A Post-Truth World
BLHV 462-01   Fall 2020

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Dates: August 26 – December 18, 2020
Class Meetings: Wednesday 5:20 PM–7:50 PM, ONLINE with Canvas and Zoom
Office Hours: Wednesdays 3pm – 5pm, or by appointment

Course Description

Manufactured skepticism directed towards academic knowledge and professional expertise allows spin, propaganda, and disinformation to disseminate widely, thereby promoting a cacophony of ideological agendas. In 2016, "post-truth" was picked as the Word of the Year by the *Oxford Dictionaries*. When political, civic, and business leaders think that deceptions and lies will escape detection and evade refutation, the cycle of disregard for facts and reason only spins faster. The "truth" may get hazy, but the public often suspects that they are getting manipulated. A tide of cynicism and distrust around the world is surging in attitudes about policy leadership, civic institutions, news reporting, and scientific discovery. Yet there is nothing new about this situation. Since the mid-twentieth century, there have been anxious warnings about "The Death of the Academy," "The Disappearance of the Public Intellectual," "The Decline of Professionalism," and so on. Blame has been placed on the relativism of the radical left, the anti-objectivism of postmodernism, the populism of the arts, the dogmatism of conservatism, the degeneration of social media, the politicization of fake news, and the conspiratorial tales of anti-science. New popular media and social media technologies are making in possible for anyone to live in their own bubble of information. Where is the truth still to be found, we may ask, while anyone and everyone can rest safely in the enjoyment of their own comforting truths? Democracies do not appear to be much more resistant to "post-truth" than dictatorships or totalitarianisms. The further question comes to mind: did "the truth" ever really matter that much? Maybe we can only surrender to our future life in a post-truth world. On the other hand, it may be possible to rebuild confidence in the resources of professional expertise and the sources of demonstrable knowledge.

Course Learning Objectives

The "post-truth" temptation and the "pro-truth" remedy will be approached through many disciplinary areas: history, literature, the visual arts, cultural criticism, science studies, technology studies, communication studies, rhetoric and logic, media ethics, professional ethics, and political philosophy. In their studies and assignments, students will develop their competencies to:

1. Critically analyze and engage with historical, contemporary, and enduring questions of the human experience.
2. Acquire a broad knowledge of philosophical, intellectual, ethical, cultural, artistic, and literary movements in recent human history.
3. Understand fundamental concepts and methodologies in the humanities, social sciences, professional areas, and media technologies; and apply these methods to the analysis of complex problems.
4. Recognize and respond to social justice issues, locally and globally; enact ethics-based approaches in study and work.
5. Apply intercultural knowledge and competence by meaningfully and ethically engaging others in respectful speech and writing.
6. Become better citizens by thinking about historical processes that have led to cultural, political, and religious interaction in a multicultural modern world.

Students will demonstrate their academic competence by:

1. Exhibiting an understanding of human values and ethical ideals from a range of personal identities and social perspectives;
2. Demonstrating interdisciplinary knowledge of major questions the human experience, including self-knowledge, the relation of the self to the community, and the relation between humans and supreme values;
3. Discovering and analyzing primary and secondary sources relevant to specific research questions in particular academic disciplines;
4. Engaging, processing, and critiquing various sorts of arguments from a logical perspective employing critical thinking;
5. Expressing in writing and in speech insightful critical analysis and understanding of texts about complex human questions to ponder and solve problems from more than one perspective or approach;
6. Writing well and presenting information clearly for specific audiences in appropriate forms and media.

This course is writing intensive. Students are posting in discussion conversations every week. Assignments are opportunities for composing a discussion piece, an analytical essay, and a research paper.

Required Texts

Taylor, Philip. *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Era*. Manchester University Press, 2003. ISBN: 9780719067679
> Publisher's abstract:
> Traces how propaganda has formed part of the fabric of conflict since the dawn of warfare, and how in its broadest definition it has also been part of a process of persuasion at the heart of human communication. Stone monuments, coins, broadsheets, paintings and pamphlets, posters, radio, film, television, computers and satellite communications - throughout history, propaganda has had access to ever more complex and versatile media. This third edition has been revised and expanded to include a new preface, new chapters on the 1991 Gulf War, information age conflict in the post-Cold War era, and the world after the terrorist attacks of September 11. The extraordinary range of this book covers media and communications studies, art history, cultural history, military history, and politics.

