

# Calling Bullshit: How to Live in a Factual World\*

Sociology 4090 – Spring 2026

Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:45am to 11:00am – Hubert H Humphrey School of Public Affairs Room 25

\*This course is a variant of similar courses taught elsewhere. See the “acknowledgements” section on page 2 in which I gratefully recognize other instructors, thank them for their contributions, and recognize where I have borrowed from their innovations.

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## WHAT IS THIS COURSE ABOUT?

There are **three** main things I want you to get out of this class.

1. **Bullshit Radar.** I want you to quickly notice when somebody is making a factual claim and to remember that there is at least some chance that the claim is bullshit.
2. Skills to Be a **Bullshit Detector.** I want you to have the tools to figure out for yourself whether and why a factual claim is scientifically defensible or bullshit.
3. Skills to Be a **Fact Spreader.** I want you to develop skills to effectively persuade reasonably open-minded people to let go of bullshit ideas and to instead be open to scientific facts.

I decided on these three things because of some observations I’ve made over the years:

- We are constantly exposed to news, research findings, social media posts, friends and family, college professors, and other spreaders of things that are alleged to be scientific facts.
- It can be *very* hard to tell the difference between scientific facts and bullshit.
- Scientific facts and bullshit are often hardest to tell apart in the areas of our lives that matter most – such as when making decisions about how to protect our health or when debating policy issues.
- Many people resist changing what they believe to be true when faced with new or better information; as a result, they often hold on to bullshit for a long time.
- Most people just suck at convincing other people that a factual claim is really bullshit.
- It is *much* easier to create and spread bullshit than it is to *refute* or *contain* it.

This is a class about scientific **facts**, not a class about religious, political, or other **opinions**. Specifically, it is a class about the difference between scientific facts and two things that can easily be mistaken for them: **bullshit** and **lies**. Facts are about what *is* or *was* (and maybe about what *will be*) – not about *should*. For the most part, *should* is a matter of morality, politics, ethics, aesthetics, religion, spirituality, and other (valuable and important but decidedly not scientific) ways of reasoning, knowing, and being human.

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*"Nothing that you will learn in the course of your studies will be of the slightest possible use to you in after life – save only this – if you work hard and diligently you should be able to detect when a [person] is talking rot, and that, in my view, is the main, if not the sole, purpose of education."* - John Alexander Smith, 1914

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The course [Calling Bullshit: Data Reasoning in a Digital World](#) was first taught by Carl T. Bergstrom and Jevin West at the University of Washington some years ago; I have borrowed many of their ideas, am assigning their book, use a few of their examples, and am assigning some of their activities. They know that I am teaching this course and say they are OK with it.

Finally, this course is the product of conversations with and feedback from many people. I am most indebted to Gina Rumore, students in the 2025 version of the course, and Carolyn Liebler.

Of course, anything objectionable about this class is totally my fault.

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## ASSIGNMENTS

You only have **two main tasks** in this course. **First, do the reading and show up to class** ready to engage. **Second, take the final project seriously.** Except for the final project, nearly all course assignments are “carrots” and “sticks” designed to incentivize and reward doing the reading and engaging in class. In exchange, I make two commitments to you: (1) I have not assigned **any** reading (or video, podcast, etc.) without having a very good reason for assigning it; I also think each one is interesting – in real-world terms, not in nerdy professor terms. (2) I will work hard to make my class sessions lively, interactive, interesting, fun, and a good use of everyone’s time. So, do the reading and show up to class!

There are four types of scored assignments in the course:

### 1. Daily Class Engagement Checks

Every class session – 29 sessions in all, including the final exam time – you will be prompted to show that you are engaged in class; because this is not a virtual or hybrid course, you can only be engaged in class if you are in the room. At some point during each class session, I will launch some sort of electronic check-in that you may only complete from the classroom. This might take the form of interactive activities; polls; small group activities; or something else. These checks might happen at any point during our time together. To get credit for an “engagement check,” you need to be physically present in the classroom, and you need to demonstrate an adequate level of engagement.

Assignments will be scored:

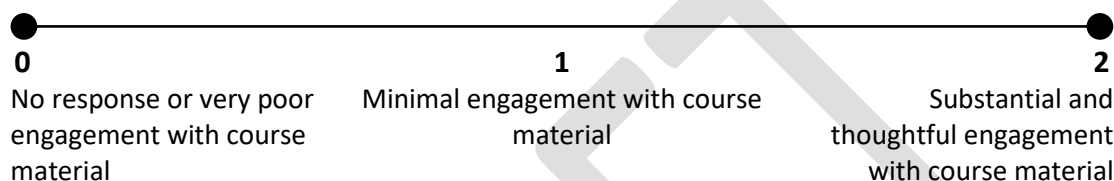


## 2. Weekly Reading Reactions

There is a fair amount of reading (and video watching, podcast listening, etc.) in this class. Your job each week is to think about the ideas raised by the assigned materials, to think about and evaluate the things they say, and to come to class ready to discuss them.

