Center (MWC)

The MWC consists of both English and foreign language writing tutoring services. The English writing tutors work with native and nonnative speakers of English, and the foreign language writing tutors work with students writing in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. Writers of all levels and abilities need feedback in order to develop their ideas and grow as writers. Dickinson's trained peer writing tutors can help you generate ideas, begin drafting, revise a rough draft, figure out your professor's preferred documentation style, understand and respond to professor feedback, and edit your writing, among other things.

To schedule an appointment for an online or face-to-face appointment, use Writing Center scheduler at <https://dickinson.mywconline.com/>.

Reference Librarian

The library employs several reference librarians, trained professionals who help library users find information. You can work with a reference librarian to help you find sources related to research you will do in this course. They can help you locate sources, choose the most relevant databases, refine your research strategies, critically evaluate information, and cite sources properly. The liaison librarian for this course is Jess Howard and he can be reached at howardj@dickinson.edu.

Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded equitable access to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you may have) a learning difference or a disability – including a mental health, medical, or physical impairment – that would hinder your access to learning or demonstrating knowledge in this class, please contact Access and Disability Services (ADS). They will confidentially explain the accommodation request process and the type of documentation that Dean and Director Marni Jones will need to determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more about available supports, go to www.dickinson.edu/ADS, email access@dickinson.edu, call (717) 245-1734, or go to the ADS office in Room 005 of Old West, Lower Level (aka "the OWLL").

If you've already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please follow the guidance at www.dickinson.edu/AccessPlan for disclosing the accommodations for which you are eligible and scheduling a meeting with me as soon as possible so that we can discuss your accommodations and finalize your Access Plan.

Other course policies

Use of electronic devices during class meeting time is limited to class-related activities or work. Generally speaking, students should not be using electronic devices during class unless it is directly related to or required for the specific activities we are completing. General laptop use for note-taking is by permission only.