

DEPARTMENT Humanities and Social Sciences

COURSE OUTLINE - Fall 2026

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:	Shawn Morton, PhD	PHONE:	(780) 539-2830
OFFICE:	L109	E-MAIL:	smorton@nwpolytech.ca
OFFICE HOURS:	W 11:00-12:00 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)/COREQUISITE:

None

REQUIRED TEXT/RESOURCE MATERIALS:

Feder (2025) *Frauds, Myths, and Mysteries: Science and Pseudoscience in Archaeology*, 11th ed. Oxford University Press (eBook).

Von Däniken (1999) *Chariots of the Gods*. Berkley Books.

DELIVERY MODE(S):

On-Campus

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate, through class discussions and in written coursework, an ability to recognize 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 has to create national, religious, social, ethnic, and political narratives.
- Discuss, in class and in written coursework, how seemingly “silly” pseudoarchaeological claims can have harmful and sometimes violent effects on indigenous groups in the form of social/political/religious/ethnic marginalization, economic exploitation, and “romanticizing” 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

<https://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
Lecture Attendance, 1 point each, for 20 points total	10%
5 reading quizzes, 4 points each, for 20 points total	10%
4 media assignments, 25 points each, for 100 points total	50%
Final exam for 60 points total	30%
Total = 200 points	100%
Note: All points are weighted equally for 200 points total.	
Extra credit for up to 10 points	5%

Lecture Attendance (1 point each, for 20 points total)

One key to successfully completing your course is regular attendance. To encourage you to attend regularly, part of your final grade is tied to attendance. There are 24 regular lecture periods this semester. To earn your full attendance points, you'll need to attend 20 of them. Points will be awarded at the end of each class period when you submit your single-sentence “take-home point.”

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 textbook 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 assignments at 25 points each for 100 points total)

Our understanding of the ancient world is developing at a remarkable rate. Every day, all over the world, archaeologists unearth relics of our shared heritage and help provide context for our modern world. Unfortunately, in this class you are often exposed to our greatest competition: 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 on "tales of archaeological discovery." We'll shift the focus with each assignment so that you can get an idea of how arguments are made by various parties.

Assignments 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). Don't worry, no prep work is required!

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 and will follow the same format as your midterm exam. Your exam is a TAKE HOME. As we will be invoking concepts that are foundational to the discipline of anthropology, 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.**

Note: I do NOT provide study guides. Extensive research demonstrates that it is not in a student's best interest to be provided with a study guide by the instructor. You may not like it, but creating your own study guide is an important study technique in its own right. Like eating vegetables, this is for your own good. Although this isn't a course where you need to memorize a lot of information, you do need to be familiar with what we've covered and where to find it.

Extra Credit (MAX. 10 points)

Extra credit is as stated, extra points above and beyond your regular class assignments. These points are somewhat easy to acquire, but to receive any point, you must do exactly as asked. Extra credit opportunities (worth 5 points each) will be announced throughout the semester.

GRADING CRITERIA:

