GOVT 4000 Major Seminar: The Truth About Fake News

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Misinformation is now a feature of modern politics, but to what extent does fake news interfere with our ability to separate fact from fiction? This major seminar will look at the historical antecedents of fake news, and the foundations of modern day free speech, before covering how unprecedented access to information via digital content, the internet, and social media has changed our current news consumption. It will also survey academic studies in political behavior that analyze both how individuals consume political information from social media, and how partisanship and polarization are making the problem worse. It will also cover how fake news works in other parts of the world, in both developing and non-developing regimes. The course will conclude by discussing the nascent policy solutions to combat the spread of fake news. Students will engage these issues using analytical writing, group projects, and structured debates. Through readings, discussions, and written assignments, students will learn how to better evaluate evidence when it comes to misinformation.

https://xkcd.com/1283/

REQUIREMENTS

Generally, students are required to attend all class meetings, to come to seminar having read and thought about the assigned material for the week, and to participate actively in class activities. Full attendance is expected, if a student misses more than 3 classes without consultation with the professor, the overall class grade will decrease by a third of a grade.

The grade will be composed of the following elements:

20%	**Short Paper I**	**February 19**
20%	**Short Paper II**	**March 11**
20%	**Group Presentation**	**March 25**
40%	**Long Paper**	**May TBD**

Topics for the short and long papers will be distributed in class. Papers are due to be submitted electronically <u>before the start of the class</u> on the specified deadlines. Late assignments will be marked down a third of a grade (such as from A to A-) for each day following the due date. All assignments are designed to be pieces of analytical writing, drawing upon leading academic research, policy analysis, or evidence derived from available data. All claims must be fully supported, and cited appropriately.

ETHICS

The course follows the general principles established in the Cornell Code of Academic Integrity; see https://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm. Cheating, plagiarism, and other offenses outlined in the code will not be permitted and will resuming in failing grade. Students must complete and submit individual assignments, there are no collective assessments. Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site.

ACCESS

Students with Disabilities: Your access in this course is important. Please give me your Student Disability Services (SDS) accommodation letter early in the semester so that we have adequate time to arrange your approved academic accommodations. If you need an immediate accommodation, please speak with me after class or send an email to me and/or SDS at sds_cu@cornell.edu. If the need arises for additional accommodations during the semester, please contact SDS. SDS is located on level 5 of Cornell Health, 110 Ho Plaza, 607-254-4545, sds.cornell.edu.

All students: Your mental health is important. If you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed, or encounter any difficulties during the semester, you can either come to me (and we'll find a solution) or you can (confidentially) consult the Cornell mental health services. See: https://health.cornell.edu/services/mental-health-care for information on how to stop by, or you can even call a licensed therapist directly from the on-call service: 607-255-5155 (option #2).

Office Hours: These are a chance for you to come consult with me about the topics in the course, assignments, or if you need more general academic help or advice. You can sign up for a 15 minute slot on calendly.com/cirone, or please email for an alternative appointment time.

NOTE

This syllabus is a "living document" and is subject to revision as the course goes on. Please consult with me before reading more than a week ahead!

SCHEDULE

Lecture will begin January 22. There will be no class on March 18th, or April 1st.

	Date	Topic	Assignments
W	January 22	Introduction	
W	January 29	Historical Uses of Misinformation	
W	February 5	Modern Misinformation	
W	February 12	Guest Speaker: NYT Editor	
W	February 19	Political Behavior	**Short Paper 1 Due**
W	February 26	2016 US Election	
W	March 4	Challenges to Democracy	
W	March 11	Rapid Fire Debate	**Short Paper 2 Due**
W	March 18	NO CLASS	
W	March 25	Policy Solutions	**Group Presentations**
W	April 1	NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)	
W	April 8	Visit to Survey Data in the Information Age, to see Joe Twyman Speak	
W	April 15	TBD	
W	April 22	Non-Democratic Regimes	
W	April 29	Documentary Screening: Under the Sun	
	May TBD		**Long Paper Due**

All readings are academic journal articles, newspaper articles, or reports that can be accessed online or on Canvas. However, for your future scholarly development, I recommend you invest in buying the following (click for Amazon links):

1. Warburton, Nigel. 2009. Free Speech: a Very Short Introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Cairo, Albert. 2019. "How Charts Lie." WW Norton and Company.
3. Wheelan, Charles. 2014. Naked Statistics. WW Norton and Company.