Every week – *except* for the first week of class and Spring Break but *including* the week of final exams – there are one or more things to read, videos to watch, and/or podcasts to listen to. That’s 14 weeks in all. In each of these 14 weeks, you will be asked – at the start of the initial class session of the week – to complete a handwritten “Reading Reaction” that helps you prepare for the upcoming class sessions. They will each take about ten minutes.

Each “Reading Reactions” assignment will be scored as follows:

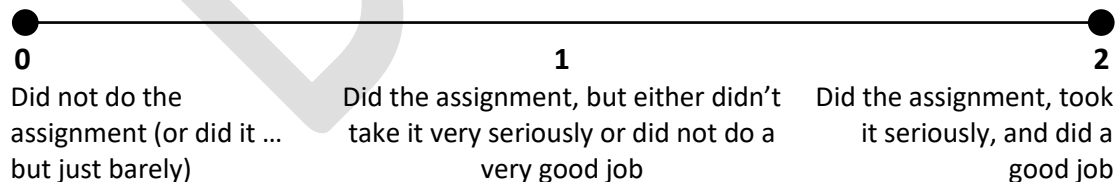


## 3. Occasional Smaller Assignments

There are six other, smaller assignments. Almost all of them set up or provide data for in-class activities; for that reason, they may seem weird as you do them. But they will make more sense when we use them in class. None of them should take you more than about 15 minutes. In each case, you will be prompted via Canvas to respond ahead of the due date.

- (a) “Class Survey” – Due by midnight on Wednesday January 21
- (b) “Syllabus Quiz” – Due by midnight on Monday January 26
- (c) “Make a Video” assignment – Due by midnight on Wednesday January 28
- (d) “Spotting Bullshit, Part 1” Survey – Due by midnight on Monday March 2
- (e) “Spotting Bullshit, Part 2” Survey – Due by midnight on Wednesday April 1
- (f) “Course Evaluation” – Due (anonymously) by 10:00am on Wednesday May 13

All six assignments will be scored as follows:



## 4. Final Project

For the final project you will work by yourself or in a small group to assess whether some claim is either scientifically defensible or bullshit. You will thoroughly research the claim, assess the evidence for its scientific defensibility or bullshit-ness, and then develop a public information campaign to better inform people about the accuracy of the claim. Details about the steps involved – including instructions,

deadlines, and scoring criteria – are in the “Final Project” document on Canvas. But briefly, the Final Project has seven steps:

- Part 1: Getting Started –3 points – Due by midnight on Monday February 9
- Part 2: Your Claim and Your Plan to Assess It – 7 points – Due by midnight on Monday March 2
- Part 3: Rough Draft of the Research – 6 points – Due by midnight on Monday March 23
- Part 4: Scoring Others’ “Rough Draft of the Research” – 4 points – Due by midnight on Wednesday April 1
- Part 5: Rough Draft of the Public Information Campaign – 6 points – Due by midnight on Monday April 20
- Part 6: Scoring Others’ “Rough Draft of the Public Information Campaign” – 4 points – Due by midnight on Wednesday April 29
- Part 7: Final Draft – 10 points – Due by 10:00am on Wednesday May 13

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## GRADES

“Full credit” in this course is 100 points. Here’s how the points break down:

<b>Daily Class Engagement Checks</b>	25 points	25% of course grade
<b>Weekly Reading Reactions</b>	25 points	25% of course grade
<b>Occasional Smaller Assignments</b>	10 points	10% of course grade
<b>Final Project</b>	40 points	40% of course grade

However, if you do the math, you can earn up to 29 (not just 25) points for Class Engagement Checks; 28 (not just 25) points for Weekly Reading Reactions; and 12 (not just 10) points for Occasional Smaller Assignments. In other words, the highest possible score in the course is  $29 + 28 + 12 + 40 = 109$  points. You could think about that extra  $109 - 100 = 9$  points in two ways. First, you could think: “I can miss up to 16 points ( $109 - 16 = 93$ ) and still get an A!” Or you could think: “Those extra 9 points give me some cushion in case I get sick, have a bad week, or just need to miss class.”

