

CSI 3601: Misperceptions and Misinformation

Instructor Information

- Instructor name: Anyun Chatterjee
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- Office hours by appointment

Course Information

- Co-requisite or prerequisite: none
- Face-to-face class meeting: Wednesdays, 5:30pm-8pm
- Class room number: Wachman 313

Course description

People often cling to beliefs about science, health, and/or politics that are unsupported or completely false. This course will explore the psychological and social factors that make people vulnerable to deceptive communication, misinformation, and conspiracy theories and why it is often very hard to correct misinformed beliefs. We will cover theories of cognitive biases, conformity, identity protection, motivated reasoning, and cultural cognition.

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Articulate what misinformation and misperception are
- Explain basic theories of persuasion, bias, and cognition
- Identify misinformation and misperception in their daily lives as well as professionally
- Write persuasively on the topics of misinformation and misperception

Course Assignments

Introductory Statement

This 1-2 page paper is due in the second week of class and is an opportunity for you to share your opinions and beliefs about the course topic. Cited sources are not required but encouraged if relevant. This paper should answer the following questions:

1. What are your career goals and how do you anticipate this course helping you achieve those goals?
2. What do you think misperception and misinformation are?
3. Can you identify any examples of these concepts in your personal life? How about in the media you consume?

This paper is an opportunity for me to assess your writing ability as well as your interests, so take it seriously. I will be using these papers to tweak the course and identify areas for growth for you all.

Response Paper

This 2-4 page paper is due in the middle of the semester and is an opportunity for you to sum up what you have learned in class thus far, or what you are struggling with. Cited sources are required as I expect you to cite materials we have covered in class. External sources are also encouraged but not required. Your works cited pages, and any images you include do not count towards your total page count. This paper should answer the following questions, if applicable:

1. What have you learned so far in class? What has been most interesting to you?
2. Are there any topics or ideas that have been confusing or tricky for you? What questions do you have that we haven't addressed yet?
3. Do you have any ideas for your final papers?
4. Are you enjoying the class? What can I do to make the course better for you?

This paper is an opportunity for me to assess what you are getting out of the class. You will not lose points for admitting that something is confusing. I will be using these papers to tweak the course as needed, and also to assess whether you are getting anything from the class.

Term Paper

This 7-10 page research paper is due at the end of the semester. This paper is an opportunity for you to take what you have learned in class and apply it to a topic of your interest which is in line with the course material. This is a research paper and as such I expect you to cite at least 15 sources, both from class and externally, in order to support an argument. Your works cited pages, and any images you include do not count towards your total page count. This paper should answer these questions:

1. What is a topic of interest to you based on the class material?
2. Why is this topic interesting to you? Why should other people care about that topic?
3. What is the background of this topic? What do we need to know in order to talk about this topic?
4. What insight/argument do you have regarding this topic that the reader should take away from your paper?
5. What evidence do you have to support your argument?
6. Are there scholars who refute your argument? How would you address them?
7. After reading your paper, what should the reader think about? What kind of paper would follow this one?

In-Class Analysis

In order to practice the concepts and skills we aim to develop in this class, 4 class days will be dedicated to group work where you, along with your assigned group for the day, will analyze a piece of misinformation or misperception. Each person is responsible for submitting a 1-2 page reflection at the end class time in which they answer the following questions:

1. What is the context of this piece of misinformation/misperception? How did it come about?
2. Imagine you were in that context - do you think you would believe this item? Would you act on it? Why?

3. Who are the important stakeholders for this item?
4. What made this item so powerful? Did it reach a lot of people quickly? How? Why?
5. What theories that we have covered might help you explain what is happening?
6. What strategies could you employ to counteract the misinformation/misperception?

These reflections do not need to be formal papers. However, if you reference any readings, articles, or external sources, you must cite them in APA style.

