Humbug! Hoaxes in Literature and Culture

ENG 181x000, writing about literature, Fall 2015

**Instructor** Lindsey Grubbs

**Office Hours** Tuesday, 11.30a-1.30p @ Peet’s Coffee, or by appt.

**Contact** [lindsey.grubbs@emory.edu](mailto:lindsey.grubbs@emory.edu)

**Meeting location** Calloway N203

**Meeting time** Tuesday/Thursday, 10a-11.15a

**Course website** <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/humbug/>



[Great Moon Hoax lithograph](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Moon_Hoax), *The Sun*, August 28, 1835.

**course description** Every day, we are asked to differentiate truth from lies: on the news, in conversation with friends, and on the cover of tabloids. In this class, we’ll read literary hoaxes, and look at how “real-life” hoaxes blur the line between literature and everyday life. This course is designed to develop your writing skills by having you write about literary texts, which for the purposes of this class will include not only fiction and poetry, but also film, television, and a variety of cultural artifacts. Our own writing will be one of our major course texts. Using close reading, research, and analysis, we will compose our own essays and creative projects examining truth, lies, and the immense grey area in between. We might ask, what are the motives behind and uses of hoaxes and lies? who gets to determine the truth? how do we decide when to be skeptical, and when to be trusting? what makes something true, anyways? We will think deeply about these and similar questions while becoming stronger writers through intensive practice.

**learning outcomes**

This is a composition course, and so it is writing intensive. I expect you not only to hone your writing skills but to also deepen your understanding of the central critical issues considered in the class.

• **Outcome 1: Rhetorical Awareness and Composition.** You will demonstrate understanding of genre, audience, and purpose in both reading and writing. You will analyze, use, and adapt generic conventions, including organization, development, and style, while composing in multiple genres and modes, including text, audio, and image.

**• Outcome 3: Writing as Process.** You will understand and practice writing as a process, recursively implementing strategies of research, drafting, revision, editing, and reflection. You will reflect on your own writing process, and learn to critique your own work and the work of others.

**• Outcome 3: Critical Thinking and Reading Resulting in Writing.** As you undertake scholarly inquiry and produce your own arguments, you will summarize, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the ideas of others, which you will encounter in a variety of media: print, visual, aural, oral, and spatial. You will learn accepted and ethical ways to integrate other texts into your work. You will use writing as a critical thinking tool.

**• Outcome 4: Hoax-Related Expertise.** You will be able to write with about the messy intersections of veracity and deception, especially as they apply to literary and popular texts, without being reductive or relying on binary thought. You will be able to support your own claims with reliable theoretical and historical materials.

These learning outcomes are drawn from and modeled on the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition. The full list of outcomes and original language can be found here: <http://wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html>.

**required texts**

*The Little Seagull Handbook, 2nd Edition*, Bullock, Brody, & Weinberg

*Passing*, Nella Larsen

Many other works, provided as links in the daily schedule or through course reserves

**make-up policy** Students are expected to complete both major and minor assignments on time. No late work will be accepted on minor assignments. Late major assignments will be accepted within 48 hours of the due date. Papers turned in within the first 24 hours of the due date will be penalized 15%. Papers turned in between 24 and 48 hours after the due date will be penalized 30%. Papers turned in more than two days late will not be accepted.

If you are absent on the day something is due, it is your responsibility to get the assignment to me on time. Computer issues will never excuse late work. Keeping track of electronic documents is necessary to success at the college level. Save early, often, and in multiple places.

**email policy** Email is the best way to contact me if you have quick questions or concerns. Generally, I will respond to all student email within 24 hours (although on weekends and holidays, it may take a little longer). Likewise, there may be instances when I will need to contact you by email. It is your responsibility to check your Emory-based email account at least once every 24 hours. If you have an in-depth issue to discuss, use email to make an appointment to meet in person.