I will add up your points across the four types of assignments, round up (if you earn half points somewhere along the line), and assign a final course grade as follows:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
A	93 or more points	B-	80 to 82 points	D+	67 to 69 points
A-	90 to 92 points	C+	77 to 79 points	D	63 to 66 points
B+	87 to 89 points	C	73 to 76 points	F	less than 63
B	83 to 86 points	C-	70 to 72 points		points

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## OTHER INFORMATION

### Can I Get Your Slides?

Of course! Any digital media that I share or present in class will be available on the course Canvas page when class begins. You will find, however, that my slides are a **very** poor substitute for coming to class; I tend to only show images or graphs on slides (not what they mean or how they connect to anything, and not the words I say about other topics). Also: I will not necessarily put *everything* online;

for example, I will often save the “punchlines” of in-class exercises or activities for the day of the lecture and not give them away by posting them.

## Is There a Required Textbook?

Yes. The book is:

Bergstrom, Carl T. and Jevin D. West. 2021. *Calling Bullshit: The Art of Skepticism in a Data-Driven World*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks.

**DO NOT GO BUY ONE!!!** The book is available – **for free** – online at the [University of Minnesota library](#). It is also available at independent booksellers like [Powell's](#) and [Bookshop.org](#). And, I have a bunch of extra paper copies you are welcome to have.

## What if I Have to Miss Class?

No worries. Life happens! And, as described above, it is still very possible to earn an A even if you miss some assignment points or must miss a few classes. However, if you anticipate missing a *lot* of classes or assignments, come meet with me to discuss. I don't want you to get behind.

## Can I Turn in Assignments Late?

No.

Class Engagement Checks are basically “real time” assessments of whether you are physically in class and engaged; it doesn't make sense to do them later. The point of the Weekly Reading Reactions is to make sure you're up to speed on assigned material *before* the class session in which we use them; completing them later defeats that purpose. Almost all the Occasional Smaller Assignments directly contribute to in-class activities we will do during the class session right after they are due. Turning them in later doesn't make much sense because they'll not be used for their intended (or any) purpose. **So, for those three kinds of assignments, I will not accept late work.** (However, I will not be a *complete* jerk about deadlines. If your Wi-Fi goes bad, for example, and the assignment gets uploaded to Canvas a few minutes late, I will not be a jerk and say the assignment is late.)

For the **Final Project**, there may be *some* wiggle room regarding when you turn in assignments. However, I will only accept late assignments if (1) you communicate with me *well ahead of time* with a reasonable explanation; (2) we agree in writing (aka, by email) on a new assignment deadline; and (3) everyone in your group – if applicable – is OK with the new deadline.

## Contesting Scoring and Grading Decisions

Your TA and I might sometimes make mistakes – it happens. But we want you to get the scores and final grade you deserve. To contest a score on an assignment: First, *wait 24 hours* after you receive the score. After you've had time to calmly reflect, are you *sure* the score was unfair? Then, if you still want to contest the score, email *me* a list of your reasons for your dissatisfaction with the score.

## Incompletes

According to university policy, a course grade of “Incomplete” is only given when (1) you are making **good progress** throughout most of a course and then (2) some **unexpected** event or circumstance **temporarily** prevents you from completing the course assignments on time. I will only agree to give an “Incomplete” when *both* conditions are met. Also, I will only give an “Incomplete” once you and I have met to sign the required university paperwork and have agreed about how and by what date all course assignments will be completed.

## Respect for Others

Everyone in the class must treat everyone else in the class with unflinching respect. We are here to learn from one another, and we can learn the *most* from people who do not think like us, vote like us, or have the same backgrounds as us. This means it is *crucial* that everyone feel free to voice their opinions, knowledge, and perspectives—even if others disagree with them. In my experience, people can only effectively communicate and learn when they feel they are being treated with respect.

Remember, also, to be respectful to your teaching assistant and me. Like you, we are busy, sometimes make mistakes, and respond better when treated well. In particular: Keep in mind that we have a right to wait to respond to emails or other communications until normal business hours. Your question may be urgent, but we might have even *more* urgent things to attend to in our lives.

## Learning Styles, Abilities, and Accommodations

If you are overwhelmed or feel like you could use some help catching up, one good first step is to visit with me or your TA. In most cases we can help you get back on track (especially if you talk to us early).

Like the University of Minnesota as a whole, I view disability as an important aspect of diversity. Everyone learns in different ways. If, for any reason, you become concerned about your ability to fully participate in and benefit from this course due to the structure of activities or assignments please talk to me about it. I am committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students.

