

POS 338: Fake News: How to Identify & Refute it

SPRING 2019

SLN: 25677

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Classroom: ARM L1-30

Class meetings: T/TH 1:30-2:45

Office hours: COOR #6694, Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10:30-11:45 and by appointment

Communication: All emails will be answered within 24 hours, M-F, and within 36 hours on weekends. Often, email is answered much sooner than this, but these are the maximum reply times. I can also call you. Email to set up an appointment and put "phone call" in subject line.

TA:

TA office location:

TA office hours:

Junior Fellow:

Email:

Credits: 3

Course outline: This is an important topic and probably will be indefinitely. Given the breadth of information pummeling us online, TV, radio, and in blogs, newspapers, and social media, how do we know what is real (fact-based) and what is fake (false)? To confuse matters, President Trump repeatedly calls out most mainstream news as "fake news" and the world is listening. What are the implications for our democracy and democratic way of life? Why should we care whether or not citizens consume fake news? How does this affect OUR individual lives? We will discuss. We will cover students and fake news, how fake news is created, fake news and President Trump, Fake news and the 2016 election, fake news and statistics, fact-checking, fake news and political bias, and fake news and Google/Facebook. You will assess and analyze news stories and elected officials' communications. You will become a bullshit detector if you are not already.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will be able to identify the different types of fake news, and the origins of modern fake news. (remember)
2. Students will execute fact-checks on different news stories. (apply)
3. Students will articulate/argue why fake news is bad for our democratic way of life. (evaluate)
4. Students will read, write, and critically think about how students' sharing of fake news, via social media, is affecting what they know and what they believe. (analyze)
5. Students will apply what we learn in class by collecting their own data, analyzing it, and presenting their fake news analysis to the class (graphically and with data). (create)
6. Students will evaluate the empirical-based work on fake news and compare this with what traditional journalists have learned about fake news.(evaluate)
7. Students will prepare their final projects with a partner, thus, negotiating and working together on a high-stakes assignment. (understand) (create)

Required Text:

1. No required textbook. This topic is fluid and changing as I type this syllabus. We will be reading MANY articles on fake news (both news articles and scholarly, peer-reviewed articles). We will be watching clips/videos/documentaries as well. Websites or citations for articles are listed in this syllabus and the pdfs themselves will be posted on our **CANVAS** page.

Important note:

For the lecture part of the course, this is a “no-laptop, no phone, no ipad” class **unless otherwise instructed**. This means laptops/phones/stuff are not permitted out in the open during class time, until the instructor (me) requests that you take them out of your bags. **Leave it in your bag until requested**. You will have something to do every class meeting, starting at 1:30 pm. NOTE: If we have a note-taker for the class (for the Disability Resource Center), then the note-taker will be permitted to use a laptop at all times. The notetaker must be comfortable with sitting towards the back of the classroom, in an aisle seat.

Grading Assessment:

Bullshit Inventory: Details of the assignment are posted on blackboard, but basically you’ll track all the bullshit you come across from an elected official, political candidate, website, etc., analyze it, and turn it in.¹ **60 points**

Fact-check assignment: Details of the assignment are posted on blackboard, but you will be fact-checking an article from a blog, website, newspaper, etc., and also discuss it. **50 points**

Exams: There are 2 exams (midterms) in this class. There is NOT a final exam. Each exam is worth 100 points. All exams have a 75 minute time limit. The exams are multiple choice, true-false, application, and short essay. There is no backtracking on exams. All exams must be taken **IN THE CLASSROOM AT THE DESIGNATED TIME**. No other browsers should be open during the exam. No books or other notes are allowed during the exam time. **If you are not present on an exam day, you forfeit the points unless you have a DOCUMENTED and VALID excuse as to why you missed it**. DOCUMENTED AND VALID EXCUSES are reserved for (1) a death in your IMMEDIATE family that occurred during exam week; (2) a serious illness that you are suffering from; (3) a traffic accident. Documentation must be given to Dr. Woodall no later than 24 hours after said emergency. There are no exceptions to this rule. **200 points**

