

# GS 1181: How to Create a Conspiracy Theory, but Not Get Fooled by One

---

*"We're all conspiracy theorists."*

-Rob Brotherton

*"...conspiracy theorists are, I submit, some of the last believers in an ordered universe."*

-Brian Keeley

## Course & Contact Information

*Instructor:* Dr. Kevin Garrison, Professor of English

*E-Mail:* [kevin.garrison@angelo.edu](mailto:kevin.garrison@angelo.edu)

*Telephone:* (325) 486-6145

*Office:* 021C, Academic Building

*Office hours:* T/H, 1:00 PM–3:00 PM

*Section:* GS 1181.F50—T/H 3:30 PM–4:20 PM, Room 205A, Academic Building

## Course Description

Seminar on various contemporary topics. This course is designed to introduce incoming freshmen to the intellectual and cultural environment of the university and the impacts it will have on their lives as students. Freshman Seminars incorporate various integral elements in order to facilitate first-year students' transition from high school to college-level learning. Emphasis will be on communication, critical thinking, and information literacy. Open to all majors; restricted to and required of first-time-in-college students. Prerequisite: Freshman classification or approval of instructor.

More specifically, this course will introduce students to the fundamentals of critical thinking by exploring conspiracy theories. We will research various conspiracies, learn about cognitive biases, examine how media influence conspiracies, watch *The Social Dilemma*, write about conspiracies, and explore how people slip into conspiratorial thought. Understanding how people *think* will provide you with life-long skills to navigate your immediate world of higher education and your professional/personal relationships after you graduate.

## Student Learning Outcomes

1. Critical Thinking (CT1): Gather, analyze, and evaluate information relevant to conspiracies.
2. Communication Skills (CS1, CS2): Develop and express ideas related to conspiracies and university life through effective written and oral communication.
3. Personal Responsibility (PR1): Demonstrate the ability to evaluate choices, actions and consequences as related to ethical decision-making.
4. Social Responsibility (SR3): Demonstrate the ability to engage effectively in the campus community.

## IDEA Objectives

1. Developing skills in expressing oneself in writing
2. Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view
3. Learning how to find and use resources for answering questions or solving problems.

## Assignments and Grading

Assignment	Points	Outcome
Conspiracy Summaries/Reflections (2 @ 100 points each)	200	Analyzing and writing about other points of view.
Information Literacy Quizzes (12 @ 5 points each)	60	Learning to think critically and accept personal responsibility for research.
Participation in a University Event and Informal Presentation	100	Engaging in the campus community. Learning to present information (orally).
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	

### *Grades on Assignments*

Points earned on assignments indicate the following:

**A** (89.5-100)    **B** (79.5-89.4)    **C** (69.5-79.4)    **D** (59.5-69.4)    **F** (0-59.4)

### *Miscellaneous*

Assignments will be assessed a penalty of 20% if turned in after the submission time and 20% more for each additional 24 hours. This includes weekends and holidays. Also, I will not give an “Incomplete” in this class, and I may use your work as examples for future classes.

## Materials for this Class

- A computer with an Internet connection, MS Office, Adobe Acrobat Reader, email access, and access to Blackboard/Rampport.
- File storage (e.g. flash drive, external drive, J: drive, email)

## Classroom Behaviors

- You will adhere to the standards set in the [ASU Student Handbook](#).
- You will adhere to standards of common courtesy (e.g. turn off and put away cell phones, no eating/drinking, no sleeping, no checking Facebook in class, no studying for tests during class time, etc...). If your actions are disruptive or disrespectful, then I will ask you to stop and/or leave.
- As I will demonstrate and discuss on the first day of class, I have a high-frequency hearing impairment. I read lips, so do three things when speaking to me:
  1. Get my attention.
  2. Speak at a volume that everyone in the class can hear.
  3. Don't cover your mouth.

## Email Policy

I check email 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM Monday through Friday. I will not discuss your grades via email since this would violate the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

## Academic Misconduct

If you plagiarize, cheat, or participate in any activities described in the [Student Code of Conduct](#), then you will receive an automatic "0" on the assignment(s). For a second violation, you will fail the course. Egregious violations will be reported to appropriate officials via an [Incident Report](#).

### **Attendance Policy**

You can miss four classes. After you miss five or more classes, you will receive an "F" for the course.

