Text: There is no required text. I have assembled a compilation of materials from various sources. Most of the readings are available online; the remainder are available on reserve at the Willis Library. The following link provides the list of readings by week and their location (online or on reserve). Please plan accordingly.

Course Readings Page: [http://guides.library.unt.edu/content.php?pid=498922&sid=4102892](http://guides.library.unt.edu/content.php?pid=498922&sid=4102892)

Online Access: This course uses Blackboard Learn for online assignments: [https://learn.unt.edu/](https://learn.unt.edu/)

Course Overview:

Much of education supplies you with various facts and theories about the world. Unfortunately, little education teaches you to evaluate the claims of others. That is, more often than not, education teaches you what to believe, but not why you should believe it. Even more unfortunate, outside of formal education there is almost no instruction on how to evaluate the claims of others. The result is that a lot of people out there hold strange beliefs, engage in bizarre rituals, and on the whole do a lot of “weirdness”. Sometimes weirdness reflects odd, but true, circumstances, but in many cases it is not. This course will provide opportunity for students to develop critical thinking skills in the evaluation of claims by examining examples from everyday life and the media.

Course Objectives:

Upon completing this course, students will be able to do the following:

1. Identify informal fallacies common to human decision making.
2. Discuss the meaning of "openmindedness".
3. Summarize pitfalls in human thinking that lead to errorful thinking.
4. Compose informed thoughts on current topics debated in our culture.
5. Analyze statements from the popular media in terms of soundness.

Disclaimer:

During this course, you may find yourself on one side of some debate. You may find your beliefs are challenged, or you may challenge the beliefs of others. However such debates go, we will always maintain respect for one another. Try always to emphasize that challenges pertain to the evidence for or against
certain ways of thinking; they should never be used to attack a person. Keep this in mind as some content of this course can become emotionally charged. This is supposed to be fun and educational. Those who would use this opportunity to slander certain groups or promote certain agendas probably should drop the course. If at any time during this class, you feel offended or uncomfortable, please come discuss your concerns with me.

**Academic Dishonesty:**
Cheating is defined as giving or receiving unauthorized assistance in an academic exercise or receiving credit for work which is not one’s own. You are encouraged to become familiar with the University’s Policy of Academic dishonesty found in the Student Handbook. The content of the Handbook applies to this course. If you are in doubt regarding the requirements, please consult with me before you complete any requirements of the course.

**Disabilities Accommodation:**
The University of North Texas complies with Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The University of North Texas provides academic adjustments and auxiliary aids to individuals with disabilities, as defined under the law. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation, please see the instructor and/or contact the Office of Disability Accommodation at 940-565-4323 during the first week of class.

**Class Etiquette / Netiquette**
My goal here is to establish forum conducive to (1) learning the material and (2) expressing ideas freely. To facilitate course objectives, I expect several things from each student.

**In Class Expectations...**

Be on time. When you come in late, it is distracting, for me and for others.

Stay the entire class. When you leave early it is distracting, for me and for others.

Cell phones--turn them off. I have found phones to be the largest barrier to student engagement. If I see you texting or using a phone, I'll ask you to stop. If you persist, you will lose participation points and/or be asked to leave the class.

Best respectful of others. Occasionally, our conversation will touch upon some heated ideas. The purpose of this class is to explore ideas in a safe, open environment. I want you to feel free to express an idea. Also, I want you to feel free to critique the ideas of others, but always make sure it is the idea you are commenting on, not the person. Additionally, some ways of criticising are more conducive to conversation and exploration. Be mindful of how you phrase criticism.

**Netiquette**

Online discussion carries some extra cautions and expectations. The nature of online discussion means that others can not see your face or gestures or hear the tone of your voice. Therefore, one should be especially cautious about what is posted.

Do not use profane or vulgar language in your posts.
Keep your posts on topic. If you want to post something outside of the material, feel free to start a new thread in the "Post General Questions" forums.

Be respectful in your comments to other students.

Use proper grammar and syntax—it does improve clarity.

Do not type in all caps—PEOPLE THINK YOU ARE YELLING (see?)

Post in a timely manner so other members of your group have chance to respond.

Refer to the Grading section for additional details of posts and the grading rubric.

**Structure of Events:**

Your activities will be divided each week between a class segment and an online segment.

**Class Segments**

The purpose of the class segment is to provide opportunity for class wide discussion and gives me a chance to clarify and elaborate on more difficult material in a face-to-face format.

As demand for this course has increased, enrollment has grown. I learned, however, that when 100 people are in the room, it is difficult to have a class-wide discussion. So, half of you will be assigned to come to class on Tuesdays and half will come to class on Thursdays. During the class segments, I will present a short slide set or video elaborating on readings assigned for the week, and we will have a class-wide discussion on the material. Thus, you should have the readings done prior to class. You should attend class on your assigned day; moving days is not permitted. I do not want to become attendance police, but if the class begins to become unbalanced, I will instate an attendance policy.

