FAKE NEWS AND MISINFORMATION:
A CLOSER LOOK (HSS 404 109) *

Instructor
Andres Crespo

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**Meeting
Location**
FMH 413

Class Time
Wednesdays
6:00 – 8:50 PM

COURSE OVERVIEW

How do we know whether something is true or not? This seminar will explore the psychological underpinnings behind fake news and misinformation in the "post-truth" era by examining real-life events. To do that, we will first look briefly at the historical developments of these phenomena, define them, and understand their unprecedented proliferation within the contemporary media landscape. Our seminar will also consider different cutting-edge approaches to combat misperception. This will help you develop the necessary tools to successfully identify, measure, diagnose, and respond to false information.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

♦ Define key concepts such as "fake news," "hoaxes," and "disinformation."
♦ Identify the psychological factors behind false or misleading information
♦ Evaluate and apply different approaches to combat misinformation
♦ Demonstrate information literacy: the ability to find, evaluate, select, and utilize information effectively when needed.
♦ Develop effective collaborative habits by working closely with others.

*"Prerequisites: ENGL 102 with a grade of C or higher, and 6 credits at the 300-level History and Humanities GER with a grade of C or higher; 3 credits at the 300-level may be taken concurrently as a co-requisite. Restrictions: Registration requires senior standing."

COURSE MATERIALS

This course does not require any book. Each article from the course outline includes a hyperlink for access. (Note: you may need your UCID and password to access materials linked to the NJIT databases.)

ASSIGNMENT & ASSESSMENT

Attendance/Participation/Discussion Question	20%
Fake News or Bias Exercise	10%
Exams	20%
First Draft Case Study	10%
Group Presentation	15%
Final Draft Case Study	25%

NOTE: all exams will be curved and centrally focus on the overarching parts of the readings in question (e.g., their hypotheses, concepts, and approaches), along with how the materials may or may not connect with one another, to test your understanding and knowledge of them. This can come in a range of ways from a brief one-page response to multiple-choice questions or a combination of both. Any make-up exam (i.e., for Dean-approved excuses) take place during office hours.

GRADES

A = 94 – 100   B+ = 87 – 93   B = 81 – 86   C+ = 76 – 80   C = 70 – 75

D = 65 – 69   F = 0 – 64

ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION

I do not accept emailed assignments. Late assignments receive a 10% late penalty for each day they are late; after 4 days, I do not accept the assignment. However, documented emergencies, accommodations, and unprecedented personal circumstances are exceptions to this rule, once the Dean of Students (https://www.njit.edu/dos/contact.php) approves it.

The threshold for plagiarism is 20%. That means that anything beyond that will not be accepted unless it comes from citations.

ENGAGEMENT

OFFICE HOURS

Office hours run T/TH from 10-11:30 AM in Cullimore 419. If you prefer to meet remotely, please let me know.

<u>ATTENDANCE</u>

Unexcused Absences: You may have up to 6 unexcused absences. Anything more than that would be grounds for failure.

Excused Absences: If you are absent at any point in the semester for a legitimate reason, you need to first contact the Dean of Students. If they approve the absence, I will receive an official response from them.

<u>PARTICIPATION</u>

This course hinges on the exchange of ideas. Thus, I expect you to read the materials thoughtfully and carefully, so that you can draw connections among them and/or apply their ideas to new contexts.

AI CHATBOTS

When using AI chatbots for assistance (e.g., research, brainstorming, etc.), you must quote any borrowed material and include a disclaimer at the end, documenting how the tool aided you in the writing process. Remember that chatbots sometimes generate fictitious content, including source material.

NJIT CODE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

"Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: [NJIT Academic Integrity Code](#)*.*

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu*"*

ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

Every attempt will be made to accommodate qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a documented disability, please see me as early in the semester as possible to discuss the necessary accommodations, and/or contact Student Disability Services at 973-596-3420.

THE WRITING CENTER

The Writing Center (G17 Central King) is available for 45-minute individual and group appointments with professional writing tutors both onsite and online. This resource is intended to help you improve your communication and writing skills. Tutors can help with planning assignments, improving your writing, refining an essay or multimedia project, or other communication-based needs. To make an appointment, please visit https://www.njit.edu/writingcenter/

COURSE SCHEDULE

The following course outline is tentative and subject to change.

