“Human beliefs, like all other natural growths, elude the barrier of system.” —George Eliot

“New situations demand new magic.” —E. E. Evans-Pritchard

“Magic is the bastard sister of science.” —James Frazer

“Superstition is, at its core, the most tangible of all faiths.” —Roberto Gervaso

“Science is a way of thinking rather than a body of knowledge’ --Carl Sagan

We regularly take for granted that scientific knowledge is objective, a universal truth unchanged by history and culture. The laws of physics are just as true in Indonesia as they are in Mexico or the United States. Yet we also know that scientific knowledge is constantly in flux. What we “knew” to be true yesterday (e.g., the world is flat) is not true today, and new discoveries revolutionize what we knew (e.g., germ theory, epigenetics). This freshmen seminar positions science along a spectrum of worldviews—explanatory models that provide causal reasons and underlying logics for events and actions—a spectrum that includes magic, occultism, witchcraft, science, spirituality, and religion. A single hurricane might be explained, within particular historical and cultural contexts, as sent by: a witch’s curse, a moving cold front, or an angry god. How we position ourselves between these ways of knowing is not, of course, mutually exclusive and the threshold between the categories is actually more blurred than we might initially expect. Interrogating the similarities and differences between “knowledge” and “belief,” this course will question our deeply held assumptions regarding the neutrality of science and the so-called backwardness of folk belief. How do socio-cultural contexts and economic systems shape the production of scientific knowledge and forms of religious and supernatural belief? Why do certain theories achieve recognition as rational and correct? We will explore the social, economic, and political implications of these hierarchies of knowledge, and examine how they shape how we experience our own bodies, our own feelings, and even our own minds.
Assignments:

**Weekly reading and reading response papers (20%)** Write a one-page cogent summary of author's main arguments and your own analytical discussion in which you consider and critically examine author's ideas, methods, and argument (~1pp, single spaced). Please hand in 11 over the course of the semester on days of your choosing (I will drop the lowest grade). You must complete and hand them in on the day the readings will be discussed. While other assignments will be digital, please bring and print **hard copies** of your paper. Hard copies only! Late papers will receive 1/3 grade per day.

**Short paper (20%)** Find at least five scholarly research articles and/or books on a topic of interest (related to class topics such as magic, science, religion, the occult, supernatural, paranormal, etc) for your research paper and write an overview of key ideas and concepts, and perform critical analyses of comparative studies. The paper will lay the groundwork for questions and lines of inquiry for your final research paper (4-5 pages). Due: February 24

**Annotated Bibliography and Research Proposal (15%)** Annotated Bibliography will include a series of numbered citations and a brief summary for each text and its value to the project. You will also include 1-2 paragraph research proposal for your topic at the beginning of the bibliography (Due April 21st). Late assignments will receive 1/3 grade per day penalty.

**Research paper (30%)** Craft an argumentative research essay on a topic of your interest related to magic, science, or religion in a cultural and historical context (12-14 pages) (Research Draft Due: May 5 (Worth 5% of 30%); Final Essay Due: May 12). Late papers will receive 1/3 grade per day penalty.

**Attendance and Participation (15%)**: Our seminar will depend very heavily on your active and sustained engagement and dialogue and close, careful reading of assigned texts. This will include one day in class in which you are our designated discussion leader. You will also responsible for a 5-minute presentation of your research project for the class (Worth 5% of 15% Participation grade).

**Statement on Academic Integrity**

Students are expected—often required—to build their work on that of other people, just as professional researchers and writers do. Giving credit to someone whose work has helped you is expected; in fact, not to give such credit is a crime. Plagiarism is the severest form of academic fraud. Plagiarism is theft. More specifically, plagiarism is presenting as your own:

- a phrase, sentence, or passage from another writer's work without using quotation marks;
- a paraphrased passage from another writer's work;
- facts, ideas, or written text gathered or downloaded from the Internet;
- another student's work with your name on it;
- a purchased paper or "research" from a term paper mill.