Grading of Assignments

There are 100 points available in this course which determine your grade. Those points are distributed as follows:

Assignments/Activities	Points
IN CLASS WORK	
- In-class analysis #1	5 points
- In-class analysis #2	8 points
- In-class analysis #3	12 points
- In-class analysis #4	15 points
SHORT PAPERS	
- Introductory statement	5 points
- Mid-semester response	15 points
TERM PAPER	
- Paper topic	5 points
- Annotated bibliography	10 points
- First draft	10 points
- Final draft	15 points

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

Letter Grade	Points	Percent
A	4.00	92.5% and higher
A-	3.67	90.0 – 92.49%
B+	3.33	87.5% - 89.99%
B	3.00	82.5% - 87.49%
B-	2.67	80% - 82.49%
C+	2.33	77.5% - 79.99%
C	2.00	72.5% - 77.49%
C-	1.67	70% - 72.49%
D+	1.33	67.5% - 69.99%
D	1.00	62.5% - 67.49
D-	.67	60% - 62.49%
F	.00	59.99% and lower

Grading Policy

Grades will be updated on Canvas regularly and finalized by December 12, 2024. Regrade requests will be accepted on a case-by-case basis, but only if they are submitted no earlier than 24 hours and no later than 72 hours after the grade has been posted.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Prepare before class	Assignment Due
8/28/24	Introductions, syllabus, course overview and expectations	None	None
9/4/24	How does information spread? How do we make decisions?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CrashCourse (Director). (2014, November 11). <i>Social Influence: Crash Course Psychology #38</i> [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGxGDdOnC1Y 2. Fischhoff, B. (2019). Tough Calls. <i>Scientific American</i>, 321(3), 74–79. 3. <i>How and why does misinformation spread?</i> (2023, November 29). American Psychological Association. https://www.apa.org/topics/journalism-facts/how-why-misinformation-spreads 	Introductory Statement
9/11/24	Why do people spread misinformation? How do evaluate information?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Combating Misinformation and Promoting Psychological Science Literacy</i>. (2024). 2. TEDx Talks (Director). (2021, August 3). <i>What We're Missing in the Fight Against Misinformation Dietram Scheufele TEDxUWMadison</i> [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Pm37Fksr60 	None

	And, how to propose a term paper topic	<p>3. <i>What psychological factors make people susceptible to believe and act on misinformation?</i> (2023, November 29). American Psychological Association. https://www.apa.org/topics/journalism-facts/misinformation-belief-action</p> <p>4. Weatherall, C. O., James Owen. (2019, September 1). <i>How Misinformation Spreads—And Why We Trust It</i>. <i>Scientific American</i>. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-misinformation-spreads-and-why-we-trust-it/</p>	
9/18/24	What is bias? How do biases form?	<p>1. Haselton, M. G., Nettle, D., & Andrews, P. W. (2015). The Evolution of Cognitive Bias. In <i>The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology</i> (pp. 724–746). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470939376.ch25</p> <p>2. The Paint Explainer (Director). (2023, December 13). <i>Every Bias Explained in 8 Minutes</i> [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8SbV1jN12RY</p>	Term Paper Topic
9/25/24	<p>Analysis Day - Misleading Charts</p> <p>And, how to write an annotated bibliography</p>	<p>1. CrashCourse (Director). (2019a, January 15). <i>The Facts about Fact Checking: Crash Course Navigating Digital Information #2</i> [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZsaA0w_0z0</p> <p>2. CrashCourse (Director). (2019b, February 12). <i>Evaluating Evidence: Crash Course Navigating Digital Information #6</i> [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxhbOvR2TGk</p>	None

		<p>3. CrashCourse (Director). (2019c, February 26). <i>Data & Infographics: Crash Course Navigating Digital Information #8</i> [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiND50qfCek</p>	
10/2/24	How do attitudes change?	<p>1. Albarracin, D., & Shavitt, S. (2018). Attitudes and Attitude Change. <i>Annual Review of Psychology</i>, 69(Volume 69, 2018), 299–327. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-122216-011911</p> <p>2. Gawronski, B. (2007). Editorial: Attitudes can be Measured! But What is an Attitude? <i>Social Cognition</i>, 25(5), 573–581. https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.2007.25.5.573</p> <p>3. Heider, F. (1946). Attitudes and cognitive organization. <i>Journal of Psychology</i>, 22, 107–112.</p>	Annotated Bibliography
10/9/24	How do people process and organize information?	<p>1. Khan Academy (Director). (2013a, October 24). <i>Encoding strategies Processing the Environment MCAT Khan Academy</i> [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlrOJgyPySw</p> <p>2. Khan Academy (Director). (2013b, October 24). <i>Information processing model: Sensory, working, and long term memory MCAT Khan Academy</i> [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMMRE4Q2FGk</p>	Response Paper
10/16/24	<p>Analysis Day - Social Media</p> <p>And, how to write a research paper</p>	<p>1. CrashCourse (Director). (2019, March 12). <i>Social Media: Crash Course Navigating Digital Information #10</i> [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5YKW6fhIss</p>	None

