

INST 152 – Fake-checking: Battling Misinformation and Disinformation in the Real World
Fall 2019
Tuesday/Thursday, 11 am - 12: 15 pm, ARM 0126

Instructors, Office Hours, & Contact Information:

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Please allow for email responses within 24-hours Mon-Fri and 48 hours on weekends and holidays.

Catalog Description: Examining the phenomenon of "fake news" using the principles of information literacy, students will develop their skills in locating, analyzing, and evaluating different information sources -- in the classroom, in their personal lives, and in the workplace.

Extended Description: In our hyper-connected world, in which we face unprecedented access to information at the touch of a button, why does there seem to be so much confusion about what is true and what is false, and what is fact and what is fiction? In this environment, we need help sorting through and thinking critically about information. But how exactly do we develop this ability? The ability to decipher misinformation from factual information is one of several key skills involved in *information literacy*. To go further, *information literacy* is a crucial set of skills involved in one's ability to find, retrieve, analyze, evaluate, create, and disseminate information. We will analyze the importance of information literacy, a set of skills that is critical not only in the workplace, but in everyday life as savvy consumers and creators of information in an open, democratic society.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Examine the quality and veracity of information in a range of contexts – personal, scholastic, and professional, as well as platforms, both physical and virtual.
- Act as analysts to critically evaluate bodies of text for alignment with literacy standards relevant to the information discipline.
- Apply their information literacy skills to the creation of an authentic information product
- Critique authentic information products created by their classmates

Course Materials

There is no required text for this course. Readings will be assigned from books, journals, trade publications, newspapers, conference proceedings, and other materials as necessary. Links have been provided in the syllabus to a number of readings; additional assigned readings are available through Course Reserves. All journal articles are also accessible through UMD Libraries. At any point in the semester, please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any trouble locating assigned readings. Any changes to course readings will be announced in class and via ELMS.

Campus Policies

It is our shared responsibility to know and abide by the University of Maryland's policies that relate to all courses, which include topics like:

- Academic integrity
- Student and instructor conduct
- Accessibility and accommodations
- Attendance and excused absences
- Grades and appeals
- Copyright and intellectual property

Please visit www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html for the Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies and follow up with me if you have questions.

Policy on Academic Misconduct

Cases of academic misconduct will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct (<https://www.studentconduct.umd.edu/>) irrespective of scope and circumstances, as required by university rules and regulations. It is crucial to understand that the instructors do not have a choice of following other courses of actions in handling these cases. There are severe

consequences for academic misconduct, some of which are permanent and reflected on the student's transcript. For details about procedures governing such referrals and possible consequences for the student, see:

<https://www.president.umd.edu/sites/president.umd.edu/files/documents/policies/III-100A.pdf>

It is very important that you complete your own course assignments, and do not share any work. If you are having problems with a class assignment, the best course of action is to contact the instructor.

University of Maryland Code of Academic Integrity

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity

(<https://www.president.umd.edu/sites/president.umd.edu/files/documents/policies/III-100A.pdf>), administered by the Student Honor Council (<http://shc.umd.edu/SHC/Default.aspx>). This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student, you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism.

Special Needs

Students with disabilities should inform the instructor of their needs at the beginning of the semester. Please also contact the Accessibility and Disability Service (ADS) (301-314-7682 or <http://www.counseling.umd.edu/ads/>). ADS will make arrangements with the student and the instructor to determine and implement appropriate academic accommodations. Students encountering psychological problems that hamper their course work are referred to the Counseling Center (301-314-7651 or <http://www.counseling.umd.edu/>) for expert help.

Academic Assistance

If you're experiencing difficulties in keeping up with the academic demands of this course, please consider contacting the University of Maryland Counseling Center, 1101 Shoemaker Building, 4281 Chapel Lane, 301-314-7651, <https://www.counseling.umd.edu/>. The Counseling Center has provided some links to on-campus and online academic resources here: <https://www.counseling.umd.edu/academic/>.

