School of Arts & Science
HUMANITIES DEPARTMENT
PHIL 290 - 001
Special Topics in Philosophy:
Conspiracy Theories, "Fake News" and Moral Panic
Fall 2017

COURSE OUTLINE

The course description is online @ http://camosun.ca/learn/calendar/current/web/phil.html

Ω *Please note: the College electronically stores this outline for five (5) years only.*
*It is **strongly recommended** you keep a copy of this outline with your academic records.*
You will need this outline for any future application/s for transfer credit/s to other colleges/universities.

1. Instructor Information

(a)	Instructor:	Megan Shelstad		
(b)	Office Hours:	Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:30 – 3:15 pm		
(c)	Location:	Young 312		
(d)	Phone:	3950	Alternative Phone:	
(e)	Email:	shelstad@camosun.bc.ca		

2. Intended Learning Outcomes
(No changes are to be made to these Intended Learning Outcomes as approved by the Education Council of Camosun College.)
Upon completion of this course the student will be able to:

1. Argue a philosophical position and support it with good reason.
2. Identify major themes and arguments relating to the course topic.
3. Analyse, assess, compare and develop nuanced arguments concerning the issues central to the topic of the course.
4. Demonstrate skills in written and oral communication.

3. Required Materials

(a) **Texts: coursepack available in the bookstore**
(b) **Other material available online**

4. Course Content and Schedule
(This section can include: class hours, lab hours, out of class requirements and/or dates for quizzes, exams, lectures, labs, seminars, practicums, etc.)
Lectures: Tuesdays 3:30 – 5:20 pm (with 10 minute break): <u>EWING 344</u>

Seminar A: Thursdays 3:30 – 4:20 pm <u>YOUNG 325</u>

Seminar B: Thursdays 4:30 – 5:20 pm <u>YOUNG 325</u>

5. Basis of Student Assessment (Weighting)
(This section should be directly linked to the Intended Learning Outcomes.)

(a) **Assignments: 15% - PECHA KUCHA presentation (Tuesday, October 17)**

(b) **Tests/Exams: 15% - Test #1 (Tuesday, October 3)**
15% - Test #2 (Tuesday, November 7)
25% - Final essay exam

(d) **Other: 10% - seminar attendance and participation**

20% - seminar homework (see instructions with course outline)
You need to complete 10 out of a possible 13 (2% each, <u>no make-ups</u>)

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6. Grading System

(No changes are to be made to this section unless the Approved Course Description has been forwarded through the Education Council of Camosun College for approval.)

Standard Grading System (GPA)

Percentage	Grade	Description	Grade Point Equivalency
90-100	A+		9
85-89	A		8
80-84	A-		7
77-79	B+		6
73-76	B		5
70-72	B-		4
65-69	C+		3
60-64	C		2
50-59	D	Minimum level of achievement for which credit is granted; a course with a "D" grade cannot be used as a prerequisite.	1
0-49	F	Minimum level has not been achieved.	0

7. Recommended Materials or Services to Assist Students to Succeed Throughout the Course

LEARNING SUPPORT AND SERVICES FOR STUDENTS

> There are a variety of services available for students to assist them throughout their learning. This information is available in the College calendar, at Student Services, or the College web site at camosun.ca.

STUDENT CONDUCT POLICY

> There is a Student Conduct Policy **which includes plagiarism**.
> It is the student's responsibility to become familiar with the content of this policy.
> The policy is available in each School Administration Office, at Student Services,
> and the College web site in the Policy Section.

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Remember to turn OFF your cell phone for class and put it away. Laptops, ipads, etc.may be used for note taking only. See "Classroom Technology Use."
Camosun.ca/learn/school/business/current-students/documents/ClassroomTechnologyUse.pdf

Missing classes: if you miss a class due to illness or some other reason, it is not necessary to notify me <u>unless</u> a test (not a quiz) is missed. It is the student's responsibility to find out from another student what was covered. Check your reading schedule.

Policy on missed tests (not quizzes): make-up tests will be permitted <u>only</u> in cases of illness or personal crisis. Documentation is required.

Disruptive behaviour, such as carrying on conversations when the instructor or others are speaking, is a sign of disrespect and is not acceptable in class.

Phil 290 Reading Schedule and Seminar Homework (from coursepack and online)

Readings should be done <u>BEFORE</u> class (schedule subject to change if needed).
Seminar homework is due Thursdays at the <u>beginning</u> of class.
<u>Two</u> short tests (1 hour) will be Tuesdays (Oct. 3 and Nov. 7).

