

Course Description

Many Americans believe in ghosts, ESP, alien abduction, conspiracy theories, or other ‘fringe’ phenomena. How do people get these beliefs? Are they warranted? Are there strange phenomena in the world that science can’t explain? Or are these beliefs better explained by the (equally strange!) workings of the human mind?

This is a class in critical reading and academic writing—especially in the social sciences. The aim is to help you become a more confident and effective consumer and producer of academic writing. The topic of fringe and paranormal phenomena is a vehicle to help you acquire skills in academic writing, critical thinking, and evaluation of evidence. So as well as thinking about the topic itself, we will cover style and mechanics in writing (grammar, editing, audience, rhetoric), principles of reasoning and evidence, and how to synthesize information from a variety of sources into a thesis-driven research essay.

This class fulfills the ‘Academic Writing I’ requirement of the General Education curriculum. As a prerequisite, you must have appropriate test scores (e.g. SAT, ACT, COMPASS, etc) or a pass in ENG 100T.

Learning Outcomes

Successful students in the course will:

1. Analyze and synthesize claims made about paranormal and fringe phenomena from an objective, scientific perspective; and in particular, use inference to the best explanation to evaluate these claims.
2. Identify and evaluate the evidence that a phenomenon did (or did not) occur, rather than demanding *proof* that it did (or did not) occur; and explain why demanding proof is obstructive and unnecessary
3. Locate relevant texts about paranormal and fringe phenomena, read these texts critically and rhetorically, and summarize them objectively, accurately, and ethically
4. Recognize when various cognitive biases and errors might be influencing someone’s (including their own) thinking about a reported paranormal or fringe phenomenon
5. Express ideas in clear and coherent academic prose, and cite and document sources precisely and effectively.