January 22   **Introduction**

Tucker et al, 2018. "Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature." Sections A-D.

Lazer et al. "The science of fake news." *Science* 359 (6380), 1094-1096.

January 29   **Historical Uses of Misinformation and Free Speech**

Lapham's Quarterly Special Issue: A History of Fake News. 2018.

Parkinson, Robert. "Fake news? That's a very old story." *Washington Post,* November 25, 2016. Accessed here: http://wapo.st/2fx6KkQ?tid=ss_tw&utm_term=.bdb0350c5451

Warburton, Nigel. Free Speech: a Very Short Introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Available online, through Cornell library. Chapters 1, 2 and Chapter 5.

Stepman, Jarret. "The History of Fake News in the United States." Daily Signal. Link: https://www.dailysignal.com/2018/01/01/the-history-of-fake-news-in-the-united-states/

February 5   **Modern Misinformation**

Skim the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019. Pages 1-31.

Sarah Jackson, NYT Op-ed, "Twitter Made US Better," Dec. 27, 2019. Link: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/12/27/opinion/sunday/twitter-social-media.html

Settle, J. (2018). *Frenemies: How Social Media Polarizes America* (pp. 1-19). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/9781108560573.001. Chapters 1 and 2.

Munger et al, Working Paper 2019. "The Effect of Clickbait." See: https://rubenson.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/munger-tpbw18.pdf

February 12   **Outside Speaker: https://as.cornell.edu/news/ny-times-editor-alumnus-first-distinguished-visiting-journalist**

February 19   **Political Behavior**

Flynn, DJ; Nyhan, B, and Reifler, J. 2017. "The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs About Politics." *Advances in Political Psychology, 38:1.*

Guess, et al. 2018. *Avoiding the Echo Chamber About Echo Chambers.* Knight Foundation Brief.

Jessica T. Feezell & Brittany Ortiz (2019) 'I saw it on Facebook': an experimental analysis of political learning through social media, Information, Communication & Society, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2019.1697340

February 26   **2016 US Election**

Fake News May Have Limited Effects Beyond Increasing Beliefs in False Claims: https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/fake-news-limited-effects-on-political-participation/

Guess, Nyhan and Reifler. Working Paper 2018. "Selective Exposure to Misinformation: Evidence from the consumption of fake news during the 2016 presidential campaign."

Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow. 2017. "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Volume 31, Number 2—Spring 2017—Pages 211-236

Mason, Lilliana. 2016. "A Cross Cutting Calm: How Social Sorting Drives Affective Polarization." Public Opinion Quarterly.

March 4   **Challenges to Democracy**

Norris, Pippa. Working Paper 7/12/ 2018. "Do public perceptions of electoral malpractice undermine democratic satisfaction? The U.S. in comparative perspective."

Tucker, et al. (2017). "From Liberation to Turmoil: Social Media and Democracy." Journal of Democracy, Volume 28, Number 4.

Isabella Hansen & Darren J. Lim (2018): Doxing democracy: influencing elections via cyber voter interference, *Contemporary Politics.*

March 11   **Rapid Fire Debate**

March 18   **NO CLASS**

March 25   **Policy Solutions (Group Presentations)**

April 1   **NO CLASS (Spring Break)**

April 8   **Visit to "Survey Data in the Information Age" class, to see guest lecture by Joe Twyman**

Naked Statistics, Chapters 1-2 (pages 1-36)
How to Lie with Statistics, Chapters 1-4 (pages 11-36)

April 15   **TBD**

April 22   **Non-Democratic Regimes**

Shanthi Kalathil Taylor C. Boas. Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The Impact of the Internet on Authoritarian Rule. Chapters 2.

King, Gary; Jennifer Pan and Margaret Roberts. "How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression." May 2013, *Annual Review of Political Science.*

India's 'Fake News' Crackdown Crumbles Over Journalists' Outrage. Kai Schultz and Suhasini Raj for the New York Times, April 3, 2018.

In WhatsApp, fake news is fast — and can be fatal." Elizabeth Dwoskin and Annie Gowen for the Washington Post, July 23, 2018.

April 29   **Documentary Screening: Under the Sun**

https://www.npr.org/2016/07/08/484945860/the-making-of-a-propaganda-film-in-under-the-sun

https://www.cnn.com/2016/06/22/asia/north-korea-propaganda/index.html