Misinformation in Politics and Society (GOVT-218-130)

Dates: June 7 - July 30, 2021

Location:

Students will participate in the course using Georgetown University's online learning management system called Canvas. To learn more about Canvas, please go through the Canvas Guide for Students.

Professor:

Leticia Bode

Professor Contact Information:

Email: lb871@georgetown.edu

Virtual Office Hours:

Office hours are a time I set aside each week just to be available to students.

My scheduled office hours for the summer are:
Tuesdays, 9-10am
Thursdays, 9-10am
*These may be adjusted depending on what time zones students are in!

Within those time blocks, I'm scheduling office hours in 20 minute increments, and you can sign up for a time using Canvas Calendar. Here's a great explainer of how to do so.

In office hours, I'm happy to talk about course material, help you work through a problem you're having with a reading or an assignment, or just talk about school in general.
If you're having trouble in the course, meeting with me during office hours is a great first step.

To join office hours, use this Zoom link.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course will start with an introduction to the concept of misinformation. What does it mean for something to be true, and therefore what does it mean for something to be false? What different types of misinformation exist, and what are their characteristics? It will also include descriptive information about how much misinformation is circulating in different places, and how much of that misinformation is believed.

The next section of the course will focus on different reasons why people 1) believe, 2) create and 3) share misinformation, as well as how they do so. Incorporated into this section will be a brief history of misinformation and conspiracy theories, and how their dissemination has changed over time. It will also address the impact of misinformation - why do we care if people are informed or misinformed – and what assumptions are we making about what it means to be informed?

The third and final section of the course will focus on efforts to combat misinformation. This includes preventive programs like media literacy interventions designed to make people more skeptical of misinformation, and better able to detect it. It also includes strategies by dissemination platforms (ie search engines, social media platforms, traditional media) to identify and reduce the visibility and spread of misinformation, including content moderation and deplatforming. And it includes efforts at misinformation correction – giving people good information to hopefully outweigh the bad. This includes expert correction, journalistic fact checking, and peer-to-peer correction.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. Develop a conceptual understanding of misinformation.

2. Demonstrate an understanding about why people create, share, and believe misinformation.

3. Assess concerns that widespread belief in misinformation undermines societal-level outcomes like public health and democratic health.

4. Evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches to countering misperceptions.

COURSE READINGS

Readings and other course materials are all available on Canvas.

There are no course materials to purchase for this class.

For specific details of readings, see course modules on Canvas.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING CRITERIA

Graded Assignments

1: Synthesis – choose 3 of the 6 options (100 points each)

These products should help you synthesize the information you're learning in class, and combine it with additional information as relevant, in a way that makes sense to you and/or helps you further your goals.

I am flexible on the format they take: you can write a 3-5 page memo, create a multimedia product (make an infographic, a video, a website, etc), or give a presentation. Think about the goals you have for yourself and for the course, and choose a format that fits those goals. Check out examples of successful past products in the synthesis product examples module.

Synthesis products are due on the following schedule:

1. Defining misinformation (module 1, due June 13)
2. Disinformation critique (module 2, due June 27)
3. Community observation (module 3, due July 4)
4. Sharing misinformation (module 4, due July 11)
5. Assessing impact (module 5, due July 18)
6. Solving misinformation (module 6, due July 30)

Synthesis products will be graded on completeness, thoughtfulness, engagement with course material, writing clarity, and effective presentation.

2: Discussion board (each week = 10 points, 80 points total)

By Wednesday – post reactions to the week's course materials (readings, podcasts, videos, etc) on Canvas. Some weeks I may provide questions to respond to, otherwise just share reactions, questions, criticisms, etc.

Your post should be one or two paragraphs. Use pictures, gifs, link to videos, be creative - you want to engage the attention of your classmates!

Within your post, you should pose at least one question for your colleagues to respond to. These questions may reflect confusion about something, or you might disagree with something an author says. Alternatively, they may be broader questions that link the issues raised in the readings with other topics already considered in the course or with current/past events or from other classes you've taken.

