

COURSE OUTLINE – Fall 2025

AN2920(A2): Fantastical Archaeology: Ancient Aliens to Atlantis – 3 (3-0-0) 45 Hours for 15 Weeks

Northwestern Polytechnic acknowledges that our campuses are located on Treaty 8 territory, the ancestral and present-day home to many diverse First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people. We are grateful to work, live and learn on the traditional territory of Duncan's First Nation, Horse Lake First Nation and Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, who are the original caretakers of this land.

We acknowledge the history of this land and we are thankful for the opportunity to walk together in friendship, where we will encourage and promote positive change for present and future generations.

INSTRUCTOR: Matt Longstaffe **PHONE:** (780) 539-2710
OFFICE: C402 **E-MAIL:** mlongstaffe@nwpolytech.ca
OFFICE HOURS: W 12:30–15:00 or by appointment

CALENDAR DESCRIPTION: It is not always easy to separate fact from fiction in archaeology, and the human past has served as fertile ground for fraudsters, charlatans, and pseudoscientists of many stripes. Through the close examination of case studies, we will critically examine some of the most persistent (and popular) myths and mysteries concerned with the archaeological past. This course will demonstrate that a strong adherence to scientific investigation and hard evidence can uncover facts about prehistory that are as interesting as the myths.

PREREQUISITE(S):
None

COREQUISITE(S):
None

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

Feder, Kenneth L. (2025) *Frauds, Myths, and Mysteries: Science and Pseudoscience in Archaeology, 17th edition*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Von Däniken, Erich (1999) *Chariots of the Gods*. Berkley Books, New York.

DELIVERY MODE(S): On-Campus

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students will be able to:

- demonstrate, through class discussions and in written coursework, an ability to recognise and characterize a pseudoscientific claim, particularly about the human past involving archaeology.
- explain, through class discussions and in written coursework, the proper structure of scientific argumentation and how to avoid common logical fallacies in pseudoscientific thinking.
- apply, in class discussions and in written coursework, techniques for critical thinking and for sharpening their analytical skills to critically evaluate pseudoscientific claims.
- demonstrate, through class discussions and in written coursework, an understanding of the role and popularity of pseudoscientific claims in contemporary North American culture and the power archaeology must create national, religious, social, ethnic, and political narratives.
- discuss, in class and in written coursework, how seemingly “silly” pseudoarchaeological claims have harmful and sometimes violent effects on indigenous groups in the form of social/political/religious/ethnic marginalisation, economic exploitation, and “romanticising” an “exotic other”.

TRANSFERABILITY:

Please consult the Alberta Transfer Guide for more information. You may check to ensure the transferability of this course at the Alberta Transfer Guide main page <http://ww.transferalberta.alberta.ca>

** For courses with alpha (letter) grading, a grade of D or D+ may not be acceptable for transfer to other post-secondary institutions. **Students are cautioned that it is their responsibility to contact the receiving institutions to ensure transferability**

EVALUATIONS:

Assessment	Weight
5 reading quizzes, 4 points each, for 20 points total	10%
4 media assignments, 30 points each, for 120 points total	60%
Final exam for 60 points total	30%
Total = 200 points	100%
Note: All points are weighted equally for 200 points	

Reading Quizzes (5 reading quizzes at 4 points each for 20 points total)

You will be given 5 reading quizzes covering your syllabus and chapters in our textbooks throughout the semester. Each quiz will consist of a small number of questions (multiple choice, matching, etc.) and are intended to encourage you to

keep up with your readings. They are not worth a whole lot of points in the grand scheme of things but could mean the difference between one letter grade and the next; don't let them slip past you! **Reading Quizzes are to be completed on our myClass page, will open Mondays at 8 am of the week assigned, and close Sundays at 11:59 pm (see due dates on schedule).**

Media Assignments (4 media assignments at 30 points each for 120 points total)

Our understanding of the ancient world is improving at a remarkable rate. Every day, all over the world, archaeologists are unearthing the relics of our shared heritage and helping to provide context to our modern world. Unfortunately, we are competing at every turn with an exponential increase in our exposure to pseudo-archaeology. It can often be quite difficult to distinguish between the two. Over the course of the semester, you will be expected to write up four brief summaries (each approximately 500 words; about 1 page single-spaced) on "tales of archaeological discovery" covered by the media. Media assignments are organized as two related pairs.

For each, I want you to find a peer-reviewed academic journal article published within the last calendar year. After summarizing the article, can you tell fact from fiction? Reference the "Pseudoscience Cheat Sheet" in your text. Does the academic paper successfully avoid the hallmarks of pseudoscience? If not, where do they slip? What evidence and argumentation do they use?

You must cite your article in a format that allows me to locate it (i.e., author, title, journal). **Assignments must be turned in on our myClass page, will open Mondays at 8 am of the week assigned, and close Sundays at 11:59 pm (see due dates on schedule).**

Final Exam (60 points total)

You will have a scheduled final exam in this class; HOWEVER, your exam WILL NOT require you to be physically present on campus. Your exam is a TAKE HOME. It will build on the material covered throughout the course. Your final exam will be worth 60 points and consist of a single essay question and response that will be provided in advance and will be related to the book by von Däniken that we are reading this semester (*Chariots of the Gods*). **Your final is to be completed on our myClass page and will open on the Monday (at 8 am) of the last week of scheduled classes. The exam is due and will close by 11:59 pm on the date scheduled by the registrar. I will let you know when this information is available.**

GRADING CRITERIA:

Please note that most institutions will not accept your course for transfer credit **IF** your grade is **less than C-**.