Quizzes/Trigger responses: There are 7 quizzes or trigger responses in this class. The quiz is based on a video, question, or article that I assign the first few minutes of class. Each quiz or response is worth 10 points. All quizzes and responses have a 10 minute time limit and must be completed in class. If you come after the 10 minutes, then you missed the quiz and won’t be able to make it up. **If you are not present on a quiz/trigger response day, you forfeit the points unless you have a DOCUMENTED and VALID excuse as to why you missed it**. DOCUMENTED AND VALID EXCUSES are reserved for (1) a death in your IMMEDIATE family that occurred during quiz week; (2) a serious illness that you are suffering from; (3) a traffic accident. Documentation must be given to Dr. Woodall no later than 24 hours after said emergency. There are no exceptions to this rule. **70 points**

¹ Props to Professors Bergstrom and West from the University of Washington for this assignment.

In-class Game: Two Truths and a Lie (With News): 50 points

Partnered Final Tracking Project : You will partner up with a classmate and work on a ½ a semester long project. Details of the assignment are posted on blackboard. You will start working on it in September. There will be some class time devoted to working on the project. You will also have to spend time outside of class, **February 5th, please send me an email with the subject: POS 394: NEED A PARTNER!** I will pair you up. Rest assured, you will have a partner by February 12th. Under no circumstances should you go off campus to meet with your partner if you do not know the person very well. You should meet in person, on campus, schedule permitting. You may also meet online/skype/etc.
150 points

Group reports (explaining the division of labor on the tracking project) are worth 20 points each **(20 points)** Details of the assignment will be posted on blackboard.

If your partner is “free-riding” and you are doing most or all of the work, you must communicate this to Dr. Woodall immediately. Do not wait until the last week of class to tell me this, as there is little I can do at that point.

Note that it is possible that groups break up and we have 1 person doing all the work and the other person doing absolutely nothing (and earning zero points). It is also possible that group members drop the class and a partner is left to work alone or is added to another group. Be aware that this is a **possibility** that cannot be controlled or prevented. Rise to the challenge! I will support you as best I can.

After all the presentations, the class will vote for the best project/presentation in class. We will define, exactly, what we mean by “best” in September (i.e., we will have a scorecard of sorts). The winning group will receive a Starbucks giftcard for \$20.00 (for each member of the winning group).

Class Participation

What I mean by “class participation” is (1) offering your insightful thoughts/opinions during class discussions (2) volunteering to share your work on the assignments (3) asking insightful questions to your classmates’ opinions and critiques (4) helping your classmates when they need help in class. 50 points

Total class points possible: 650

Grade	Percentage	Points Range
A+	100%+	650+
A	93-99.9%	605-649
A-	90-92.9%	585-604
B+	88-89.9%	572-584
B	83-87.9%	540-571
B-	80-82.9%	520-539
C+	78-79.9%	507-521
C	70-77.9%	455-506
D	60-69.9%	390-454
E	50-59.9%	389 and below

COURSE POLICIES

Extra Credit

Currently, one extra credit assignment is planned. Go here: <http://www.newsu.org/courses/hands-on-fact-checking-short-course> and show proof that you completed the course. Proof must be submitted on canvas before March 1, 2019. **Late extra credit assignments will not be accepted.** This is worth 20 points.

Late or Missed Assignments

Late work for assignments (not extra credit assignments) are deducted 10 points per day is late. If the due date is March 1st at 9:00 AM and the assignment is turned in at 10:00 AM on March 1st, 10 points will be deducted. If the assignment is turned in at 9:01 AM on March 2nd, 20 points will be deducted (**the total number of points per assignment is irrelevant. This is the policy used).

If you get severely ill and are hospitalized, or somebody in your IMMEDIATE family (not extended/not roommate's/boyfriend's/girlfriend's) has passed away, I will work with you. I must have documentation of the tragedy and you must contact me within 24 hours of said tragedy and I will work with you to make up the work without penalty. If, at any time in the semester, you think a tragedy may occur because somebody in your family is gravely ill or you yourself are scheduled for a necessary surgery or hospitalization, **talk to me about it weeks in advance. I will work with you.**

If you are in the military and/or have a sanctioned school event (ASU sports, band, speech and debate), give me the documentation for your class absences at least **2 weeks** before you miss class.

