

## ENC 1145: Writing About Paranoia Section 3312 - Spring 2017

Section 3312  
MWF, Period 3  
MAT 0007

**Instructor:** Jason Crider  
**Email:** jason.crider@ufl.edu  
**Office Hours:** MW Period 4  
or by appointment

### Course Description

Alternatively titled “Paranoid Writing” or “Writing About Writing About Paranoia,” this course will focus on the roles that paranoia, propaganda, and pseudoscience have played (and continue to play) throughout American history, as well as methodologies for counteracting them. Paranoia has long been an inseparable part of American identity, especially as it relates to the news and other forms of media, and this is precisely the crossroads this course will intersect.

We will examine historical examples of paranoia: witch hunts, cults and secret societies, and government conspiracies. Our literary examples will come from texts such as Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, Zadie Smith’s “Meet the President,” Shirley Jackson’s “Paranoia,” and Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*. We will also explore contemporary examples such as holocaust denial, modern flat Earth societies, government surveillance, the phenomenon of “fake news,” and climate change denialism. Students will administer skeptical inquiry, rhetorical analysis, and the scientific method in developing a praxis of suspicion that will aid in delineating fact from falsehood.

Drawing from classical rhetoric, critical theory, and contemporary scientific inquiry, we will create our own paranoid writings in the form of skeptical critiques, as well as diagnosing the unfounded skepticism (propaganda, pseudoscience, etc.) of others, in the hopes of finding a balance between “good” and “bad” paranoia. Students will become interdisciplinary makers as they write skeptical inquiries and prolonged argumentative pieces that deal with contemporary paranoid topics, composing in digital modalities. In doing so, students will become more critically engaged with the world around them. Or, as David Foster Wallace writes in *Infinite Jest*: “Yes, I’m paranoid, but am I paranoid enough?”

### General Education Objectives

- This course confers General Education credit for either Composition (C) or Humanities (H). This course also fulfills 6,000 of the university’s 24,000-word writing requirement (WR).
- *Composition courses* provide instruction in the methods and conventions of standard written English (grammar, punctuation, usage), as well as the techniques that produce effective texts. Composition courses are writing

intensive. They require multiple drafts submitted to your instructor for feedback before final submission.

- Course content should include multiple forms of effective writing, different writing styles, approaches and formats, and methods to adapt writing to different audiences, purposes and contexts. Students should learn to organize complex arguments in writing using thesis statements, claims and evidence, and to analyze writing for errors in logic.
- The University *Writing Requirement (WR)* ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. To receive Writing Requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course. This means that written assignments must meet minimum word requirements totaling 6000 words.

### **General Education Learning Outcomes**

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes in content, communication and critical thinking:

- **Content:** Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the academic discipline.
- **Communication:** Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline. Students will participate in class discussions throughout the semester to reflect on assigned readings.
- **Critical Thinking:** Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline-specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems.

### **Required Texts:**

The majority of our course readings will be free via Canvas, but you will still be required to purchase the following:

- Danielewski, Mark Z. *House of Leaves*. New York: Pantheon, 2000. ISBN: 0375703764.
- DeLillo, Don. *White Noise*. Penguin, 2009. ISBN: 0143105981

### **Recommended Texts:**

- Lowe, Charlie and Pavel Zemliansky. *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*. Parlor Press, 2016 (Open-access online: <http://writingspaces.org/>).
- Williams, Joseph M. and Joseph Bizup. *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. Twelfth Edition. Pearson, 2016. ISBN: 0134080416

\*All other assigned readings will be made available via Canvas\*

### **Assignments:**

## **1,000 possible points (see below for assessment rubric)**

### **Visual Rhetoric Analysis – 150 points**

Using what we have learned so far about rhetoric and image culture, you will analyze a visual pop culture text. This could be anything from an advertisement or commercial to a propaganda poster or political photograph. The focus of this assignment is not to explain *what it means*, but rather *how it works*. You will apply the rhetorical skills we have developed so far into breaking down your chosen text and analyzing how it makes its argument. **1,000 words.**

### **Paranoid Research Paper – 250 points**

For this assignment, you will compose a traditional research paper that takes up an issue discussed in our critical texts and demonstrated through our literary texts. Your paper should present an original argument that engages larger critical conversations by citing at least one theoretical works assigned in class and at least three outside scholarly sources found through your own research in its discussion of one or more of our assigned literary works. **2,000 words.**

### **Multimodal Paranoid Argument – 300 points**

As the source of our news and other information is increasingly mediated through the Internet, is becoming increasingly important not only to be paranoid about our facts and their sources, but about their method of delivery as well. As Marshall McLuhan famously stated, “the medium is the message,” or perhaps more aptly, as Neil Postman has argued, the medium is the metaphor. If this is the case, the form our rhetorical delivery takes becomes equal in importance to our argument itself. As such, this assignment will ask you to choose a non-traditional medium (i.e. not an 8.5x11” linear essay) for your argument. The argument could be arranged as a video, Twine composition, augmented reality criticism (ARC), podcast, or other format. In your chosen modality, you will compose a paranoid argument, that is, something that you argue we *should* be paranoid about. This should be a well-researched, well-organized argument that draws from both course materials and outside research. **2,000 words** or equivalent.

### ***House of Leaves* Presentation – 100 points**

Beginning September 22<sup>nd</sup> we will be having a weekly *House of Leaves* discussion. You and two other partners will be responsible for presenting and leading group discussion for one of these six days. Along with an overview of your section, you will be asked to analyze something about the book’s layout/interface, and connect at least one scholarly, outside source to the text. **15 minutes presentation** plus discussion.

### **Discussion Posts – 100 points (10 points each)**

In addition to the writing formal writing assignments, you will also keep a weekly blog about various topics discussed in the course. These will vary from informal reflections on the course, to critical examinations of our readings, to formal pitches for the major assignments. There will be sixteen of these total, due Sunday at midnight after they are assigned.

### Participation – 100 points

You must be an active and engaged part of the course to not only receive participation credit but to ensure that our course will be an academically fruitful experience. This grade will be gauged by not only your attendance, but your contribution to in class group activities and larger discussions. **To guarantee receipt of a full grade, you must contribute within class meaningfully at least once a class period.**

### Grading Scale

A	4.0	930-1000
A-	3.67	900-929
B+	3.33	870-899
B	3.0	830-869
B-	2.67	800-829
C+	2.33	770-799
C	2.0	730-769
C-	1.67	700-729
D+	1.33	670-699
D	1.0	630-669
D-	0.67	600-629
E	0.00	0-599

### Assessment Rubric

	SATISFACTORY (Y)	UNSATISFACTORY (N)
<b>Content</b>	Papers exhibit evidence of ideas that respond to the topic with complexity, critically evaluating and synthesizing sources, and provide an adequate discussion with basic understanding of sources.	Papers either include a central idea(s) that is unclear or off- topic or provide only minimal or inadequate discussion of ideas. Papers may also lack sufficient or appropriate sources.
<b>Organization and Coherence</b>	Documents and paragraphs exhibit identifiable structure for topics, including a clear thesis statement and topic sentences.	Documents and paragraphs lack clearly identifiable organization, may lack any coherent sense of logic in associating and organizing ideas, and may also lack transitions and coherence to guide the reader.
<b>Argument and Support</b>	Documents use persuasive and confident presentation of ideas, strongly supported with evidence. At the weak end of the satisfactory range, documents may provide only generalized discussion of ideas or may provide adequate discussion but rely on weak support for arguments.	Documents make only weak generalizations, providing little or no support, as in summaries or narratives that fail to provide critical analysis.
<b>Style</b>	Documents use a writing style with	Documents rely on word usage that

	word choice appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline. Sentences should display complexity and logical structure.	is inappropriate for the context, genre, or discipline. Sentences may be overly long or short with awkward construction. Documents may also use words incorrectly.
<b>Mechanics</b>	Papers will feature correct or error-free presentation of ideas. At the weak end of the satisfactory range, papers may contain a few spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors that remain unobtrusive and do not obscure the paper's argument.	Papers contain so many mechanical or grammatical errors that they impede the reader's understanding or severely undermine the writer's credibility.

**Course Policies:**

1. *Assignments:* You must complete all assignments to receive credit for this course.
2. *Attendance:* Attendance is mandatory. Students are allowed three unexcused absences. If you miss more than three classes during the semester, each additional absence will lower your overall grade by 100 points. If you miss more than five classes, you will fail the course. Exempt from this policy are only those absences involving university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, and religious holidays, family emergencies, and health issues for which you must provide appropriate documentation in advance of the absence. In addition, if you are tardy for three class periods, you will receive an unexcused absence.
3. *Email:* Many of you will need to write courteous, formal emails in your place of work, and this classroom is no different. As this is a course focused on rhetoric and communication, students will be expected to be critical and sensitive writers in all their communication, including email. As such, I will only respond to emails that demonstrate a professional tone and style. This means that your emails must display a subject line, greeting, and writing that is edited, clear, and demonstrates that the student has already consulted all necessary documentation (such as the course syllabus) prior to writing. Furthermore, I will only reply to emails during "normal" business hours: M-F, 9-5. I will not discuss the following over email: grade disputes, feedback on papers, or course policies. These can all be discussed during my office hours or by appointment.
4. *Classroom behavior:* Please keep in mind that students come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Many of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. Diversified student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own.
5. *Class work:* All written assignments are due at the beginning of class on their assigned deadlines via Canvas. I will not accept hard copies of your work. Late work will be docked ten points for every day it is late until it loses all credit. In-class assignments will consist of group activities and larger classroom discussion. Be prepared for each class by doing the assigned reading and being ready to contribute to class in a meaningful way each day.

6. *Assignment Maintenance*: Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.
7. *Plagiarism and Academic Honesty*: Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. Any plagiarized assignment will receive a zero, and may result in your automatically failing my class. Plagiarism also violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the Student Honor Code: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>.
8. *Students with disabilities*: If you are requesting accommodations you should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565 and at [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)), which will provide appropriate documentation to give to your instructor.
9. *Harassment*: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/recruitment-staffing/institutional-equity-diversity/resources/harassment/>.
10. *Grade Appeals*: In 1000- and 2000- level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade. For more information on UF Grading policies, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.
11. *Course Evaluations*: Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>.
12. *Mental Health and Wellness*: Students who face difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center (352) 392-1575, or contact them online: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>.

## **Course Schedule (Subject to Change)**

### **Week 1:**

**8/21** Course Introduction

**8/23** *Phaedrus*

**8/25** Finish *Phaedrus*

Complete Blog #1 – Introductions

### **Week 2:**

8/28 Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image”

8/30 Marchand, “Whisper Copy”

9/1 Clark, “How Halitosis Became a Medical Condition With a ‘Cure’”  
Screening: *The Century of the Self* – “Happiness Machines”

Complete Blog #2 – Are you paranoid?

**Week 3:**

9/4 No class (Labor Day)

9/6 DeLillo, *White Noise*

9/8 Workshop

**First draft of Visual Rhetoric paper due**

**Week 4:**

9/11 Wallace, “The View from Mrs. Thompson’s”  
**Visual Rhetoric paper due**

9/13 Library Research Demonstration  
**Meet at Library West, Room 211**

9/15 DeLillo, *White Noise*

Complete Blog #3 – Paranoia and *White Noise*

**Week 5:**

9/18 DeLillo, *White Noise*

9/20 Duvall, “The (Super)Marketplace of Images: Television as Unmediated Mediation  
in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*”

9/22 Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (Group 1)

Complete Blog #4 – Paranoia and *House of Leaves*

**Week 6:**

9/25 Foucault, “Panopticism” from *Discipline and Punish*

9/27 Smith, “Meet the President”  
Balkan, “Beyond the Camera Panopticon”

9/29 Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (Group 2)

Complete Blog #5 - Panopticism

**Week 7:**

10/2 *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace* (chapter TBD)

10/4 Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (Group 3)

10/6 **No class (homecoming)**

Complete Blog #6 – On Ergodic Literature

**Week 8:**

10/9 Jackson, “Paranoia”

10/11 In class: individual meetings (topic pitch)

10/13 Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (Group 4)

Complete Blog #7 – Topic Pitch

**Week 9:**

10/16 Hayles, “Inhabiting House of Leaves”

10/18 Stedman “Annoying Ways People Use Sources”

10/20 Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (Group 5)

**Week 10:**

10/23 Second critical text on *House of Leaves* (TBD)

**10/25** In class: Workshop  
**“Chaos Draft” due**

**10/27** Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (Group 6)

Complete Blog #8 – Paranoia and *House of Leaves* part 2

**Week 11:**

**10/30** Powell, “Tangled Up in Indigo”

**11/1** In class: Workshop  
**Rough Draft due**

**11/3** No Class

**Week 12:**

**11/6** In class: conspiracy film screening (TBD)  
Prepare research on assigned film segment with your small group  
**Paranoid Research Paper due**

**11/8** In class: film discussion and group rhetorical analyses  
Noam Chomsky on conspiracy theories

**11/10** No class (Veterans Day)

**Week 13:**

**11/13** Wade, “In Defense of Flat Earthers”  
Kriss, “Flat-Earthers Have a Wild New Theory About Forests”  
Shermer, “What Skepticism Reveals about Science”

**11/15** *Science Vs* podcast, “Climate Change...the Apocalypse?”  
*Radiolab* podcast, “Climate Change and Critical Thinking”

**11/17** *S-Town* podcast, episode 1  
In class: Mandatory Conferences

**Week 14:**

**11/20** In class: *The Stanley Parable*

**11/22 No class (Thanksgiving)**

**11/24 No class (Thanksgiving)**

Complete Blog #10 – Paranoia in *The Stanley Parable*

**Week 15:**

**11/27** Selections from *Paranoia Magazine* and *Skeptic*

**11/29** *Intelligence Squared* podcast, “Is The Internet Closing Our Minds Politically?”  
*Planet Money* podcast, “Finding the Fake-News King”

**12/1 Rough draft of Multimodal Paranoid Argument due**

**Week 16:**

**12/4** Reading TBD

**12/6 Last Day of Class**

Complete Blog #11 – Course reflection

**Final projects due 12/10 by 11:59 p.m.**