The Disability Resource Center (DRC) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations. If you have, or think you have, a disability in any area such as, mental health, attention, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical, please contact the DRC office (612.626.1333 or [drc@umn.edu](mailto:drc@umn.edu)) to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations. If you have a short-term disability, such as a broken arm, the DRC can often work with instructors like me to minimize classroom barriers. In situations where additional assistance is needed, you should contact the DRC as noted above. If you are registered with the DRC and have a disability accommodation letter dated for this semester or this year, please contact me early in the semester to review how your accommodations will be applied in this course. More information is on the DRC website: <https://diversity.umn.edu/disability/>.

Bottom Line: If you have a *documented* disability that may impact your learning and /or participation in this course, please talk with me early in the semester so we can develop a plan to effectively support your learning and participation. If you have an *undocumented* disability that you would like me to know about, if you are opting not to register your disability with the university, or if you just want to

talk about learning to learn, please set up a conversation with me so we can plan for ways you might collaborate with me, peers, others on campus, and family members to maximize your learning.

## Sexual Misconduct

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment. I also have a reporting responsibility related to my role: I am *required* to share information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime of sexual misconduct with the Office for Equal Opportunity & Affirmative Action (EOAA) at [eot.umn.edu](http://eot.umn.edu). For victims of sexual assault: The Aurora Center provides free and confidential support and academic advocacy via their 24-hour help line (612-626-9111) and by email ([aurora.umn.edu](mailto:aurora.umn.edu)).

## Academic Misconduct

I strongly encourage you to collaborate and brainstorm with your classmates and to review and critique one another's work, both in and out of class. However, **individual assignments must represent your own ideas and be your own work**. Taking credit for work that is not your own – whether that work was done by another human or by a robot – constitutes scholastic dishonesty.

The university makes it easy for me to report scholastic dishonesty, too. I fill out one short report via a convenient web interface – I can do it from my phone – and they take it from there. If I ever think you engaged in scholastic dishonesty, I will respectfully discuss it with you first. After that, if I still think you engaged in scholastic dishonesty, I will give you a zero on the relevant assignment and report the incident to the university. Not sure what scholastic dishonesty is? Read about it in the “Scholastic Dishonesty” section of the [Student Conduct Code](#).

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## SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

### PART I: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OPINION, SCIENTIFIC FACT, BULLSHIT, AND LIES?

**Week of January 19 – Facts, Lies, Opinions, and Bullshit.** An introduction to the course. Assessing your ability to spot bullshit in the wild.

- Due this week:
  1. “Class Survey” assignment (Complete by midnight on Wednesday)

**Week of January 26 – The Essence and Origins of Bullshit.** The difference between scientifically defensible facts, opinions, lies, and bullshit. Why it’s so hard to tell them apart, and why it matters whether we try to do so.

- Due this week:
  1. “Syllabus Quiz” assignment (Complete by midnight on Monday)
  2. “Make a Video” assignment (Complete by midnight on Wednesday)
- Before Tuesday’s class, read:
  1. Calling Bullshit, Chapter 1, 2, and 3
  2. Lewandowsky et al. 2022. "When Science Becomes Embroiled in Conflict: Recognizing the Public’s Need for Debate while Combating Conspiracies and Misinformation." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 700(1): 26-40.
  3. Harry Frankfurt. 1986. “On Bullshit.” *Raritan Quarterly Review* 6: 1-16.
  4. Carl Sagan. 1996. “The Fine Art of Baloney Detection.” Pp. 189-206 from *The Demon-Haunted World*. Ballantine Books.

PART II:  
**HOW CAN YOU TELL THE DIFFERENCE  
BETWEEN A SCIENTIFIC FACT AND BULLSHIT?**

**Week of February 2 – The Life Cycle of Scientific Research Studies.** Science and academic publishing. How research studies are funded, how they get conducted, and how they get published. How and why do honest and well-meaning scientists so often publish bullshit? Fraud in scientific research.

- Due this week:
  1. Nothing
  
- Before Tuesday's class, read/listen:
  1. **Skim** these three articles well enough to get the basic question, methods, and findings:
    - a. Studnicki et al. 2021. "A Longitudinal Cohort Study of Emergency Room Utilization Following Mifepristone Chemical and Surgical Abortions, 1999–2015." *Health Services Research and Managerial Epidemiology*. 8.
    - b. Regnerus, Mark. 2012. "How Different Are the Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study." *Social Science Research* 41: 752-770.
    - c. Wakefield, Andrew J., et al. 1998. "Ileal-lymphoid-nodular hyperplasia, non-specific colitis, and pervasive developmental disorder in children." *The Lancet* 351: 637-641.
  2. For the Regnerus (2012) and Wakefield et al. (1998) articles above: Search for and read several reactions and responses to these articles ... by academics, in the media, etc.
  3. *Freakonomics* podcast #572 from 1/10/2024. "Why Is There So Much Fraud in Academia?"
  4. *Freakonomics* podcast #573 from 1/17/2024. "Can Academic Fraud Be Stopped?"
  5. Pages 28-40 of Michaels, David. 2020. *The Triumph of Doubt: Dark Money and the Science of Deception*. New York: Oxford University Press.
  6. Pages 8-17 of Oreskes, Naomi and Erik M. Conway. 2015. *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

**Week of February 9 – Science in the News.** Real news and fake news. Social media and traditional media. Communicating scientific findings and scientific uncertainty to non-scientists.

