

# FAKE NEWS AND MISINFORMATION: A CLOSER LOOK (HSS 404 112) \*

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## 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.

**Meeting  
Location**  
CKB 219

**Class Time**  
Tuesdays  
6:00 – 8:50 PM

## 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.

### ATTENDANCE

*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.

### PARTICIPATION

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](mailto: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

Jan. 16

## INTRODUCTION

Syllabus, Ice breakers, Media discussion

### Week 2

Jan. 23

## PART 1: DEFINING MISPERCEPTION BELIEF

**Humbugs, Hoaxes, Fakes News, and More**

### Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 1/21

- 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  
Jan. 30

## Historical Perspectives

### Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 1/28

- 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**  
Feb. 6

## **The 1950s “blueprint for science denial”**

**Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 2/4**

- 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**  
Feb. 13

## **PART 2: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FALSE BELIEFS**

### **The Role of “Repetition” in Misperception Belief**

**Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 2/11**

- 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  
Feb. 20

## Who misperceives? Who is misperceived?

Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 2/18

- 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**  
Feb. 27

## **Bias in information exposure and processing**

**Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 2/25**

**Fake News or Bias Exercise due 2/25**

- 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)**

SPRING 2024

March 5

Midterm Exam due 3/5

Week 9  
March 12

**No Class – Spring Recess from 3/10 to 3/16**

Week 10  
March 19

## **PART 3: HOW TO COMBAT MISPECEPTION BELIEF**

### **Applying the “Inoculation Theory” to Misinformation**

Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 3/17

- 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](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 11  
March 26

## Experiments and Approaches

Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 3/24

- 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 12  
April 2

## Application: Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 3/31

## Group Presentations begin 4/2

- 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 13  
April 9

## Application: QAnon

### Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 4/7

### First Draft Case Study Due 4/7

- Hanley, Hans W. A., Deepak Kumar, and Zakir Durumeric. "No Calm in the Storm: Investigating QAnon Website Relationships." *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* 16 (May 31, 2022): 299–310. <https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v16i1.19293>.
- Holoyda, Brian J. "QAnon: A Modern Conspiracy Theory and the Assessment of Its Believers." *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online*, January 25, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.29158/JAAPL.210053-21>.

- Reuters. “Fact Check: No Evidence to Support QAnon Claims of Mass Arrests, Military Takeover, Illegitimacy of Biden’s Presidency or Trump’s Return to Power,” January 22, 2021, sec. 2020 Candidate Slideshows.  
<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-qanon-military-theories-idUSKBN29R1ZA>.

**Week 14**  
April 16

## **Application: “the Ukraine and Iraq War”**

**Post question & comment for in-class discussion due 4/14**

- 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**  
April 23

## **Last Day of Classes**

**Final Project (Final Draft) Due 4/21**

**Final Exam due 4/23**

SPRING 2024

**Week 16**  
April 30

**No Class – Friday Classes Meet on Tuesday**