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FYSM 1210A

First-Year Seminar:

*Fake News, Fad Diets, and Flat Earthers:  
Knowledge (and Ignorance) in a Social World*

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Winter 2021  
Course Outline

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## **I. Admin**

Instructor: Gabriele Contessa

Office Hours: Wednesday, 10:35pm–11:25pm or by appointment (Virtual Office: )

Virtual Seminar Room: Wednesday, 11:35pm–2:25pm (Virtual Seminar Room: )

E-mail: [gabriele\\_contessa@carleton.ca](mailto:gabriele_contessa@carleton.ca)

## **II. Description**

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy devoted to studying knowledge and belief. Traditionally, epistemology focussed primarily on how individuals get to know themselves and the world around them. However, social epistemologists argue that the traditional approach ignores the social dimensions of knowledge and, in particular, the fact that most of what we know we learn from others. Moreover, while traditional epistemologists are mostly interested in abstract questions about knowledge and justification, social epistemologists are primarily interested in applied issues, such as testimony, disagreement, fake news, epistemic bubbles, conspiracy theories, science denialism, the relationship between experts and lay persons as well as the epistemic injustices faced by members of marginalized groups. In this seminar, we will explore some of these applied issues as well as discussing more theoretical questions about knowledge (and ignorance) in a social world.

## **III. Prerequisites**

A course in philosophy or second-year standing.

## **IV. Readings**

All readings for this seminar will be posted on cuLearn.

## **V. Grading**

- a. Three Response Papers (each worth 15% of your final grade + 5% extra “star” points (see details below)) (see Course Schedule below for deadlines);
- b. Discussion Questions (worth 15% of your final grade).
- c. Attendance and Participation (worth 25% of your final grade).
- d. Optional Take-Home Exam (Special Project) (worth 10% of your final grade)

All final grades are subject to the approval of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

## **VI. Course Organization and Course Policies**

**Overview.** In a seminar, the role of the instructor is not to lecture the students but to lead and facilitate the discussion among them. Seminars encourage students to adopt a more active approach to learning, to engage more directly with the issues discussed, and to take responsibility for their own learning. The success of a seminar depends on everyone doing their part. This includes, among other things,

doing all of the readings, submitting the Discussion Questions, and contributing to the discussion in class.

**Logistics.** The seminar will be divided into two groups of roughly equal size. Typically, one group will attend meetings on Wednesday and the other one on Friday (although, occasionally, you might have to attend on a different day). All meetings will be held on Zoom. If you are unable to attend on your usual day, you are welcome to join the other group, but please do so only when strictly required, as I am trying to keep the size and membership of the group as stable as possible. I will circulate a poll where you will be able to express your preference for the Wednesday or Friday group, but please keep in mind that I might not be able to accommodate your preference and that you might have to occasionally attend on a different day.

**Discussion Questions.** You are expected to submit one Discussion Question per meeting. A Discussion Question is a question about one of the readings for the day. Discussion Questions can be either an interpretive question (e.g. ‘What does the author mean in this passage?’) or an evaluative question (e.g. ‘Do you think that the argument that the author gives in this passage works?’). Discussion Questions need to be posted on the appropriate forum on cuLearn by Wednesday at noon (irrespective of which group you belong to). As a rule, specific Discussion Questions (i.e. questions that refer to a specific passage) are preferable to general Discussion Questions. However, general Discussion Questions are also acceptable. If you do refer to a specific passage, please give a clear reference and please provide a full quotation of the passage in your cuLearn post. During the meeting, students will take turns asking their Discussion Questions and giving tentative answers to their own questions (e.g. ‘I don’t think that the argument works because...’). The tentative answers do *not* have to be submitted with the Discussion Questions but count as part of your participation (see below). If, for whatever reason, you are unable to attend either of the meetings of the week, you should still submit your Discussion Questions if you can.