- Due this week:
  1. "Part 1: Getting Started" survey for the Final Project (Complete by midnight on Monday)
  
- Before Tuesday's class, read/listen:
  1. Brown, Paige. 2012. "Nothing but the Truth: Are the Media as Bad at Communicating Science as Scientists Fear?" *EMBO Reports* 13: 964-967.
  2. Sutter, Paul. 2022. "Opinion: Science Has a Communication Problem – and a Connection Problem." *Undark*, October 20.

3. Thompson, Joanna. 2023. "Opinion: Are We Having a Moral Panic Over Misinformation?" *Undark*, October 26.
4. Talpos, Sarah. 2024. "Interview: Are We Misinformed About Misinformation?" *Undark*, October 24.
5. Pennycook, Gordon et al. 2021. "The Psychology of Fake News." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 25: 388-402.
6. Yoder, Kate. 2023. "Why Fake News About Climate Change Is Still So Effective." *Mother Jones*, December 23.

**Week of February 16 – Science in the News: Some Examples.** Two case studies – one on hydroelectric dams and the size of the global human population, the other on whether living near a golf course increases your risk of getting Parkinson’s Disease – from beginning to end. We will read the studies, consider media reactions, and interview the authors.

- Due this week:
  1. Nothing
- Before Tuesday’s class, read/listen:
  1. Láng-Ritter, Josias, Marko Keskinen, and Henrikki Tenkanen. 2025. "Global Gridded Population Datasets Systematically Underrepresent Rural Population." *Nature Communications* 16: 2170.
  2. Aalto University [Press Release](#)
  3. *More or Less* [podcast](#) from 6/7/2025
  4. *Popular Mechanics* [article](#) from 10/31/ 2025
  5. *Jerusalem Post* [article](#) from 4/10/2025
  6. Krzyzanowski Brittany, Aidan F. Mullan, et al. 2025. "Proximity to Golf Courses and Risk of Parkinson Disease." *JAMA Network Open* 8:e259198.
  7. ScienceAlert [post](#) from 5/14/2025
  8. YouTube [post](#) on 7/28/2025 by William M. Briggs
  9. *Psychology Today* [article](#) on 10/12/2025

**Week of February 23 – Statistical Bullshit, Part 1.** Why do we usually study samples of cases when we care about the whole population? Sampling processes, selection biases, and the bullshit that can result. Distributions, probability, and the limits of human brains. The ingenious logic of statistical inference, and the bullshit that results from its misuse.

- Due this week:
  1. Nothing
- Before Tuesday’s class, read/listen:
  1. [Calling Bullshit](#), Chapter 6
  2. *Radiolab* podcast from 9/20/2010. "Taking the Plunge." (Just the first 7 minutes and 50 seconds.)
  3. Boldan, Melissa. 2024. "High-Rise Syndrome in Cats." PetMD article on 2/13. (Just the first few paragraphs.)

4. Moyer, Justin Wm. 2015. "Over Half of Dead Hip-Hop Artists Were Murdered, Study Finds." *Washington Post* on 3/25.
5. Swanson, Ana. 2015. "The Causes of Musicians' Deaths, by Genre." *Washington Post* 4/15.
6. Squire, Peverill. 1988. "Why the 1936 Literary Digest Poll Failed." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 52: 125-133.
7. *Science Forward* video. "Scientific Uncertainty."

**Week of March 2 – Replication and Reproducibility.** Shouldn't we be able to exactly reproduce what a scientist did? What does it mean when scientists come to different conclusions even when they seem to do the same research?

