



SELF PROGRAM 2025/2026

Debating matters in the context of the Culture Wars Myth, misinformation and mayhem: Conspiracy theories and the not-so-modern world

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Course information

Number of credits : 6 credits

Contact hours : 30 hours

Hours taught per week : 2,5 hours

Teaching period : Fall Semester 2025

Course description :

The first part of this course will explore the Culture Wars which are ideological fights over domestic issues in a given country. Through several case studies and practical exercises we will see who the cultural warriors are as well as the arguments and worldviews that divide them. We will analyse the origins, development, and meanings of those cultural conflict and how they are exported from one country to the next. The course examines current debates, different ways to make a coherent and persuasive argument.

The second part of this course will explore the history, reach, and impact of conspiracy theories in shaping societal perceptions and behaviors. From historical examples like the Protocols of the Elders of Zion to modern-day conspiracies amplified by digital platforms, students will examine how myths and misinformation proliferate, influence public opinion, and affect political and cultural landscapes. The course investigates the psychological, social, and technological factors that fuel conspiracy theories and their real-world consequences, such as polarization and mistrust.

Prerequisites :

Basic knowledge of current social debates.

Course objectives:

- The main objective of this course is to learn how to persuade, organize your arguments and provide relevant examples. We will study the technics used to persuade in a very polarized political environment: the types of arguments used and those which are the most effective. We will work on the different themes of the Culture War and conspiracies. You will also develop skills to critically evaluate sources, distinguish credible information from misinformation (media and digital literacy to navigate and counteract misinformation in an increasingly connected world) and identify logical fallacies in conspiratorial narratives. The class will foster respectful and evidence-based discussions to explore the societal impact of both culture wars and conspiracy theories and their role in shaping public discourse.

Assessment: [at least 2 marks, one for the final written exam in class and one for a mid-term/oral presentation ...]

50%: group presentation in first part of class

50%: group presentation in second part of class

Attendance:

In order to participate, students must be present. Nevertheless, a maximum of 2 (two) unexcused absences will be allowed; otherwise no mark will be given. An unexcused absence at a test (final test or continuous assessment) means no credits for the course.

Bibliography:

Bonnet, Alma-Pierre, Denis Jamet-Coupé and Cédric Passard (eds) "The Words of "Cultural Wars". Between Discursive Issues and Argumentative Aims" in *Mots, Les langages du politique* 2024/3 No 136.

Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars*. Oxford University Press, 1992.

Hartman, Andrew. *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*. University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Thomson, Irene Taviss. *Culture Wars and Enduring American Dilemmas*. University of Michigan Press, 2010

Zimmerman, Jonathan. *Whose America?: Culture Wars in the Public Schools*. University of Chicago Press, 2022.

Barkun Mikael, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, 2003

Weill Kelly Off the Edge: *Flat Earthers, Conspiracy Culture, and Why People Will Believe Anything*, 2022