Seminar on Language and Deception
Syllabus

TTh 3:10-4:55, Olin 103

Instructor: Mija Van Der Wege
Office: Olin 135
Phone: 4375
Email: mvanderw
Office Hours: W 2:00 – 4:00 (or by appt.)

Course description:
In this course we will examine deception and other kinds of literal untruths. We will take up three main issues. The first is what it means to deceive and how people deceive others through language. What methods do they use, and how do these methods work? The second issue is why people deceive. What purposes do their deceptions serve—in court, in advertising, in bureaucracies, in business transactions, and in everyday face-to-face conversation? The third issue is the ethics of deception. Is it legitimate to deceive others, and if so, when and why?

What is the difference between a lie and an untruth? How do we distinguish between the two? How can others take advantage of our automatic language processing systems to deceive or persuade?

Required Texts:
Readings will be made available in the library closed reserves and online on the course website (http://www.acad.carleton.edu/curricular/PSYC/mija/psyc375). You will need to be on campus to access the readings online and will need to be able to use Adobe Reader.

Optional Texts:
We will be reading large parts of the following books. Most of them are inexpensive and a few copies of each are available at the bookstore. If the bookstore runs out of copies and you would like to purchase one, please let me know.

APA Publication Manual
**Expectations:**

1. *Mandatory regular attendance* at all classes. If you miss three (3) or more classes for whatever reason (including illness), you will fail the class. Additionally, plan on being to class on time.

2. *Active participation* in discussions. This includes familiarity with the assigned readings each class. You will also take responsibility for leading discussion on an assigned reading on two class days. You will have a partner and will need to collaborate with them on your presentations. I encourage you to be creative when planning your presentations. Class is long, and interactive (but educational) activities are encouraged.

3. *CAUCUS discussion.* To encourage you to complete the reading in a timely fashion and to begin a conversation about the reading before class, I would like you to submit discussions (a few questions or sentences or paragraphs) on the readings before each class on CAUCUS. Share any silly questions, piercing comments, idle thoughts, and inflammatory opinions you have (at least the ones regarding the assigned readings). Please do not just summarize the findings. Feel free to respond to what others have written or to discussions begun in class. Post by noon the day before class.


   **Mini-project 1** (due 2/3): Record and transcribe one TV commercial break (3-5 advertisements/1-3 minutes of advertising). Write down the words used and any significant nonverbal communication and events in the ad. Describe how language and other kinds of nonverbal communication are used to deceive or mislead in these commercials. Try to make use of the concepts discussed in class and in the readings. The paper should be brief (2-3 pages). If you have problems finding access to the necessary equipment, please let me know as soon as possible.

   **Mini-project 2** (due 3/2): Find one other example of deception and describe it, with documentation, in a brief write up (3-4 pages). Try to find examples related to the topics of the seminar (e.g., a biased news article, an infomercial, a horoscope, a friend telling a story, a euphemistic article or speech), and tie the class readings and discussions into your analysis of the deception.

5. *Term Paper.* In place of a course examination, students will complete a term paper (10-14 pages) on a relevant topic of your choice to be turned in to me by noon, March 15. An experimental proposal is the preferred format. Please make an appointment with me early on in the term to discuss your potential topic. I am happy to comment on paper drafts, provided you submit them by 3/5.

   **Term paper proposal** (due 2/10): Write a one-page initial proposal for your term paper. Outline your general topic, your ideas for experimentation, and your method of analysis. Sign up for an appointment to talk to me about your ideas.

   **Term paper** (due 3/15): The term paper should be a 10-14 page experimental proposal. The paper should be in APA format, with an introduction outlining previous research done on your topic (at least 10 articles), a method section outlining your proposed study, a results section describing how you might analyze your data, and a discussion section proposing implications in the field of communication of your proposed study. If you like, you can collect some data, but you must discuss your project with me before doing so.

**Grading:**

- 15% Class Attendance and Participation
- 15% CAUCUS discussions
- 30% Term Paper
- 20% Class presentations
- 20% Mini-Assignments

**Extension and Absence Policy:**

Late work will not be accepted or graded. Situations such as serious illness and personal emergencies are grounds for an extension. Having another assignment or exam due on the same day does not constitute a legitimate excuse. If you are involved in extracurricular activities that may take them off-campus on the day an assignment is due, please discuss options with me, but plan on submitting the work early.
## Topic schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/6</td>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>“The Truth about Lies.” <em>Bill Moyers: The Public Mind</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Psychology 375, Winter 2004

1/29

**Advertising**

“Consuming Images.” *Bill Moyers: The Public Mind.*


2/3

**Advertising**

*Mini-project 1 due in class*


2/5

**Statistical reporting**


2/10

**Catch up**

*Term paper proposal due*

2/12

**Perspective-taking**


2/17

**Surveys and polls**


2/19

**Obfuscation and political spin**


2/24 Self-deception

2/26 Psychics, magicians, & con-artists
Hyman, R. (1977). Cold reading: how to convince strangers that you know all about them. The Zetetic (The Skeptical Inquirer), 1, 18-37.

3/2 Civility and politeness

3/4 Euphemism and nonserious speech

3/9 Lying and its detection

3/15 Term papers due at noon in Prof. Van Der Wege’s office or mailbox