First-Year Seminar – Section 21

Calling Bullshit: Fighting for Facts in a Post-Truth World

Fall 2023

Instructor: Jacqueline M. Campbell, Ph.D.

Instructor Email: campbeja@dickinson.edu

Office Location: QR Center, Waidner-Spahr Library

Office Phone: (717)-254-8103

Course Time/Location: MF 11:30-12:45 pm in East Asian Studies Room (Library)

Office Hours:

All office hours are Eastern Standard Time (EST) and will be held in-person. Students may request additional hours and/or virtual meetings by appointment.

Mondays 3:00-4:15 pm; **Thursdays** 8:45 am-10:00 am

COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES

The First-Year Seminar (FYS) introduces students to Dickinson as a "community of inquiry" by developing habits of mind essential to liberal learning. Students will:

- critically analyze information and ideas
- examine issues from multiple perspectives
- discuss, debate and defend ideas, including one's own views, with clarity, open-mindedness, and reason
- develop discernment, facility and ethical responsibility in using information, and
- create clear academic writing

In this particular seminar, we will meet the objectives above by thinking about misinformation and methods of deception.

We live in a post-truth world in which the line between truth and falsehood is increasingly blurred. This may be because there are more insidious methods of deception that mix truth with sloppy reasoning. In this seminar, we'll discuss the differences between "bullshit," misinformation, disinformation, and fake news and learn strategies to detect and defuse unreliable information. We will explore common and often subtle ways in which information is presented by those who wish to influence our thinking and behavior. The information skills fostered in this seminar – detecting, defusing, and refuting bullshit – will be further developed through knowledge of statistical traps, misleading data visualizations, and the role of the internet and social media. After learning how to detect unreliable information, understanding its growth and development, and developing strategies to refute it, students will be asked to apply their skills to study both sides of a topic of interest.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Required Texts

- Harford, Tim. 2021. *The data detective: ten easy rules to make sense of statistics*. New York: Riverhead Books. (ISBN-13: 978-0593084595) (Hardcover)
- Rosenwasser, D. and Stephen, J. 2019. *Writing analytically*. 8th edition. Boston: Cengage. (ISBN-13: 978-1337559461) (Paperback)

Moodle (via Gateway)

Most materials for this course – syllabus, course schedule, any additional readings – will be available via *Moodle*. You should check *Moodle* regularly as I will post any additional readings or resources here.

Readings/Preparation:

You should complete all readings before coming to the class in which they will be discussed. You will want to reference the course schedule to know what is expected of you for each class.

Course Assignments:

There are three types of assignments in this course. All assignments will help you refine and hone your skills as a researcher and writer:

1. **Bullshit Journal (20%)**

   The Bullshit Journal is a low-stakes way for you to practice your writing skills and reflect on your critical reading skills. For most class sessions, you will be asked to complete a set of readings before class and respond to a journal prompt on Moodle. These prompts are intended to prepare you for the in-class discussion that day, while allowing you to practice writing. All journals will be due by 8:00 am on the day of class and prompts will be posted on Moodle.

   How to get full credit on your journal entries: Before the due date, submit your response to the journal prompt on Moodle. Your responses will only be seen by the instructor. Typically, the expected length of your response is one well-developed paragraph (approximately 4-6 sentences), although there may be prompts where you are asked to write more or less. There are a total of 22 journal entries in this course and you must submit acceptable level quality responses for 19 of the entries. If you do this, you will receive full credit (20% of your grade) for this part of the course. If you have fewer than 19 acceptable entries, then your grade will be calculated by taking the number of acceptable entries out of 19 (e.g., 17/19 = 89.5%).

   In order for your entry to be acceptable, you must: (1) post a thoughtful entry by the deadline on Moodle and (2) you must respond to my comment within **one week** <u>only if I ask you to</u> (e.g., I will say "please respond"). If your initial entry is acceptable, it is unlikely that I will ask you to respond. However, if I think you need to improve your entry in any way, then I am likely to ask you to respond to my comment(s). Your response must be thoughtful and address the point(s) raised in my comment in order to receive full credit. Once you respond, I will not respond again.

There are no exceptions for missed entries. If you are sick, need to travel, simply forgot about the deadline, or have an emergency, then this will count as one of the three "free days" that are built into the grading system. You can miss three entries and still be eligible for full credit on the journals. You are still expected to do the readings and attend class, even if you miss an entry.