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<u>Week 1</u> (Sept. 5, 7): <u>Tuesday</u>: Lecture: Intro., "pizzagate"

      <u>Thursday</u>: *Seminar: Argument analysis: Levitin, "Thinking, Critically"*
USE TEMPLATE INCLUDED WITH THE COURSE OUTLINE
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<u>Week 2</u> (Sept. 12, 14): <u>Tuesday</u>: Whyte, "The Right to Your Opinion" <u>AND</u>
                       McRaney, "Confirmation Bias," "Consistency Bias"

      <u>Thursday</u>: *Seminar: Argument analysis: Bethune, "Born to Believe"*
USE TEMPLATE INCLUDED WITH THE COURSE OUTLINE
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<u>Week 3</u> (Sept. 19, 21): <u>Tuesday</u>: Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief"

      <u>Thursday</u>: *Seminar: McRaney, "Argument from Authority," "Embodied Cognition," <u>AND</u>*
                       "The Anchoring Effect"
READ THE 3 SELECTIONS AND COME UP WITH YOUR OWN EXAMPLES
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<u>Week 4</u> (Sept. 26, 28): <u>Tuesday</u>: Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief" <u>AND</u>
                       James, "The Will to Believe"

      <u>Thursday</u>: *Seminar: "Eric Hoffer's True Believer checklist," http://spiderjohnson.com AND*
          "What Eric Hoffer tells us about "true believers." http://dangerousintersection.org
READ THE SELECTIONS; SEE HOW HOFFER'S ANALYSIS CAN BE APPLIED TO THE PRESENT (IF IT CAN)
MAKE YOUR OWN ARGUMENT FOR OR AGAINST
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<u>Week 5</u> (Oct. 3, 5): <u>Tuesday</u>: 1st hour: ****<u>TEST #1</u>****, 2nd hour: Analysis of Knowledge

      <u>Thursday</u>: *Seminar: Argument analysis: "In America, the less you know, the cooler you are,"*
Lawrence Martin, June 28, 2017, theglobeandmail.com <u>AND</u> "Why Americans have come to
worship their own ignorance," Brian Bethune, March 20, 2017, macleans.ca
USE TEMPLATE INCLUDED WITH THE COURSE OUTLINE
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<u>Week 6</u> (Oct. 10, 12): <u>Tuesday</u>: Plato, "The Republic," "Theaetetus"

      <u>Thursday</u>: *Seminar: <u>Group project work period</u>: Sign up for 1 of the conspiracy theories that*
Olmsted speaks about in "Conclusion" from "U.S. conspiracy theories 1970's to 9/11)" and
find out about it. This is in preparation for your PECHA KUCHA presentation next week.

Week 7 (Oct. 17, 19): Tuesday: ***PECHA KUCHA*** AND Levitin, "Counterknowledge"

      Thursday: *Seminar: Argument analysis: Harari, "People Have Limited Knowledge. What's the Remedy? Nobody Knows,"* https://www.nytimes.com
USE TEMPLATE INCLUDED WITH THE COURSE OUTLINE
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Week 8 (Oct. 24, 26): Tuesday: Harry Frankfurt, "On Bullshit," www.stoa.org.uk AND
                         "Donald Trump is BS, Says Expert in BS" http://time.com

      Thursday: *Seminar: Argument analysis: Kakutani, "Why '1984' is a 2017 Must-Read"*
                    https://www.nytimes.com
USE TEMPLATE INCLUDED WITH THE COURSE OUTLINE
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Week 9 (Oct. 31, Nov. 2): Tuesday: Huxley, "Propaganda Under a Dictatorship" AND "Propaganda in a
                        Democratic Society"   https://www.huxley.net

      Thursday: *Seminar: Argument analysis: Fernbach and Sloman, "Why We Believe Obvious*
                        Untruths"   https://www.nytimes.com
USE TEMPLATE INCLUDED WITH THE COURSE OUTLINE
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Week 10 (Nov. 7, 9): Tuesday: 1st hour: **TEST #2**, 2nd hour: Lynch, "Why Truth Matters: Intro."