Grading Chart

Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalent	Percentage Guidelines	Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalent	Percentage Guidelines
A+	4.0	95-100	C+	2.3	67-69
A	4.0	85-94	C	2.0	63-66
A-	3.7	80-84	C-	1.7	60-62
B+	3.3	77-79	D+	1.3	55-59
B	3.0	73-76	D	1.0	50-54
B-	2.7	70-72	F	0.0	00-49

COURSE SCHEDULE/TENTATIVE TIMELINE:

Week	Date	Topic(s)	Reading(s)
1.1	Sept 1	No Classes: Labour Day	
Module 1: What is Archaeology?			
1.2	Sept 3	Introduction to the course. What is archaeology?	Syllabus
Homework: Reading Quiz 1 – Due Sunday Sept 7, 11:59 PM			
2.1	Sept 8	How do we know what we know?	Feder Ch 1-3
2.2	Sept 10	An introduction to Erich von Däniken	von Däniken – Forward & Intro
Homework: Reading Quiz 2 – Due Sunday Sept 21, 11:59 PM			
Module 2: Topics in Pseudoarchaeology and Archaeology			
3.1	Sept 15	Pittdown Man and other tales of early humans	Feder Ch 4
3.2	Sept 17		von Däniken Ch 1 & 2
Homework: Media Assignment 1 – Due Sunday Sept 28, 11:59 PM			
4.1	Sept 29	The first Americans: Sorting fact from fiction	Feder Ch 5
4.2	Oct 1		von Däniken Ch 3
Homework: Reading Quiz 3 – Due Sunday Oct 5, 11:59 PM			
5.1	Oct 6	Vikings, Templars, Africans, and ancient Chinese in the Americas?	Feder Ch 6
5.2	Oct 8		von Däniken Ch 4
Homework: Media Assignment 2 – Due Sunday Oct 12, 11:59 PM			
6.1	Oct 13	No Classes – Thanksgiving Day	
6.2	Oct 15	Reaching further afield: The apparent	Feder Ch 7

Week	Date	Topic(s)	Reading(s)
		mystery of the moundbuilders	von Däniken Ch 5
7.1	Oct 20	Everything you never wanted to know about Atlantis and other lost continents, pt. 1	Feder Ch 8
7.2	Oct 22		
Homework: Reading Quiz 4 – Due Sunday Oct 26, 11:59 PM			
8.1	Oct 27	Everything you never wanted to know about Atlantis and other lost continents, pt. 2	von Däniken Ch 6
8.2	Oct 29		
9.1	Nov 3	Ancient Aliens: Flying millions of lightyears to show us how to stack rocks	Feder Ch 9
9.2	Nov 5		von Däniken Ch 7
10.1	Nov 3	Ancient Egypt: Are there deeper secrets in Egypt than science is willing to tell us?!?	Feder Ch 10
10.2	Nov 5		von Däniken Ch 8
Homework: Media Assignment 3 – Due Sunday Nov 12, 11:59 PM			
11.1	Nov 10	No Classes: Reading Break	
11.2	Nov 12	No Classes: Reading Break	
12.1	Nov 17	Psychics and archaeology	Feder Ch 11
12.2	Nov 19		von Däniken Ch 9
Homework: Reading Quiz 5 – Due Sunday Nov 23, 11:59 PM			
13.1	Nov 24	Creationism and Intelligent Design	Feder Ch 12
13.2	Nov 26		von Däniken Ch 10
Homework: Media Assignment 4 – Due Sunday Nov 30, 11:59 PM			
14.1	Dec 1	When archaeologists are the perpetrators of fraud	von Däniken Ch 11 & 12
14.2	Dec 3		
Module 3: Putting it all together			
15.1	Dec 8	Real mysteries of a veritable past. Why do we seem to prefer the fantasy?	Feder Ch 13
15.2	Dec 10	Wrap up	
Final Exam – Date TBD			

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

Late Assignment/Make-up Policy: You are expected to follow the schedule as posted and **late assignments will not be accepted, except with my permission.** Make note of the due dates (and as you see, there is a lot of flexibility to complete and submit the assignment, BEFORE the due date)

Attendance and Participation: Attendance will not be taken, and no part of your grade is directly tied to attendance/participation. You are paying good money for this class and committing a significant amount of time to it. To get the most for your money and effort, **attendance is strongly encouraged.**

Classroom Climate Expectations: To create and maintain a safe and productive learning environment in the classroom, standards of behaviours are expected as follows:

1. **Listen** attentively and TAKE NOTES.
2. **Communicate** clearly and actively when asking questions or during discussions.
3. **Be respectful** when asking questions/discussing topics with EVERYONE. This does not mean that you need to agree with all the views/opinions expressed but note that there is a difference between being critical or engaging in a productive conversation and being confrontational or abusive.
4. **Refrain** from excessive talking or use of technology for NONACADEMIC PURPOSES. You are supposed to be in class, so BE IN CLASS.

Use of Generative AI in Assignments and Exams: We all know that Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) can create pieces of writing and other creative outputs. These tools include ChatGPT, Claude, Microsoft Copilot, and so on. These tools are now with us, so it is important to learn how to use them responsibly. You may use AI tools to learn and practice concepts in this course but remember to use a critical eye to what it is telling you. However, you **may not** use AI to write your class assignments or exams for you. This course policy is designed to promote learning and development and help you reach the course learning outcomes. You're here to learn and learning how to communicate ideas through writing is one of the most important parts of being a student.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:

Academic Misconduct will not be tolerated. For a more precise definition of academic misconduct and its consequences, refer to the Student Rights and Responsibilities policy available at <https://www.nwpolytech.ca/about/polytechnic-leadership/policies-directory>.

**Note: all Academic and Administrative policies are available on the same page.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

I'm here to help you! Ask me questions. Talk to me after class. Come to my office hours.