

Syllabus of Record

Program: CET Prague

Course Code / Title: (PR/POLI 370) Propaganda, Fake News, and Disinformation in the Modern World

Total Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: Political Science / History, Communications, International Relations

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites / Requirements: None

Description

The course focuses on propaganda, disinformation and other tools of information manipulation. Participants will be introduced to a theoretical discussion about propaganda and its impacts on various audiences. The overview of historical examples allows them to understand how this instrument evolved, and the attention to the current situation will provide them with insight about thinking and research of this issue. Special attention will be dedicated to practical examples of how to counter this phenomenon on a personal, state, and societal level.

Objectives

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- describe various aspects of propaganda
- identify and apply key concepts of propaganda
- summarize historical developments and present situations in the realm of propaganda
- evaluate various methods to counter propaganda and disinformation
- compare and critique current debates led by experts and researchers in this field

Course Requirements

Class structure:

- Lecture
- Discussion about the week's mandatory reading
- Student's presentation and debate on selected topic relevant to the current discussion about propaganda

Graded assignments:

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- In-class presentation and debate on the week's topic

Short presentation (15–20 minutes) summarizing key arguments of the selected topic, lead and stimulate the subsequent debate on the given topic. Students will select their preferred topic during the first lecture.

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- Midterm exam

The midterm written exam will focus on topics discussed in lectures in the first part of the semester with emphasis on terminology.

- Final project - Essay

The final project is a 6-7 page-long essay on a topic selected by each student (with professor approval).

- Final project – Presentation of the Essay’s topic

Each student will prepare a presentation (10-15 minutes) on the topic of their essay. The goal is for each student to receive critical feedback from the teacher and classmates.

Students are expected to attend each class and field study course component, as outlined in the CET Attendance Policy. Students are expected to read all assigned materials before the relevant class session and come prepared to participate thoughtfully in class discussions.

Grading

Class participation	20%
In-class presentation on the week’s topic	20%
Midterm exam	20%
Final project – Essay	30%
Final project – In class presentation of the Essay’s topic	10%

Readings

Basu Tanya. 2020. “How to talk to conspiracy theorists—and still be kind.” MIT Technology Review. July 15, 2020. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/07/15/1004950/how-to-talk-to-conspiracy-theorists-and-still-be-kind>.

Berenstein, Joseph. 2021. “Bad News: Selling the story of disinformation.” Harpers Magazine. Available from <https://harpers.org/archive/2021/09/bad-news-selling-the-story-of-disinformation/>.

Bickel, Craig. 2000. “Operation FORTITUDE SOUTH: An Analysis of its Influence upon German Dispositions and Conduct of Operations in 1944.” *War & Society* 18 (1): 91-121. DOI: 10.1179/war.2000.18.1.91

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- “COVID-19 and Conspiracy Spreaders.” 2021. STEM 2021. <https://www.stem.cz/en/covid-19-and-conspiracy-spreaders/>
- Damistra, Alyt et al. 2020. “What Does Fake Look Like? A Review of the Literature on Intentional Deception in the News and on Social Media.” *Journalism Studies* 22 (14): 1947-1963. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2021.1979423
- Derakhshan, Hossein, and Claire Wardle. 2017. “Ban the term 'fake news'.” CNN. Last modified November 27, 2017. <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/26/opinions/fake-news-and-disinformation-opinion-wardle-derakhshan/index.html>
- Deutsch, Gabby. 2018. “Social Media Has Become a Global Battlefield.” *The Atlantic*. October 2, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/10/social-media-battlefield-internet/571960/>
- Hwang, Tim. 2020. “Deconstructing the Disinformation War.” *Mediawell*. June 1, 2020. <https://mediawell.ssrc.org/expert-reflections/deconstructing-the-disinformation-war/>
- Kiely, Eugene, and Lori Robertson. 2016. “How to Spot Fake News.” *FactCheck.org*. November 18, 2016. <https://www.factcheck.org/2016/11/how-to-spot-fake-news/>
- Kohl, Daniel. 2011. “The Presentation of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ in