

EN 110

T/Th 6:40-8:30

Online

Email: james.richie@qc.cuny.edu

Office Hours: M/F 1-3 (email and we can arrange a meeting via Blackboard)

Instructor: Dr. James Richie

Course Description:

This is a course about information. Ok, well, topic-wise it's a course about witchcraft, urban legends, and conspiracy theories, but the overarching concern is the gathering and disseminating of information. Why would someone believe that their friends and relatives are secretly witches working to drag their souls to hell? Why would we share creepy stories that a friend's cousin swore were true without verifying their reality for ourselves? Why would a person arrive at a well-liked Washington, D.C. pizza restaurant armed with several guns with the intention of freeing kidnapped children being held in the restaurant's non-existent basement? Information can be accurate or inaccurate, and yet enough information accrued (regardless of accuracy) can build a person's sense of reality about the world. In this course we'll be looking at the way information can spread and accumulate and why we need to be cautious about what we take to be accurate or inaccurate.

Learning Goals:

By the end of English 110, students will produce writing that responds appropriately to a variety of rhetorical situations; synthesizes, critiques, and analyzes others' arguments and ideas fairly; and employs appropriate language conventions in different writing situations. Students will:

- Analyze and respond to the demands of a variety of audiences and situations.
- Choose evidence and detail consistent with purpose and audience.
- Demonstrate active engagement with a variety of texts and genres of appropriate difficulty.
- Utilize basic research practices in identifying and analyzing appropriate sources for a particular context.
- Develop flexible strategies for reading, drafting, reviewing, collaborating, revising, rewriting, and editing.
- Use appropriate structural conventions for communicating multimodally.
- Show emergent control of stylistic and mechanical features such as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Course Components:

Meeting: We'll be meeting virtually through Blackboard's Collaborate function. There will be a tab on Blackboard to allow you to gain access to the course. Please turn on your camera. I need to be able to interact with you. We will meet for somewhere between 45-60 minutes and then you'll have a roughly 30-minute activity. After that activity (which will count as class participation) we'll come back and go over our findings.

Materials: All of the reading materials will be available online via Blackboard. You need to have access to these during the synchronous part of class. Aside from the online texts you will need to buy *The Bedford Handbook*, 10th edition by Hacker and Sommers. It is essential that you get

this text. We will be working with it extensively through the course to help you develop your writing.

Essays: You will write three main essays for this course that will build upon each other in your exploration of the ways we accumulate and disseminate information. The first two of these essays will build from the ideas and conventions of a particular essay that we will read during that section of the course. The first essay will be a rhetorical analysis in which you become familiar with the ways that writers frame the information they convey. The second essay will be an analysis of an academic lens developed to account for urban legends and other folk beliefs. The third essay will be a research essay in which you develop your own observational and analytical lens (based on your previous work) and apply it to a conspiracy theory. Each essay will be composed using a drafting process, which means you will hand in two rough drafts and a final draft. The first rough draft is a “garbage” draft, i.e., just an attempt to get some thoughts out on paper. The second draft will be a more polished draft that will receive extensive commentary. The final draft will be a fully polished piece of academic writing. The first and second drafts will be graded on a pass/fail basis and will be incorporated into the homework grade. The final draft will receive a letter grade. All drafts will be posted to Blackboard in PDF format. **Note: if you do not turn in a rough draft of your essay then your final draft will not receive a passing grade.**

Participation Grade: For the participation grade you’ll need to engage each other using the Blackboard group breakout function. I’ll assign arbitrary groups the first day. This will be your group for the entire term. I’ll typically lecture for around 45-60 minutes and then have a specific thing I want you to look at and write about in your groups. You guys will discuss and work for around 30 minutes and then we’ll come back and go over what you found. You’ll post your individual writings derived from your discussions on the appropriate place on Blackboard. The writings will be graded as follows:

A= Thoughtful engagement with the question

B= Somewhat thoughtful engagement, though perhaps the ideas aren’t as fully developed

C=Engagement only accounts for certain parts of the question or is lackluster

D=Makes only a minimal attempt at responding

F=Doesn’t respond

Everyone in class will need to volunteer at some point. I’ll send around a calendar via google docs and you can sign up. You will be graded for your question as well. The same rules apply: the more thoughtful a question or the more the question develops an idea from the course, the higher the grade. The thread grade and the question grade will be incorporated into the Participation grade for the course.