**Material covered in class is fair game for quizzes!**

So, it is important you attend class and take notes. **Nothing from the class segments will be posted online.**

**Online Segments**

The purpose of the online segment is to provide an opportunity for focused interactions about the material and to promote engagement with other students.

Each week you will engage in small group, online discussions. You will post an original comment/question/critique pertaining to the readings for the week. Additionally, you will respond to your other group member's posts. Discussions should on topic and adhere to the course netiquette policy.
In general, the class assignments will run from Tuesday to the Monday of the next week. Discussion boards will be available for the online segment starting each Tuesday of the week. Quizzes will become available by Friday of the week. All assignments will be due the following Monday by 5 pm. See course calendar for specific deadlines.

When do I come to class?

The class has been split into two groups that will alternate participating in class segments and online segments. If you are in Small Group 1 - 10, you will attend class only on Tuesdays; if you are in Small Group 11 - 20, you will attend class only on Thursdays. The time available on your alternate day can be used to complete the online assignments.

Grading:

Grades will come from 3 sources

I. Quizzes (150 points possible, 45% of total grade)

Each week, I will post a quizz based on the readings, class segments, and online segments.

Quizzes will be posted by **Friday at 5 pm and will remain open until the following Monday at 5 pm** (72 hrs). Quizzes will be open book and there will be no time limit for completing the quiz beyond the 72-hour window. Quizzes will be a combination of fill-in-the blank and multiple choice questions.

Each quizz will be worth **10 points**. There will be 15 quizzes across the term. One for each week.

II. Discussion Posts (150 points possible, 45% of total grade)

Each week, you will post a comment/question/critique pertaining to the week's readings. Discussion topics will be available by the Tuesday of the week the material is covered, if not earlier. Topics will be found in the forum title.

Do not post assignments to the general forum! Although you may make a post there to expand the discussion to the entire class, your grade will be determined by you posts to your Group.

**Initial Posts.** Your initial posts should be on topic and attempt to integrate and expand upon the material for the week. Posts should be of sufficient length, in general, they should be twenty words or more. Posts should not duplicate what another student has written upon (although you may do so in a reply). Posts should adhere to standards of conduct set out in the Netiquette policy.

**Replies.** In general, you will be asked to response to 1-2 of your group members posts. Your post should attempt to further the conversation, ask for elaboration/clarification, offer unique
insights, or provide constructive criticism. Posts should adhere to standards of conduct set out in the Netiquette policy.

**Discussion Grading.** Posts will be graded according to the Discussion Board Rubric, given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points Possible</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timeliness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Initial Post)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Response is posted late.</td>
<td>Responses are posted on the last day of the assignment (after 6 am on due date)</td>
<td>Responses are posted in advance of the last day (prior to 6 am on due date)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points Possible</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your initial Post</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response does not address the topic or is of insufficient length (20 words) or duplicates a previous post or uses inappropriate remarks (see Netiquette section in syllabus)</td>
<td>Response does not address all parts of the question, or makes only superficial contact with the material.</td>
<td>Response addresses all parts of the question and expands upon the topic, drawing from the course material, personal experience, and other resources to bring novel insights to the topic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your response to your group</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response makes vague acknowledgement to the post without adding to the discussion (“I agree!” or “Nice post”), or uses inappropriate remarks (see Netiquette section in syllabus)</td>
<td>Response addresses the course material and contributes to the discussion, but does not offer reflection or make contact with another group member’s post.</td>
<td>Response demonstrates reflection of the post, pointing out a potential concern or offers an extension of the post or offers constructive criticism.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Example Posts and Grading.**

To provide an example of how a post could be graded, examples are given below. Here three group members post on the story of the **Three Little Pigs**. Three posts are given. Instructor grading and feedback are in **bold italics.**
Topic: Reflect on the story of the three little pigs. How does this story help you understand human decision making?

Jason: This story is about some pigs that behave badly.

Instructor: 0 Points. It is not clear the person read more than a few sentences, no attempt is made to synthesize or integrate the information, and the post lacks sufficient length.

Susan: This story is about three pigs that wander off and encounter a wolf that attacks them; two pigs were killed, but one survived. The one that survived made a brick house.

Instructor: 2 Points. Good job summarizing the story. It is clear you read the material, but you didn't go further to elaborate on the story's meaning and its implications for decision making and delayed consequences.

Emily: This story is about three pigs who go off to search their fortune. Each builds a house for himself, one of straw, one of stick, and one of brick. A wolf attacks them, killing the pigs in the houses made of straw and stick, but the pig in the house made of brick survives. I think this story says something about early preparation and delayed consequences. It was easier to build cheaper houses early on, but those didn't last long...nor did the pigs. It was more difficult to build a house of brick up front, but the long term benefits outweighed the short term gain.

Instructor: 4 Points. Nicely done. You identified the primary point of the reading and integrated the material across other course segments. Yes, the point is that up front costs are not initially valued, but may have greater cost-benefits later.

Well, you see where I am going.

There will be 15 discussion assignments, one for each week. Each post will be worth 10 points.

