



RHE 270

FALL 2023

MWF 11-11:50am
Center Hall 300

MISINFORMATION IN A SOCIAL MEDIA AGE

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Research shows that most Americans get their news from social media at the same time we know that misinformation runs rampant on those platforms. In a society built on the principle of free speech, how do we ensure that the information we receive is reliable? This course engages scholarship that explores the nature and scope of misinformation, prominent case studies, and tactics that students can implement to guard against misinformation. Students will generate several short assignments with the possibility of creating a public information campaign.

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NOTE: The class focuses primarily on misinformation in a contemporary U.S. context

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Email Address: druryj@wabash.edu

Student Hours: M, 3-4pm; T, 1:30-3:30pm; W, 2-3pm; by appt.; or drop-in 9am-4pm. On Fridays, I may not be available after noon.

Appointments: <https://calendly.com/profdrury> or scan this QR code:



REQUIRED MATERIALS

All course readings and assignments are available on the RHE 270 Canvas site. I recommend you print out course readings to annotate. You should budget ≈\$15 (300 pages, single-sided) for printing.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

The course addresses the following student learning outcomes that align with the Rhetoric Department Goals, the College's Mission, and the Language Studies distribution requirement:

- Students will identify theories and concepts relevant to the disciplinary study of misinformation and information literacy.
- Students will use theories and concepts to analyze misinformation artifacts.
- Students will identify ethical concerns related to misinformation in social media contexts.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Attendance, Homework, & Scholarly Conduct (100 pts., 20%):

The class requires you to attend and actively participate in class. On occasion, you may be asked to complete homework (a quiz, discussion board post, or some other short assignment) for class. Beyond just showing up, I expect that you will have read the assigned material and will get involved in class discussion and activities. You will earn at best a "C" for this aspect of your grade if you consistently attend class and pay attention but do not participate. You will fail this aspect of your grade if you consistently attend class but are distracted or disengaged. Arriving late or leaving early count as half an absence. Each absence beyond 2 will result in a 5-point reduction from your attendance and scholarly conduct grade in addition to the points you lose for not being in class to participate. More than 6 total absences may result in failure of the course. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to communicate with me (in advance, whenever possible) about make-up work.

Misinformation Inventory (75 pts., 15%):

You will keep track of the misinformation you encounter over the course of a week.

Misinformation Design (175 pts., 35%):

You will work in small groups to design a misinformation campaign in response to a scenario I assign you. You will need to apply course material and will present the results in class.

Misinformation Defense (150 pts., 30%):

You will design a campaign to defend against misinformation. As a class, we will discuss options and decide a focus for this project.

COURSE GRADING SCALE

Grade	Points	Grade	Points	Grade	Points
A	465-500	B	415-434	C	365-384
A-	450-464	B-	400-414	C-	350-364
B+	435-449	C+	385-399	D	300-349
				F	<300

APPROACHING CLASS DISCUSSION

Class discussion will address personal and political issues that involve you sharing ideas that reflect your biases. In creating a productive environment, you should attempt the following personal measures:

- Carefully consider how your own position, values, beliefs, and upbringing might predispose you to assume certain things about the world and your fellow classmates.
- Avoid making statements that you believe are categorically “true.” All points are arguments requiring support more than just “feeling.”
- Treat your fellow classmates’ arguments as you would like them to treat yours: a valid and worthwhile consideration.
- Refrain from overly hostile or disrespectful comments seeking to shut down or “win” debates.

COURSE POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Course Meetings and Assignments

- *Class meetings will largely build on, not duplicate, readings.*
- Late written assignments are penalized 5% per 24-hours they are late, for a maximum of 50%. I also will be more delayed in providing feedback on late assignments.
- Late policy does not apply to homework, which receive zero if late.

Written Assignment Guidelines

- Papers should be typed, double-spaced, using 11- or 12-pt font.
- Must be submitted to Canvas in .doc or .pdf format, not via email.
- Be sure to proofread written work before submitting.

Assignment Feedback

- I will provide detailed written feedback to class assignments designed to prompt continued reflection on and engagement with the material and to identify concrete steps to improve on future assignments.
- You should see me if any of my feedback is confusing or unclear.

Cell Phones, Laptops, and Tablets

Please treat class time as you would any other professional meeting. Cell phones need to be silenced and invisible during class; this means you should not use a phone to access course materials. Laptops and tablets may be used *only* to help you engage more fully with the class content and not as a means of “multitasking.”

Writing Center

The Wabash Writing Center (located on the second floor of the Lilly Library) is able to help with all facets of paper writing (from outlining and drafting to researching and proofreading). Go [here](#) to schedule an appointment.