- Due this week:
  1. "Spotting Bullshit, Part 1" assignment (Complete survey by midnight on Monday)
  2. "Part 2: Your Claim and Your Plan to Assess It" survey for the Final Project (Complete by midnight on Monday)
- Before Tuesday's class, read/listen:
  1. Mischel, W., Ebbesen, E. B., & Raskoff Zeiss, A. 1972. "Cognitive and Attentional Mechanisms in Delay of Gratification." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 21: 204–218.
  2. Watts, Tyler W., Greg J. Duncan, and Haonan Quan. 2018. "Revisiting the Marshmallow Test: A conceptual Replication Investigating Links Between Early Delay of Gratification and Later Outcomes." *Psychological Science* 29: 1159-1177.
  3. Calarco, Jessica M. 2018. "Why Rich Kids Are So Good at the Marshmallow Test." *The Atlantic* on June 1.
  4. Resnick, Brian. 2018. "More Social Science Studies Just Failed to Replicate. Here's Why This is Good." *Vox.com* on August 27.
  5. Weeden, Kim. 2023. "Crisis? What Crisis? Sociology's Slow Progress Toward Scientific Transparency." *Harvard Data Science Review* 5.4. October 23.
  6. Sociological Science. 2021. "Reproducibility Policy." Accessed on 9/23/2024.

**Week of March 9 – Spring Break.**

**Week of March 16 – Bullshit Causal Claims.** We all know that correlation is not causality, but ... what *is* causality? Healthy and well-informed skepticism about cause-and-effect statements. Why is it so hard to make iron-clad causal claims about social issues.

- Due this week:
  1. Nothing
- Before Tuesday's class, read:
  1. Calling Bullshit, Chapter 4

2. Go to recent editions of one or two of the top journals in your major discipline (e.g., the *American Sociological Review* if you are a sociology major, the *American Journal of Political Science* if you are a political science major). Pick out three articles that interest you and that – based on their titles and/or abstracts – appear to be making a “cause and effect” statement or asking a “cause and effect” question. You can spot these because they say things like, “We investigate how X affects Y” (although they may use a synonym for “affects” like “causes,” “influences,” or “shapes”). *Read them*. Bring them to class (digitally or on paper). Be prepared to report the bibliographic information (e.g., authors, title, journal name, year, etc.)

**Week of March 23 – Logical Fallacies; Statistical Bullshit, Part 2.** So many logical fallacies, so little time. Healthy skepticism for the premises, structures, and conclusions of claims and arguments. A variety of common statistical traps and tricks that produce and sustain bullshit.

- Before Tuesday’s class, read:
  3. Calling Bullshit, Chapter 5
- Due this week:
  1. “Part 3: Rough Draft of the Research” portion of the Final Project (Complete by midnight on Monday)

**Week of March 30 – Data Visualization and Bullshit.** Graphs and figures: A picture is worth a thousand words ... of bullshit? How to visualize data and results as (un)clearly as possible. Also: Is it all hopeless? Are people ever willing to change their minds or let go of bullshit ideas?

- Due this week:
  1. “Part 4: Scoring Others’ ‘Rough Drafts of the Research’” portion of the Final Project (Complete by midnight on Wednesday)
  2. “Spotting Bullshit, Part 2” assignment (Complete survey by midnight on Wednesday)
- Before Tuesday’s class, read:
  1. Calling Bullshit, Chapters 7 through 11
  2. *This American Life* podcast from 2/21/2025. “[Ten Things I Don't Want to Hate About You.](#)”
  3. Costello, Thomas H., Gordon Pennycook, and David G. Rand. 2024. “Durably reducing conspiracy beliefs through dialogs with AI.” *Science* 385, eadq1814.

PART III:  
**REDUCING BULLSHIT IN THE WORLD**

**Week of April 6 – Refuting Bullshit, Part 1: Traditional and Social Media.** How to effectively and respectfully use social and traditional media to counter bullshit with truth.

- Due this week:
  1. Nothing
- Before Tuesday’s class, read:
  1. *To be announced*
  2. Chapter 3 of Perry, David. 2026. *The Public Scholar: A Practical Handbook*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

**Week of April 13 – Refuting Bullshit, Part 2: Hard Conversations.** How to reduce bullshit through interpersonal conversations.

- Due this week:
  1. Nothing
- Before Tuesday’s class, read:
  1. *To be announced*

**Week of April 20 – Refuting Bullshit, Part 3: Practice, Practice, Practice.** You experience a factual claim in the wild. What do you do? How do you respond? Should you trust it? Also: Using AI to decide whether something is factually accurate or bullshit?

- Due this week:
  1. “Part 5: Rough Draft of the Public Information Campaign” portion of the Final Project (Complete by midnight on Monday)
- Before Tuesday’s class, read:
  1. *To be announced*

**Week of April 27 – “I’m From the Government and I’m Here to Help.”** The most terrifying words in the English language? Where do official government data come from?

- Due this week:
  1. “Part 6: Scoring Others’ ‘Rough Drafts of the Research’” portion of the Final Project (Complete by midnight on Wednesday)
- Before Tuesday’s class, read:

1. *To be announced*
2. *More or Less* podcast from 9/27/2025. "The Case of the Missing US Data."