Week 1
Sep. 6

INTRODUCTION

Syllabus, Ice breakers, Media discussion

Week 2
Sep. 13

PART 1: DEFINING MISPERCEPTION BELIEF

Humbugs, Hoaxes, Fakes News, and More

- Molina, Maria D., S. Shyam Sundar, Thai Le, and Dongwon Lee. "'Fake News' Is Not Simply False Information: A Concept Explication and Taxonomy of Online Content." *American Behavioral Scientist* 65, no. 2 (February 1, 2021): 180–212. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764219878224.

- Tandoc, Edson C., Zheng Wei Lim, and Richard Ling. "Defining 'Fake News.'" *Digital Journalism* 6, no. 2 (February 7, 2018): 137–53. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143.

- Hsu, Tiffany. "Falsehoods Follow Close Behind This Summer's Natural Disasters." *The New York Times*, August 30, 2023, sec. Business. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/30/business/media/maui-idalia-disinformation-climate-change.html.

Week 3
Sep. 20

Historical Perspectives

- Burkhardt, Joanna M. "Chapter 1. History of Fake News." *Library Technology Reports* 53, no. 8 (November 16, 2017): 5–9. https://journals.ala.org/index.php/ltr/article/view/6497.

- "The Age-Old Problem of 'Fake News' | History| Smithsonian Magazine." Accessed January 4, 2023. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/age-old-problem-fake-news-180968945/.

- BBC Bitesize. "A Brief History of Fake News." Accessed January 4, 2023. https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zwcgn9q.

Week 4
Sep. 27

The 1950s "blueprint for science denial"

<mark>Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 9/24</mark>

- Brandt, Allan M. "Inventing Conflicts of Interest: A History of Tobacco Industry Tactics." *American Journal of Public Health* 102, no. 1 (January 2012): 63–71. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300292.

- Fake News. "Fake News: Conspiring to Fight Science." Accessed January 4, 2023. https://dsp.domains.trincoll.edu/fake-news/fake-news/conspiring-to-fight-science.

- Bero, Lisa A. "Tobacco Industry Manipulation of Research." *Public Health Reports* 120, no. 2 (2005): 200–208. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1497700/.

Week 5
Oct. 4

PART 2: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FALSE BELIEFS

The Role of "Repetition" in Misperception Belief

<mark>Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 10/1</mark>

- Fazio, Lisa K., this link will open in a new window Link to external site, Raunak M. Pillai, and Deep Patel. "The Effects of Repetition on Belief in Naturalistic Settings." *Journal of Experimental*

Psychology: General 151, no. 10 (October 2022): 2604–13.
https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0001211.

- Lyons, Benjamin A., Jacob M. Montgomery, Andrew M. Guess, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. "Overconfidence in News Judgments Is Associated with False News Susceptibility." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 23 (June 8, 2021): e2019527118. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2019527118.

- "Fact Check: 7 Persistent Myths about COVID-19 Vaccines | Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center." Accessed January 5, 2023. https://www.mskcc.org/coronavirus/myths-about-covid-19-vaccines.

Week 6 Oct. 11	# Who misperceives? Who is misperceived? ==Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 10/8==

- Ecker, Ullrich K. H., Stephan Lewandowsky, John Cook, Philipp Schmid, Lisa K. Fazio, Nadia Brashier, Panayiota Kendeou, Emily K. Vraga, and Michelle A. Amazeen. "The Psychological Drivers of Misinformation Belief and Its Resistance to Correction." *Nature Reviews Psychology* 1, no. 1 (January 2022): 13–29. https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-021-00006-y.

- Rudloff, Jan Philipp, this link will open in a new window Link to external site, Markus Appel, and this link will open in a new window Link to external site. "When Truthiness Trumps Truth: Epistemic Beliefs Predict the Accurate Discernment of Fake News." *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, October 13, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1037/mac0000070.

- Lopes, Lunna, Mellisha Stokes, and 2021. "KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor: Media and Misinformation." *KFF* (blog), November 8, 2021. https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-media-and-misinformation/.

Week 7
Oct. 18

Bias in information exposure and processing

<mark>Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 10/15</mark>

<mark>Fake News or Bias Exercise due 10/15</mark>

- Fazio, Lisa K., Nadia M. Brashier, B. Keith Payne, and Elizabeth J. Marsh. "Knowledge Does Not Protect against Illusory Truth." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 144, no. 5 (October 2015): 993–1002. https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000098.