Homework: You are required to complete all HW. It needs to be posted to Blackboard as a PDF

Grade Breakdown:

Participation: 25%

Homework/Drafts: 15%

Final Draft of Rhetorical Analysis: 15%

Final Draft of Lens Analysis: 20%

Final Draft of Research: 25%

Course Policies:

Late Work: I can't take late work. If it's not posted at the appropriate time I can't accept it.

Paper Presentation: Your drafts are to be uploaded to Blackboard in PDF format. They should be composed in Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, double-spaced, and with a one-inch margin. I can't accept email copies. **All work must be turned in at the time designated on Blackboard.**

Academic Integrity:

College Writing will provide you with strategies for working ethically and accurately with the texts you engage. We will discuss source use practices that prevent plagiarism, a serious academic offense that runs counter to our academic community's core values of honesty and respect for others. According to the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity

(<http://web.cuny.edu/academics/info-central/policies/academic-integrity.pdf>):

Plagiarism is the act of presenting another person's ideas, research or writings as your own. The following are some examples of plagiarism, but by no means is it an exhaustive list:

- Copying another person's actual words without the use of quotation marks and footnotes attributing the words to their source.
- Presenting another person's ideas or theories in your own words without acknowledging the source.
- Using information that is not common knowledge without acknowledging the source.
- Failing to acknowledge collaborators on homework and laboratory assignments.

Internet plagiarism includes submitting downloaded term papers or parts of term papers, paraphrasing or copying information from the internet without citing the source, and "cutting & pasting" from various sources without proper attribution.

Final drafts that contain plagiarism will receive a zero, may result in failure of the course, and the case will be reported to the University.

Decorum: You'll need to interact with each other as part of the forums for the course. When doing so, please remember to keep things civil. This doesn't mean you need to agree with each other totally, but it does mean that you need to be respectful and thoughtful when dealing with your peers. I will be monitoring and grading the forum threads as part of the participation grade. If I find anyone writing in a manner that I find to be inappropriate I will not count the thread. Likewise, if I'm informed of inappropriate behavior or contact I will take action.

Attendance: This is a little tricky as this is an online course. However, you need to be here and you need to participate during the class time. And keep in mind, you have limited time to engage in the forum section of the course, a section of the course which requires that you pay attention during the synchronous part of class. If you have extenuating circumstance preventing you from attending class, please contact me.

Special Accommodation

If you have or develop any condition that might require accommodation in this class—for example, a medical condition—you should immediately contact the Office of Special Services (OSS) in 171 Kiely Hall at 718-997-5870. OSS will ensure you receive any additional support needed to fully participate in and succeed at this course (and QC).

Campus Writing Resources

If you need additional help (beyond my office hours) with your writing, you are welcome to utilize any of the following on-campus writing resources:

- *The Writing Center* in Kiely Hall 229 (phone: 718-997-5676) provides free writing support services to all enrolled Queens College students.
<http://www.qc.cuny.edu/Academics/SupportPrograms/SupportCenter/Pages/WritingCenter.aspx>
- *The Tutoring Center* in Kiely Hall 127 (phone: 718-997-5677) provides a range of free tutoring to students enrolled in many courses offered at QC.
<http://www.qc.cuny.edu/Academics/SupportPrograms/SupportCenter/Pages/default.aspx>
- *Writing at Queens* in Queens Hall 330A (phone: 718-997-4695) provides free support for digital writing including Qwriting. <http://writingatqueens.qc.cuny.edu/>

Calendar

Section 1: Rhetoric and The Salem Witch Trials

The 21st century perspective of the 1692/3 witch persecution in Salem tends to look at the event as the outcome of “primitive” or irrational thinking. If only the Puritans had not been so beholden to supernatural belief the whole thing never would have happened and hundreds of lives would be spared (only 19 people were convicted and executed; two hundred people were accused). Well, the Puritans weren’t necessarily “backwards” or uneducated. In fact, because their particular beliefs centered around Biblical literalism which required universal literacy, they were one of the most educated groups in the colonies (and England) at the time. So what happened? There were some pretty rational reasons, given the environment, for panic to break out. In this section of the course we’ll take a look at a piece of writing on the witch trials at Salem that uses particular rhetorical moves to get a modern reader to think more empathetically with an inhabitant of the 17th century.

