TOPICS IN AMERICAN POLITCS: CONSPIRACY & SECRECY IN U.S. POLITICS

Summer 2020

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Sessions: Tues. & Thurs. 6:30-9:30*
Room: Online (*See Session Agenda)
Office Hours: Online, 6:30

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Course Description

Each offering of this 'topics' course focuses on a central component of the U.S. political system. This course will focus on the theme 'Conspiracy and Secrecy in American Politics'. Students will collaborate to explore and examine the role of conspiracy theories, fake news, pseudoscience, paranoia, and demonization in contemporary U.S. politics and society. It will also examine the role of secrecy, transparency, subterfuge and publicity in American governance, elections, and institutions.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Distinguish between historically documented political 'conspiracies', unconfirmed 'conspiracy theories', and dispositional tendencies towards 'conspiracism', recognizing the interplay between each;
- Critically examine contemporary American conspiracist narratives with reference to their social, historical, and political context;
- Develop independent research-based insights drawing connections between U.S. party politics, social movements, media institutions, and the politics of knowledge and authority;
- Analyze both the continuities and changes in conspiracist politics across the twentieth and twenty-first century, tracing the influence of social, political, and technological changes.

Required Materials and Texts

- Kathryn Olmsted, *Real Enemies: Conspiracy Theories and American Democracy, World War I to 9/11, 2nd Edition,* Oxford University Press. The purchase or license of this book will be the sole materials cost in this course.
- The lowest-cost, default, and strongly recommended option for accessing this book will be directly via the website of a social reading tool called Perusall website. See the details on Perusall below.
- All other materials will be made available, cost-free, via Perusall.

Class Format

This course will be offered in a virtual format, meaning that live synchronous sessions with lecture and discussion will be held during the course's scheduled timeslot via Zoom. Attendance and participation are encouraged at these synchronous sessions, yet to ensure accessibility given the unusual context of Summer 2020 courses, alternate methods for participation and engagement will also be available on Avenue to Learn (A2L) following each session. Between sessions, students will be required to read the assigned readings, and make interactive comments on them to peers, via the social reading tool Perusall. See the 'Online Tools' section below.

Time Management Guidelines

The standard Fall/Winter course at McMaster has approximately three (3) hours of 'contact time' (class and tutorial time) per week. Academic advisors and student success staff typically recommend budgeting approximately one (1) to two (2) hours of 'study time' for every contact hour, per week (e.g. usually 3-6 additional hours per week), for preparation, reading, and maintenance rehearsal of notes, with additional time budgeted for independent assignments. In sum, the typical Fall/Winter course takes up about 6-9 hours per week when 'contact time' and 'study time' are combined.

Time Management in Spring and Summer Courses

In the Spring and Summer semesters at McMaster, the standard course pacing is compressed, with 3 hours of 'contact time' *twice* per week, totaling 6 hours. Please budget approximately 3 to 6 hours of 'study time' for each session, totaling 6 to 12 hours per week. Please also use the schedule below to budget any additional time needed for the independent assignment, whether in one block or across several days. In sum, the typical Spring/Summer course takes up about 12-18 hours per week when 'contact time' and 'study time' are combined.

With this time budget in mind, students with full daytime commitments, a second Spring/Summer course – or especially both – may wish to be especially strategic in planning how time will be managed.

Time Management and the Virtual Classroom

The 'virtual' design of this course allows students to complete the 'contact time' of videos, lectures, and discussions either synchronously (i.e. during the set timeslot) or asynchronously (i.e. afterwards at a time of your choosing). Please be advised that this flexibility will shift – not reduce – the time and effort needed for these elements.

Please aim to stay 'on pace' with your peers, session by session, even if your time management circumstances require doing your 'study time' reading early or completing 'contact time' elements in the days after any given synchronous session. If you find that you are falling behind by more than one week, please contact me by email at bussermp@mcmaster.ca to collaborate on a strategy for support and getting on track.