2. **Essays (70%)**

There are four essays in this course, which will account for the majority of your grade in this course. Because this course is focused on writing, it is important that you practice formal writing in each essay assignment. Each essay will vary in its scope, topic, and length, but all are focused on helping you critically analyze ideas and organize your thoughts. The grading rubric for each essay will be discussed as a class when the essays are assigned.

For each paper (other than the essay 3 annotated bibliography), you will draft the paper, give and receive feedback, revise, and edit. As you develop more sophisticated writing behaviors, you will come to see that this process is recursive, not linear. For each paper, you will write a thoughtful first version and then revise after receiving peer review feedback on the draft. All papers (drafts and final versions) must be word-processed and follow standard formatting: double-spaced; 12-point font; top right hand corner numbering; and title, name, and date on first page. Throughout the paper, the citations and documentation style should be consistent according to APA style.

You must submit papers by the due date listed on the course schedule. Papers that are one day late will receive a 10-point penalty. Extensions beyond one day need to be discussed with the instructor. If a medical or personal crisis makes it difficult for you to complete an assignment, let me know immediately, and preferably before the due date.

The four essays in this course will be due on the following days:

Essay 1 - Friday, September 22nd

Essay 2 - Friday, October 6th

Essay 3 – Wednesday, November 1st

Essay 4 – Friday, December 1st

3. **Lightning Talks (10%)**

Between essays 3 and 4, all students will be asked to give a brief talk on their final project. The purpose of this is to find any "holes" in your arguments and allow your classmates and instructor to give you feedback. More information on the structure of these talks and how you will be graded will be provided later in the semester. These talks will take place on **November 6th, 10th, and 13th**.

Dialogue Across Differences:

Dickinson College recently launched the *Dialogue Across Differences* project, which is supported by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation. The purpose of the grant is to introduce students to new ideas without feeling threatened and teach them how to dialogue about difficult or complex topics. Throughout this course, we will learn about and practice how to have productive dialogue, ask meaningful questions, and listen carefully to peers.

On the following days in this class, we will discuss these techniques in formal ways, with informal conversations occurring throughout the semester:

- Day 1: Introduction to dialogue and community agreement
- Day 2: Connect before content
- Day 10: Full-spectrum listening
- Day 15: Full-class dialogue about misinformation
- Day 21: Questions of Understanding vs. Persuasion
- Day 26: Full-class dialogue about social media's role in spreading misinformation

COURSE POLICIES

Grading System: Your final course grade will be calculated as follows:

Grading System

Assignment/Task	Percentage
Bullshit Journal	20%
Essay 1	15%
Essay 2	15%
Essay 3	15%
Lightning Talks	10%
Essay 4	25%
Total	100%

The grading scale will be as follows:

Grading Scale

Grade	Percentage
A	92.6-100%
A-	89.6-92.5%
B+	86.6-89.5%
B	82.6-86.5%
B-	79.6-82.5%
C+	76.6-79.5%
C	72.6-76.5%
C-	69.6-72.5%
D+	66.6-69.5%
D	62.6-66.5%
D-	59.6-62.5%
F	59.5% or below

Academic Integrity:

Students have an obligation to integrity in all academic work. Plagiarism is copying the words and/or ideas of another person (published or not) and submitting them as your own. When you plagiarize, you do not comprehend the course material, and you do not learn. If you are accused of plagiarism, there with be an academic conduct hearing, and potential consequences include an F for the assignment, required withdrawal from the course with a penalty grade of F, stayed suspension, suspension from the college, expulsion, or revocation and withholding of diploma. Cheating includes re-purposing a paper that you wrote for another course or turning in one paper for two courses without the permission of both professors. If you are confused about the complicated rules regarding documenting research, please ask me. I can help.