By Friday - "Like" questions from your colleagues and comment on at least two of them with answers, clarifications, additional questions, thoughts, challenges, etc.

3: Knowledge Quiz (each quiz = 6 points, 48 points total)

Complete the three question quiz for the week, which will cover all readings, podcasts, and videos.

Quizzes will be open book but time limited. You should have completed all of the course materials before starting the quiz!

In addition, tell me about what was most confusing for you this week. What do you need clarification about, or more information to better understand? Based on your answers, I'll make a "muddiest point" clarification video which I'll post on Canvas each week.

Complete this by Wednesday of each week.

Element 4: Hypothesis Reading (each week = 3 points, 24 points total)

Discuss the reading of the week in Hypothesis with at least two comments. Some weeks may have more specific prompts.

Complete this by Wednesday of each week.

Respond to at least one comment someone else has made.

Complete this by Friday of each week.

Grading Scheme

93 - 100 % = A

90 - 92 % = A-

87 - 89 % = B+

83 - 86 % = B

80 - 82 % = B-

77 - 79 % = C+

73 - 76 % = C

70 - 72 % = C

67 - 69 % = D+

60 - 66 % = D

Below 60 % = F

COURSE SCHEDULE

This course begins with an Orientation and is divided into 6 modules. Below is an outline describing the course structure. Each Module will be released on a weekly basis every Sunday at 11:59 pm (ET). Students are required to move through each module in sequential order.

Here is a typical weekly flow, including my recommended timeline for completing assignments. For each element, I provide a recommendation of when you might complete it to stay on track throughout the week. However, only the items highlighted in red are due at a particular time. Other than those, feel free to complete each item as fits with your schedule. ***I also encourage you to think about how you will integrate ways to protect your general wellness and mental health into each week's schedule.***

1. Framing podcast from Dr. Bode (3-10 minutes)
   - Listen by Monday

2. Readings (journal articles, media articles, blog posts, social media threads)
   - Complete by Tuesday

3. Audio and Visual Content (podcasts and videos)
   - Complete by Tuesday

4. Hypothesis/Directed Reading
   - Complete by Wednesday

5. Weekly quiz - will also include input on muddiest point

- ○ Complete by Wednesday

6. Discussion board assignment
   - ○ Complete by Wednesday

7. Discussion board replies
   - ○ Complete by Friday

8. Hypothesis replies
   - ○ Complete by Friday

9. Muddiest point video from Dr. Bode
   - ○ Complete by Friday (posted by Thursday)

10. Synthesis Assignment
   - ○ Complete by Sunday (except last week of the semester, complete by Friday)

ORIENTATION: Opens June 4

The orientation provides an overview of the course and introduces you to your instructor and peers. You will also learn about the technology requirements and where to get support.

MODULE 1: Defining Misinformation: June 7 - June 20 (two weeks)

This module will be divided into two weeks. The first week will focus on defining misinformation and related concepts. The second week will examine the history and prevalence of misinformation.

MODULE 2: Creating Misinformation: June 21 - June 27

This module considers who creates misinformation and why, considering several key cases, including disinformation campaigns and misinformation creators driven by financial motivations.

MODULE 3: Believing Misinformation: June 28 - July 4

This week we'll look at why people believe misinformation, based both on the characteristics of believers and of the misinformation itself.

MODULE 4: Spreading Misinformation: July 5 - July 11

This week will focus on how and why misinformation spreads, focusing on both traditional and social media as two distinct mechanism of spread.

MODULE 5: Misinformation's Impact: July 12 - July 18

This module considers different cases of misinformation, specifically from the perspective of what impact it might have on people's attitudes and behaviors. We'll pay special attention to health misinformation and political misinformation.

MODULE 6: Combatting Misinformation: July 19 - July 30 (two weeks)

For our last module, we'll consider different ways of combatting misinformation. The first week will focus on prebunking, inoculation, media literacy, and counterspeech. The second week will focus on content moderation, labeling, and deplatforming.