Online Tools

Because of the virtual format of this class, we will use a number of learning tools:

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be

deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Perusall

In this course we will be using an online 'social reading' tool called Perusall (https://perusall.com) where you can comment on, question, and discuss the readings right where you access them. This tool has two advantages: a) it allows you to receive course credit for active reading, in the place of an additional assignment or test; b) it allows students to participate in 'active learning' in a flexible and asynchronous environment. See 'Social Reading' in the Assignments section for details.

Perusall is free to use. Instructors can upload readings for free to Perusall, within the bounds of Canadian copyright law and fair use principles. Because whole books cannot be uploaded to Perusall under fair use principles, access to books can be purchased or licensed from the publisher, usually for much less than even used copies or ebooks. If you have concerns or reservations about obtaining access to our textbook through Perusall, please contact me, and I will be happy to discuss and explore alternatives.

In advance of the course, you will receive an email with instructions on how to access Perusall. We will also discuss Perusall and its workflows in the first few sessions of our course, in order to accommodate new registrants and ensure smooth setup.

Zoom

We will use the web conferencing tool Zoom to enable our live sessions. To access Zoom, you will need to download and install the program. To access each session, you will be able to click on our password-protected link and join the 'waiting room' to be admitted. Please make sure that if your Zoom name is not the same as your name on Mosaic or Avenue, that you communicate your preferred name to the instructors to help establish a secure learning environment. Participating in the live audio and video components of Zoom is encouraged but not required. See the sections on 'Quizzes' and 'Discussions' in the Evaluations section below for details.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via Avenue to Learn (A2L) plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work through A2L and/or Turnitin.com must still submit an electronic and/or hardcopy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com or A2L. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more information please refer to the Turnitin.com Policy.

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Social Reading (20%): Annotate our Readings Online via Perusall
2. Mini-Quizzes (10%): Via Zoom (live) or A2L (Asynchronous)
3. Discussions (20%): Via Zoom (Live) or A2L (Asynchronous)
4. Presentation Storyboard (20%): Answer a Question using Academic Research
5. Presentation Video and Discussion (10%): Post Video on A2L and Engage Peers
6. Final Exam (30%): Quiz Section and Written Section on A2L

Course Evaluation – Details

Social Reading (20%), In Advance of Each Session

In this course you will get credit for doing the readings. We will use the online system Perusall to organize our reading of book chapters, articles, and websites. You are asked to engage with the assigned reading in advance of each class. You will be able to highlight certain sections and add comments or questions. Highlights, comments, and questions will be shared interactively between randomized sets of peers, allowing you to learn from, and respond to, your colleagues. You will also be able to flag portions that confuse you, which will help to focus our lectures and discussions. You will receive course credit for engaging regularly and reliably with the materials, and for the constructive quality of your contributions. See the section on Perusall (above).

Quizzes (10%), During Each Session

Short quizzes on the materials will test your knowledge and understanding. These quizzes will be held during each live session using the Zoom quizzing tool. An alternate version will be available asynchronously on Avenue to Learn for three days following the session for students who cannot participate in the live quiz.

Discussions (10%), During Each Session

Participatory discussions will be held via Zoom as a portion of each class session. These discussions will typically have both whole-group and breakout-group components. To create a more personable space students are encouraged to enable their web cameras if possible, and to use non-verbal participation buttons in Zoom. Unlike the lecture, the discussion component will not be recorded. An alternate discussion space will be available asynchronously on Avenue to Learn for three days following the session for students who cannot participate in the live discussion.

Presentation Storyboard (20%), Due July 12th (to July 19th)

Your scholarly research project for this course will take the form of a two-part presentation assignment. In this first component you will organize your academic research, including relevant research sources, quotations, and citations, into a ‘storyboard’ plan using your preferred presentation program. A full assignment sheet will be made available on Avenue to Learn. Note: Late penalties will begin July 20th.

Presentation Video (July 26th) and Discussion Posts (Aug 2nd) (10%),
The second part of your research project will involve sharing your insights with the class by creating a video version of your presentation. You will be asked to post your video in the Discussion area on Avenue to Learn, to engage views in discussion and to view at least four (4) other videos and engage the creators in constructive discussion. Please note: the previous Presentation Storyboards will be graded in the order submitted, so earlier submission will increase the chances of receiving feedback before the video post is due.

