**Merchants of Doubt:**

**How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming -** Naomi Oreskes & Erik. M. Conway

Course meets in Little 117, Tuesday’s 9th period (4:05-4:55pm)

**Instructor:** Lily R. Lewis, PhD

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Office: Carr 220

Office Hours: By appointment M – F (please try to provide at least 24hr notice when scheduling appointments)

**Course Description:**

For the 50% of United States citizens who accept the global scientific communities’ consensus that our climate is rapidly changing due to human activities (PEW Research Center 2015), it can be mind-boggling why 50% the nation still has doubts. Not all of us are climate scientists or ecologists who can wade through the primary scientific literature on climate change. Instead we are called upon to trust in science. But why should we trust in science? Why does half the nation attribute climate change to natural patterns or reject its occurrence all together? With catchphrases like “post-truth”, “fake news” and “alternative facts” becoming characteristic of our time, assessing the trustworthiness of information is more pertinent than ever.

In *Merchants of Doubt*, Oreskes and Conway tell the story of how a small group of scientists helped spread doubt to create an illusion of scientific uncertainty on topics spanning cigarette smoking to climate change. Oreskes and Conway address the question, “How can we trust science?”. They don’t tout the scientific method, but rather peer review and consensus within the scientific community as the reason we should trust science. Published in 2010, this book remains a highly relevant and eye-opening exposé on how the intentional manufacture of doubt has shaped public opinion on key environmental and social issues of our time.

In this 1 credit course, students will have weekly reading assignments of about 30-40 pages. Supplemental readings including Chris Mooney’s *The Science of Why We Don’t Believe Science* and selections from the National Academy of Sciences Sackler Colloquia on Science and Science communication will be assigned to facilitate solution based discussions. Guest speakers may be introduced throughout the semester.

# Assignments and Grades:

Students will submit three short reflection essays (~250 words) throughout the course, and one final reflection essay (~1000 words). Students will act as discussion leaders during each session. Discussion leadership assignments and partnerships will be chosen on the first day of class. Discussion leader teams may find it helpful to use the college level *Merchants of Doubt* study guide developed for the Merchants of Doubt movie by the journalistic Poynter Institute in collaboration with Participant Media to inspire discussion topics. This study guide was designed to help citizens develop critical thinking skills that will allow them to sort through confusing messages and distinguish between truth, propaganda, and misinformation.

The study guide can be found here: http://www.takepart.com/sites/default/files/2014-03-06%20Merchants%20of%20Doubt%20-%20College%20Study%20Guide.pdf

Attendance 15 points (1 point / course meeting)

Reflection Papers (3) 30 points (10 points each)

Discussion Leadership (2) 40 points (20 points each)

Final Reflection 15 points

All assignments are due by 11:59 pm on the due date. You will forfeit one point for each day an assignment is late (i.e. if you hand a reflection paper in 2 days late, you can only earn 8 points). A grade of Incomplete (I) will not be issued under any circumstance.

**Attendance:** Since this is a discussion-based class, attendance and participation is important. Each class meeting counts as one point. Your final grade will be dropped an entire letter grade (e.g. from a “A” to a “B+”) for each additional absence after 1. Absences with a doctor’s note or legal note may be excused. Please do not hesitate to check in with me if you know you are going to be absent.

**Reflection Papers:** These will brief reflections (250 words maximum) that will be related to readings and/or guest speakers.

**Discussion Leadership:** Groups of two students will be assigned to serve as discussion leaders of 2 assigned sections of the book.

**Final Reflection:** This is meant to be an opportunity for you to synthesize the thoughts and experiences you’ve had in this course. I encourage you to reflect on any “ah-ha” moments you’ve had, ways in which this course has changed (or confirmed) the way you see the world around you, and how you see this experience guiding your future.

**Grading Scale:** 93-100 (A); 90-92 (A-); 87-89 (B+); 83-86 (B); 80-82 (B-); 77-79 (C+); 73-76 (C);70-72 (C-); 67-69 (D+); 60-66 (D); 60-62 (D-); Below 59 (E)

# UF Policies

**Academic Honesty**

All students sign the following statement upon registration at the University of Florida: “I understand that the University of Florida expects its students to be honest in all their academic work. I agree to adhere to this commitment to academic honesty and understand that my failure to comply with this commitment may result in disciplinary action up to and including expulsion from the University.” As instructor for this course, I fully support the intent of the above statement and will not tolerate academic dishonesty. The university’s policies regarding academic honesty, the honor code, and student conduct related to the honor code will be strictly enforced. Full information regarding these policies is available at the following link: https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/student-­‐honor-­‐code.aspx.

**University Policy on Accommodating Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodations. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

**University Policy on Academic Misconduct**

Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Student Honor Code at [http://www.dso.ufl.edu/students.php.](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/students.php)

**University Policy on Netiquette and Communication Courtesy**

All members of the class are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all email messages, threaded discussions and chats. <http://teach.ufl.edu/docs/NetiquetteGuideforOnlineCourses.pdf>

Please also link here for best practice guidelines for blogging [http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/terms-­‐](http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/terms-)of-­‐use/

**University Policy on Course Evaluation**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at https://evaluations.ufl.edu Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester. 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

# UF Policies for Getting Help

For issues with technical difficulties for E-­‐learning, please contact the UF Help Desk at:

* Learning-­‐[support@ufl.edu](mailto:support@ufl.edu)
* (352) 392-­‐HELP -­‐ select option 2
* https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml
* Any requests for make‐ups due to technical issues MUST be accompanied by the ticket number received from LSS when the problem was reported to them. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. You MUST e-­‐mail your instructor within 24 hours of the technical difficulty if you wish to request a make-­‐up.

Other resources are available at [http://www.distance.ufl.edu/getting-­‐](http://www.distance.ufl.edu/getting-)help for:

* Counseling and Wellness resources
* Disability resources
* Resources for handling student concerns and complaints
* Library Help Desk support

Should you have any complaints with your experience in this course please visit [http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-­‐](http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-)complaints to submit a complaint.

**Course Schedule**

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| **Date** | **Discussion Leadership** | **Readings / Assignment Due** |
| 1/09 | Introductions & Course Overview; assign discussion leaders for semester. | Introduction |
| 1/16 | Discussions Leaders TBD | Pgs. 1-35 |
| 1/23 | Discussions Leaders TBD | Pgs. 36-65 |
| 1/30 | Discussions Leaders TBD | Pgs. 66-95  **Reflection Paper 1** |
| 2/6 | Discussions Leaders TBD | Pgs. 95-125 |
| 2/13 | Discussions Leaders TBD | Pgs. 125-148 |
| 2/20 | Discussions Leaders TBD | Pgs. 148-168  **Reflection Paper 2** |
| 2/27 | Discussions Leaders TBD | Pgs. 169-197 |
| 3/13 | Discussions Leaders TBD | Pgs. 197-230 |
| 3/20 | Discussions Leaders TBD | Pgs. 230-260 |
| 3/27 | Discussions Leaders TBD | Pgs. 260-274  **Reflection Paper 3** |
| 4/3 | Discussions Leaders TBD | Chris Mooney’s *The Science of Why We Don’t Believe Science* |
| 4/10 | Discussions Leaders TBD | Selections from the National Academy of Sciences Sackler Colloquia on Science and Science communication |
| 4/17 | Discussions Leaders TBD | Selections from the National Academy of Sciences Sackler Colloquia on Science and Science communication |
| 4/24 | Discussions Leaders TBD | Selections from the National Academy of Sciences Sackler Colloquia on Science and Science communication  **Final Reflection Paper** |