INFORMATION ABOUT TOOLS AND TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

As a Georgetown student your online classroom experience will be very different but just as rigorous as your residential student experience. You can expect to:

- Communicate with your professor and classmates regularly via email, discussion boards, and other technologies available.
- Navigate the internet using a web browser (note that certain tools may require a specific browser).
- Use applications such as Microsoft Office or Google Docs to create documents and work on projects.
- Submit assignments in Canvas.
- Upload and download saved files (including text, audio, and video).
- Use a microphone to record audio.
- Use a webcam to record video.

In this course we will use the following tools:

- Canvas
  - Discussion boards
  - Assignment submission
  - Access to course materials
- Hypothesis

Computer Requirements

- You will need access to a computer (Windows or Mac) and adequate Internet service to complete this course. Although you can use other devices such as smartphones and tablets for some online coursework, please note that some tools, such as Proctorio, do not work on tablets or smartphones.

- You will also need an internal or external microphone and camera to complete this course. While you can use any browser to access Canvas please note that some tools only work with certain browsers (e.g., Proctorio only works with Chrome).

The minimum requirements needed to use Canvas can be found in this [Canvas guide](#).

COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Student Expectations

You are expected to complete all readings, assignments, and activities on time. Participation is essential to your success in this class. You are expected to actively participate in discussions with your peers, and contribute to the group assignments. It is important to subscribe to the course discussion boards so that you receive notifications when new messages are posted. In order to get full credit for participation, you will have to complete all of your module assignments and quizzes on time.

Time Expectations

Our remote learning courses are designed to meet the same academic standards as our place-based (face-to-face) courses. Students should plan on spending approximately 6-9 hours a week on assignments, readings, projects, etc.

Communication Expectations

Building an inclusive climate of mutual respect and inquiry in this class:

I respect your right to be called whatever you want to be called, because I understand that for all of us, social recognition of our sense of self is key to our own integrity and flourishing. I expect everyone in the class to do the same. **In particular, if you would like to be called by a specific set of pronouns or name that might not be obvious from your official school records, please let me know in any way that makes you comfortable.**

Georgetown's Trans, Non-Binary, and Gender Non-Conforming Resource Guide:
https://lgbtq.georgetown.edu/resources/transatgu/

Communication with Peers

You will be expected to engage with your peers via the discussion board and other required tools on a regular basis.

Communication with Professor

Please feel free to email me with your questions, concerns, and/or to schedule a time to meet over Zoom. When sending emails please remember to follow the guidelines outlined below.

If you have general questions about assignments and course materials please post these questions in the General Question Discussion Board Forum **[link to board in the course]**, which you can access by clicking Discussions in the course navigation menu. This is an open forum, and you are encouraged to give answers and help each other.

- *Check the syllabus*. Before sending your email or message, be sure that your question has not already been addressed in the syllabus or announcements.

- *Be patient*. If you have a concern and send me a message, you can expect a response within one business day. Please allow five business days for assessment submission feedback.

- *Specify subject*. Subject line should include the topic of the message and class title.

- *Greet & Close*. E-mails should begin with a formal greeting and end with you signing your name in all messages/emails.

- *Check writing*. Proofread (i.e. grammar and spelling) your message before sending.

Netiquette Guidelines

To promote the highest degree of education possible, we ask each student to respect the opinions and thoughts of other students and be courteous in the way that you choose to express yourself. Students should be respectful and considerate of all opinions.

In order for us to have meaningful discussions, we must learn to genuinely try to understand what others are saying and be open-minded about others' opinions. If you want to persuade someone to see things differently, it is much more effective to do so in a polite, non-threatening way rather than to do so antagonistically. Everyone has insights to offer based on his/her experiences, and we can all learn from each other. Civility is essential.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with Disabilities

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, individuals with disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the

nature of the course. Some accommodations might include note takers, books on tape, extended time on assignments, and interpreter services among others. 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; https://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/disability/) 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.

Accessibility and Inclusion

One of the central tenets of Georgetown's educational mission is cura personalis, a Latin phrase meaning "care of the whole person." Georgetown is committed to showing care and concern for each student by creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment that follows universal design principles to meet the needs of its diverse student body.