**Week of May 4.** Nothing. Work on your Final Project. Study for other classes. Enjoy the nice weather.

**Week of May 11.** Final "Exam" is Wednesday, May 13 from 8am to 10am. There will be donuts ... and prizes!

- Due this week:
  1. "Part 7: Final Draft" portion of the Final Project (Complete by 10:00am on Wednesday)
  2. "Course Evaluation" (Complete by 10:00am on Wednesday)
- Before the final exam time, read:
  1. *To be announced*

DRAFT

## COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS POLICIES

**GRADES:** University academic achievement is graded under two systems: A-F (with pluses and minuses) and S-N. Choice of grading system and course level (1xxx/3xxx/4xxx) is indicated on the registration website; changes in grade scale may not be made after the second week of the semester. Some courses may be taken under only one system; limitations are identified in the course listings. The Department of Sociology requires A-F registration in courses required for the major/minor. University regulations prescribe the grades that will be reported on your transcript.

- A Represents achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements (4.00 grade points)
- A- 3.67 grade points
- B+ 3.33 grade points
- B Achievement significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements (3.00 grade points)
- B- 2.67 grade points
- C+ 2.33 grade points
- C Achievement that meets the basic course requirements in every respect (2.00 grade points)
- C- 1.67 grade points
- D+ 1.33 grade points
- D Achievement worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements (1.00 grade point)
- F Performance that fails to meet the basic course requirements (0 grade points)
- S Represents achievement that is satisfactory, which is equivalent to a C- or better.
- N No credit. Its use is now restricted to students not earning an S on the S-N grade base
- I Incomplete, a temporary symbol assigned when the instructor has a "reasonable expectation" that you 1) can successfully complete unfinished work on your own no later than one year from the last day of classes and 2) believes that legitimate reasons exist to justify extending the deadline for course completion. The instructor may set date conditions for make-up work
- W Official withdrawal from a course after the end of the second week of the semester.

**FINAL EXAMINATIONS** (see schedule on the Calendar web site at [onestop.umn.edu/calendar/final-exam-times](http://onestop.umn.edu/calendar/final-exam-times)): You are required to take final examinations at the scheduled times. Under certain circumstances, however, you may request final examination schedule adjustment in your college office. Instructors are obligated to schedule make-up examinations within the final examination period for students who have three final examinations within a 16-hour period. Instructors also are encouraged to reschedule examinations for students with religious objections to taking an examination on a given day. You must submit your request for an adjustment in your schedule at least two weeks before the examination period begins. For assistance in resolving conflicts, call the CLA Student Information Office at 625-2020. If you miss a final, an F or N is recorded. You must obtain the instructor's permission to make up the examination. Final examinations may be rescheduled by the instructor only through the official procedure for that purpose (as noted on the above web page). Final examinations may not be scheduled for the last day of class or earlier or for Study Day. If an examination is rescheduled at the instructor's request, and you have an examination conflict because of it, you are entitled to be given the final examination at an alternative time within the regularly scheduled examination period for that semester.

**CLASS ATTENDANCE:** As a student, you are responsible for attending class and for ascertaining the particular attendance requirements for each class or department. You should also learn each instructor's policies concerning make-up of work for absences. Instructors and students may consult the CLA Classroom, Grading, and Examination Procedures Handbook for more information on these policies (<https://policy.umn.edu/education/makeupwork>).

**COURSE PERFORMANCE AND GRADING:** Instructors establish ground rules for their courses in conformity with their department policies and are expected to explain them at the first course meeting. This includes announcement of office hours and location, the kind of help to be expected from the instructor and teaching assistants, and tutorial services, if available. The instructor also describes the general nature of the course, the work expected, dates for examinations and paper submissions, and expectations for classroom participation and attendance. Instructors determine the standards for grading in their classes and will describe expectations, methods of evaluation, and factors that enter into grade determination. The special conditions under which an incomplete (I) might be awarded also should be established. The college does not permit you to submit extra work to raise your grade unless all students in the class are afforded the same opportunity.

**CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR:** You are entitled to a good learning environment in the classroom. Students whose behavior is disruptive either to the instructor or to other students will be asked to leave (the policies regarding student conduct are outlined on-line at <https://communitystandards.umn.edu/policies-and-procedures/what-kind-consequences-could-i-face>

**ELECTRONIC DEVICES:** University instructors may restrict or prohibit the use of personal electronic devices in his or her classroom, lab, or any other instructional setting. For the complete policy, visit: <http://policy.umn.edu/education/studentresp>

**SCHOLASTIC CONDUCT:** The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows: Scholastic Dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. **Students cannot evade (intentionally or unintentionally) a grade sanction by withdrawing from a course before or after the misconduct charge is reported. This also applies to late withdrawals, including discretionary late cancellation (also known as the "one-time-only drop").** For the complete policy, visit: [http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Student\\_Conduct\\_Code.pdf](http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Student_Conduct_Code.pdf)

**STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND STRESS MANAGEMENT:** As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. University of Minnesota services are available to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via <http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu/>.