The Office of Student Enrichment

If you have questions about developing college skills, from time management, to how to study more efficiently, to taking better notes, you can arrange a one-on-one meeting with Dr. Koppelman [here](#).

Emergency Procedures

- **FIRE:** Proceed down two floors to nearest mall-side exit and move at least 50 yards away from building. Join me and your classmates there for roll call.
- **TORNADO:** Proceed down two floors to nearest exit and then move to the basement of Hays Hall to shelter in a safe location. Join me and your classmates there for roll call.

Wabash College Academic Credit Policy

Rhetoric 270 complies with the [Wabash College Academic Credit Policy](#) stated in the Academic Bulletin. In addition to regular class meetings, direct instruction takes place in the form of office hours, individualized guidance on student papers and projects, and detailed feedback on written work.

Academic Honesty

The Gentleman's Rule should guide your academic honesty in this course. This means:

- All work is your own original work, not "borrowed" from someone or somewhere else, recycled from other courses, or completed with others (unless unmistakably permitted). ***This means that the use of generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT) on any assignment is a form of academic dishonesty (and causes you to lose out of the learning experience).***
- All work drawing upon other sources must **explicitly** reference those sources using MLA or APA format for written citations and author, source, and date for oral citations

At my discretion, cases of misconduct may be reported to the Dean of Students and/or result in failing the assignment or course. Refer to the [Academic Honesty Guide](#) (also available on the "Student Resources" tab of MyBash) for more information.

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

I am committed to your success in the class and to fostering an inclusive space. My door is open so please come talk to me if you're having trouble with the readings, wrestling with how to take notes, or want to generally discuss how to maximize your learning. If there are circumstances that affect your class performance—be they personal, health, or other—let me know as soon as possible so that we can collaboratively discuss how to proceed. Direct, open communication is often the only way that I know I need to be clearer about ideas or that you need help. In the end, communication will enhance our teaching and learning.

Students with disabilities (apparent or invisible) are invited to confidentially discuss their situation with Heather Thrush, Associate Dean for Student Engagement and Success. If a student wishes to receive an academic accommodation, he must have documentation on file with Dean Thrush (Center Hall 112A, x6347, thrushh@wabash.edu).

COURSE SCHEDULE

Dates and assignments are subject to change. Pay attention in class & check Canvas for updates. You should complete assignments before class on the day they appear in this schedule.

DATE	TOPIC
W Aug 23	Course Introduction
F Aug 25	What is Misinformation? Complete Misinformation Pretest and then read Wardle, "Understanding Information Disorder"
M Aug 28	What is Misinformation (cont.)? Read Jack, "Lexicon of Lies: Terms for Problematic Information"
W Aug 30	What is Misinformation (cont.)? Play "Bad News" & post screenshot of your score to discussion board
F Sept 1	What is the History of Misinformation? Read Bennett & Livingston, "A Brief History of the Disinformation Age"
M Sept 4	What is the History of Misinformation? Read Mejia et al., "White Lies"
W Sept 6	How & Why Does Misinformation Spread? Your Misinformation Inventories Read Menczer & Hills, "Information Overload Helps Fake News Spread..." DUE: Misinformation Inventory
F Sept 8	How & Why Does Misinformation Spread? Read Ecker et al., "The Psychological Drivers of Misinformation..."
M Sept 11	How & Why Does Misinformation Spread? Read Hannan, "Trolling Ourselves to Death"
W Sept 13	How Can We Counter Misinformation (cont.)? (prospective students from Providence Cristo Rey HS, Indy, sitting in) Read Klein, "I Didn't Want It to Be True, but the Medium Really Is the Message" ; Uscinski, "Why We (Still) Shouldn't Censor Misinformation"
F Sept 15	How Can We Counter Misinformation? Read Walter & Murphy, "How to Unring a Bell"
M Sept 18	How Can We Counter Misinformation? Read van der Linden, "How to Inoculate Your Friends & Family," <i>Foolproof</i>
T Sept 19	MANDATORY: Vanessa Otero, Ad Fontes Media, Lecture (7pm, Salter Hall)
W Sept 20	Vanessa Otero Class Visit
F Sept 22	Misinformation Design Presentations DUE: Misinformation Design by 11am
M Sept 25	Misinformation Design Presentations

W Sept 27	Case Study TBD by class
F Sept 29	Case Study TBD by class
M Oct 2	Case Study: COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation Read Hamel et al., "KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor: Media and Misinformation"
T Oct 3	MANDATORY: Film Viewing, <i>Virulent: The Vaccine War</i> (7pm, Hays 104)
W Oct 4	Case Study: COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation Bring notes about <i>Virulent: The Vaccine War</i>
F Oct 6	Project TBD by class
M Oct 9	Project TBD by class
W Oct 11	Project TBD by class DUE: Misinformation Defense