Sim, Stuart. *Post-Truth, Scepticism & Power*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. ISBN: 978-3030158750
> Publisher's abstract:
> This book examines the concept of post-truth and the impact it is having on contemporary life, bringing out both its philosophical and political dimensions. Post-truth is contextualised within the philosophical discourse of truth, with particular reference to theories of scepticism and relativism, to explore whether it can take advantage of these to claim any intellectual credibility. Sim argues that post-truth cannot be defended on either sceptical or relativistic grounds – even those provided by recent iconoclastic philosophical movements such as poststructuralism and postmodernism. The affinity between post-truth and conspiracy theory is emphasised, and the extent to which post-truth plays a role in religious doctrine is also considered. Post-truth is seen to constitute a threat to liberal democratic ideals and our Enlightenment heritage, raising the question of whether we are moving into a post-liberal age where the far right would hold power. To prevent this, post-truth urgently needs to be countered.

Kakutani, Michiko. *The Death of Truth: Notes on Falsehood in the Age of Trump*. Penguin, 2019. ISBN: 9780525574835
> Publisher's abstract:
> We live in a time when the very idea of objective truth is mocked and discounted by the occupants of the White House. Discredited conspiracy theories and ideologies have resurfaced, proven science is once more up for debate, and Russian propaganda floods our screens. The wisdom of the crowd has usurped research and expertise, and we are each left clinging to the beliefs that best confirm our biases. How did truth become an endangered species in contemporary America? This decline began decades ago, and Kakutani takes a penetrating look at the cultural forces that contributed to this gathering storm. In social media and literature, television, academia, and politics, Kakutani identifies the trends—originating on both the right and the left—that have combined to elevate subjectivity over factuality, science, and common values. And she returns us to the words of the great critics of authoritarianism, writers like George Orwell and Hannah Arendt, whose work is newly and eerily relevant. With remarkable erudition and insight, Kakutani offers a provocative diagnosis of our current condition and points toward a new path for our truth-challenged times.

McIntyre, Lee. *Post Truth*. MIT Press, 2018. ISBN: 9780262535045

> Publisher's abstract:
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> What, exactly, is post-truth? Is it wishful thinking, political spin, mass delusion, bold-faced lying? McIntyre analyzes recent examples—claims about inauguration crowd size, crime statistics, and the popular vote—and finds that post-truth is an assertion of ideological supremacy by which its practitioners try to compel someone to believe something regardless of the evidence. Yet post-truth didn't begin with the 2016 election; the denial of scientific facts about smoking, evolution, vaccines, and climate change offers a road map for more widespread fact denial. Add to this the wired-in cognitive biases that make us feel that our conclusions are based on good reasoning even when they are not, the decline of traditional media and the rise of social media, and the emergence of fake news as a political tool, and we have the ideal conditions for post-truth. McIntyre argues that we can fight post-truth, and that the first step in fighting post-truth is to understand it.

Highly recommended (not required):

> Baggini, Julian. *A Short History of Truth*. Quercus, 2017. ISBN: 9781786488909

> Barclay, Donald. *Fake News, Propaganda, and Plain Old Lies: How to Find Trustworthy Information in the Digital Age*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2018. ISBN: 9781538108895

> Cosentino, Gabriele. *Social Media and the Post-Truth World Order: The Global Dynamics of Disinformation*. ISBN 9783030430047

<u>Course Requirements</u>

You are expected to do the readings, observe lectures, and engage with the course material in depth. Your responsibilities include completing all the assignments. Participation is essential to your success in this class. Students should spend approximately 12 hours per week on the work for each module.

1. Class Participation. Regular participation in online classes via Zoom and in Discussion via Canvas. Each week, a discussion area is the student forum for conversations about the weekly course material. Each student will give a 15 minute presentation about their research paper at the end of the semester. 200 points possible. 20% of total grade.

2. Discussion Piece. 1000 words. A discussion piece, typical for a magazine or blog, offers insight and commentary on an issue of public importance, composed for a broad audience. Students will choose a current controversy related to a matter raised during the first six weeks. This commentary will either (a) support optimism about efforts to diminish and debunk the influence of a false narrative spreading across media, or the commentary will (b) support pessimism towards countering the influence of a false narrative despite efforts praised by optimists. 100 points possible. 10% of total grade.