**academic honesty** Find Emory's honor code [here](http://catalog.college.emory.edu/academic/policy/honor_code.html). I take academic honesty very seriously, and I expect my students to do the same. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will receive a zero at the minimum, but I also plan to report instances of academic misconduct to the Honor Council.

**Emory Counseling Services** Free and confidential counseling services and support are available from the Emory Counseling Center (404) 727-7450. This can be an invaluable resource when stress makes your work more challenging than it needs to be. <http://studenthealth.emory.edu/cs/>

**access and disability resources** (Emory-mandated language): Students with medical/health conditions that might impact academic success should visit Access, Disability Services and Resources (ADSR, formerly the Office of Disability Services, ODS) to determine eligibility for appropriate accommodations. Students who receive accommodations must present the Accommodation Letter from ADSR to their professor at the beginning of the semester, or when the letter is received.

My goal is to help you succeed both in this course and at Emory. Please let me know if there are factors keeping you from performing to your best ability. Those factors might include your personal learning style, classroom dynamics that might make you uncomfortable, ESL issues, disability or chronic illness, and/or personal issues impacting your work. I will work to help you resolve those issues when they arise.

**public writing, public debate** As learning to respond to feedback from an audience is a major goal of the class, we will be devoting much time—both in and out of class—to sharing our work as it progresses towards a graded draft. Keep this in mind as you develop your ideas. Likewise, I expect that students take their roles as listeners and readers seriously: this classroom aims to be a safe space for all to express their opinions and experiences without judgment or ridicule. Disagreements can and will happen, of course, but those disagreements will be investigated in a way that respects every participant's right to her or his own opinion.

**electronic devices** Both for reasons of accommodation and because they sometimes offer significant contributions to class activities, I am allowing students to use computers during class—but please, no phones. That said, I reserve the right to ask particular students to put devices away if they become distractions. Students found to be using their devices for purposes unrelated to the classroom will be counted absent for the day.

**attendance policy** Much classroom time in this course will be devoted to classroom discussions and writing workshops. Your attendance in class is necessary not only to your success but also to the success of your classmates. As such, students are expected to be in class, on time. Students are allowed 3 absences without penalty. Students who miss between 4 and 6 classes will be penalized one letter grade. Students who miss more than 6 classes will be penalized two letter grades.

**Emory Writing Center** The Emory Writing Center offers 45-minute individual conferences to Emory College and Laney Graduate School students. It is a great place to bring any project-from traditional papers to websites-at any stage in your composing process. Writing Center tutors take a discussion- and workshop-based approach that enables writers of all levels to see their writing with fresh eyes. Tutors can talk with you about your purpose, organization, audience, design choices, or use of sources. They can also work with you on sentence-level concerns (including grammar and word choice), but they will not proofread for you. Instead, they will discuss strategies and resources you can use to become a better editor of your own work. The Writing Center is located in Callaway N-212. Visit writingcenter.emory.edu for more information and to make appointments.

**tutoring for multilingual students** If English is not your first language, you may benefit from working with specially trained ESL Tutors. The tutors are undergraduates who will support the development of your English language skills. Like Writing Center tutors, ESL tutors will not proofread your work. Language is best learned through interactive dialogue, so when you come to an ESL tutoring session, be ready to collaborate! ESL tutors will meet with you in designated locations across campus (visit ASST to view the list), and they will help you at any stage of the process of developing your essay or presentation. You may bring your work on a laptop or on paper. Each regular appointment lasts 50-55 minutes. Each student may only schedule two ESL tutoring appointments per week.

Additional walk-in hours without appointment will be offered on five Sundays at the end of the semester: on November 8, 15, 22, 29, and on December 6. On these days, walk-in hours will be held from 4-6pm in Math & Science E301A. You may have less time to work with a tutor if other students are waiting, but you can briefly discuss an assignment and some of your concerns. For more information, go to the website (see below) or contact Dr. Levin Arnsperger: [larnspe@emory.edu](mailto:larnspe@emory.edu).

