

IDH3931 - Introduction to Lying



Before wooden puppets became a [horror movie cliché](#), they were the stuff of children's fiction. The puppet and title character of the book *The Adventures of Pinocchio* is basically a decent fellow but a frequent liar.

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- **Fall 2016** - Section 025D

- **Catalog Description**

IDH3931 - Introduction to Lying is an [\(un\)common reading course](#): These courses are discussion oriented, seminar courses centered on a performance or exhibit (arts) or a book (reads).

Credits: 1

Writing or Math Req: None

Gen Ed: None

- **Instructor**

Prof. Steve Hagen

Email: sjhagen@ufl.edu

Tel.: (352) 392-4716

Office: 2362 NPB

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Prof. Hagen's current office hours

Location: 2362 NPB

No scheduled office hours in summer 2016

Office hours change from week to week, in order to accommodate more students. This week's office hours are shown above. If you cannot make this week's scheduled hours you are welcome to contact me and make an appointment.

- **Class Meetings**

Wednesdays 9th Period
4:05 - 4:55 pm
Hume 0119

- **Course Goals**

When is it okay to tell a lie? Is it wrong to tell small lies? Can one have an obligation to lie? Is it even possible to live a normal life while telling only the absolute truth?

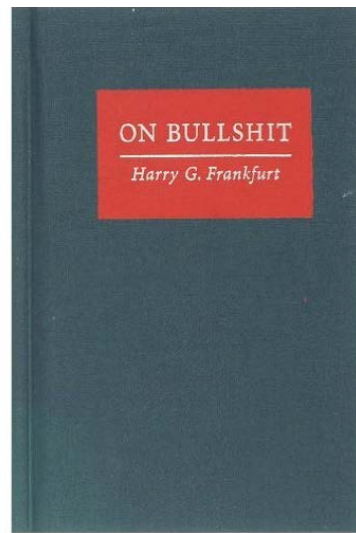
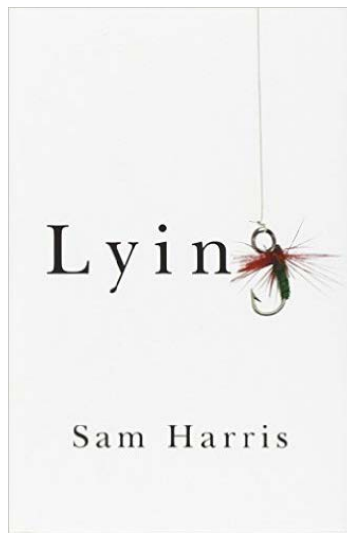
Most of us have pondered these questions in private life. But larger, more public lies are taking a toll on our society. We have all seen the quality of our public discourse cheapened and degraded by internet trolls and sock puppets, cable television blowhards, nontroversy and corporate shills. Intentional misinformation seems rampant in politics and media. As good citizens we should think more about truth and falsehood. What is the difference between a lie and simple wrong information, or misinformation? How do our institutions permit or even facilitate the persistence of big lies that impact millions? What is the responsibility of an individual when a lie is being promulgated in the public sphere? In this course we will examine public lying in different but overlapping contexts, such as science, politics, media, religion, commerce, and academia. Our goal is to clarify the meaning of lies, understand the mechanisms by which they flourish in the private and public spheres, and explore our own individual obligations when lies are told.

Students will read *Lying* (2011), by author and neuroscientist Sam Harris, and *On Bullshit* (2005), by philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt. Each student will document, through a written blog or journal, his/her own experience of truth and falsehood in everyday life. Students will discuss highlights of their journals in class from time to time. Each student will also present for the class one example of an important lie that has had recent impact in the public sphere, researching both the lie and the related truth, and leading a discussion of this example from the perspective of the above course goals.

- **Textbooks(required)**

Lying
by Sam Harris
(2013) 108 pages
ISBN-13: 978-1940051000

On Bullshit
by Harry G. Frankfurt
(2005) 67 pages
ISBN-13 978-0691122946



- **Dates, Calendar and Website**

We will begin the semester with an introductory exercise or two to gather class viewpoints on the subject of truth and falsehood. Then we will spend a class or so discussing the Sam Harris book, followed by a another class discussing Frankfurt's book. Please come to class ready to talk about these books.

In subsequent classes we will explore, through discussions led by the instructor and by students, examples of lying in the public sphere. Each student-led discussion (1-2 per class period) will consist of a brief but fascinating student presentation followed by student-led discussion.

Tentative schedule for Fall 2016:

- Week 1 / Aug 24 - Introductions and exercise
- Week 2 / Aug 31 - Class discussion of *Lying*, by Sam Harris
- Week 3 / Sep 7 - Class discussion of *On Bullshit*, by Harry Frankfurt
- Week 4 / Sep 14 - An excerpt from *Merchants of Doubt*, by Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway
- Week 5 / Sep 21 - Student presentations
- Week 6 / Sep 28 - Student presentations
- Week 7 / Oct 5 - *No Class*
- Week 8 / Oct 12 - Student presentations
- Week 9 / Oct 19 - Student presentations
- Week 10 / Oct 26 - Student presentations
- Week 11 / Nov 2 - Student presentations
- Week 12 / Nov 9 - Student presentations
- Week 13 / Nov 16 - Student presentations
- Week 14 / Nov 23 - *No Class*
- Week 15 / Nov 30 - Student presentations
- Week 16 / Dec 7 - Student presentations

All dates and announcements will be posted on the [Canvas site](#). The Canvas website has the course calendar in addition to assignments, readings, and other timely information. The instructor will assume that all students check the site regularly and are familiar with the information and announcements posted there.