10/23/24	How does our identity affect what we believe?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kahan, D., Braman, D., Cohen, G., Gastil, J., & Slovic, P. (2010). Who Fears the HPV Vaccine, Who Doesn't, and Why? An Experimental Study of the Mechanisms of Cultural Cognition. <i>Law & Human Behavior (Springer Science & Business Media B.V.)</i>, 34(6), 501–516. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10979-009-9201-0 2. Kahan, D. M., Braman, D., Gastil, J., Slovic, P., & Mertz, C. K. (2007). Culture and Identity-Protective Cognition: Explaining the White-Male Effect in Risk Perception. <i>Journal of Empirical Legal Studies</i>, 4(3), 465–505. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-1461.2007.00097.x 	None
10/30/24	How do the people around us affect our beliefs and attitudes?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Granville, K., & Gilbertson, A. (2017, September 15). In Amish Country, the Future Is Calling. <i>The New York Times</i>. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/15/business/amish-technology.html 2. TED-Ed (Director). (2018, July 26). <i>How can you change someone's mind? (Hint: facts aren't always enough) - Hugo Mercier</i> [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58jHhNzUHm4 	Term Paper First Draft
11/6/24	<p>Analysis Day - "Fake News"</p> <p>And, how to edit a research paper</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aubin, G. S., Amy Mitchell, Katerina Eva Matsa, Regina Widjaya, Mark Jurkowitz, Shreenita Ghosh, Aaron Smith, Sarah Naseer and Christopher St. (2022, October 6). The Role of Alternative Social Media in the News and Information Environment. <i>Pew Research Center</i>. https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2022/10/06/the-role-of 	None

		<p>-alternative-social-media-in-the-news-and-information-environment/</p> <p>2. Gubbala, R. W., Laura Silver, Janell Fetterolf, Christine Huang, Sarah Austin, Laura Clancy and Sneha. (2022, December 6). Social Media Seen as Mostly Good for Democracy Across Many Nations, But U.S. is a Major Outlier. <i>Pew Research Center</i>.</p> <p>https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/12/06/social-media-seen-as-mostly-good-for-democracy-across-many-nations-but-u-s-is-a-major-outlier/</p>	
11/13/24	How do people react to information that doesn't match their current beliefs?	<p>1. <i>Cognitive Dissonance: Mental Distress from Holding Contradictory Beliefs - Concept Social Psychology JoVe</i>. (n.d.). Retrieved August 23, 2024, from https://app.jove.com/science-education/v/11060/concepts/cognitive-dissonance</p> <p>2. Kunda, Z. (1990). The case for motivated reasoning. <i>Psychological Bulletin</i>, 108(3), 480–498. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.108.3.480</p> <p>3. Nickerson, R. S. (1998). Confirmation bias: A ubiquitous phenomenon in many guises. <i>Review of General Psychology</i>, 2(2), 175–220. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.2.175</p>	None
11/20/24	What kinds of research do people do about misperception and	<p>1. Still Watching Netflix (Director). (2020, October 18). <i>Can YouTube Algorithms Make You Believe Anything? The Social Dilemma</i></p>	Term Paper Final Draft

	misinformation today?	<p>[Video recording].</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k6ZTUf5NUiA</p> <p>2. Zhou, J., Zhang, Y., Luo, Q., Parker, A. G., & De Choudhury, M. (2023). Synthetic Lies: Understanding AI-Generated Misinformation and Evaluating Algorithmic and Human Solutions. <i>Proceedings of the 2023 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems</i>, 1–20.</p> <p>https://doi.org/10.1145/3544548.3581318</p>	
11/27/24	-----No class, Fall break-----		
12/4/24	<p>Analysis Day - Journalism and Regulation</p> <p>And, what did you learn?</p>	<p>1. Barthel, K. W. and M. (2020, December 8). Many Americans are unsure whether sources of news do their own reporting. <i>Pew Research Center</i>.</p> <p>https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/12/08/many-americans-are-unsure-whether-sources-of-news-do-their-own-reporting/</p> <p>2. LastWeekTonight (Director). (2017, July 3). <i>Sinclair Broadcast Group: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (HBO)</i> [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvtNyOzGogc</p> <p>3. Walker, A. M. and M. (2021, August 18). More Americans now say government should take steps to restrict false information online than in 2018. <i>Pew Research Center</i>.</p> <p>https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/08/18/more-ame</p>	None

		ricans-now-say-government-should-take-steps-to-restrict-false-information-online-than-in-2018/	
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Course Materials

All readings will be shared in PDF form on canvas - you are not expected to purchase any reading material. If you prefer a hard copy of any reading, the Charles Library's staff will be able to assist you.