*Please note that, unless exceptional circumstances (e.g., illness or family emergency) prevent you from submitting a Discussion Question, failing to submit a Discussion Questions on time will result in an ‘Incomplete’, which is equivalent to a 0%.*

*If exceptional circumstances (e.g., illness or family emergency) prevent you from submitting a Discussion Question, please notify me by email as soon as possible.*

**Attendance and Participation.** Attendance and participation are crucial to the success of a seminar. You are strongly encouraged to contribute to the class discussion. For every session you attend, you will receive a participation grade based on both the number and the quality of your contributions to the class discussion (see table below). If your only contribution to the class discussion is asking your Discussion Questions, then your participation level is considered ‘Minimal’. In order to receive a grade at or above the Satisfactory level, you have to contribute to the class discussion more than just to ask your Discussion Questions. While the most important way for you to contribute to the discussion is by speaking in class, contributions you make to the discussion forums on cuLearn will also count towards your participation grade.

*Please note that, unless exceptional circumstances (e.g. illness) prevent you from attending, failure to attend a session will result in an ‘Absent’ for that session, which is equivalent to 0%.*

*If exceptional circumstances (e.g., illness or family emergency) prevent you from attending a meeting, please notify me by email as soon as possible.*

Absent (Unexcused)	0
Present - Minimal Participation	65

Present - Satisfactory Participation	75
Present - Good Participation	85
Present - Excellent Participation	100

**Response Papers.** Response Papers are supposed to engage with one (or more) of the readings in the course. A Response Paper is expected to have a clearly stated thesis and a clearly stated argument to support that thesis. You are encouraged to argue for one of two possible general theses: (i) one of the main theses in one of the readings is false or (ii) one of the main arguments offered in one of the readings is unsound (i.e. the argument does not support its conclusion either because one of its premises is false or because the argument is invalid). In either case you are expected to describe clearly and accurately the thesis/argument you are arguing against. Response papers that display an adequate level of clarity, argumentation, and critical engagement with the relevant reading(s) will receive full credit (which means that a satisfactory Response Paper will be worth 15% of your final grade). Exceptionally good Response Papers (e.g. Response Papers that display an exceptional level of clarity, insightfulness, originality, engagement with the material, etc.) will be awarded a “star.” Each star is worth 5% in extra credit (or “star” points) (for a total of up to 15%). Please keep in mind that stars are reserved for exceptionally good Response Papers (they are the equivalent of an A/A+). As such, they are not easy to earn and they are relatively rare. Please do not be disappointed if your Response Papers do not receive a star (most of them don’t!). Just try harder next time! Also, please feel free to come to see me during office hours if you would like some guidance about earning stars or more detailed feedback on your previous Response Papers. If your Response Paper does not display a satisfactory level of clarity, argumentation, and critical engagement with the readings, you will receive a ‘Needs Improvement.’ If you receive a ‘Needs Improvement’, you are expected to contact me to schedule an appointment with me to discuss your Response Paper. At that point, you have two options: you either (a) submit a new or revised Response Paper or (b) receive half credit for your old Response Paper.

*Please note that, unless exceptional circumstances (e.g., illness, family emergency) prevent you from submitting a Response Paper, failing to submit a Response Paper will result in an ‘Incomplete’ (which is equivalent to a 0%). Please also note that, if you submit a Response Paper late, you will lose one tenth of its value for every day the paper is late.*

*If exceptional circumstances (e.g., illness or family emergency) prevent you from attending a meeting, please notify me by email as soon as possible.*

**Optional Take-Home Examination (Special Project).** The Take-Home Examination is an optional special project that allows students to earn up to 10% extra credit. Instructions for the Special Project will be posted on cuLearn by the last day of the term and they are due on the last day of the Exam Period.

**Academic Integrity.** You are responsible for ensuring that you understand the nature of academic offences (such as plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration), as defined in the [Undergraduate Calendar](#), and to avoid both committing them and aiding or abetting academic offences perpetrated by other students. Please be aware that I am bound to report any suspected academic offence directly to the Office of the Dean.