Final Exam (30%), August 6th during class time (exceptions upon request).
A final examination on course materials will be conducted on Avenue to Learn in a 'take-home' format during class time. You will have 3 hours to write the exam. One component of the exam will be delivered using the Quizzes feature of Avenue to Learn. A second component will use the Assignments feature, with Turnitin originality checking enabled. The final exam is for individual completion only, and collaboration or discussion using group chats or other tools is prohibited. No proctoring or monitoring service will be used for this exam. If you need to delay the start of your 3 hour test time by up to 24 hours, you may do so; please simply let me know by email.

Session Agenda

Each of our scheduled sessions (6:30-9:30 pm, Tuesdays and Thursdays) will be broken down as follows:

1. 6:30 p.m. Appetizer (short video, etc.) goes live on Avenue
2. 7:00 p.m. Break (Join the Zoom waiting queue for secure admission)
3. 7:15 p.m. Discussion and Quiz. ('Cameras On' if possible)
4. 8:15 p.m. Break
5. 8:30 p.m. Lecture ('Cameras Off' if preferred; recording enabled)

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (June 22 – June 26)

Session 1: Course Introduction – June 23rd
Readings: Short News Articles (via Avenue and Perusall)

Session 2: The Study of Conspiracism – June 25th
Key Reading: Olmsted, Introduction; Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style

Note: Each session will have one assigned chapter as a 'key' reading, as noted, complemented by one additional chapter or article (TBD). An updated syllabus with the full list of readings will be released when the course begins.

Week 2 (June 29 - July 3)

Session 3: The Military Industrial Complex – June 30th
Key Reading: Olmsted, Chapter 1 on the Money Power and WWI

Session 4: Critical Investigation – July 2nd
Key Reading: Uscinski and Parent, Chapter 1 on Evaluating Theories

Note: Assignment details to be discussed in-depth during this session.

Week 3 (July 6 – July 10)

Session 5: State Secrets – July 7th
Key Reading: Olmsted, Chapter 2 on Pearl Harbor Conspiracy Theories

Session 6: Witch Hunts – July 9th
Key Reading: Olmsted, Chapter 3 on the McCarthy Era Red Scares

Notes: Presentation Storyboard due Sunday, July 12th (Soft Date)

Week 4 (July 13 – July 17)

Session 7: Assassinations – July 14th
Key Reading: Olmsted, Chapter 4 on John F. Kennedy and Cold War Plots

Session 8: Abuse of Power – July 16th
Key Reading: Olmsted, Chapter 5 on Watergate

Note: Presentation Storyboard late penalties begin July if applicable 20th

Week 5 (July 20 – July 24)

Session 9: Disillusionment and Distrust – July 21st
Key Reading: Olmsted, Chapter 6 on Late 20th Century Conspiracism

Session 10: False Flags and Inside Jobs – July 23rd
Key Reading: Olmsted, Chapter 7 on the 9/11 Truth Movement

Note: Presentation Video Post due July 26th

Week 6 (July 27 – July 31)

Session 11: Fake News and the Post-Truth Era – July 28th
Key Reading: Olmsted, Conclusion and Epilogue on Trump

Session 12: Conspiracy Without the Theory – July 30th
Key Reading: Rosenblum and Muirhead, Chapter on *The New Conspiracism*

Note: Peer Discussion Posts on Presentation Videos due August 2nd

Week 7 (August 3 to August 7)

Session 13: Emerging Issues and Course Review – August 4th
Key Reading: To Be Determined

Session 14: Final Exam – August 6th
Note: Final Exam to be written online during this session; adjustment available.