Course Policies

Participation, Attendance, and Tardiness

Excessive and habitual tardiness, or failure to show up to class consistently will result in third-grade deductions (ex. A → A-) at the discretion of the instructor. There are precisely 14 class meetings during the semester and you are expected to be in attendance and on time for at least 12 class meetings before grade deductions are made. If you miss more than 2 classes, documented excuses are required to prevent grade deductions. If you feel that you will be unable to meet this expectation, please reach out to the instructor as soon as possible. If you miss a class session where we have an in-class exercise, you have the option to submit a makeup reflection paper ONLY with a documented reason for an excused absence.

Late Assignments

All assignments are due at 5PM EST on Wednesday of the week they are listed under, i.e. 30 minutes before class time. Late assignments are accepted at the instructor's discretion only if they are notified by the preceding Monday by 12:30PM EST.

Professionalism

College education should prepare you for a fulfilling professional life. Your ability to maintain a work life balance is crucial for that goal. For this reason, you are encouraged to read, write, and communicate with classmates and the instructor only between 9am and 5pm, Monday through Friday (excluding class time on Wednesday evenings). The instructor will only read and respond to emails during these hours, and may take, at minimum, 3 business days before responding.

Additionally, all submitted work is expected to use APA style. Failure to use APA or any other recognizable citation style will be grounds for a grade deduction.

Respect and Maturity

Some topics covered in this course can be considered inflammatory or controversial. This course is built on the foundation that studying these works will enrich your academic, professional, and personal lives. The ability to discuss such works is a protected activity as part of academic freedom.

You are encouraged to take personal inventory before committing to this course. It is your responsibility to ensure that you will be able to engage with topics that may challenge your beliefs. Discussions around these works may bring up emotional responses. Learning to hold mature forums in spite of these feelings is a key skill. You are expected to, at all times, critique only ideas, never people. Personal attacks, harassment, and insinuations will never be tolerated in this course, and are cause for referral to Student Conduct.

Incomplete Grade Policy

Incomplete grades will be granted only in rare circumstances and require the approval of the instructor. Students who have not completed all the requirements prior to the last day of class will need to talk with the instructor about how this will be rectified.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

You are expected to do your own work and any form of academic dishonesty—plagiarism and cheating—is as unacceptable in this course as it is across the University and throughout higher education. Plagiarism is defined in the Bulletin as “the unacknowledged use of another person's labor, another person's ideas, another person's words, and another person's assistance.”

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

Acceptable uses of Generative AI (ex. ChatGPT, Snapchat AI, Gemini, Copilot, Midjourney, etc.) is limited to only the following cases:

- Ideation - you may use generative AI to understand, develop, or iterate on ideas. AI can be a wonderful way to find a starting point when you do not know how to approach an assignment, and I encourage you to do so when needed.
- Editing - you may use AI tools like Grammarly or Hemmingway, or even generative AI if desired, only to improve writing you have already done on your own.
- Formatting - you may use AI tools if it is helpful to generate citations and assist with the visual presentation of your original works. However, it is always your responsibility to ensure the results are correct and that your work is of acceptable quality to you.

AI may never be tasked with independently writing any part of any assignment. Doing such, even with attribution, constitutes academic dishonesty and will result in a failing grade.

Disability Disclosure Statement

Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability, including special accommodations for access to technology resources and electronic instructional materials required for the course, should contact the instructor privately to discuss the specific situation by the end of the second week of classes or as soon as practical.

If you have not done so already, please contact Disability Resources and Services (DRS) at 215-204-1280 in 100 Ritter Annex to learn more about the resources available to you. We will work with DRS to coordinate reasonable accommodations for all students with documented disabilities.

Student and Faculty Academic Rights and Responsibilities

Please refer to Temple University's Recommended Statement. The University's policy on Student and Faculty and Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy #03.70.02) can be accessed through at: <http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policyno=03.70.02>.

Technology Usage Policy

Read Temple University's Technology Usage policy which includes information on unauthorized access, disclosure of passwords, and sharing of accounts. The [Temple University Technology Usage Policy](#) can be accessed at <http://policies.temple.edu/PDF/84.pdf>