Visit the website of the Office for Undergraduate Education (<http://college.emory.edu/oue/>) and select “Student Support” and then “ESL Program” to schedule a regular appointment via ASST, to read the tutoring policies, and to view the offerings of the ESL Program. Here is the direct link to ESL Tutoring: <http://college.emory.edu/oue/student-support/esl-program/esl-tutoring.html>. We look forward to working with you.

**assignments and weights**

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| **Assignment** | **Percentage of final grade** | **Due date** |
| Low-Stakes/Informal Writings (Blog Posts, In-Class Writings) | 15% | N/A |
| Participation | 10% | N/A |
| 3-5 page close reading and rhetorical analysis | 10% | 9/22 |
| Hoax podcast | 15% | 10/17 |
| Prospectus for final paper | 5% | 11/2 |
| Exploratory essay/bibliography | 10% | 11/12 |
| 7-9 page thesis-driven academic research paper | 15% | 11/24 |
| E-Portfolio | 20% | 12/16 |

**assignment descriptions**

**Blog:** Throughout the semester, we will maintain a class blog to which you will post weekly on a variety of topics. Not only will these posts engage with the weekly readings, but they will also be our primary venue for practicing important parts of the writing and researching process. We will read each other’s blog posts, and will use them as jumping off points for discussion in class.

**Close reading:** 3-5 page close reading and rhetorical analysis of a hoax. You can choose something from a resource like Barnum’s “Humbugs,” Hoaxes.org, or the “History” channel, but there must be a primary source (or two!) that you can work with. You will give a brief summary and description of the hoax, and then perform a rhetorical analysis of the source. Who is the target audience? What strategies were employed to convince that audience of the veracity of the hoax? If there are multiple artifacts involved with your hoax, you may also be able to suggest how the various iterations interact to create a certain effect. For whom is it likely to be most and least effective? Why?

**Podcast:** You will choose a hoax or series of hoaxes that strikes you as particularly interesting—I strongly recommend that you choose one with both primary and secondary sources that you can utilize for research. You will create a 3-5 minute podcast about the hoax, blending information and entertainment by utilizing the types of strategies we will have heard while listening to podcasts for class—for example, a hook to draw in listeners, background information to set the scene, interviews with eye witnesses or experts, clips of “found footage” (that you are welcome, and encouraged, to fabricate), and some sort of claim about the bigger picture significance of your topic. You will need to utilize the unique features of the podcast format instead of simply reading an essay aloud.

**Research and analysis paper:** Your final paper will be a 7-9 page, thoroughly researched, thesis-driven paper about a “literary hoax”— a piece of literature about hoaxes, literature written or received as a hoax, and so on. The ultimate goal of this paper is to argue for a claim about the cultural significance of a particular literary hoax, utilizing both primary and secondary research, which may include news articles, public response, academic articles, and other materials that fill out the context of your topic. Your close reading and rhetorical analysis skills will still come in handy here, as this paper must incorporate close and careful readings of your texts and contexts, but your frame for writing about literature will broaden for this paper by incorporating a significant research component.

This paper will prepare you to be ready and able to join a pre-existing academic conversation. Research skills will be integral to your success at Emory (and beyond), and we will spend much of the latter half of this course working on this extended research project, which will be broken into several stages before your first polished draft:

**prospectus:** Write a one-page single-spaced document to propose a topic for your final literary analysis and research paper. Unlike the first paper, in which you had a clear task, your research paper asks a bit more—not simply that you can give a good reading of a text, but that you are writing a paper that *ought* to be written—that engages important questions and illuminates important topics. Your prospectus is your opportunity to make the case for your paper.

You’ll need to give a brief background of the hoax you’re interested in, explain why you find it interesting, and propose a research question, explaining why that question is problematic and significant. Questions may include (though are certainly not limited to): What made a particular hoax successful (or not) at a given point in time? What social factors might a hoax have been responding to? Is a hoax perhaps responding to developments in gendered or racial relations? Scientific advancement? Military incidents? How is an author utilizing or disrupting hoax tropes to influence their audience? How does literary form inflect the hoax? Be as specific as possible to ground your claim.

