Truth has become a controversial topic lately. This course will take a historical look at truth and its opposites, including lies and false beliefs, in the history of the West from the Renaissance to the present. We will consider changing conceptions of evidence and knowledge in law, religion, science, the arts, and politics and the media. We will also consider the historian’s responsibility to truth, in the past and today.

Part of the course will focus on the discussion of readings in common, including both primary sources and secondary sources that introduce students to interpretative problems in this field. Part will be devoted to the construction of an extensive research paper in which students grapple with a problem of their choice related to the history of truth claims or lies. Class time will also be devoted to discreet steps involved in this process, including framing a question, building a bibliography, analyzing various kinds of evidence or sources, constructing an effective outline, and writing an argument-driven and well substantiated seminar paper.

**Course requirements:** 1) Class participation (40% of final grade), which will entail submitting a thoughtful question for discussion in the evening prior to each class meeting and then coming to class every week prepared to engage in a vigorous discussion of the assigned reading, and 2) Writing of an approx. 20 page research paper (60% of final grade), including handing in on assigned dates: a paper proposal, a preliminary bibliography of primary and secondary sources, an outline, and a final paper, as well as a brief (10 min.) class presentation in the last weeks of the semester centered on a key piece of evidence and the argument you are building around it.

**Course readings:** Readings marked (X) designate books that can be found on reserve in Van Pelt Library and are also available for purchase through amazon.com. All other readings are available either as electronic reserves on Canvas--marked (C) in each case--or as links embedded in this syllabus.

**Schedule:** Class Meetings, Assignments, and Readings

Wed., January 23: **Introduction to the Course**
*discussion of course subject matter and of the steps involved in constructing a research paper
*handouts
Law

Wed., January 30: Truth in the Courtroom and the Historian as Judge
*Carlo Ginzburg, “Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian”

*Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica (1485), in Edward Peters, ed., Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe, 182-83
*Dallas Dennery, The Devil Wins: A History of Lying from the Garden of Eden to the Enlightenment (2015), excerpts

*primary sources in Van Pelt library
*Lorraine Daston, “Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe”

Wed., February 20: Truth Detection in the 20th Century
[or Geoffrey Bunn, The Truth Machine: A Social History of the Lie Detector (2012)]
*library resources meeting during class (come ready with a broad idea of a research direction)

Science (and Religion)

Wed., February 27: The New Science and New Kinds of Truth Tellers
*two-paragraph paper proposals due in class

SPRING BREAK

*primary sources in Van Pelt library
*Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, Objectivity (2008), one chapter on the 19th c.
Politics and Media

Wed., March 20: Free Speech as the Way to Truth
* Perez Zagorin, How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West (2003) chapt. 1
* Frederick Schauer, Free Speech: A Philosophical Enquiry (1982), 15-72, 209-14

Wed., March 27: Democracy and Truth-Telling
* Rosenfeld, Democracy and Truth: A Short History (2018)
* David Runciman, Political Hypocrisy, 2nd ed (2028), excerpt
* preliminary bibliography, including primary and secondary source lists, due in class

Wed., April 3: Propaganda
* primary sources in library
* Jason Stanley, How Propaganda Works (2015), ch. 1
* paper outline due in class, incl. statement of the paper's question and argument

Wed., April 10: History as Truth?
* Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, Telling the Truth About History (1995)

Your Research

Wed., April 17: Brief presentations of a key source and accompanying project

Wed., April 24: Brief presentations of a key source and accompanying project

Wed., May 1: Brief presentations of a key source and accompanying project

The final paper will be due on Fri., May 3, and must be submitted by 5 pm that day, both in hard copy and electronically, in order to be on time. Late papers will lose a full grade each day that they are late.

Note on Academic Integrity: Students are expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity, which presents standards regarding plagiarism, multiple submissions (i.e., using a paper or portions a paper to fulfill requirements in more than one course), and other actions. If not familiar with the Code, students should become familiar with and follow the standards set forth at http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai_codeofacademicintegrity.html