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

The written assignments in this course will be submitted via the digital Assignments function on Avenue to Learn, found under the Assessments tab. Many file types are compatible with the submission system, including Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, PostScript, Adobe Acrobat (.pdf), or Rich Text (.rtf) files. Please note that Pages (.pages) and Google Docs files are not compatible. If your word processing program uses a file type not listed here, please contact the instructor to check compatibility.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

All written work is due at 11:59 p.m. on the date stated in the schedule above, unless other arrangements have been made in advance with the instructor. A late penalty of 3% will apply after the due time on the due date. Further penalties will accumulate beginning the next day (6%) and increase by 3% per day following (including weekends). Late assignments will be accepted, and the late penalty applied, with no shame or stigma. Assignments will be marked and returned in the order in which they were submitted.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”.

Late Submission Policy (for Situations Not Covered by the MSAF)

Late submissions will be accepted, with no shame or stigma, until the last scheduled day of class, with the late deduction above. Please note that the self-reporting MSAF tool cannot be used for assignments worth 25% or more, or for periods of absence exceeding 3 days.

If you experience a medical, health or other personal emergency which complicates the submission of your assignment, and the MSAF does not apply, please take the following steps if you would like the late penalties adjusted:

1. Seek support for your emergency issue.

2. As soon as you are safely able to do so, please submit your incomplete draft work, rough notes so far, etc. to [e.g. the assignments folder on Avenue] as a placeholder for your submission, and include a note explaining that it is an emergency placeholder submission.

3. Visit your Faculty Office (e.g. for Social Sciences Students at Kenneth Taylor Hall, Room 129); this is the place to bring medical or other confidential documentation and to arrange for the practical details (not private details) to be communicated to your instructor.

4. Contact the course instructor as soon as possible once you have visited your faculty office. Please note that according to University Policy, you are under no obligation to disclose private or medical details or documentation to your instructor or TA. Communicating practical information about your timeline and ability to complete work will help to make appropriate arrangements.

Based on the information available, the instructor will typically aim to use fair and sound professional judgment to determine whether late penalties can be waived altogether, 'flattened' to an amount, reduced by an amount, etc., and/or which new due date is appropriate. Several factors can often help your instructor to arrange greater leniency or room for academic discretion, such as:

- When specific guidance is available from academic advisors or other support professionals;

- When your placeholder submission shows evidence of diligent advance preparation before the emergency arose;

- When your timely correspondence throughout the problem-solving process helps to maximize the range of solutions that are practically available.

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via Avenue to Learn (A2L) plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work through A2L and/or Turnitin.com must still submit an electronic and/or hardcopy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com or A2L. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more information please refer to the Turnitin.com Policy.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office ***normally within 10 working days*** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the

Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy**.**

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty

- Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- Improper collaboration in group work.
- Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Inclusivity and a Culture of Respect

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience and the responsibility to demonstrate respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. Expectations are described in the Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students' access to these platforms.

Additional information about the Code and netiquette can be found on the Student Support and Case Management website,

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University's Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities policy.

Additional Course and Faculty Policies

Course Policy on Accommodation and Exception

All students, please note: If you need to request accommodation or exception for any reason, please note that making your request as soon as possible will allow greater flexibility in making arrangements. Delaying your request will typically result in a progressively narrower range of options being available for accommodation.

Students registered with SAS are encouraged to note the guidance on the SAS Website: "When your instructor reviews and acknowledges receipt of your accommodations, an auto generated email will be sent to you requesting you to communicate with your instructor. You are expected to communicate at the beginning of the term with each of your instructors for all courses with accommodations requested. SAS strongly recommends you meet with your instructors in person to discuss your accommodation plan and implementation." (Please see the section on Academic Accommodations of Students with Disabilities, above.)

Early communication about whether, when and how your registered accommodations might apply to this course will help to identify options and make contingency plans. Please follow-up on the acknowledgment of your letter by making contact with the instructor, even if you do not yet wish to make requests based on your accommodations. Delaying this follow-up communication will typically result in a progressively narrower range of options being available for accommodation.

Similarly, when you need to make a specific request regarding a course assignment based on your registered accommodations, getting in touch as early as possible will help ensure that a greater range of options for accommodation are available. Delaying your request until close to (or after) the assignment or test date will typically result in a progressively narrower range of options being available for accommodation.

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster

account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.