**Exploratory essay/bibliography:** Compose an essay narrating your process as you work on your final paper. What have you been particularly struck by as you read through source documents and secondary research? Has your research question evolved as you begin research? Talk, too, about your research process—what have you found—or not found? Briefly summarize your sources (at least six) and explain their utility for your project—what you found useful, what you found unconvincing, and how they influence your own claims. Include a bibliography of the sources you’ve found so far using Zotero or EndNote.

**Portfolio:** The final project will be a compilation of your work for this class, substantially edited and revised, and accompanied by a 1000-word reflective essay on how you selected and edited these pieces, and how they demonstrate your success with the learning outcomes of the course. You should be collecting and cataloging your work throughout the semester in order to facilitate this final project, for example, by name, date, draft number, or some other system that works for you (i.e., “Paper 1, Draft 1, 9.3.2015,” “Paper 1, Draft 2, 9.8.2013,” and so on.) You will be asked to provide not just polished drafts, but evidence of the progress you’ve made on different projects—so keep the messy stuff, the marked-up papers, the painful edits.

**grading criteria**

F: Treatment of the subject is superficial. Theme lacks organization. Prose is garbled. Mechanical errors abound. Ideas, organization, and style are well below acceptable college writing.

D: Treatment and development of subject is only in the beginning stages. Organization is present but is neither clear nor effective. Sentences are awkward, ambiguous, and contain serious errors. Little or no evidence of careful proofreading exists. Reader feels writing was done in haste.

C: Meets the assignment, reasonably well-organized and developed, and shows some grasp of audience. However, the information delivered is thin and commonplace. Reader is not instructed. Paper is often too vague and general--general in that the confused reader asks, "In every case?" "Why?" "Exactly how many?" Opening is uninteresting to reader. The conclusion is not engaging but is pedantic. Transitions between paragraphs lack smoothness. Sentences are choppy and show little variety. Word choice is acceptable but not always precise containing tedious repetitions. Often contains errors that impede readability. Reader is not tempted to read the paper again.

B: Paper is more than merely competent. Idea stated clearly but with little original thought. Few errors have escaped the writer's attention. Reader feels instructed. Organizing principle stated clearly, and all points are unified around central idea. Opening draws reader in, and closing relates thematically to opening. Transitions are smoother than the C paper. Sentence structure is varied even though the prose may be a bit flabby and wordy. Diction is more concise and precise. Little is included to distract or disturb the reading process. Reading is a pleasure.

A: Shows unusual polish and style. Surpasses the ordinary paper and is free of serious errors. The subject is very well developed with original and fresh ideas and depth of thought always with an eye to the reader. Reader feels delighted or instructed at every stage of the reading process. The title is engaging. The opening entices the reader to read on. The transitions are artful; the phrasing is tight; descriptions are telling and not general. The reader feels--for the entire length of his reading journey--that the writer is a careful, trustworthy, craftsperson. The reader feels bright, fresh, satisfied, and ready to reread the paper.

**grading breakdown**

**Percentage Scale:**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Points/Percentage** | **Letter Grade** | **Emory Point**  **Scale** |
| 93.00-100 | A | 4.00 |
| 90.00-92.99 | A- | 3.70 |
| 86.00-89.99 | B+ | 3.30 |
| 83.00-85.99 | B | 3.00 |
| 80.00-82.99 | B- | 2.70 |
| 76.00-79.99 | C+ | 2.30 |
| 73.00-75.99 | C | 2.00 |
| 70.00-72.99 | C- | 1.70 |
| 66.00-69.99 | D+ | 1.30 |
| 60.00-65.99 | D | 1.00 |
| 0-59.99 | F | 0.00 |