

## **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**

Many people strongly hold beliefs about science, health, and/or politics that are often 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.

### **Course Overview and Goals**

In addition to reflecting the overall goals of the Communication and Social Influence major, this course:

1. Prepares students to be highly media literate
2. Educates students about cognitive biases and social factors that people often hold when encountering (mis)information
3. Instructs students about effective and ethical communication
4. Teaches students strategies to overcome false information and misperceptions

### **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 Requirements**

#### **Class Participation**

Your participation is crucial to your learning and the instructor's ability to assess your growth. Speaking up in class can be difficult for some people, and for this reason there will also be opportunities to participate digitally through surveys and discussion boards.

Each class day will consist of a discussion of the readings followed by an exploration of the topic for the week. This means your participation grade hinges on your ability to complete the readings. The expectation is that you will make a good faith effort to read all assigned readings, with the knowledge that a portion of class time will be dedicated to explaining the points of these readings.

#### **Introductory Statement**

This 2-3 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 3-5 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 books or papers we have read 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 so be honest! 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 a separate works cited page.

### Grading of Assignments

The grade for this course will be determined according to the following formula:

Assignments/Activities	% of Final Grade
Introductory Statement	5%
Response Paper	10%
In-class Analysis #1	5%
In-class Analysis #2	10%
In-class Analysis #3	10%
In-class Analysis #4	15%
Term paper: Topic	5%
Term paper: Annotated Bibliography	5%
Term paper: First Draft	10%
Term paper: Final Paper	15%
Attendance and Participation	10%

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

### View Grades

Grades will be updated on Canvas regularly and finalized by December 12, 2024.

## Course Schedule

Date (2024)	Topic	Reading	Assignment Due
August 28	Introductions, syllabus, course overview	TBD	-----
September 4	How does information spread? How do we make decisions?	TBD	Introductory Statement
September 11	Why do people spread misinformation? Why do people have misperceptions?	TBD	-----
September 18	What is bias? How do biases form?	TBD	Term Paper Topic
September 25	<b>Analysis Day</b>  And, how to write an Annotated Bibliography	TBD	-----
October 2	How do attitudes change?	TBD	Term Paper Annotated Bibliography
October 9	How do people process and organize information?	TBD	Response Paper
October 16	<b>Analysis Day</b>  And, how to write a Research Paper	TBD	-----
October 23	How does our identity affect what we believe?	TBD	-----
October 30	How do the people around us affect our beliefs and attitudes?	TBD	Term Paper First Draft
November 6	<b>Analysis Day</b>  And, how to edit a Research Paper	TBD	-----
November 13	How can people hold conflicting ideas? And how do they resolve these conflicts?	TBD	-----

November 20	What kinds of research do people do about misperception and misinformation today?	TBD	Term Paper Final Draft
November 27	-----No class, Fall break-----		
December 4	<b>Analysis Day</b>  And, what did you learn?	TBD	-----

### **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 loss of participation points at the discretion of the instructor. There are precisely 14 class meetings during the semester and you are expected to be in attendance for at least 12. If you feel that you will be unable to meet this expectation, please reach out to the instructor by Week 2.

Additionally, I expect you to actively participate in class discussions. Understanding that speaking up in class may be difficult for some students, there will be opportunities to participate using digital tools in class. However, attending class and remaining disengaged during class time will result in loss of participation points.

#### **Late Assignments**

All assignments are due at 5PM EST on Tuesday of the week they are listed under. 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 follow established professional style guides, such as APA, Chicago, or MLA style. Failure to submit properly formatted work will affect your grade.

#### **Respect and Maturity**

The reading material and some topics covered in this course can be considered inflammatory or controversial by some. 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, 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?policy=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>