Course Overview

This course investigates political conspiracies and conspiratorial thinking in three ways: theoretically, psychologically, and historically. If the legal definition of a conspiracy is a secret agreement among two or more people to commit a crime, a political conspiracy takes place within or outside government for the purpose of political influence. Some key questions in this class will be: what is the relationship between political conspiracies and power? Is conspiratorial thinking a healthy or inevitable outcome of democracy? Are there political indicators, such as ideology, that indicate whether an individual would most likely believe in conspiracy theories? Most of the readings will be historical works of political theory and recent political science and political psychology scholarship on conspiracies and conspiratorial political culture. Media and film will be included in course content. Units on specific conspiracies will include the JFK assassination, 9/11, and contemporary conspiratorial politics on the American right.

Course Required Books (Available at the Duck Store)

- Additional readings will be available on Canvas.

Course Assignments

Weekly Quizzes
Weekly quizzes will test knowledge on the readings for that week. There will be 10 multiple choice questions chosen from a larger pool of questions. Your two lowest quiz scores will be dropped, which will give you 6 graded quizzes (5% of your grade for each quiz, 30% of your total grade for all quizzes).

Conspiracy Theories and Democracy Essay
This 2–3-page paper will directly engage the following questions: Are conspiracy theories good for democracy? Are conspiracy theories a necessary outcome of a robust, transparent democratic society? Is there a line or context in which conspiracy theories imperil democratic governance? If so, what is that line or context? Use specific examples in answering your question.

**Paper Proposal Assignment**
Students will submit a paper proposal assignment by Week 4 of the summer term. The proposal will identify a research question, why the question matters, resources to be used, and a basic outline of the final paper, which will be directly tied to the proposal.

**Final Paper**

There will be a final (minimum 10 page) paper due on finals week of the summer term. The final paper must be substantively tied to the proposal, the question you design in the proposal, and the outline you provide in the proposal stage, but the direction or content of the paper may change as the term develops. A guidelines sheet for the final paper will be available on Canvas.

**Grade Breakdown**

Conspiracy Theories and Democracy Essay: 15% of overall grade  
Weekly Quizzes: 5% of overall grade each (30% total for 6 quizzes)  
Paper Proposal Assignment: 20% of overall grade  
Final Paper: 35% of overall grade

**Substantive Learning Goals**

- Gain theoretical knowledge of conspiracies, political power, and influence over governance and institutions.  
- Evaluate the relationship between conspiracy theories and democracy.  
- Analyze the historical development and themes of political conspiracies.  
- Make connections between contemporary American political culture and conspiratorial logic or conspiracy theories.  
- Make normative assessments of the dangers of conspiratorial thinking in a democratic society.  
- Use argument and evidence to advance an analysis pertaining to the historical and theoretically concerns of political conspiracies.

**Unique Learning Needs**

I am happy to accommodate any unique learning requirements so long as prior authorization is granted by UO’s Accessible Education Center. Please review their information here: [https://aec.uoregon.edu](https://aec.uoregon.edu)

Additionally, I will attempt to accommodate any any religious observances that may conflict with the course if identified within the first two weeks of class. For UO’s religious holidays information, see: [https://registrar.uoregon.edu/calendars/religious-observances](https://registrar.uoregon.edu/calendars/religious-observances)
**Classroom Expectations**

Plagiarism is a violation of your student responsibilities and will not be tolerated. Students are encouraged to review UO’s plagiarism and cheating policy and review resources that may help students avoid this here: [https://dos.uoregon.edu/academic-misconduct](https://dos.uoregon.edu/academic-misconduct)

Food and drink are allowed in the classroom but must not be a distraction to others. Similarly, laptops and other electronic devices are allowed but only if used exclusively for our course. Browsing the internet or engaging in social media activity is explicitly not allowed. Students who use electronic devices for anything other than course work will be asked to leave.

**Title IX Statement**

In our roles as Instructors, we are generally required to let the Office of the Dean of Students, Title IX Coordinator or the Office of Affirmative Action & Equal Opportunity know about any discrimination, harassment, or physical and sexual assault students disclose to us (or in our presence). If an abuse that occurred in the past is disclosed, we are still encouraged to report if we reasonably believe there is a current or future risk of harm based on the information we received.

However, it is important for you to know that disclosures in a classroom discussion or course assignments that may draw on personal experiences will not trigger such a reporting obligation. That means that if you disclose something in an assignment or discussion as part of this course we will not share that information, and the university will not initiate an investigation or outreach based on that information, unless you ask us to. If you have questions about your rights, resources that are available or how to file a complaint please see [http://safe.uoregon.edu](http://safe.uoregon.edu) or call the 24-hour SAFE hotline to speak with a confidential resource who can talk to you about your options.

**Course Schedule**

**Week One: Theoretical Foundations: Democracy, Power and Conspiracy**

Seneca, Machiavelli, Lenin, Steven Lukes, etc.

**Week Two: From Theory to History: Understanding Political Theories on Time**

Critchlow, chapter one; Walker, chapters one and two

**Week Three: The United States of Conspiracy Theories and Other Ways I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love the Bomb**
Critchlow, Chapters 2 and 3; Walker, chapters three and four

**Week Four: From History to Theory: Evaluating History to Inform New Theory**

Critchlow, finish; Walker, finish

**Week Five: The Logics of the Conspiratorial Mind**

Brotherton, chapters one, two, and three

**Week Six: Understanding Politics through Psychology**

Brotherton, chapters four, five, and six

**Week Seven: The Return of Democracy and Other Phantasms of the Conspiratorial Mind**

Brotherton, finish

**Week Eight: Conspiracy and Political Turbulence in the Present**