      Thursday: *Seminar: Argument analysis: Southey, "The Problem with Fake News is not Supply,*
                        It's Demand"   https://www.theglobeandmail.com
USE TEMPLATE INCLUDED WITH THE COURSE OUTLINE
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Week 11 (Nov. 14, 16): Tuesday: Russell, "Truth as Correspondence" AND
                Bradley, "Truth as Coherence" AND
                James, "Pragmatism and Truth"

      Thursday: *Seminar: "Facebook launches resource to help spot misleading news"*
                    https://www.apnews.com
IS THIS SUFFICIENT? DOES IT WORK?
MAKE YOUR OWN ARGUMENT FOR OR AGAINST
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Week 12 (Nov. 21, 23): Tuesday: Lewis, "On Moral Panic" http://philosophynow.org/issues/6

      Thursday: *Seminar: Argument analysis: Hedges, "American Psychosis"*
                        http://www.truthdig.com
USE TEMPLATE INCLUDED WITH THE COURSE OUTLINE
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Week 13 (Nov. 28, 30): Tuesday: Levitin, "Identifying Expertise" AND
                Dastagir, "People Trust Science. So Why Don't They Believe It?"
                    http://www.wgrz.com

Thursday: *Seminar: argument analysis: Keith R. Holden, M.D. "Placebo Effect – The Power of*
` *Belief"* https://www.linkedin.com

USE TEMPLATE INCLUDED WITH THE COURSE OUTLINE
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Week 14 (Dec. 5, 7): **Tuesday:** Zerubavel, "A Conspiracy of Silence"

Thursday: *Seminar: Argument analysis: "The Emperor's New Clothes" (Denmark)* <u>*OR*</u>
"The Invisible Cloth" (Spain), both at http://www.pitt.edu
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<u>FINAL TEST</u> (not cumulative) IN EXAM PERIOD

Make work schedules and travel plans accordingly; exams are part of the term.
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<u>BRAINTEASERS</u>

1. A toy puck and a hockey stick cost $1.10 in total. The stick costs $1 more than the puck. How much does the puck cost?

2. If it takes five machines five minutes to make five widgets, how long would it take 100 machines to make 100 widgets?

3. There are three toy blocks stacked up. The top one is green and the bottom one is red. Is there a green block directly on top of a non-green one? a) yes b) no or c) cannot be determined.

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<u>What is PechaKucha 20x20?</u>

PechaKucha 20x20 is a simple presentation format where you show 20 images, each for 20 seconds. The images advance automatically and you talk along to the images.

Check out pechakucha.org

Youtube: "How to make a pecha kucha"

SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS AND HOMEWORK (30%)

In seminar periods we will be analyzing and discussing various current issues in studies of knowledge and belief that are connected in some way to the classical readings as well as more contemporary issues. These sometimes present cases which offer examples of various situations that have happened (or not, as in "thought experiments"). Others present arguments. The authors often offer claims (conclusions) for which they provide reasons (premises) and evidence for why we should be convinced of the likely truth of their claims.

You should employ all the usual rules of grammar, spelling, etc. as well as using an appropriate method of citation for any quotes you may use (approximately 250 words).

The following is a template you can use when analyzing arguments. Occasionally you are required to answer additional questions as well. Check the reading list.

1 mark for attendance/participation
2 marks for written work (satisfactory - 1 or excellent - 2)
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TEMPLATE FOR ARGUMENT ANALYSIS (summary and evaluation)

1. What is the author's main point(s)/thesis? What are they claiming and trying to convince you of? Be specific. Use declarative sentences. Find a quote where the author says this.

2. What main reasons (premises) does the author offer in support of the main point? Are these good reasons? Why? Are these reasons relevant to the author's conclusion? Be specific when answering these questions; find appropriate quotes.

3. What evidence is offered in support of those reasons (premises)? Is the evidence good? Why? Is the evidence relevant to the author's reasons and/or conclusion? Be specific when answering these questions: find appropriate quotes. Most of our seminar selections will be essays so evidence will likely be in the form of examples, cases, illustrations. Don't expect someone to insert statistics or experimental research into an essay although they could refer to it.

4. Your evaluation: Does the author's argument(s) depend on any key beliefs or assumptions? Are these assumptions warranted or unwarranted? Explain. What objections can you think of to the author's claims or arguments? Are they good objections? Are they relevant? Did the author already address them in the article in a convincing way? What part(s) do you agree with, if any? Explain. What else does the article make you think of? At all times use the "PRINCIPLE of CHARITY."