Enrollment at Dickinson represents a commitment to abide by the College's principles of academic integrity. More information about Dickinson College's views on academic misconduct can be found in the community standards at:
https://www.dickinson.edu/download/downloads/id/11821/community_standards.pdf

All incoming Dickinson students are required to complete the **Academic Integrity Tutorial** on Moodle by **8 am on Monday, September 11ᵗʰ.** This tutorial is not posted on our course Moodle – it can be accessed in the orientation materials you were given. Many of you may have completed this over the summer. As per college policy, students who do not complete this tutorial will not be able to request spring classes during the registration period in October. All questions must be completed to get credit for the tutorial. Students receive credit only after completing the entire tutorial, answering all questions, and clicking the "Finish attempt" button, followed by "Submit all and finish". *The "Submit all and Finish" button must be clicked at the end of the tutorial in order for students to receive credit for completing the tutorial.*

If you do not complete the academic integrity tutorial by the deadline, 1% will be deducted from your final grade in this course.

Use of Large Language Models:

Your use of Large Language Models (such as ChatGPT, Bing, Bard, Claude, Sage, Dragonfly, Neeva, etc.) is prohibited in researching and writing your essays and responding to journal prompts in this course. Because the goals of this course are focused on learning to analyze information and write (using the library and other sources), you would undermine your learning by using LLM tools. If you need assistance with any aspect of researching or writing any of the assignments in this course, please meet with me, our Writing Associate, our librarian, or the writing center.

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 condition– 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 Executive 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. If you will be using any test-taking accommodations in this class, be sure to enter all test dates into your Access Plan in advance of our meeting. ADS will be happy to provide any assistance you may need.

Physical Access to our Classroom

This class meets on the second floor of the Waidner-Spahr Library, which has an elevator located on the western half (less quiet side) of the library. You can find it on the library's main level near the High Street entrance. If you require the use of an elevator to access the second floor, please let me know, and be sure that ADS (access@dickinson.edu) knows as well. If there is ever a malfunction with the elevator, we will be notified by email and I will consult with ADS to identify our options for that day.

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STUDENT SUPPORT

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Writing Associate:

Your Writing Associate will be Amanda Tran (tranam@dickinson.edu). Amanda will support you as you make your transition to college writing. She will facilitate peer review, offer feedback to you on drafts, and attend some classes to assist with writing instruction. She will report to me about your progress and let me know if you attended peer review sessions, if you brought a complete rough draft, and if you participated in the sessions you attended. Amanda is here to help you develop the

good writing habits of effective writers, which will then serve as a strong foundation for your entire academic experience.

The Writing Center:

Writers of all levels and abilities need feedback in order to develop their ideas and grow as writers. As mentioned above, in our course, we have a dedicated Writing Associate who is able to provide this kind of feedback. However, for other courses, or if you would like additional help in this course, Dickinson's trained 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, edit your writing – among other things. You can walk in or [make an appointment online](#). For more information about hours and procedures, please [visit the webpage for writing tutoring](#).

Reference Librarians:

The library employs several reference librarians, trained professionals who help library users find information. Whether it be for this course or any other over the next four years, you need never become frustrated by your research. Instead, you can ask a reference librarian to help you find sources related to your topic. They can help you find information (books, articles and more), choose the most relevant databases, improve your research strategy, critically evaluate information, and cite sources properly. Kendall Thompson (thompken@dickinson.edu) is the liaison librarian for our course, and there are reference librarians who can work with every major in the college. If you start at the Writing Center in the library, their offices are on the parallel wall. To find out who the reference librarian on duty is, please ask at the circulation desk at the main entrance or go to https://dickinson.libanswers.com/.

SOAR: Academic Success Support and More

Students can find a wealth of strategic academic success tools (like weekly planners, semester calendars, and much more) by going online to www.dickinson.edu/SOAR or to Old West's Lower Level (aka "the OWLL"). SOAR stands for **S**trategies, **O**rganization, & **A**chievement **R**esources, and there you'll find apps, tips, and other resources related to organization, study skills, memory strategies, note-taking, test-taking, and more. You'll find strategies for managing your time and well-being, as well as information about academic success workshops offered throughout the semester. If you'd like to attend a workshop or request one-on-one assistance with developing a strategy for a manageable and academically successful semester, email SOAR@dickinson.edu.