Please note that most universities 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)
Getting Started			
1	Sep. 3	Introduction to course	Syllabus
Homework: Reading Quiz 1 - Due Sunday, Sep. 6, 11:59 PM			
Module 1: What is Archaeology			
2.1	Sep. 8	What is archaeology and how do we know what we know?	Feder - Chs. 1 - 3
2.2	Sep. 10	Anatomy of an archaeological hoax and an introduction to Erich von Däniken	von Däniken - Forward & Intro
Homework: Reading Quiz 2 - Due Sunday, Sep. 13, 11:59 PM			
3.1	Sep. 15	Pitldown Man and other tales of early humans	Feder - Ch. 4
3.2	Sep. 17		von Däniken - Ch. 1 & 2
Homework: Media Assignment 1 - Due Sunday, Sep. 20, 11:59 PM			
Module 2: Ancient Migrations and Lost Civilizations			
4.1	Sep. 22	The first Americans: Sorting fact from fiction.	Feder - Ch. 5
4.2	Sep. 24		von Däniken - Ch. 3
Homework: Reading Quiz 3 - Due Sunday, Sep. 27, 11:59 PM			
5.1	Sep. 29	Vikings, Templars, Africans, and ancient Chinese in the Americas?	Feder - Ch. 6
5.2	Oct. 1		von Däniken - Ch. 4
Homework: Media Assignment 2 - Due Sunday, Oct. 4, 11:59 PM			
6.1	Oct. 6	Reaching further afield: The apparent mystery of the moundbuilders.	Feder - Ch. 7
6.2	Oct. 8		von Däniken - Ch. 5
7.1	Oct. 13	Everything you never wanted to know about Atlantis and other lost continents, pt. 1.	Feder - Ch. 8
7.2	Oct. 15		von Däniken - Ch. 6
Homework: Reading Quiz 4 - Due Sunday, Oct. 18, 11:59 PM			
8.1	Oct. 20	Everything you never wanted to know about Atlantis and other lost continents, pt. 2.	Feder - Ch. 9
8.2	Oct. 22		
Module 3: Explaining Ancient Super Civilizations			
9.1	Oct. 27	Ancient aliens: Flying millions of lightyears to show us how to stack rocks.	Feder - Ch. 10
9.2	Oct. 29		von Däniken - Ch. 7
10.1	Nov. 3	Ancient, ancient Egypt: Are there deeper secrets in Egypt than science is willing to admit?	Feder - Ch. 11
10.2	Nov. 5		von Däniken - Ch. 8
Homework: Media Assignment 3 - Due Sunday, Nov. 8, 11:59 PM			
11.1	Nov. 10	Reading Break - No Classes	
11.2	Nov. 12	Reading Break - No Classes	
Module 4: When Things Get Weird			
12.1	Nov. 17	Psychics and archaeology: Why dig when you can feel the past?	Feder - Ch. 12
12.2	Nov. 19		von Däniken - Ch. 9
Homework: Reading Quiz 5 - Due Sunday, Nov. 22, 11:59 PM			
13.1	Nov. 24	Creationism and Intelligent Design.	Feder - Ch. 13
13.2	Nov. 26		von Däniken - Ch. 10
Homework: Media Assignment 4 - Due Sunday, Dec. 29, 11:59 PM			
14.1	Dec. 1	When archaeologists are the perpetrators of fraud.	von Däniken - Ch. 11 & 12
Module 5: Wrapping it up in a Neat Bow			
14.2	Dec. 3	Real mysteries of a veritable past. Why do we seem to prefer the fantasy?	Feder - Ch. 14
15	Dec. 8	Wrap up	
Final Exam - Take-Home - Date TBA			

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. Contrary to a popular idiom, it is always better to ask for permission than forgiveness; if you know that you are going to miss a deadline, please let me know in advance.

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.

If you choose to violate the above expectations, either once or repeatedly the following consequences will be enforced:

1. Verbal warning;
2. Meeting after class/in office hours, or;

Pursuing a report of non-academic misconduct under the Student Rights and Responsibilities policy.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI): While you should develop a sense of how social scientists construct an argument, this is not a writing course. Using tools, including AI, to improve your prose is both allowed and appreciated. There is nothing wrong with using such tools to convey YOUR IDEAS more clearly. However, the use of Generative AI is strictly prohibited. If detected, it will result in an F grade on your assignment and an official note on your permanent record in accordance with NWP's Academic Misconduct policies.

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/administration/policies/index.html>

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

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Note that you should not take your performance in this course as an indication of how much I like or respect you. No, that will depend on whether you laugh at my jokes (that was a joke). It goes without saying that post-secondary education is a process. You'll figure out what works for you. I'm here to help. Also, looking for a little extra credit? Just send me an email with "AN2920 – Extra Credit" in the subject line and the phrase "Bat Boy is real and we're engaged!" as the body.