I am committed to creating a learning environment for my students that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives and experiences, and honors your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.). If your name or pronoun needs to be corrected, please let me know early in the semester so that I can make the appropriate changes to my records.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students at Georgetown University are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity. Although most Georgetown students conduct themselves in accordance with these standards, occasionally, there are students who violate the code of conduct. Cheating harms the University community in many ways. For example, honest students are frustrated by the unfairness of cheating that goes undetected and students who cheat can skew the grading curve in a class, resulting in lower grades for students who worked hard and did their own work.

Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are expected to fully adhere to the policies and procedures of Georgetown's Honor System and to take the Honor Code Pledge.

Honor Code Pledge

In pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life I commit myself
to respect and to uphold the Georgetown University honor system:

- *To be honest in every academic endeavor, and*

- *To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community as we live and work together.*

Plagiarism

Stealing someone else's work is a terminal offense in the workplace, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as "the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another." More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs. If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing, and the need to credit, check out Plagiarism.org.

All submissions must be your original work. Any submission suspected of plagiarism will be immediately referred to the Honor Council for investigation and possible adjudication. All students are expected to follow Georgetown's honor code unconditionally. If you have not done so, please read the honor code material located online at the Honor Council website.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Georgetown recognizes that COVID-19 has a significant impact on everyone in the Georgetown community. Georgetown offers a variety of support services for students that can be accessed online and has put together this newsletter which aims to provide you with information about well-being resources and virtual meetings that can connect you with mental health professionals on and off campus during this time. Below are some resources available to you:

- 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

Title IX/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.].

Please note that University policy requires faculty to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University's response to sexual misconduct. 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, Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention (202) 687-0323 | jls242@georgetown.edu
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS), (202) 687-6985 | After Hours: (833) 960-3006
- Sexual Assault Response and Prevention (SARP) confidential email: sarp@georgetown.edu
- Get Help Resources

More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the Sexual Misconduct Website. If you would like to find out how recent changes to Title IX regulations are impacting Georgetown's policies and procedures, see this video briefing.

Title IX/Pregnancy and Parenting 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 needs and academic requirements. Students seeking a pregnancy adjustment or accommodation should follow the process laid out on the Title IX website.

Discrimination based on sex, including sexual misconduct and discrimination based on pregnancy or parenting status, subverts the University's mission and threatens permanent damage to the educational experience, careers, and well-being of students, faculty, and staff.

Georgetown Library

If you have a question for a librarian you can go to their "Ask Us" page where you will have the option to chat online, send an email, or schedule a Zoom appointment to discuss a research topic, develop a search strategy, or examine resources for projects and papers. Librarians offer an overview of and in-depth assistance with important resources for senior or master's theses, dissertations, papers and other types of research. This service is available to currently enrolled students who need assistance with Georgetown-assigned projects and papers. Please review the Services & Resources Guide for Online Students for additional information.

eResources

Students enrolled in courses have access to the University Library System's eResources, including 500+ research databases, 1.5+ million ebooks, and thousands of periodicals and other

multimedia files (films, webinars, music, and images). You can access these resources through the Library's Homepage by using your NetID and password.

Learning Resources

Georgetown offers a host of learning resources to its students. Two that you might find particularly helpful in this course are the Writing Center and Refworks.

- The Writing Center offers peer tutoring by trained graduate and undergraduate students who can assist you at any point in the writing process. They help at any stage of your writing process, from brainstorming to revision. Tutors can offer advice on thesis development, use of evidence, organization, flow, sentence structure, grammar, and more. The Writing Center will not proofread or edit papers; rather, they will help to improve your proofreading and editing skills to become a better writer. Appointments can be booked online through their website.

- Refworks is an online research management tool that aids in organizing, storing, and presenting citation sources for papers and projects.

Technical Support

All students have 24/7 access to Canvas technical support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including live chat and a support hotline at 855-338-2770. Use the 'Help' icon in the lower left of your Canvas window to view all available support and feedback options. If you're looking for help on a specific feature, check out the Canvas Student Guide.