***Syllabus***

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| **Department**  | **Department of English Studies** | **Year** | 2025/2026 |
| **Course**  | Conspiracy Theories and American Culture | **ECTS** | **4** |
| **Study programme** | MA programme in English; philology |
| **Level of study programme** | [ ]  Undergraduate | [x]  Graduate | [ ]  Integrated | [ ]  Postgraduate |
| **Type of study programme** | [ ]  Single major[x]  Double major  | [x]  University | [ ]  Professional | [ ]  Specialized |
| **Year of study** | [ ]  1 | [ ]  2 | [ ]  3 | [x]  4 | [x]  5 |
| **Semester** | [x]  Winter[ ]  Summer | [x]  I | [ ]  II | [x]  III | [ ]  IV | [ ]  V |
| [ ]  VI | [ ]  VII | [ ]  VIII | [ ]  IX | [ ]  X |
| **Status of the course** | [ ]  Compulsory | [x] Elective | [x]  Elective course offered to students from other departments | **Teaching Competencies** | [ ]  YES [x]  NO |
| **Workload** | **15** | **L** | **15** | **S** |  | **E** | **Internet sources for e-learning** | [x]  YES [ ]  NO |
| **Location and time of instruction** | **Hall 143 (Old Campus)** | **Language(s) in which** **the course is taught** | English  |
| **Course start date** | October 7th  | **Course end date** | January 23rd  |
| **Enrolment requirements** | Enrolment in the 1st or 3rd semester of the MA Program (in English, philology) |
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| **Course coordinator** | Marko Lukić, PhD, Full Professor |
| **E-mail** | mlukic@unizd.hr | **Consultation hours** | By appointment |
| **Assistant/****Associate** | Irena Jurković |
| **E-mail** | ijurkovic@unizd.hr | **Consultation hours** | Tuesday, 12:00-13:00 and by appointment via e-mail |
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| **Mode of teaching** | [x]  Lectures | [x]  Seminars and workshops | [ ]  Exercises | [ ]  E-learning | [ ]  Field work |
| [x]  Individual assignments | [x]  Multimedia and network | [ ]  Laboratory | [ ]  Mentoring | [ ]  Other |
| **Learning outcomes** | By the end of the course, students will:* Gain a deep understanding of the role of media and literature in shaping and spreading conspiracy theories.
* Be able to critically analyze how conspiracy theories are represented in literature, film, and digital media.
* Develop the skills to differentiate between harmful conspiracy theories and legitimate investigative narratives.
* Understand the broader cultural and political implications of conspiracy theories in American society.
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| **Learning outcomes at the Programme level** | Learning outcomes at the level of the programme to which the course contributes include the following:* connect different approaches, perceptions, and knowledge through an interdisciplinary approach
* apply a critical and self-critical approach in argumentation
* distinguish basic theoretical concepts of narrative and narratology, and analyze narratives in literature and film
* recognize and describe relevant ideas and concepts
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| **Assessment criteria**  | [x]  Class attendance | [x]  Preparation for class | [ ]  Homework | [x]  Continuous evaluation | [ ]  Research |
| [ ]  Practical work | [ ]  Experimental work | [x]  Presentation | [x]  Project | [ ]  Seminar |
| [x]  Test(s) | [ ]  Written exam | [x]  Oral exam | [ ]  Other: |
| **Conditions for permission to take the exam** | Attendance of 70% of classes and completion of the project assignment are prerequisites for taking the final exam. |
| **Exam periods** | [x]  Winter | [ ]  Summer | [x]  Autumn­ |
| **Exam dates** | TBA |  | TBA |
| **Course description** | This university course delves into the intricate world of conspiracy theories in the United States, focusing on their representation and problematization across literature, film, and digital media. Over the span of the semester, students will explore how these platforms both reflect and shape conspiracy theories, examining the ways in which they influence public perception, cultural norms, and political discourse. The course integrates historical contexts with contemporary analyses to uncover how these narratives comment on and exacerbate societal anxieties and divisions. The course is structured into several segments, each spotlighting a different medium where conspiracy theories thrive:Literary Representations: Explores conspiracy theories within American literature; the students will analyze how authors use conspiracy as a narrative device to critique societal and political conditions.Film and Television: The exploration of visual media, with an analysis of how films and TV/streaming shows depict conspiracy theories, often dramatizing and popularizing them. This segment will discuss the impact of these portrayals on viewers' perceptions and beliefs, using case studies from both streaming platforms as well as popular and independent films.Digital Media Dynamics: The last segment examines the explosive growth of conspiracy theories in digital media, particularly on social media platforms and alternative news sites. The students will study how these platforms allow for conspiracy theories to intersect with political narratives, focusing on how media representations influence political behavior and policy-making. |
