

**How to Talk to a Conspiracy Theorist**

**Course Subject Outline:**

**WEEK #1**

The ABC’s of Critical Thinking

Introduction: How to Talk to a Conspiracy Theorist

The History of Conspiracy Theories. From the earliest recorded conspiracy theories all the way to Qanon, we will look at trends behind the surges of conspiracy theories through recorded history.

**WEEK #2**

An examination of the Psychology of a Conspiracy Theorist. This will involve several classes and will begin with an overview of various human biases and how they contribute to the profile of a conspiracy theorist.

WEEK #3

Continuing with the Psychology of a Conspiracy Theorist, we will consider the processes which underlie the trends of conspiracy theories. This will consider an examination of a very recent social phenomenon in which the demise of newsprint journalism and the rise of social media, led to a type of ‘perfect storm’ in which conspiracy theories could develop and foment.

**WEEK #4**

We will take a look at a list of the ‘Top 20 Conspiracy Theories’. We will also consider perhaps the biggest problem with conspiracy theories. And that is, every now and again, one of them turns out to be true.

**WEEK #5**

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In this lecture, we will look at the future of conspiracies. What predictions can be made in relation to current trends in such forms of communication?

K **WEEK #6**

An examination of the Conspiracy Theorist Spectrum and Checklist. We have developed tools that others can use to best identify where, precisely, their conspiracy theorist lies in terms of degree of belief, potential for harm, etc. We will also use this class to discuss various aspects related to previously-discussed conspiracy theories.

**WEEK #7**

Using the Socratic Method to gradually reach the conspiracy theorist. The Pattern of Discussion: Listen, Trust, Suggest, Repeat. Gradually introduce logic and rationality into the dialogue. Every conspiracy theorist will be unique. But this pattern of engagement has proven successful.

**WEEK #8**

When a Conspiracist is Ready to Give Up the Theory: The Escape Plan/Exit Strategy. Introduce the idea that changing one’s mind is not a bad thing. Discussion of past notable figures who were conspiracy theorists but no longer maintain such beliefs e.g. Kyrie Irving (Flat Earther) who no longer believes in such an idea. Develop a different mindset and applaud those who give up such beliefs. De-stigmatize the entire conspiracy belief ethos by re-naming key terms and applauding those who are able to see alternatives to their views.

**Learning Outcomes:**

Students will become more familiar with the core concepts, ideas, and issues involved in the research and understanding of conspiracy theories and those who believe them. Students will not only know more about the history of such theories, but the various socio-politico factors which allow for such ideas to develop and move throughout a population. And most importantly, students will learn how to better dialogue with those who hold such views. We all know people who believe in conspiracy theories. It may even be us. This course will help us all to better understand why anyone could believe in such theories under the right circumstances. This course provides and insightful and humane way of understanding and dealing with those in our lives who hold such conspiracy theories to be true.

Instructor: Dr. Christopher DiCarlo (Google, ChatGPT, et al)