3. Analytical Essay. 2000 words. This essay will fulfill two goals: (1) first explain how a chosen public feature of our "post truth" society is similar to events from past American eras, and also resembles events that have happened in other countries; and then (2) explore how these commonalities across eras and countries can illuminate the underlying psychological factors and social trends responsible for that chosen feature. 300 points possible. 30% of total grade.

4. Research Paper. 4000 words. On an issue of students' choice from the course's topics, except for issues already addressed by the student's previous assignments. You will first develop a one-page prospectus outlining your plan for the organization and goals of this paper, to be approved by the instructor. The research paper explores some selected part of society – perhaps of a governmental, bureaucratic, professional, scientific, academic, civic, or grass-roots nature – that takes responsibility for investigating and judging "the truth of the matter" able to directly impact people's lives. How does this social structure or group justify and achieve its expertise, and how would that respected prestige get eroded away by characteristics of a "post truth" agenda? A successful paper synthesizes relevant information gained in the course (lectures and readings), information from a selected body of secondary literature, and the student's academic experience. 400 possible points. 40% of total grade.

Citation Style: The APA Style (APA Publication Manual 6th Edition) – http://pitt.libguides.com/citationhelp/APA

Final Grade

Total Points	Grade	Quality Points
920-1000	A	4.00
900-919	A-	3.67
881-899	B+	3.33
800-880	B	3.00
781-799	B-	2.67
761-780	C+	2.33
700-760	C	2.00
690-699	C-	1.67
680-689	D+	1.33
660-679	D	1.00
Less than 660	F	0.00

Course Policies: Remote Course Delivery

This course is subject to the University's ongoing status of Instructional Continuity and will be delivered remotely throughout the term/semester. This means you will be required to attend and actively participate in synchronous sessions at the assigned class time via Zoom. Further, all coursework (assignments, announcements, projects, discussion boards etc.) outside of the synchronous sessions must be submitted through Canvas. Canvas is Georgetown University's learning management system. Access this course and related material in the Canvas learning management system at canvas.georgetown.edu and logging in with your Georgetown netID credentials.

Virtual Office Hours: If you would like to meet with me or should you have questions or concerns about the course, please schedule with my virtual office hours or email me to schedule a one-on-one meeting.

Participation and Engagement - Domestic Students
Participation is a key component of your success as a student engaged in a remote learning environment as it encourages rich discussion and interaction with your classmates and demonstrates your command of course concepts to the instructor. In this course, participation is worth 20% of your grade. Synchronous participation will primarily take place via Zoom. What does good participation look like?
1. Actively contribute to class conversations by answering instructor questions and responding to peers' comments and ideas;
2. Demonstrate your comprehension of course content by sharing stories the real-world application in class discussions;
3. Ask relevant clarifying and contextual questions during synchronous sessions;
4. Appropriately use Zoom tools to meaningfully contribute to class conversations: the hand raise tool, reaction emojis, the chat function, and participating in breakout rooms.

Participation and Engagement - International Students
Participation is a key component of your success as an international student engaged in a remote learning environment as it encourages rich discussion and interaction with your classmates and demonstrates your command of course concepts to the instructor. In this course, participation is worth 20% of your grade. Synchronous participation will primarily take place via Zoom. What does good participation look like?
1. Submit a Zoom video of your reflection after watching the recorded lecture
2. Schedule a time to meet with your teammates to work on projects

3. Attend the rotating synchronous class meeting

Student Expectations in a Remote Learning Environment
1. If you have questions or concerns about the course, schedule time to meet with the instructor 1-1 or attend virtual office hours.
2. Given Zoom will serve as the primary tool for synchronous sessions, please adhere to the following practices:
   a. Attend class on-time and remain on Zoom throughout the session
   b. Arrive to the Zoom class prepared to discuss readings, current events, and other materials assigned by the instructor
   c. Unless you have received prior approval from the instructor, keep webcams and speakers on throughout the entire class session
   d. Keep your microphone muted unless speaking
   e. Dress appropriately for class (business casual or casual is best)
   f. Limiting eating to before or after class (or during breaks)
3. Submit completed assignments by the date specified in the syllabus.
4. Complete all assigned reading and watch all pre-recorded videos by the assigned due date
5. Complete Canvas modules or other online literature by specified dates.
6. Meet with team members or partners virtually to complete assignments equitably (if applicable).