III. Participation (40 points possible, 10% of total grade)

Ten percent of your grade will come from participation. You can consider these points you have “in the bank” but if you violate standard of conduct laid out in the syllabus, you will lose participation points. Additionally, if the class as a whole begins moving days, I will instate an attendance policy using daily sign up sheets and attendance will become tied to participation.
IV. Grade Calculation

There are 340 points available in the course. All points are weighted equally.

Letter grades are broken across 10% bins, but I find it is easier to keep track of point totals because they are built into BlackBoard.

Thus, grades can be calculated by using the following (inclusive) cutoff values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lower Cut Off</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>306</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>272</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>238</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>204</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 204</td>
<td>Not so good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Course Calendar:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Class Segments</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Weekly Tasks Due By 5 PM On:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>August 29</td>
<td>Introduction to BEHV 3200</td>
<td>No Limit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>September 3, 5</td>
<td>Why do people believe weird things?</td>
<td>September 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>September 10, 12</td>
<td>Openmindedness</td>
<td>September 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>September 17, 19</td>
<td><strong>Realism and Relativism</strong></td>
<td>September 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>September 24, 26</td>
<td><strong>Positives of Science</strong></td>
<td>September 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>October 1, 3</td>
<td>Why we mistrust science</td>
<td>October 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>October 8, 10</td>
<td>Informal fallacies</td>
<td>October 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>October 15, 17</td>
<td>Patternicity &amp; superstitions</td>
<td>October 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>October 22, 24</td>
<td>Statistical reasoning</td>
<td>October 28</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>October 29, 31</td>
<td>Inference and bias</td>
<td>November 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>November 5, 7</td>
<td>Limitations of human memory</td>
<td>November 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>November 12, 14</td>
<td>Near death experiences</td>
<td>November 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>November 19, 21</td>
<td>Alternative medicine</td>
<td>November 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>November 26, 28</td>
<td>Global warming</td>
<td>December 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>December 3, 5</td>
<td>Intelligent Design &amp; Natural Selection</td>
<td>December 9</td>
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</table>

The assignments due on December 9 are the last of the term. There is no assignment scheduled during the final.
Readings by Week:

**Week 1 – Course Introduction**

**Week 2 – Why Do People Believe Weird Things**


**Week 3 – Openmindedness**
   Available on Google Books
   [http://books.google.com/books?id=JOpq1LOGrroC&printsec=frontcover&dq=pseudoscience+paranormal&hl=en&sa=X&ei=eu0UUtOtOaa42wYHYAQ&ved=0CC8Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=pseudoscience%20paranormal&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=JOpq1LOGrroC&printsec=frontcover&dq=pseudoscience+paranormal&hl=en&sa=X&ei=eu0UUtOtOaa42wYHYAQ&ved=0CC8Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=pseudoscience%20paranormal&f=false)

**Week 4 – Realism and Relativism**
   On Reserve in UNT Library

2. Listen to interview with Alan Sokal
   [http://ec.libsyn.com/p/b/6/8/b6826d935eb02a26/MI_Alan_Sokal.mp3?d13a76d516d9dec20c3d276ce028ed5089ab1ce3da902ea1d01cf8036d5cb5c75d5&c_id=1836583](http://ec.libsyn.com/p/b/6/8/b6826d935eb02a26/MI_Alan_Sokal.mp3?d13a76d516d9dec20c3d276ce028ed5089ab1ce3da902ea1d01cf8036d5cb5c75d5&c_id=1836583)

3. Watch video on Realism and Relativism
   [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bezqNIJ6qcFw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bezqNIJ6qcFw)

**Week 5 – Positives of Science**
   On Reserve in UNT Library

   On Reserve in UNT Library
Week 6 – Why We Mistrust Science?
   On Reserve in UNT Library

Week 7 – Informal Fallacies
   On Reserve in UNT Library

Week 8 – Patternicity and Superstitions
1. Watch video by Michael Shermer: The pattern behind self-deception


Week 9 – Statistical Reasoning
   On Reserve in UNT Library

Week 10 – Inference and Bias
   On Reserve in UNT Library

Week 11 – Limitations of Human Memory

   [http://faculty.washington.edu/eloftus/Articles/sciam.htm](http://faculty.washington.edu/eloftus/Articles/sciam.htm)

Week 12 – Near Death Experiences
   [http://www.susanblackmore.co.uk/Articles/si91nde.html](http://www.susanblackmore.co.uk/Articles/si91nde.html)
http://www.susanblackmore.co.uk/Articles/2013OBEupdate.htm

3. Listen to NPR story: Decoding The Mystery Of Near-Death Experiences  

**Week 13 – Alternative Medicine**

http://www.texasobserver.org  


http://www.csicop.org/si/show/gary_schwartzrsquos_energy_healing_experiments_the_emperorrsquos_new_clothe/

**Week 14 – Global Warming**

http://www.skeptic.com/reading_room/how-we-know-global-warming-is-real/

http://www.skeptic.com/reading_room/a-climate-of-belief/

**Week 15 – Intelligent Design & Natural Selection**


*On Reserve in UNT Library*