



FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

PHILOSOPHY PROGRAMME
PHIL 236: Conspiracy Theories

TRIMESTER 1 2013
4 March – 3 July 2013

Trimester dates

Teaching dates: 4 March to 7 June 2013

Easter break: 28 March to 3 April 2013

Mid-trimester break: 22–28 April 2013

Withdrawal dates

Information on withdrawals and refunds may be found at
www.victoria.ac.nz/home/admisenrol/payments/withdrawalsrefunds

Names and contact details

Course Coordinator: Dr Stuart Brock
Room No.: MY 701
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Office hours: By Appointment

Lecturer: AProf Marc Wilson
Room No.: EA 625
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Office hours: By Appointment

Class times and locations

Can be found on the Victoria website at:

<http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/subjects/coursecatalogue>

It is advisable to check the above for any changes to the timetable programme.

Lecture Time: Tues, Fri 1-3 pm
Lecture Venue: Hugh Mackenzie LT002

Teaching/learning summary

Tuesday's class will be a traditional two-hour lecture. Friday's class will be conducted in seminar style and will require students to come to class prepared, having closely read one assigned article for the week. In some cases, the Friday class will also involve a pop quiz on the content of the nominated article. A list of required readings for each week is available on blackboard.

Communication of additional information

This course uses Blackboard and presumes that all enrolled students have valid myvuw.ac.nz addresses. Please check that this account is active and you have organised email forwarding. Additional information and any changes to the timetable or lecture and seminar programme will be advised by email, announced in lectures, and posted on the Course Blackboard site.

Course prescription

This course will examine philosophical and psychological issues pertaining to conspiracy theories.

Course content

Questions addressed in the course will include: What is a conspiracy theory? What (if anything) is wrong with conspiracy theories and conspiracy theorists? What are the social, political, or psychological conditions most conducive to the development and maintenance of conspiracy theories? What are the 'functions' of conspiracy beliefs? This course will assist students in appropriately assessing the validity of conspiratorial theorising.

Learning objectives

Students who pass this course should be able to:

1. distinguish conspiracy theories from other closely related theories of social phenomena;
2. evaluate the evidence in support of conspiracy theories; and
3. understand the conditions required for the development and maintenance of conspiracy theories.
4. discriminate between various moral and ethical considerations that apply to conspiracies and conspiracy theorizing.

Graduate attributes

As with all Philosophy courses, learning objectives of this course contribute to the attainment of specific attributes in the areas of logical and critical thinking, conceptual analysis and rational and ethical decision-making. For more details please consult our website <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/hppi/about/overview-of-the-school/phil-overview#grad-attributes>

Expected workload

In accordance with Faculty Guidelines, this course has been constructed on the assumption that students will devote 200 hours to the course throughout the trimester. This includes weekly attendance at lectures, and seminars, completion of all set weekly readings and research and writing for set assessment tasks.

Readings – set texts:

Students must purchase the PHIL 236 course book. There will also be information about additional readings posted on the Blackboard course page.

All undergraduate textbooks and student notes will be sold from the Memorial Theatre Foyer from 11 February to 15 March 2013. After week two of the trimester all undergraduate textbooks and student notes will be sold from vicbooks, Ground Floor Easterfield Building, Kelburn Parade.

Customers can order student notes online at www.vicbooks.co.nz or can email an order or enquiry to enquiries@vicbooks.co.nz. Books can be couriered to customers or they can be picked up from nominated collection points at each campus. Customers will be contacted when they are available.

Opening hours are 8.00 am – 6.00 pm, Monday – Friday during term time (closing at 5.00 pm in the holidays). Phone: 463 5515.

Assessment requirements

The assessment will be based on the following: two essays (worth 40% each) and five pop quizzes (worth 4% each; 20% in total).

ESSAYS. Students are required to write two essays. Each essay will count for 40% of your overall assessment and should be approximately 3500 words. Essay questions and instructions will be posted on blackboard on or before March 18, 2013. In addition, the instructions will include a statement of the particular learning objectives each essay is designed to assess, together with marking criteria. The first essay will be due on April 30, 2013. The second essay will be due on June 25, 2013. Essays should be submitted by 1:00pm on the due date.