Other forms of academic fraud include:
• "collaborating" between two or more students who then submit the same paper under their individual names.
• submitting the same paper for two or more courses without the knowledge and the expressed permission of all teachers involved.
• giving permission to another student to use your work for a class.

Term paper mills (web sites and businesses set up to sell papers to students) often claim they are merely offering "information" or "research" to students and that this service is acceptable and allowed throughout the university. THIS IS ABSOLUTELY UNTRUE. If you buy and submit "research," drafts, summaries, abstracts, or final versions of a paper, you are committing plagiarism and are subject to stringent disciplinary action. Since plagiarism is a matter of fact and not intention, it is crucial that you acknowledge every source accurately and completely. If you quote anything from a source, use quotation marks and take down the page number of the quotation to use in your footnote.

Consult The Modern Language Association (MLA) Style Guide for accepted forms of documentation, and the course handbook for information on using electronic sources. When in doubt about whether your acknowledgment is proper and adequate, consult your teacher. Show the teacher your sources and a draft of the paper in which you are using them. The obligation to demonstrate that work is your own rests with you, the student. You are responsible for providing sources, copies of your work, or verification of the date work was completed.

The academic community takes plagiarism very seriously. Teachers in our writing courses must report to the Director of the Expository Writing Program any instance of academic dishonesty in student writing, whether it occurs in an exercise, draft, or final essay. Students will be asked to explain the circumstances of work called into question. When plagiarism is confirmed, whether accidental or deliberate, students must be reported to the Dean of their School, and penalties will follow. This can result in failure of the essay, failure in the course, a hearing with the Dean, and/or expulsion from the university. This has happened to students at New York University.

For more information on avoiding plagiarism and proper use of online citation, we recommend visiting these websites:

• “Academic Integrity.” New York University, College of Arts & Science. [http://cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity]
• Virtual Salt. “Citing Web Sources MLA Style.” By Robert Harris. Guidelines to what to cite and how to cite in Modern Language Association style. [http://www.virtualsalt.com/lit/mla.htm]
• “How to Avoid Plagiarism.” Northwestern University. A comprehensive site about academic integrity and citing sources. [http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/plagiar.html]

Writing Resources

The Writing Center
The Writing Center is a place where any NYU student can get help with his or her writing. The Writing Center is a part of NYU’s Expository Writing Program in the College of Arts and Science. It is a place where one-on-one teaching and learning occur, as students work closely with professional consultants at every stage of the writing process and on any piece of writing except for exams.
All Writing Center sessions are 40-45 minutes long. Try to schedule your appointment in advance of the due date for your paper so that you will have ample time to revise after the session.

To schedule an appointment using their online system, please go to www.rich15.com/nyu/. If you haven’t used the Writing Center before, you will be prompted to register. Then you will be able to log in and make your appointment.

You may schedule one appointment per week, up to two weeks ahead of time, using our online system. Undergraduate NYU students will have priority, though we also reserve sessions each week for graduate students, faculty, and alumni. Please call 212-998-8866 if you have questions.

All NYU students are eligible for walk-in sessions, even those who have had an appointment earlier in the week. All students who want additional time beyond one session per week should use walk-in sessions.

To get a walk-in session, come to the Writing Center and put your name on the waiting list. When a cancellation or no-show occurs, a session becomes available. The waiting list operates on a first-come, first-serve basis.
1: Theories of Belief & Magic and Religion

Week 1
Mon Jan 27  • IN-CLASS: Introduction to Course
Related readings: Horace Miner, "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema"

Wed Jan 29  • READING ASSIGNMENT: Lindquist and Coleman, “Against belief;”

Week 2:
Mon Feb 3  • READING ASSIGNMENT: Bronislaw Malinowski, “Magic, Science, and Religion;”
James Frazer “Sympathetic Magic” in The Golden Bough