Obviously we follow the [University of Florida academic calendar](#). There are several holidays in Fall 2016 but most will not affect our class meetings. Thanksgiving (Nov 23-25) is the exception: Note that the official UF calendar indicates that classes will meet on the Monday (Nov 21) but not the Wednesday (Nov 23) before

Thanksgiving.

- **Assignments and Grading**

Grading policies of the university are posted [here](#). The final course grade will be based on three components:

The *Presentation* - Each student will present in class an example of a lie that has impact in the public sphere. The presentation includes (a) providing some appropriate, professional background reading for the class (e.g. a published news story, book chapter or magazine article, but not a Wikipedia page), (b) giving a classroom presentation that shows insight into the actual facts, the lie, and the how and why, and (c) leading the discussion, question, and comment period following the presentation. The total duration of the presentation and subsequent discussion will be 20-30 minutes.

The *Journal* - Students are asked to keep a journal that contains a brief (1-2 paragraph) reaction to each in-class presentation and discussion, and that documents any other thoughts or observations about the course material during the course of the semester. Ideally the journal will describe at least one interesting point that you seized upon during each class meeting or presentation, and thus provide evidence of regular, thoughtful reflection on the issues raised in the course.

Class participation and engagement is definitely expected. Students should plan to attend all class meetings and contribute to lively and constructive conversation.

There will be no final examination. *Tentative* grade weights are as follows:

- 50% - Presentation
- 25% - Journal
- 25% - Class participation and engagement
- 100% - Total

- **Make-ups**

The Instructor believes that make-ups are intrinsically unfair. Consequently the course is designed to avoid any need for makeups. However some students may suffer a severe personal or family emergency that forces them to miss one or two classes. The final grading calculation will not penalize a student who suffers a small number of such events.

If a very serious problem arises that will prevent you from attending multiple classes, or giving your presentation, it is essential that you contact the instructor as soon as reasonably possible. (See Attendance, below).

- **Attendance**

Regular class attendance and constructive participation are definitely expected. Students who fall short in either area cannot expect to earn a respectable final grade.

- **Auditing the course**

Unfortunately the instructor cannot approve requests to audit. Every student must register formally and take the class for credit.

- **Privacy**

Student academic records are confidential, under [federal law](#). I will not answer emailed questions about your grades or other academic matters, unless the email comes from *your* UF email or Canvas account. Parents (and others) cannot ask instructors for information on a student's attendance, grades, performance, etc, either by phone or email. Even your UFID is confidential.

- **Disabilities (Accommodations)**

Students who will require a classroom accommodation for a disability must contact the Dean of Students Office and request proper documentation. Upon bringing that documentation to the Instructor, the student will be given the appropriate accommodations. No accommodations are available to students who lack this documentation. If accommodations are provided, it will be through the Disability Resource Center (DRC).

It is the policy of the University of Florida that the student, not the instructor, is responsible for arranging accommodations when needed. The instructor will not remind the student to schedule accommodations prior to each instance. Students must plan ahead sufficiently to meet DRC deadlines in advance of needed accommodation.

- **Professional Behavior**

This is an honors seminar course at this state's flagship university. We expect professional behavior from everyone. Frequent lateness, entering and leaving the classroom during the lecture, texting, websurfing, emailing during class, reading the newspaper, etc. ... are all rude and disruptive behaviors. Kindly show courtesy and respect to your classmates, your institution, and yourself by stowing away your electronic devices prior to class and by avoiding any other distractions or disruptive behaviors.

- **Academic Honesty**

All students are expected to hold themselves to a high standard of academic honesty. This includes abiding by the [Student Honor Code](#). Consistent with university policy, any incident of academic dishonesty in this course will be reported to the Dean of Students Office. No warnings and no exceptions. If the incident is the student's first offense at UF, the student will receive a failing grade. If not, the Dean of Students Office will decide the appropriate sanction.

Note that one of the most common forms of academic dishonesty is plagiarism. If you read the news at all, you will know that many careers have been needlessly sunk by intentional or unintentional plagiarism. No part of your presentation should be plagiarized - give appropriate credit to all sources. The instructor can and will check all written work for plagiarism, and will take action if any plagiarism is detected.

[The Dean of Students Office website](#) has further details on academic honesty policies at UF.

- **Religious Holidays**

Major religious observances will be accommodated. It is university policy, however, that the student must inform the instructor of religious observances that will conflict with class attendance or other activities, *prior to the class or the occurrence of that activity*. Since major religious holidays are usually based on astronomical calendars - which can be calculated hundreds of years in advance - the instructor will expect the student to provide *at least* 7-14 days of advance notice of any upcoming religious observance.

- **Evaluations**

Students in this course will be expected to demonstrate the professional skill of giving useful, constructive feedback. That includes giving feedback on this course by completing online end-of-semester evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>

- **Copyright**

The [UF Code of Student Conduct](#) (6C1-4.041, section 3(i) *Unauthorized Recordings*) prohibits a student from making any type of recording of any class or activity without express authorization from the instructor and from other participants. Please also note that the instructor of this course holds the copyright to *all course materials* that are not already the copyright of someone else (such as the book publisher). Permission to redistribute, reuse, recycle, share, upload, copy, buy, sell etc. any course materials in any form is denied. Period. That means for example that it is *illegal* to copy or upload anything from this course to any website or distribute it to any third party for any purpose.

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