All essays must be submitted in two ways. A copy of the essay must first be submitted digitally via blackboard (select 'assignments' icon in the course menu). Make sure you save your file as a Microsoft Word document. The title of your file should follow the following format: last name, underscore, first name, underscore, essay number, dot, docx (for example: brock_stuart_3.docx). A hard copy of the essay must then be submitted to the lecturer at the start of class on the due date or to one of the school administrators located in

MY518. The hard copy will not be graded unless there is a problem with your blackboard submission. In such cases, students will be required to re-enter an identical copy to blackboard at their earliest convenience.

POP QUIZZES: Students will also be assessed on their performance on a series of pop quizzes. Pop quizzes will be short tests (10 minutes) taken at the beginning of the Friday class. Each quiz is designed to test the student's understanding of an assigned reading for the week. There will be at least six quizzes worth 4% each. Only the student's best five quizzes will count towards their final grade (20% in total). The quizzes are specifically designed to assess how well students have met all four of the learning objectives. Information about the assigned readings for each week is given on blackboard.

In exceptional circumstances, students who miss a pop quiz may be able to take a make-up quiz. Requests for a make-up quiz should be directed to the course coordinator and made at the earliest possible time after the missed quiz. If the reason is medical, a doctor's certificate must accompany the request.

Penalties

Philosophy Programme policy stipulates that students will be penalised for late submission of essays. For each week or part thereof of lateness, a late assignment gets a 5% penalty, up to three weeks, after which the assignment will get a zero mark. (i.e. 1-7 days late a loss of 5%; 8-14 days late a loss of 10 %; 15-21 days late a loss of 15%, and after that a zero mark.) Extensions may be granted in exceptional circumstances. Requests for an extension should be made *before* the due date, and should be directed to the course coordinator. If the reason is medical, a doctor's certificate must accompany the request.

Mandatory course requirements

There are no mandatory course requirements.

Return of marked course work

Grades for essays and pop quizzes will be entered directly on blackboard. Comments on essays will also be posted on blackboard. Hard copies of essays will not be returned to students.

Class representative

A class representative will be elected in the first week, and that person's name and contact details will be available to VUWSA, the Course Coordinator and the class. The class representative provides a communication channel to liaise with the Course Coordinator on behalf of students.

Academic integrity and plagiarism

Academic integrity means that university staff and students, in their teaching and learning are expected to treat others honestly, fairly and with respect at all times. It is not acceptable to mistreat academic, intellectual or creative work that has been done by other people by representing it as your own original work.

Academic integrity is important because it is the core value on which the University's learning, teaching and research activities are based. Victoria University's reputation for academic integrity adds value to your qualification.

The University defines plagiarism as presenting someone else's work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not. 'Someone else's work' means anything that is not your own idea. Even if it is presented in your own style, you must acknowledge your sources fully and appropriately. This includes:

- Material from books, journals or any other printed source
- The work of other students or staff
- Information from the internet
- Software programs and other electronic material
- Designs and ideas
- The organisation or structuring of any such material

Find out more about plagiarism, how to avoid it and penalties, on the University's website: <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/plagiarism>

Use of Turnitin

Student work provided for assessment in this course will be checked for academic integrity by the electronic search engine <http://www.turnitin.com>. Turnitin is an online plagiarism prevention tool which compares submitted work with a very large database of existing material. At the discretion of the Head of School, handwritten work may be copy-typed by the School and subject to checking by Turnitin. Turnitin will retain a copy of submitted material on behalf of the University for detection of future plagiarism, but access to the full text of submissions is not made available to any other party.

Where to find more detailed information

Find key dates, explanations of grades and other useful information at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study. Find out how academic progress is monitored and how enrolment can be restricted at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/academic-progress. Most statutes and policies are available at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/policy, except qualification statutes, which are available via the *Calendar* webpage at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/calendar (See Section C).

Other useful information for students may be found at the Academic Office website, at www.victoria.ac.nz/home/about/avcacademic.