## A REMINDER OF RELEVANT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES \* SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT POLICIES \*

**GRADE INFORMATION:** Grades are due in the Office the Registrar within 3 business days after the final examination. No information regarding grades will be released by the department office staff to anyone except designated personnel in Records and college offices. Students may access their own grades through the MyU Portal.

**INCOMPLETES:** It is the instructor's responsibility to specify conditions under which an Incomplete (I) grade is assigned. Students should refer to the course syllabus and talk with the instructor as early as possible if they anticipate not completing the course work. Coursework submitted after the final examination will generally be evaluated down unless prior arrangements are made in writing by the instructor. University policy states that if completion of the work requires the student to attend class in substantial part a second time, assigning an "I" grade is NOT appropriate. Incompletes are appropriate only if the student can make up the coursework independently with the same professor. Students need to have completed a substantial portion of the course in order to be even considered for an Incomplete.

**MAKE-UP EXAMINATIONS:** Arrangements for special examinations must be made directly with the instructor who taught the course and who is responsible for approving and supervising the examination or making individual arrangements. Circumstances for missing an exam include, but are not necessarily limited to: verified illness, participation in athletic events or other group activities sponsored by the University, serious family emergencies, subpoenas, jury duty, military service, and religious observances. It is the responsibility of the student to notify faculty members of such circumstances as far in advance as possible.

**GRADE CHANGES:** Grades properly arrived at are not subject to renegotiation unless all students in the class have similar opportunities. Students have the right to check for possible clerical errors in the assignment of grades by checking with the instructor and/or teaching assistant.

Students with justifiable complaints about grades or classroom procedures have recourse through well-established grievance procedures. You are expected to confer first with the course instructor. If no satisfactory solution is reached, the complaint should be presented in writing to the department Director of Undergraduate Studies or the Coordinator of Undergraduate Advising (909 Soc Sci). If these informal processes fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, other formal procedures for hearing and appeal can be invoked.

**DISABILITY SERVICES:** Students with disabilities that affect their ability to participate fully in class or to meet all course requirements are encouraged to bring this to the attention of the instructor so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged. For more info contact Disability Resource Center in 180 McNamara. <https://disability.umn.edu>. This publication/material is available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact the Coordinator of Undergraduate Advising at [socadvis@umn.edu](mailto:socadvis@umn.edu) or visit the Department of Sociology in 909 Social Sciences Building, 271 19<sup>th</sup> Ave SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT:** "Sexual harassment" means unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Faculty, Graduate Students, and full time Staff are Mandated Reporters for prohibited conduct. Such behavior is not acceptable in the University setting. If you have experienced sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment, or related retaliation; or if you have questions about any EOAA-related issue, please contact Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (EOAA) at (612) 624-9547 or [eoaa@umn.edu](mailto:eoaa@umn.edu) For the complete policy, visit [policy.umn.edu/hr/sexharassassault](http://policy.umn.edu/hr/sexharassassault)

**SOCIOLOGY PROGRAMS INFORMATION:** The Sociology Department offers two options for the Bachelor of Arts degree and a Bachelor of Science degree. Students interested in majoring in Sociology should view the online-information session about the major. Further information can be obtained from the following persons via email or online at <http://cla.umn.edu/sociology>

General information, Sociology Department – [soc@umn.edu](mailto:soc@umn.edu)  
Coordinator of Undergraduate Advising, Bobby Bryant – [socadvis@umn.edu](mailto:socadvis@umn.edu)  
Director of Undergraduate Studies, Prof. Jane VanHeuvelen – [jvanheuv@umn.edu](mailto:jvanheuv@umn.edu)  
Soc Honors Faculty Representative, Prof. Joe Gerteis – [gerte004@umn.edu](mailto:gerte004@umn.edu)  
Director of Graduate Studies, Professor Michelle Phelps – [phelps@umn.edu](mailto:phelps@umn.edu)  
Graduate Program Associate, Evva Parsons – [eparsons@umn.edu](mailto:eparsons@umn.edu)

Undergraduate jobs, internships, volunteer and research opportunities, scholarships, and much more can be found in the Undergraduate Resources site - <https://sociologyundergrad.wordpress.com/>