Exams can only be taken late with documentation of an illness in your IMMEDIATE family, or for yourself, or some other type of medical emergency (again, documentation is required). **Late exams are not accepted for any other reason.**

Tardies/Absences

Roll-call attendance is not taken. However, the "trigger quizzes/responses" serve as a proxy attendance grade. If you miss a class when one is given, or, if you come once we are done with the quiz, then the points are forfeited. Students are expected to be in every class meeting, on time.

- Information on excused absences related to religious observances/practices can be found here: [ACD 304-04](#) "Accommodations for Religious Practices."
- Information on excused absences related to university-sanctioned events/activities can be found here: [ACD 304-02](#) "Missed Classes Due to University-Sanctioned Activities."

Reporting Title IX violations

Title IX is a federal law that provides that no person be excluded on the basis of sex from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. Both Title IX and university policy make clear that sexual violence and harassment based on sex is prohibited. An individual who believes they have been subjected to sexual violence or harassed on the basis of sex can seek support, including counseling and academic support, from the university. If you or

someone you know has been harassed on the basis of sex or sexually assaulted, you can find information and resources at <https://sexualviolenceprevention.asu.edu/faqs>.

Policy on Sexual Discrimination

Arizona State University is committed to providing an environment free of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation for the entire university community, including all students, faculty members, staff employees, and guests. ASU expressly prohibits [discrimination](#), [harassment](#), and [retaliation](#) by employees, students, contractors, or agents of the university based on any protected status: race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and genetic information.

As a mandated reporter, I am obligated to report any information I become aware of regarding alleged acts of sexual discrimination, including sexual violence and dating violence. ASU Counseling Services, <https://eoss.asu.edu/counseling>, is available if you wish discuss any concerns confidentially and privately.

Copyrighted materials

A warning to students that they must refrain from uploading to any course shell, discussion board, or website used by the course instructor or other course forum, material that is not the student's original work, unless the students first comply with all applicable copyright laws; faculty members reserve the right to delete materials on the grounds of suspected copyright infringement.

ADA and Student Resource Center

If you have ANY learning, physical, emotional or other disability that requires additional resources and exceptions from your instructors, please visit: <https://eoss.asu.edu/drc> ASAP. The DRC then contacts me and alerts me to the steps I need to take to accommodate any student registered with them.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to have the highest academic integrity. If that integrity is compromised, a series of unfortunate events will begin. Look here for our policy: <https://provost.asu.edu/academic-integrity/policy> and the steps that occur if there are allegations, and then proof, of academic dishonesty. If at any point in the semester, you are unclear as to whether you or somebody in class engaged in dishonest academic behavior, bring it to my attention immediately! Ask questions, early and often.

Classroom Decorum/Discourse

We live in very interesting political times. We have a diverse student body, not only in terms of ethnicity or race, but also in terms of political ideology and political opinions. **This is a good thing.** It's important to respect others' personal passions, persuasions, and beliefs, especially when they differ from ours. This is difficult to do, especially when we don't see this modeled often in those in the media or government. **However, we can (and will) do hard things.** Ad hominem attacks on one another or on elected officials will not be tolerated inside the classroom. You may attack ideas, logic (or lack thereof), arguments, evidence (or lack thereof) until you're blue in the face. Attacking personal characters, families, physical appearances, religious beliefs, and the like, however, will be grounds for removal from the classroom. A first time offender will be verbally warned, but will be allowed to stay in class. The second time, however, the student will be asked to leave for the day. The third time, the student will be asked to leave for the week and I will begin a request to withdraw the student from the classroom indefinitely.

Counseling Services

Our lives are all hectic, busy, and, sometimes chaotic. It helps to talk with a trained professional when it becomes overwhelming. Seeking help in such situations is a sign of a wise adult. So, when you are feeling like you need some direction/support/helpful advice in managing your complicated life, go here:

<https://eooss.asu.edu/counseling> The first session is free! Use this resource. It may change your life.