**Copyright.** Carleton University is committed to compliance in all copyright matters. Noncompliance is a violation of the Canadian Copyright Act. In addition to any actions that might be taken by any copyright owner or its licensing agent, the University will take steps

against any breach of this policy. In Canada, copyright for a work is given automatically to the creator of the work. The work does not need to be marked or declared as copyrighted in order to be copyrighted. The majority of works in Canada are copyrighted. It is important for students to understand and respect copyright. Copyright determines your usage rights for a particular work, which includes textbooks, web pages, videos and images, both electronic and hard copy. Students may not photocopy entire or major portions of books or other works, even if it is only for their personal use. Fair dealing makes some allowances for copying small portions of works. See Carleton's Fair Dealing Policy for more information. If journal articles or portions of works are available through the library, either as hard copies or electronically, students may make a single copy for their personal use. Students may not distribute copies of works that are under copyright. For more information, please see the Carleton's Fair Dealing Policy and the library's copyright website: [www.library.carleton.ca/copyright](http://www.library.carleton.ca/copyright).

## VII. Schedule

<b>Important Dates and Deadlines</b>	
<b>Response Paper 1</b>	Feb 12
<b>Response Paper 2</b>	Mar 12
<b>Response Paper 3</b>	Apr 14
<b>Take-Home Examination (Optional)</b>	Apr 27

<b><i>Week</i></b>	<b><i>Dates</i></b>	<b><i>Readings</i></b>
1	Jan 13	Introduction
2	Jan 20/Jan 22	Miller & Record, "Taking iPhone Seriously: Epistemic Technologies and the Extended Mind"
3	Jan 27/Jan 29	Nguyen, "How Twitter Gamifies Communication"
4	Feb 3/Feb 5	Keeley, "Of Conspiracy Theories"
5	Feb 10/Feb 12	Nguyen, "Cognitive Islands and Runaway Echo Chambers - Problems for Epistemic Dependence on Experts"
6	Feb 24/Feb 26	Nguyen, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles"

7	Mar 3/Mar 5	Rini, “Fake News and Partisan Epistemology”
8	Mar 10/Mar 12	Stanley, “Propaganda in Liberal Democracy”
9	Mar 17/Mar 19	Fricker, “Testimonial Injustice”
10	Mar 24/Mar 26	Medina, “Epistemic Responsibility and Culpable Ignorance”
11	Mar 31 <i>[Joint Meeting!]</i>	Dotson, “Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression”
12	Apr 7/Apr 9	Talisse, “The Problem of Polarization”
13	Apr 14 <i>[Joint Meeting!]</i>	Anderson, “The Epistemology of Democracy”

*Please note that all of the information provided above is provisional and subject to change.  
Please check the Course Outline on cuLearn regularly for updates.*

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## Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2020-21)

### **Assignments:**

Please follow your professor’s instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. There will be NO hard copies placed in the essay box this coming year.

### **Evaluation:**

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

### **Deferrals for Term Work:**

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

### **Deferrals for Final Exams:**

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar’s Office](#) for further information.

### **Plagiarism:**

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. ([Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations](#))

### **Academic Accommodation:**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term:

- *Pregnancy or religious obligation:* write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the [EDC](#) website.
- *Academic accommodations for students with disabilities:* The [Paul Menton Centre](#) for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- *Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy](#).
- *Accommodation for [Student Activities](#):* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

### **Important Dates:**

Sept. 9	Classes start.
Sept. 23	Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Oct. 12	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 26-30	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 27	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.
Dec. 11	Last day of fall term classes. <b><i>Classes follow a Monday schedule.</i></b> Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for a fall term course.
Dec. 12-23	Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 23	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 11	Classes begin.
Jan. 25	Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Feb. 15	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 15-19	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 31	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.
Apr. 2	Statutory holiday. University closed.

- Apr. 14 Last day of two-term and winter term classes. Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses. ***Classes follow a Friday schedule.***
- Apr. 15 No classes or examinations take place.
- Apr. 16-27 Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
- Apr. 27 All take-home examinations are due.

**Addresses:**

Department of Philosophy:  
[www.carleton.ca/philosophy](http://www.carleton.ca/philosophy)  
520-2110

Registrar's Office:  
[www.carleton.ca/registrar](http://www.carleton.ca/registrar)  
520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:  
[www.carleton.ca/academicadvising](http://www.carleton.ca/academicadvising)  
520-7850

Writing Services:  
<http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/>  
520-3822

MacOdrum Library  
<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>  
520-2735