

# Elmhurst College

First Year Seminar: FYS-100.09

## Becoming a Skeptical Student: Science, Pseudoscience, and Self-deception (<http://www.elmhurst.edu/~earls/fys100>)

### Project, Presentation, and Final Paper

Your project group is to define, elaborate, execute, and present a group project in which you critically examine some example of pseudoscience or some significant science-based issue. The choice is up to you (all), but you will fare much better if your focus is fairly narrow and well-defined. We will, of course, be glad to help. You have two lists of possibilities, but your choice is not limited to those lists. In your work you need to draw upon (and make reference to) various ways to distinguish real scientific knowledge from bogus knowledge claims (pseudoscience or “voodoo science”).

As an initial concrete step, your group will need to prepare a **basic proposal** -- a few paragraphs explaining what you tentatively plan to do and how you plan to go about it. It should also include some specific references (5 or more) you plan to use. Of course, it would be best if you have already examined at least some of the references. It is very much to the point that you include and examine primary resources wherever possible.

Also note that I need to receive a **preliminary draft** (including reference citations, etc.) of your project paper early enough in the term that you have time to act on my suggestions after I read it and comment on it. How long should the paper be? That depends on many factors, but it seems hard to imagine that you could do justice to your group’s efforts in less than 10 pages. **Your group must decide whether you will prepare a single group paper or individual papers.** Your group will also make an **oral report presentation** to the class.

An important starting point for developing the project, paper, and presentation is to clearly lay out the **claims** made by the proponents of your chosen area of (suspected) pseudoscience. On the other hand, while some historical background is helpful, protracted discussion of the history of the area usually doesn’t contribute very much to the analysis – and it certainly is not, in itself, evidence for the validity of the claims. Similarly, long plausibility arguments don’t substitute for systematic examination of the presence or absence of high-quality observational (or experimental) evidence.

You are to submit your proposal, draft, and final paper by email as a WordPerfect (.wpd) or Microsoft Word (.doc) email attachment.