Academic Assistance: Writing Center (<http://www.english.umd.edu/academics/writingcenter/>):

The University of Maryland Writing Center has tutors available in person and online to help you improve your writing, research, and critical thinking skills. The Writing Center also hosts a Grammar Hotline: 301-405-3785.

Emergency Preparedness

Please see the University's Emergency Preparedness Website (<http://prepare.umd.edu>) for information about the current status of campus. If a class session needs to be rescheduled, I will email you as soon as possible.

Course Specific Policies

- **Attendance** - As per University policy, students may submit a self-signed note for a medically necessitated absence from a single lecture during the semester. Any student missing more than one lecture is required to provide documentation from the Health Center or from an outside health care provider that verifies the dates of treatment and time frame during which the student was unable to meet academic responsibilities.
- **In-Class Behavior** - Please be on time for class and stay until the end, unless you have made special arrangements with us. Entering late and leaving early is distracting to the instructor and other students. If you must enter late or leave early, please take the seat nearest an exit and enter or leave as quietly as possible. In general, be aware of the people around you and avoid doing things that will disturb them or otherwise prevent them from fully engaging with the content. Put your phones on silent before the start of class. If you need to make/take a phone call, leave the classroom before doing so. Any student creating a disruption will be asked to leave for the day.
- **Missed Deadlines** - If you will not be able to meet an assignment deadline, it is your responsibility to contact us **at least 48 hours** before the due date to explain why you will need to submit the assignment late; requests will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Assignments submitted more than 7 days late will not be accepted. If you need to miss an exam because of outside circumstances (e.g., a religious holiday, military duties, work/athletic team travel), you must email us at least 48 hours before the exam to reschedule your exam time. If you miss an exam due to other circumstances (e.g., oversleeping), you will not be able to make up the exam. Exam extensions will not be granted beyond 7 days.
- **Late Assignments** - A 10% penalty will be deducted for each day or part of a day that an assignment is late. Please prepare in advance so that you will not encounter technical difficulties that will result in your work receiving a late penalty. If you have a conflict with the due date, assignments can always be submitted early.
- **Syllabus Change Policy** - This syllabus is subject to change with advance notice. If a change becomes necessary, I will announce the change in class and post an announcement on Canvas. The Course Schedule posted on Canvas (in the Syllabus section) will always provide up-to-date information.

- **Guidelines for Written Assignments** - All written assignments should be submitted via ELMS, by the date and time indicated on the syllabus.
 - Written work should be proofread and revised as necessary before you submit it. Use Times New Roman 12-point font and one-inch margins.
 - All documents should be single-spaced.
 - Be sure to organize your papers, using section and subsection headings to identify portions of your work.
 - Use APA Style for in-text citations and reference lists. There are many resources about APA style available on the Internet. See, for example: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/> and <http://www.apastyle.org/learn/faqs/index.aspx>.

- **Grading Policy** - Your course grade will be determined by in-class exercises, written assignments, and a group project. The weight of each component is listed in the Course Assignments section. Any challenges to a grade must be submitted in writing via email within one week. After considering the issue, I will adjust your grade if appropriate and inform you of my decision within one week. Final grades will be submitted 48-72 hours after the Final Exam. Please note that I do not round grades up. Final grades will be assigned using the following categories:

A+	97-100 pts.	C	73-76.9
A	93-96.9	C-	70-72.9
A-	90-92.9	D+	67-69.9
B+	87-89.9	D	63-66.9
B	83-86.9	D-	60-62.9
B-	80-82.9	F	less than 60
C+	77-79.9		

Course Assignments

- I. **In-Class Exercises/Activities (15%)** - Throughout the semester, we will have in-class activities that reinforce course content. The only way to receive credit for in-class activities is to be present during class, as you will be required to submit something online or in writing at the end of that class session. Therefore, attendance and active participation is crucial to success in this course.