Course Topics and Schedule²

Week 1	Tuesday	Thursday
1: Intro	(1/8) Welcome! Course Overview, Video	(1/10) What's due: have read Bullshit article; Discussion of Bullshit article "Think/Pair/Share" Discuss Bullshit Inventory Assignment. For FRIDAY , start BS inventory
2: Students & Fake News	(1/15): What's due: have read the Stanford Study ; "Think/Pair/Share" the Stanford Study Listen to (in class): Cory Turner and Kate Lonsdorf, "The Classroom Where Fake News Fails," NPR, "All Things Considered." **Go over "Defining Fake News" article—focus on typology of fake news	1/17) What's due: have read: (1) Clayton, Katherine and Davis, Jase and Hinckley, Kristen and Horiuchi, Yusaku. 2017. "Media Source, Selective Exposure, and Susceptibility to False Information." In <i>Behavioral and Experimental Economics E-journal</i> . (2) Levine, Peter and Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg "The Republic is still at Risk-and Civics is Part of the Solution." (Medford, MA: Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University, 2017) *fishbowl discussion In class Watch https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2017/the-miseducation-of-dylann-roof Work on BS inventories. Final collection of data is TODAY, inventories and summary due tomorrow (FRIDAY) by 11:59 PM.

² Since this topic is fluid and research is constantly being updated, as well as news reports coming at us, 24/7, it's possible the readings may change. I may add to our schedule, or delete something. I will always give you at least **48 hours of advance notice** if this occurs. I will communicate any and all changes as a blackboard announcement, email, AND facebook post. In short, the responsibility to make sure you are reading the appropriate articles lies with you.

3: Fake News Creators	(1/22) What's due: Be ready to discuss BS inventories. Have read: Ghansah, Rachel Kaadzi. "A Most American Terrorist: The Making of Dylan Roof." 2017, August 21. Class discussion	(1/24): What's due: Have read: Higgins, Andrew, McIntire, Mike, & Gabriel J.X. Dance. November 25, 2016. "Inside a Fake News Sausage Factory: This is All About income." The New York Times. Have read or listen to REVEL story, Robb, Amanda. November 16, 2017 "The Anatomy of A Fake News Scandal" Rolling Stone. Class discussion Have listened to: (1) "Fake News Expert On How False Stories Spread and Why People Believe Them." on Fresh Air, NPR.org, December 14, 2016. Think/Pair/Share
4: Proliferation of Fake News	(1/29) Have read: Sagan's Baloney Detection and Prof. Zimdars "click-bait and fake news excel file and tips" "Think/Pair/Share" In class, read Flynn, D.J., Nyhan, Brendan and Jason Reifler. 2017. "The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs About Politics." (Fishbowl)	(1/31) What's due: Have read: Sydell, Laura. 2017. "Facebook and Google Spread Information about Las Vegas Shooting: What Went Wrong?" Think/pair/share Frontline special: https://youtu.be/EuA4qxPbpQE
5: Fact-Checking and fake News	(2/5) Have read: (1) Maheshwari, Sapna. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/business/media/how-fake-news-spreads.html (think/pair/share) Have read: (2) Qiu, Linda & Justin Bank. 2017. "Fact-Check: Distortions and Fake News after Virginia Shooting." The New York Times. (think/pair/share) (3) Kiely, Eugene and Lori Robertson. 2016. "How To Spot Fake News." factcheck.org Class discussion. (Calimero video-in class) Hand out "fact-check" assignment that is due next Thursday.	(2/7) What's due: (1) Kahn, Jennifer, and Alexis Wagner. "Fact Checking in the 2016 Presidential Campaign: Exploring the Effectiveness of Fact Checking Statements by the Candidates." <i>The Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics</i> (2016): 92. (fishbowl) (2) Davis, Wynne. 2016. "How to Self-Check the News and Get the Facts." NPR.org, All Tech Considered. (Fishbowl) Work on fact-checking assignment, due Thursday.