| **Course content** | Lectures:1. Introduction to Conspiracy Theories: Defining the Framework2. Narrative Techniques in Conspiracy Literature3. The Witch Hunts: Early American Conspiracies in Literature4. History of secret society conspiracies5. Literature of Paranoia: Cold War Influences6. Moon Landing Hoaxes in Media7. Cultural Studies Approach to UFOs and Alien Conspiracy Theories8. 9/11 and Its Aftermath in Film and Media9. Conspiracy Theories in Contemporary Television Series10. Hollywood Whistleblowers: Filmmaking and Government Conspiracies11. Documentaries and Debunking Conspiracies12. Conspiracy Theories and Political Manipulation13. Digital Age Conspiracies: The Role of Internet and Social Media14. Fake News and Information Warfare in the Digital Era15. Concluding lectureSeminars:1. Research methods and possible research topics2. Case study 1: Early American Conspiracies3. Case study 2: Cold War4. Research proposals: Discussion5. **Exam 1**6. Moon Landing Hoaxes7.Aalien Conspiracy Theories8. 9/119. Conspiracy Theories in Contemporary Television Series10. Hollywood Whistleblowers11. **Exam 2**12. Student presentations13. Student presentations14. Student presentations15. **Exam 3**  |
| **Required reading** | 1. Carver, Ben, Craciun, Dana and Hristov, Todor editors. 2022: *Plots: Literary Form and Conspiracy Culture*. Routledge2.Barkun, Michael. 2013. *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*. University of California Press.3. Robertson, David. 2016. *UFOs, Conspiracy Theories and the New Age: Millennial Conspiracism*. Bloomsbury3.Butter, Michael, Knight, Peter editors. 2020. *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*5. Rice, Jenny. 2020. *Awful Archives: Conspiracy Theory, Rhetoric, and Acts of Evidence*. Ohio State University Press. 6.Lepselter, Susan. 2016. *The Resonance of Unseen Things: Poetics, Power, Captivity, and UFOs in the American Uncanny*. University of Michigan Press.7.Selected articles from <https://www.theatlantic.com/shadowland/>  |
| **Additional reading** | 1. Beck, Richard. 2015. *We Believe the Children: A Moral Panic in the 1980s*. PublicAffairs.2. Anna Merlan. 2019. *Republic of Lies: American Conspiracy Theorists and Their Surprising Rise**to Power*. Metropolitan Books.3. Carl T. Bergstrom & Jevin D. West. 2020. *Calling Bullshit: The Art of Skepticism in a**Data-Driven World*. Random House |
| **Internet sources** |  |
| **Assessment criteria of learning outcomes** | Final exam only |  |
| [ ]  Final written exam | [ ]  Final oral exam | [ ]  Final written and oral exam | [ ]  Practical work and final exam |
| [ ]  Only test/homework  | [x]  Test/homework and final exam | [x]  Seminar paper | [ ]  Seminar paper and final exam | [ ]  Practical work | [ ]  other forms |
| **Calculation of final grade** | 40% of the final grade is premised on completed project task, 60% of the grade is premised on midterm tests and the final exam. |
| **Grading scale** | 0-59 | % Failure (1) |
| 60-69 | % Satisfactory (2) |
| 70-79 | % Good (3) |
| 80-89 | % Very good (4) |
| 90-100 | % Excellent (5) |
| **Course evaluation procedures** | [x]  Student evaluations conducted by the University[ ]  Student evaluations conducted by the Department[ ]  Internal evaluation of teaching[x]  Department meetings discussing quality of teaching and results of student evaluations[ ]  Other |
| **Note /Other** | In accordance with Art. 6 of the *Code of Ethics* of the Committee for Ethics in Science and Higher Education, “the student is expected to fulfil his/her obligations honestly and ethically, to pursue academic excellence, to be civilized, respectful and free from prejudice.”According to Art. 14 of the University of Zadar's *Code of Ethics*, students are expected to “fulfil their responsibilities responsibly and conscientiously. […] Students are obligated to safeguard the reputation and dignity of all members of the university community and the University of Zadar as a whole, to promote moral and academic values and principles. […]Any act constituting a violation of academic honesty is ethically prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to:- various forms of fraud such as the use or possession of books, notes, data, electronic gadgets or other aids during examinations, except when permitted;-various forms of forgery such as the use or possession of unauthorised materials during the exam; impersonation and attendance at exams on behalf of other students; fraudulent study documents; forgery of signatures and grades; falsifying exam results.”All forms of unethical behaviour will result in a negative grade in the course without the possibility of compensation or repair. In case of serious violations the *Rulebook on Disciplinary Responsibility of Students at the University of Zadar* will be applied.In electronic communications only messages coming from known addresses with a first and a last name, and which are written in the Croatian standard and appropriate academic style, will be responded to.This course uses the Merlin system for e-learning, so students are required to have an AAI account.  |