Note: The lowest two grades for in-class exercises/activities during the semester will be dropped.

- II. **Personal Information Profile (10%) (due September 12th):** To establish the value and broad applications of information literacy, each student will create a personal ‘information profile’ of 500-750 words that reflects their unique information needs and behaviors.

- III. **Fact-Finding Mission (15%) (due October 3rd):** This assignment requires students to critically analyze a source, and serve as scholarly ‘fact-checker’. The student will identify appropriate source material that either supports or refutes claims within the source. In a short, written analysis, the student will identify each claim and support that claim’s accuracy with a relevant, accurate, reliable source.

- IV. **Group Project - Each group (2-4 students) will choose a current issue/event to focus on for this project. At the beginning of the semester, as a class, we will come up with a list of current issues/events that can be used for this project.**
 - A. **Project Proposal (5%) (due October 17th)-** Using the worksheet provided by the instructor, each group will provide their initial ideas for a topic (current event/issue) and target audience for their issue brief.
 - B. **“Pick a Side” Essay (10%) (due October 31st) -** Each group member will prepare a persuasive essay (750-1,000 words) in which they present an argument, backed by credible evidence, related to the current issue/event. **Each student will submit his/her/their own essay.**
 - C. **Annotated Bibliography (15%) (due December 12th)-** As a group, you will select and critically evaluate information sources that support your audience’s information needs related to your chosen current event/issue. The students will conduct research on the topic and compile no less than 15 sources into a strong, clear annotated bibliography that follows the scholarship conventions discussed in class.
 - D. **Issue Brief (15%) (due December 12th):** As a group, you will create an information brief for the population or community you’ve researched that accurately conveys information around the issue. The product can be print, digital, or visual or oral. Define the issue in a term that your audience can connect with; use language that appeals to the demographic; make the product appropriately accessible to the population; present accurate information in a way the community will not reject.
 - E. **Presentation (10%) (in class on December 3rd or 5th):** As a group, you will present your issue brief in a town-hall style discussion where the class will assume the role of your community. You will share the product and communicate information about this issue as it affects the population.

- F. Self & Peer Assessment (5%) (due December 12th):** Using the worksheet provided by the instructor, each member of the group will reflect on the contributions made by each individual to the group project. **Each student will submit his/her/their own worksheet.**
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Course Schedule

Week 1 (Aug. 27th & 29th) – Course Introduction; Case Study: Are millennials growing horns?

Week 1 Assignments

- 1) Review the syllabus (before Thursday)
- 2) Come to Thursday's class prepared to discuss the following readings (Please note that there is a good chance that you will not understand much of what is written in the Shahar and Sayers article - that's ok! Just try to think through how it connects to the other articles):
 - a) [‘Horns’ are growing on young people’s skulls. Phone use is to blame, research suggests](#)
 - b) Shahar, D., & Sayers, M. G. (2018). Prominent exostosis projecting from the occipital squama more substantial and prevalent in young adult than older age groups. *Scientific Reports*, 8(1), 3354.
 - c) Smartphones aren’t making millennials grow horns. Here’s how to spot a bad study

Week 2 (Sept. 3rd & 5th) – The Big Picture: Information Literacy, Democracy, and an Informed Citizenry

Week 2 Assignments:

Come to Tuesday's class prepared to discuss the following:

- Knight Commission Report: Crisis in Democracy: Renewing Trust in Democracy, pp.1-29
- Understanding news? We’re not even close

Come to Thursday's class prepared to discuss the following:

- [The Facts About Fact Checking](#)

Week 3 (Sept. 10th & 12th) – The Government as a Source of Information

Week 3 Assignments:

- Personal Information Profile (due 9/12)
- Come to Tuesday's class prepared to discuss the following:
 - a) Chapter 1 of “Fundamentals of Government Information” (available through Course Reserves on our ELMS site)

- b) What is Propaganda?
- c) Propaganda Techniques to Recognize

Week 4 (Sept. 17th & 19th) - Media Literacy: The Media as a Source of Information