Wed Feb 5  • READING ASSIGNMENT: Lewis, “Magic, Religion, and the Rationalist of Belief;”
Tambiah, “Form and Meaning of Magical Acts”

Week 3:
Mon Feb 10  • READING ASSIGNMENT: Stroeken, “Believed Belief;” George Gmelch’s “Baseball Magic”

Wed Feb 12  • READING ASSIGNMENT: Hutson, The 7 Reasons for Magical Thinking, (selections); Styse “How Superstition Works”

Week 4
Mon Feb 17  NO CLASS

Wed Feb 19  • READING ASSIGNMENT: Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System;" Stephen, Michele, “Cargo Cults, Cultural Creativity, and Autonomous Imagination”
[Rec: Lindholm, “What is bread? Anthropology of belief”]

2: Witches, Possession, the Occult, and Modern Religions

Week 5
Mon Feb 24  • READING ASSIGNMENT: Byron Good, “Medical Anthropology and the Problem of Belief;” Jeanne Favret-Saada, "Unbewitching as Therapy."
[Film: Strange Beliefs]
Due: Short paper

Wed Feb 26  • READING ASSIGNMENT: William Blecourt, “The Making of the Female Witch;”
Adeline Masquelier, “She Devils;” Tanya Luhrmann, “Persuasion of the Witch’s Craft”

Week 6:
Mon Mar 3  • READING ASSIGNMENT: Pigg, Stacy, “The Credible and the Credulous: The Question of ‘Villagers' Beliefs’ in Nepal.”

[Recommended: Johnson, “Naming Chaos”]
Week 7  
**Mon Mar 10**  

**Wed Mar 12**  
• READING ASSIGNMENT: Atwater, “Living in Death: Vampires;” Laycock, “Real Vampires as Identity Group”

*Spring Break March 18-22*

### 3: Belief & Religion, Medicine, and Science

**Week 8**  
**Mon Mar 24**  

**Wed Mar 26**  

**Week 9**  
**Mon Mar 31**  
• READING ASSIGNMENT: Smith, Daniel, *Muses, Madmen, and Prophets* (selections)

**Wed Apr 2**  
• READING ASSIGNMENT: Moerman, “Anthropology of Symbolic Healing;” Anne Harrington, “Placebo Effect;” Andrew Lakoff, “Placebo”

### 4: Classics and New Work in Science Studies & the Anthropology of Science

**Week 10**  
**Mon Apr 7**  

**Wed Apr 9**  
• READING ASSIGNMENT: Haraway, Donna, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century.”

**Week 11**  
**Mon Apr 14**  
• READING ASSIGNMENT: Martin, Emily, "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles."

**Wed Apr 16**  
• READING ASSIGNMENT: Fausto-Sterling, Anne, “Dueling Dualisms.”

**Week 12**  
**Mon Apr 21**  
• READING ASSIGNMENT: Brandt, Allan, “Racism and Research: The Case of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study;” Duster, Troy, “Race and Ethnicity in Biomedical Research”

**Due: Annotated Bibliography and Proposal (on Classes)**

**Wed Apr 23**  
• READING ASSIGNMENT: Dumit, “Objective Brains, Prejudicial Images”
Week 13
Mon Apr 28  • READING ASSIGNMENT: Masco, Joe, “Engineering Ruins and Affect;” Gusterson, “The Virtual Nuclear Weapons Gallery”

Wed Apr 30  • READING ASSIGNMENT: Helmreich, Stefan, “An anthropologist underwater: immersive soundscape, submarine cyborgs, transductive ethnography”

Week 14
Mon May 5  • READING ASSIGNMENT: Lock, Margaret, “The Epigenome”
Due: Draft of Research Paper (on Classes)

Wed May 7  • Research Presentations and Course Reflections

Week 15
Mon May 12  • Research Presentations and Course Reflections
Due: Final Research Paper (on Classes)