Course Schedule – Fall 2023

Reading from Writing Analytically = Red Text
Reading from Data Detective = Blue Text
Reading on Moodle = Purple Text

Week	Date	Topic	Reading(s)	Assignment(s)
1	Thurs. 8/24	Introductions	--	--
	Sat. 8/26	Reading & Writing in College	*Writing Analytically* pgs. 1-16	Bullshit Journal #1
2	Mon. 8/28	Introduction to Bullshit	*On Bullshit* by Harry Frankfurt (on Moodle) *Calling Bullshit*, Chapter 3 (on Moodle)	Bullshit Journal #2
	Fri. 9/1	What is Post-Truth?	*Writing Analytically* Move 3 pgs. 21-25 *Post-Truth* Chapter 1 (on Moodle)	Bullshit Journal #3
3	Mon. 9/4	Logical Fallacies	*Writing Analytically* pgs. 93-97	Bullshit Journal #4
	Fri. 9/8	Applying Logical Fallacies	*Deadly Immunity* by Robert Kennedy (on Moodle) *Writing Analytically* pgs. 38-68	Bullshit Journal #5
4	Mon. 9/11*	Cognitive Biases	*Post-Truth* Chapter 3 (on Moodle)	Bullshit Journal #6 Academic Integrity Module Complete
	Fri. 9/15	Applying Cognitive Biases	Lessons 1, 2, & 3 from Library (on Moodle) Re-read *Deadly Immunity* by Robert Kennedy (on Moodle)	Bullshit Journal #7

5	Mon. 9/18	Search your Feelings	*Data Detective* Chapter 1 *Writing Analytically* Moves 1 & 2 pgs. 16-21	Bullshit Journal #8 Draft of Essay 1 Due
		Throughout the week, all student meet one-on-one with the Writing Associate		
	Fri. 9/22	Ponder your Personal Experience	*Data Detective* Chapter 2 *Writing Analytically* pgs. 45-47	Bullshit Journal #9 **Essay 1 Due!**
6	Mon. 9/25*	Thesis Statements + Compare & Contrast	*Writing Analytically* pgs. 109-111 & 178-188	Bullshit Journal #10
	Fri. 9/29	Avoid Premature Enumeration	*Data Detective* Chapter 3 *Writing Analytically* Move 4 pgs. 25-32	Bullshit Journal #11
7	Mon. 10/2	Step Back & Enjoy the View	*Data Detective* Chapter 4 *Writing Analytically* pgs. 162-169	Bullshit Journal #12 Draft of Essay 2 Due
		Throughout the week, all student meet one-on-one with the Writing Associate		
	Fri. 10/6	Get the Backstory	*Data Detective* Chapter 5 *Post-Truth* Chapter 2 (on Moodle)	Bullshit Journal #13 **Essay 2 Due!**
8	Mon. 10/9	Misinformation	--	--
	Fri. 10/13*	Distinguishing between Sources & Searching Databases	Library Tutorials (on Moodle)	Bullshit Journal #14 Initial Topics Due
9	Mon. 10/16	NO CLASS – FALL PAUSE		
	Fri. 10/20	Ask who is Missing	*Data Detective* Chapter 6 *Writing Analytically* Move 5 pgs. 32-36	Bullshit Journal #15 Final Topic Deadline

10	Mon. 10/23	SIFT Method	Read & watch SIFT method materials (on Moodle)	Bullshit Journal #16
	Fri. 10/27	Writing Research Questions & Revising your Working Thesis	*Writing Analytically* pgs. 151-153 & 222-225	Bullshit Journal #17
11	Mon. 10/30	Citing Sources	*Writing Analytically* pgs. 242-263	Bullshit Journal #18
		**Essay 3 Due Wednesday, November 1ˢᵗ at 8:00 am**		
	Fri. 11/3	Questions of Understanding vs. Persuasion	--	--
12	Mon. 11/6	Lightning Talks	--	Lightning Talks
	Fri. 11/10	Lightning Talks	--	Lightning Talks
13	Mon. 11/13	Lightning Talks	--	Lightning Talks
	Fri. 11/17*	Media & Trust	*Post-Truth* Chapter 4 (on Moodle)	Bullshit Journal #19
14	Mon. 11/20	Social Media Influence	*Post-Truth* Chapter 5 (on Moodle)	Bullshit Journal #20 Full Draft of Final Paper Due
	Fri. 11/24	NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING		
15	Mon. 11/27	Peer Review Final Paper	--	Bullshit Journal #21
		Throughout the week, all student meet one-on-one with the Writing Associate		
	Fri. 12/1	Golden Rule & Questions of Curiosity	*Data Detective* Golden Rule pgs. 265-279	Bullshit Journal #22 **Final Paper Due!**

*Meet in Weiss 235