Week 4 Assignments

- Come to Tuesday's class prepared to discuss the following:
 - Knight Commission Report: Crisis in Democracy: Renewing Trust in Democracy, pp.30-37
 - Six questions that will tell you what media to trust
- Come to Thursday's class prepared to discuss the following:
 - So What Should I Write On? Researching and Developing a Topic You Like
 - I Like It, But Will It Work? Developing a Feasible Topic

Week 5 (Sept. 24th & 26th) – Other Sources of Information

Week 5 Assignments:

- Come to Tuesday's class prepared to discuss the following:
 - Devaluing the think tank
 - NGOs - Non-Governmental Organizations
 - What does a lobbyist do

Week 6 (Oct. 1st & 3rd) – Information Literacy in the Classroom

Week 6 Assignments:

- Fact Checking Mission (due 10/3)
- Come to Tuesday's class, prepared to discuss:
 - We are all confident idiots
- Come To Thursday's class, prepared to discuss:
 - The ACRL Framework
 - The CRAAP Test
 - Big 6

Week 7 (Oct. 8th & 10th) – Research Strategies in the Classroom

Week 7 Assignments:

- Come to Tuesday's class prepared to discuss:
 - 7 ways to lie with statistics and get away with it
 - How do I determine if an article is scholarly?

- How to (seriously) read a scientific paper

Week 8 (Oct. 15th & 17th) – Information Literacy in the Real World (Understanding bias)

Assignments:

- Project Proposal (due 10/17)
- Come to Tuesday's class prepared to discuss:
 - How do you tell when the news is biased? It depends on how you see yourself.
 - Biased news media or biased readers? An experiment on trust.

Week 9 (Oct. 22nd & 24th) – Information Literacy in Real World (Arguing and Debating with Friends and Families!)

Week 9 Assignments

- Come to Tuesday's class prepared to discuss:
 - Facebook wants to limit the reach of bogus medical 'cures' by treating them like spam
 - The Causes and Effects of "Filter Bubbles" and how to Break Free
 - Few people are actually trapped in filter bubbles. Why do they like to say that they are?
- Come to Thursday's class prepared to discuss:
 - Logical fallacies and discourse
 - Fallacies

Week 10 (Oct. 29th & 31st) - The rise of the "Fake News Phenomenon" (Part 1)

Assignments:

- "Pick a Side Essay" (10/31)
- Comes to Tuesday's class prepared to discuss:
 - A Reminder That 'Fake News' Is An Information Literacy Problem - Not A Technology Problem
 - Two sides of the same coin: Misinformation and disinformation

Week 11 (Nov. 5th & 7th) – The rise of the "Fake News Phenomenon" (Part 2)

Assignments:

- Comes to Tuesday's class prepared to discuss:
 - The Future of Free Speech, Trolls, Anonymity and Fake News Online
 - Anatomy of a Fake News Scandal

Week 12 (Nov. 12th & 14th) - Information Literacy & Health

Assignments:

- Come to Tuesday's class prepared to discuss:
 - Impact of Mis/Disinformation on Health Care Information Literacy
- Come to Thursday's class prepared to discuss

Week 13 (Nov. 19th & Nov. 21st) – Information Literacy & History

Assignments:

- Draft of Issue Brief & Annotated Bibliography (due 11/21 - bring to class!)
- Come to Tuesday's class prepared to discuss:
 - Holocaust Denial
- Come To Thursday's class prepared to discuss:
 - Bigotry Has No Innocent Intent

Week 14 (Nov. 26th) - Presentation Practice (Tuesday)/No Class on Thursday (Happy Thanksgiving!)

Assignments:

- Come to Tuesday's class with a draft of (or least notes for!) your presentation

Week 15 (Dec. 3rd & 5th) – Student Presentations

**Final Issue Brief & Annotated Bibliography and Self/Peer Review Worksheet
due December 11th**