6: Fact-Checking and Fake News and President Trump	<p>(2/12) What's due: Fact-Checking Assignment (random "voluntold" presentations) Have read: (1) Erlanger, Steven. 2017. "Fake News' Trump's Obsession, Now a Cudgel for Strongmen." Think/pair/share</p> <p>In class- Video: Meet the Strongmen who Started Blaming Fake News too. Class discussion</p>	<p>(2/14) What's due: Have read: 2) Hasell, and Brian Weeks 2016. "Partisan Provocation: The Role of Partisan News Use and Emotional Responses in Political Information Sharing in Social Media" Human Communication Research. Volume 42(4):641-661. (Fishbowl)</p>
7: Fake News and 2016 election	<p>(2/19) What's due: Have read: (1) https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/17/us/russian-social-media-posts.html?action=click&module=RelatedCoverage&pgtype=Article&region=Footer (2) The Atlantic https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/12/trump-world-fake-news/548888/ (3) Politifact article http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2017/oct/18/deciding-whats-fake-medias-definition-fake-news-vs/ (4) https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/17/technology/social-media-russia-interference.html</p> <p>Class discussion</p>	<p>(2/21) What's due: Have read: (1) 12 Duke J. Const. L. & Pub. Pol'y 57 (2016-2017) Illiberal Democracy: The Toxic Mix of Fake News, Hyperpolarization, and Partisan Election Administration. Think/pair/share.</p> <p>In-class: Twitter and Trump doc https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIMHYTRiQoU (46 minutes)</p> <p>Class discussion</p>
8: Midterm review and Midterm 1	(2/26) Midterm Review	(2/28) Midterm
9: Fall Break and Fake News/social media	(3/5) SPRING BREAK -NO CLASS	(3/7) SPRING BREAK NO CLASS (
10: Fake News and Statistics	(3/12) EXTRA SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS	<p>(3/14) Have read: (1) Vox article https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/7/10/15904600/trump-russia-investigation-michigan-supporters (fishbowl) (2) PEW study (fishbowl)</p>

		(3) Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow. 2017. "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election." Journal of Economic Perspectives. 31(2): 211-236. (fishbowl)
11: FAKE NEWS & STATISTICS and How to Refute Fake News	<p>(3/19) Have read: Berinsky et al. http://rsos.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/royopensci/4/3/160802.full.pdf (think/pair/share)</p> <p>Explain and discuss final project: expectations, etc.</p>	<p>(3/21): What's due: Have read (1) Storks Deliver Babies http://robertmatthews.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/RM-storks-paper.pdf (fishbowl) (2) 538 https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/as-a-major-retraction-shows-were-all-vulnerable-to-faked-data/ (fishbowl)</p> <p>Explain in-class game for Tuesday (voluntolds) For In-class game each student comes up with 3 headlines/stories/pictures "2 truths and a lie" have it on PPT or images...</p> <p>Leave 15 minutes to work on projects.</p>
12: How to refute fake news cont'd & Fake news & political bias	<p>(3/26)What's due: Have read: (1) Berinsky, Adam. 2017. Telling the Truth about Believing the Lies? Evidence for the Limited Prevalence of Expressive Survey Responding. Journal of Politics. (Fishbowl) Have read: (2) Benkler, Y., Faris, R. Roberts, H., & Zuckerman, E. (2017). Study: Breitbart-led right-wing media ecosystem altered broader media agenda. Retrieved from http://www.cjr.org/analysis/breitbart-media-trump-harvard-study.php; (Fishbowl) (3)) Blue Feed/Red Feed article (WSJ); (fishbowl)</p> <p>Leave 15 min to work on projects</p>	<p>(3/28) What's due: EXTRA CREDIT OPP! (1) media bias chart all generalizations are false,</p> <p>Have read: (2); Silver, Nate. https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/there-really-was-a-liberal-media-bubble/ (3) https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/09/expanding-fact-checking/ (4) https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/12/guardian-fact-check/ (think/pair/share)</p> <p>Work on projects</p>
13: Midterm Review & Midterm	<p>(4/2) Review for midterm 2</p> <p>Leave 15 min to work on projects</p>	(4/4) Midterm 2. Presentation and analysis due on 4/9 (TUESDAY)
14: Presentations & Voting	(4/9) ALL PROJECTS DUE by 9 AM. BEGIN PRESENTATIONS	(4/11) PRESENTATIONS

15: Presentat ions & Voting	(4/16) PRESENTATIONS	PRESENTATIONS
16: Presentat ions & Voting Plus Winner Announc ed	(4/23) PRESENTATIONS	(4/25) PRESENTATIONS LAST DAY OF CLASS. NO FINAL EXAM