Remote Learning Tips: As a student engaging in this class remotely, you must take a far more active role in learning and accessing information than traditional students in face-to-face classrooms. Click the link to learn about 10 ways to ensure distance learning success.

Announcements: Announcements related to this course will be posted in Canvas regularly. They will appear on your Canvas dashboard when you log in and/or they will be sent to you directly through your preferred method of notification. Please make certain to check them regularly, as they will contain important information about upcoming projects or class concerns.

Email: In this course we will use Canvas to send email for private messages. You can either check your messages in the Canvas system or set your notifications to your preferred method of contact. Please check your messages at least once per day. When submitting messages, please do the following:
● Put a subject in the subject box that describes the email content with your name and module
● Do not send messages asking general information about the class, please post those in the "Ask the Instructor Discussion Form" in the Canvas course

Academic Support: Services and resources may include an online orientation; access to library resources; a readiness assessment or survey; testing services; tutoring; non-native language services; writing and/or math centers; tutorials or other forms of guidance on conducting research, writing papers, citing sources, using an online writing lab, and using institution-specific technology; supplemental instruction programs; and teaching assistants.

Writing Center: The Georgetown University Writing Center is a free resource open to all enrolled Georgetown students and offers online appointments.

Technical Support for Students:
● Canvas - Students have 24/7 access to http://canvas.georgetown.edu/getting-help, including live chat and a support hotline at (855) 338-2770
● Zoom - For support with Zoom, email: zoom@georgetown.edu
● Use of Georgetown University-issued accounts for Google Mail, Calendar, Groups, Talk, Docs, Sites, Video, and Contacts is governed by the contract between Georgetown University and Google. For help managing your Google Documents, visit Google Drive Help Center.
● Contact the UIS Service Center at help@georgetown.edu if you have a question regarding your GU netID and/or password; your GU email account; any connectivity issues.

Support Services:

SCS offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed online, at the School of Continuing Studies downtown location, and on the main Georgetown campus:

- [Academic Resource Center](#)
- 202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
- [Counseling and Psychiatric Services](#)
- 202-687-6985
- [Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action (IDEAA)](#)
- (202) 687-4798

Students' Religious Observances: The following is university policy: Georgetown University promotes respect for all religions. Any student who is unable to attend classes or to participate in any examination, presentation, or assignment on a given day because of the observance of a major religious holiday or related travel shall be excused and provided with the opportunity to make up, without unreasonable burden, any work that has been missed for this reason and shall not in any other way be penalized for the absence or rescheduled work. Students will remain responsible for all assigned work. Students should notify professors in writing at the beginning of the semester of religious observances that conflict with their classes.

Disabilities: Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, individuals with disabilities are provided reasonable accommodations to ensure equity and access to programs and facilities. Students are responsible for communicating their needs to the Academic Resource Center, the office that oversees [disability support services](#), (202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu;) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. The University is not responsible for making special accommodations for students who have not declared their disabilities and have not requested an accommodation in a timely manner. Also, the University need not modify course or degree requirements considered to be an essential requirement of the program of instruction. For the most current and up-to-date policy information, please refer to the [Georgetown University Academic Resource Center website](#). Students are highly encouraged to discuss the documentation and accommodation process with an Academic Resource Center administrator.

Extreme weather, Emergencies, and Instructional Continuity: During inclement weather or other emergencies on a day when we are scheduled to meet face-to-face, check the university's Web site or call (202) 687-7669 for information on whether the university is open. If the university is open, this class will meet. Check your e-mail for a message from me on how we will proceed in that situation. Due dates for written assignments submitted through Blackboard will not be changed due to campus closings. The university recently has acquired the capability to send text messages and recorded messages about emergencies to cell phones and other mobile devices. Sign up on MyAccess.

Georgetown Honor System: All students are expected to follow Georgetown's honor code unconditionally. We assume you have read the honor code material located at http://scs.georgetown.edu/academic-affairs/honor-code, and in particular have read the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, What is Plagiarism, Sanctioning Guidelines, and Expedited Sanctioning Process. Papers in this course will all be submitted to turnitin.com for checking.
Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge: *In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

Plagiarism: In accord with university policy, all incidents of suspected plagiarism or other Honor Code violations will be reported to the Honor Council without fail. If the Honor Council finds that a student has plagiarized or has violated the Honor Code in any other way, the student may receive a grade of F for the course.