- *Excused*: The only excused absences are sickness/quarantine, a university-sanctioned event, or the observance of a religious holiday.
- *Sickness Policy*: Do NOT come to class if you suspect that you have a transmissible illness or if you've been exposed to one. All absences that are the result of actual illness, contact tracing, or quarantine will be waived. I may ask you to provide proof (emails, doctor's notes, text messages, etc...), especially if you have to miss several weeks.
- *Tardies*: Several minutes after class begins (approximately 3-5 minutes), I check attendance. If you arrive after I've checked attendance, then you will be counted absent. You have one "grace" tardy this semester.
- *Leaving Early*: If you leave class early for any reason, you will be counted absent.

### **Covid-19 Policy**

Please adhere to the university policies, as outlined here: <https://www.angelo.edu/covid-19/> Any student who chooses to wear a face covering should wear a clear, plastic face shield/mask.

### **Accommodations**

If you have a disability and would like to request reasonable accommodations, please contact: Dallas Swafford, the Director of Student Disability Services, in the University Center, Room 112. Her phone number is 325-942-2047, and her email is [dallas.swafford@angelo.edu](mailto:dallas.swafford@angelo.edu).

### **Basic Needs**

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect his or her performance in the course, is urged to contact the Multicultural and Student Activities Programs center ([multicultural@angelo.edu](mailto:multicultural@angelo.edu); 325-942-2729). The Multicultural and Student Activities Program Center has a [food pantry](#) and other resources to help.

### **Title IX**

The University prohibits discrimination based on sex, which includes pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other types of Sexual Misconduct. Sexual Misconduct is a broad term encompassing all forms of gender-based harassment or discrimination including: sexual assault, sex-based discrimination, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, public indecency, interpersonal violence (domestic violence and/or dating violence), and stalking. As a faculty member, I am a Responsible Employee meaning that I am obligated by law and ASU policy to report any allegations I am notified of to the Office of Title IX Compliance.

Students are encouraged to report any incidents of sexual misconduct directly to ASU's Office of Title IX Compliance and the Director of Title IX Compliance/Title IX Coordinator at: Michelle Boone, J.D., Director of Title IX Compliance/Title IX Coordinator, Mayer Administration

Building, Room 210, 325-942-2022, [mmichelle.boone@angelo.edu](mailto:mmichelle.boone@angelo.edu). You may also file a report online 24/7 at [www.angelo.edu/incident-form](http://www.angelo.edu/incident-form).

If you are wishing to speak to someone about an incident in confidence you may contact the University Health Clinic and Counseling Center at 325-942-2173 or the ASU Crisis Helpline at 325-486-6345. For more information about Title IX in general you may visit <https://www.angelo.edu/services/title-ix/>.

### **Course Support**

- [Writing Center](#) for peer reviewed help of your writing
- [Information Technology \(IT\)](#) for help with email, Blackboard, and Ramport
- [Library](#) for help with conducting research
- [English Language Learners' Institute](#) for English as Second Language (ESL) students
- [Career Development](#) for students wanting help with resumes, job applications, etc...
- [Freshman College](#) for academic success and tutoring
- [Disability Accommodations](#) for disabled and impaired students

## Tentative Schedule

Week	Day	Topic	Assignment Due
Week 1	8/24	Introduction to the Syllabus, Course, and the Professor	
	8/26	Introduction to the Students: Degrees, Goals, and Interests	
Week 2	8/31	Introduction to ASU: University vs High School; RamPort	
	9/2	In-Class Quizzes	Information Literacy Quizzes Due
Week 3	9/7	Conspiracy 101 – Cognitive Biases	
	9/9	Conspiracy 101 – Examples of Conspiracies	
Week 4	9/14	First Major Assignment: How to Write a Summary	
	9/16	In-Class Workshop on Summary	
Week 5	9/21	Campus and Community Engagement: Opportunities	Summary/Reflection #1 Due
	9/23	Conspiracy 101 – Media Influences on Conspiracy	
Week 6	9/28	Conspiracy 101 – Watch <i>The Social Dilemma</i>	
	9/30	In-Class Workshop on Summary	
Week 7	10/5	Reflection on the Semester; Submit Course Evaluations	Summary/Reflection #2 Due
	10/7	Workshop on Informal Presentation	
Week 8	10/12	Presentations of University Event Participation	Informal Presentation Due
	10/14	Presentations of University Event Participation	Informal Presentation Due