English- 1138 Prof. Frank Donoghue

W- 1:00-1:55 DE 556

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Office Hours: Friday 12:40-2 or by

appointment

**Course Goal**

The goal of this course is to encourage the formation of college-level critical thinking skills through the critical analysis of commonly held conspiracy theories. These conspiracy theories invite this type of analysis and are incredibly fascinating as well: what actually happened on 9/11? Does Bigfoot exist? Who really assassinated Robert Kennedy? These questions have generated a tremendous amount of popular debate, but they’re rarely analyzed critically. This course will consist of a series of exercises in assessing the reliability of different sources of evidence and in making persuasive arguments about hotly contested subjects.

**Content Analysis**

We’ll begin analysis of each conspiracy with the official or accepted story. Then, through articles, documentaries, book excerpts, and other pieces of evidence, students will be presented with information that challenges this story. Each of the three segments of the course will end with student-centered, small group discussions in which each member of the class will come to a reasoned conclusion as to what they think the truth is.

**Readings and Course Schedule**

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| 08/24 | Introduction |
| 08/31 | 9/11: The Official Story  -9/11 Commission Report Executive Summary (http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report\_Exec.htm) |
| 09/07 | How to Analyze a Conspiracy Theory  - Marshall Brain “How Conspiracy Theories Work” (http://people.howstuffworks.com/conspiracy-theory.htm/printable) |
| 09/14 | In Class Discussion of *Loose Change*  -*Loose Change* |
| 09/21 | Continued In Class Discussion of *Loose Change* |
| 09/28 | Small Group Discussion of 9/11 Conspiracy Theories |
| 10/05 | Bigfoot, the Commonly Accepted Story  -Erin Wayman,“Did Bigfoot Really Exist? How Gigantopithecus Became Extinct” (http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/did-bigfoot-really-exist-how-gigantopithecus-became-extinct-16649201/?no-ist) |
| 10/12 | Is Gigantopithecus Really Extinct? Could Gigantopithecus Be Living in the Pacific Northwest?  -Jeff Meldrum, “Giant Ape of the Orient: Gigantopithecus” |
| 10/19 | Video Evidence- Giganto or Man in a Monkey Suit?  -The Patterson-Gimlin Film, the Freeman video, and the Memorial Day video (viewed in class) |
| 10/26 | Small Group Discussion of Bigfoot Theories |
| 11/02 | The Assassination of Robert Kennedy, the Official Story  -Robert Kennedy Assassination FBI Report (<https://vault.fbi.gov/Robert%20F%20Kennedy%20(Assassination)%20)> |
| 11/09 | In Class Discussion of *RFK Must Die*  -*RFK Must Die* |
| 11/16 | Thane Eugene Caesar, Anti-Castro Enemies of the Kennedys, and Other Suspects  -Audio recording of RFK assassination (to be played in class)  (Note: This recording is somewhat disturbing in nature. Students who are bothered by it may leave the room while the recording is played.) |
| 11/23 | **Thanksgiving Break, No Class** |
| 11/30 | Sirhan Sirhan: Manchurian Candidate?  -National Geographic, “A Real Life Manchurian Candidate” (http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/videos/a-real-life-manchurian-candidate/) |
| 12/07 | Small Group Discussion, Final Paper Review |

**Assignment**

This course only has one assignment, a three page essay due Tuesday, December 13th. For this paper, the students will each choose one of the three conspiracy theories presented in the class and write a persuasive essay presenting their version of the truth. This essay may be turned in at any point during the semester. As such, it is strongly recommended that students who choose one of the first two theories write their essays while the group discussions of those topics are still fresh in their minds. However, essays may be turned in at any time up until the official due date.

**Class Participation**

Though class participation is not graded in a traditional fashion in this course, the purpose of taking the Freshman Seminar is to engage in substantive participation and discussion, both with the professor and with your fellow students. The subjects covered in this course invite this type of discourse, so I am confident you will have a lot to talk about. Students who struggle speaking out in class should try to be more active in the small group discussions at the end of each section to get the most out of this course.

**Electronic Devices**

Ordinarily, I do not permit the use of electronic devices in my classroom. However, because this is a more relaxed sort of course and the topics we will discuss invite further research, I am bending my rule for this course. Students caught using their devices in a manner that is not related to the class discussion (social media, texting, playing games, etc.) will not be permitted to use their devices in subsequent classes.

**Attendance Policy**

Students are expected to come to class prepared, having read or viewed the assigned content for that day. As noted above, you are not required to speak in class, however, as the purpose of the course is to give students the chance to practice interacting with a professor and their classmates, speaking in class is strongly recommended. Attending every class is also strongly recommended, as each class in a segment builds upon previous classes and allows you to participate fully in discussion at the end of each segment.

**Class Cancellation Policy**

Though it is unlikely to be a factor in an Autumn semester class, if bad weather is expected, pay close attention to whether Columbus Public Schools are cancelled. If they are cancelled, then we will not have class that day. In the unlikely event of a class cancellation, because of weather or some other unexpected event, I will email the class as soon as possible to inform you of what will be expected for our next class meeting.

**Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct**

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term ‘academic misconduct’ includes all forms of student academic misconduct

wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest

practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged

academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information,

see the Code of Student Conduct. Note that plagiarism via the internet is not only dishonest, it's

also liable to be caught. Paper assignments, if they are clear and course-specific, do not match

well with what is available on the net, and search engines on the net make detection of

plagiarism as easy as plagiarism itself.

**Disability**

Here’s the boilerplate language: "Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; OSU Office for disability Services Web Site." It’s much more complicated than that, since disability is more complicated that the official statement. You might not even be able to define your disability, but you should certainly feel comfortable talking with me about it. If you’re connected with ODS already, great. They have a terrific staff and I’ve always worked well with them. If not, and if you feel that something other than your intellect and your work ethic is getting in the way of your performance, feel free to stop by my office and talk with me.

**Required Texts**

There will be an assortment of required articles, book chapters, documentaries, sound and video clips. When possible, I will make these available on Carmen or I will tell you where to find them online. There is no traditional required text for this course.