8/27: Welcome to the Course; getting settled with the tech and the rhetorical vocabulary

HW: Summarize Wikipedia page on Salem Witch Trials; start reading Schiff

9/1: Summary vs. Analysis/Analyzing Wikipedia

HW: Summarize Schiff

9/3: Summary vs. Analysis/Analyzing Schiff

HW: garbage draft due; read Bedford

9/8: Nuts and Bolts: Thesis statements and introductions (Bedford)

9/10: Citations: Yours and Schiff’s

HW: First draft due

9/15: In-Class Draft Review

9/17: Transitions: Yours and Schiff’s

HW: Visit Snopes.com and find a legend; rewrite your own version of it to upload to the HW and be prepared to perform it for class; read Dundes, “Bloody Mary in the Mirror”

Section 2: How an Academic Thinks About Urban Legends

Bloody Mary. Killer clowns. Slender Man. The killer in the back seat (or high beams). Alien abduction. These are some common spooky urban legends that have been circulating for a while (or in the case of Slender Man for the past decade). Why do they still circulate and what do they mean? In this section of the course we’ll take a look at a couple of analyses of urban

legends performed by academics who specialize in folklore. Of particular interest is what an academic does with an urban legend. It's not about the truth of the legend, but about how the legend circulates and what it means within the culture.

9/22: What is an Urban Legend: The Content of the Bloody Mary Legend

9/24: Analyzing Urban Legends Part 1

HW: Read Tucker, "Ghosts in Mirrors: Reflections of Self"

10/1: Analyzing Urban Legends Part 2

HW: read Campion-Vincent, "Organ Theft Narratives"

10/6: Content: What is an Organ Theft Narrative

10/8: Analysis: Why is an Organ Theft Narrative

HW: Garbage draft due; read Bullard, "UFO Abduction Reports"

10/13: Content: What is a UFO Abduction Narrative

10/15: Analysis: Why is a UFO Abduction Narrative

HW: First full draft due; read Eaton, "'Give Us a Sign of Your Presence'"

10/20: Ghost Hunting Behavior

10/22: Ghost Hunting Behavior Analyzed

HW: read Bennett, "The Vanishing Hitchhiker at 55"

10/27: Looking Back at the Whole Thing

10/29: In-Class Draft Review

HW: Read Hostadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics;" find a conspiracy theory and be ready to explain it to the class

Research: Critical Thinking vs. Conspiratorial Thinking

Obama was born in Kenya. JFK Jr. faked his death as part of a long-term plan to get Trump elected in order to take down a secret satanic pedophile ring serving the most powerful people in the nation. The Sandy Hook shooting never happened and was a planned event in order to take away guns. The military is preparing to enforce martial law in Texas. Pizzagate. Reptilians are secretly running the world. There's a deep underground military base on Montauk where evil former Nazi scientists have been experimenting with time travel. These conspiracy theories are really pretty absurd on the face of it, and yet they have their adherents (some of whom are running for congress). Part of the problem of conspiracy thinking is that it can mirror critical thinking, except where critical thinking uses skepticism to verify, conspiracy thinking can often make irrational leaps that may not seem irrational at the time. In this section of the course you'll be researching a conspiracy theory not necessarily with the aim of debunking it, but in order to develop an understanding of how these things proliferate and why even sometimes very intelligent people may take them seriously.

11/3: Paranoia in the 1950s

11/5: Finding a Topic

HW: read Douglas, et al., "The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories"

11/10: Thinking Through the Thought Processes of Conspiracy

HW: watch posted videos of Montauk conspiracy theorists; topic and tentative thesis statement due

11/12: Case File 1: Montauk

11/17: Case File 2: QAnon

11/19: Finding Academic Resources

11/24: Evaluating Sources

12/1: Constructing an Annotated Bibliography

HW: Annotated Bibliography Due

12/3: Turning A Bibliography into Research: Drafting a Thesis Statement and Introduction

12/8: Juggling Multiple Sources

12/10: In-Class Draft Review

Final Draft Due on Day Scheduled for the Exam (there is no exam, but we're still scheduled a day)