Turnitin.com: Students acknowledge that by taking this course all required papers can be submitted for a Textual Similarity Review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site.

Sexual Misconduct: Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors and those impacted by sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, and stalking. Georgetown requires faculty members, unless otherwise designated as confidential, to report all disclosures of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator or a Deputy Title IX Coordinator. If you disclose an incident of sexual misconduct to a professor in or outside of the classroom (with the exception of disclosures in

papers), that faculty member must report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator, or Deputy Title IX Coordinator. The coordinator, will, in turn, reach out to the student to provide support, resources, and the option to meet. [Please note that the student is not required to meet with the Title IX coordinator.]. More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the Sexual Misconduct Website.

If you would prefer to speak to someone confidentially, Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources that can provide support and assistance. These resources include:

1. Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention: confidential email sarp@georgetown.edu
2. Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS): 202. 687.6985 or after hours, call 202. 444.7243 and ask for the on-call CAPS clinician.

Thank you for supporting our students impacted by sexual violence. If interested, other helpful more general resources are included below:

- Georgetown Self-Care Resource Guide
- Georgetown Wellness Wheel
- Georgetown Guide to Recognizing Students in Distress

Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include:

Jen Schweer, MA, LPC	**Erica Shirley**
Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention	Trauma Specialist Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS)
(202) 687-0323	(202) 687-6985
jls242@georgetown.edu	els54@georgetown.edu

More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at: https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/get-help.

Pregnancy Adjustments and Accommodations: Georgetown University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment for pregnant and parenting students. Students may request adjustments based on general pregnancy needs or accommodations based on a pregnancy-related complication. Specific adjustments will be handled on a case by case basis and will depend on medical need and academic requirements. Students seeking a pregnancy adjustment or accommodation should follow the process laid out at the Pregnancy Adjustments and Accommodations for Students webpage.

Class Schedule

This tentative schedule is subject to change as necessary.

Week	Topics	Readings, Events
Week 1. Aug 26	Propaganda, psychological warfare, and public persuasion	Munitions of the Mind: Intro, chaps 1-3
Week 2. Sept 2	Propaganda in Europe: Popes, Monarchs, Bibles, and Books.	Munitions of the Mind: chaps 4-15
Week 3. Sept 9	Propaganda goes to War: WW I, Soviets, WW II, Cold War, Middle East wars.	Munitions of the Mind: chaps. 16-28
Week 4. Sept 16	The Post-truth landscape and the pre-history of post-truth.	Post-Truth, Scepticism & Power: chaps 1, 2, 3
Week 5. Sept 23	Religious faith, philosophical skepticism, and postmodernist post-truth	Post-Truth, Scepticism & Power: chaps 4, 5, 6
Week 6. Sept 30	Narrative, fable, and fiction. What is the best defense of truth?	Post-Truth, Scepticism & Power: chaps 7, 8, 9
Week 7. Oct 7	Reason v emotion, the culture wars over values, and the "me first" society.	The Death of Truth: chaps. 1, 2, 3 Discussion piece due Oct 10
Week 8. Oct 14	Reality and language and truth is just what my group says it is.	The Death of Truth: chaps. 4, 5, 6
Week 9. Oct 21	If everyone has all the truth, then who really has any truth?	The Death of Truth, chaps. 7, 8, 9
Week 10. Oct 28	Dimension of post-truth. Why we resist letting science tell us truth.	Post Truth: chaps 1, 2
Week 11. Nov 4	Cognitive biases, group-think, conspiracy theories. Do we miss traditional media?	Post Truth: chaps 3, 4 Analytical Essay due Nov 6
Week 12. Nov 11	False narratives, fake news. deep fakes, and the complicity of social media	Post Truth: chaps 5
Week 13. Nov 18	Blaming postmodernism for the decline of truth. After truth, what? A fight for truth.	Post Truth: chaps 6, 7
Week 14. Nov 25	Student Presentations	
Week 15	Work on research paper	Research Paper due Dec 16