- Derreumaux, Yrian, this link will open in a new window Link to external site, Robin Bergh, this link will open in a new window Link to external site, and Brent L. Hughes. "Partisan-Motivated Sampling: Re-Examining Politically Motivated Reasoning across the Information Processing Stream." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 123, no. 2 (August 2022): 316–36. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000375.

- Longwell, Sarah. "Trump Supporters Explain Why They Believe the Big Lie." The Atlantic, April 18, 2022. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/04/trump-voters-big-lie-stolen-election/629572/.

Week 8

Exam Week (No readings/postings this week)

Oct. 25

Week 9
Nov. 1

PART 3: HOW TO COMBAT MISPECEPTION BELIEF

Applying the "Inoculation Theory" to Misinformation

Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 10/29

- Inoculation Science. "Inoculation Science - Video Resources - Truth Labs for Education." Accessed January 9, 2023. https://inoculation.science/inoculation-videos/.

- MediaWise. *Media Literacy Masterclass with MediaWise Campus Correspondents*, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cdx5zz5Dtr8.

- https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/tactics-of-disinformation_508.pdf

In-Class Activity

- https://www.getbadnews.com/en (interactive game)

- https://library.buffalostate.edu/c.php?g=1156338&p=8443577 (Interactive game)

Week 10
Nov. 8

Experiments and Approaches

- Roozenbeek, Jon, and Sander van der Linden. "How to Combat Health Misinformation: A Psychological Approach." *American Journal of Health Promotion* 36, no. 3 (March 1, 2022): 569–75. https://doi.org/10.1177/08901171211070958.

- Chan, Man-pui Sally, Christopher R. Jones, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, and Dolores Albarracín. "Debunking: A Meta-Analysis of the Psychological Efficacy of Messages Countering Misinformation." *Psychological Science* 28, no. 11 (2017): 1531–46. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26957332.

- Grant, Nico, and Tiffany Hsu. "Google Finds 'Inoculating' People Against Misinformation Helps Blunt Its Power." *The New York Times*, August 24, 2022, sec. Technology. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/24/technology/google-search-misinformation.html.

Week 11
Nov. 15

Application: Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

- Pilger, John. "The Iraq WMD Rationale Was 95% Charade." *Peace Research* 36, no. 2 (2004): 89–92. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23684864.

- Lewandowsky, Stephan, Werner G. K. Stritzke, Klaus Oberauer, and Michael Morales. "Memory for Fact, Fiction, and Misinformation: The Iraq War 2003." *Psychological Science* 16, no. 3 (2005): 190–95. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40064200.

- The New York Times. "FROM THE EDITORS; The Times and Iraq," May 26, 2004, sec. World. https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/26/world/from-the-editors-the-times-and-iraq.html.

Week 12
Nov. 22

No Class – Friday Classes Meet on Wednesday

Week 13
Nov. 29

Application: QAnon

<mark>Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 11/26</mark>

<mark>First Draft Case Study Due 11/27</mark>

- Löffler, Paul. "Review: Vaccine Myth-Buster – Cleaning Up With Prejudices and Dangerous Misinformation." *Frontiers in Immunology* 12 (2021). https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fimmu.2021.663280.

- Pluviano, Sara, Caroline Watt, and Sergio Della Sala. "Misinformation Lingers in Memory: Failure of Three pro-Vaccination Strategies." *PLOS ONE* 12, no. 7 (July 27, 2017): e0181640. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0181640.

- Omer, Saad B. "The Discredited Doctor Hailed by the Anti-Vaccine Movement." *Nature* 586, no. 7831 (October 27, 2020): 668–69. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-020-02989-9.

Week 14
Dec. 6

Application: "the Ukraine and Iraq War"

- Opsal. (2022). Comparative analysis of western and Russian news framing of the Ukraine and Iraq war. uis.

- Irvin-Erickson. (2017). Genocide discourses: American and Russian strategic narratives of conflict in Iraq and Ukraine. Politics and Governance, 5(3), 130–145. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v5i3.1015

Week 15
Dec. 13

Last Day of Classes

Final Project (Final Draft) Due 12/10

Final Exam due 12/13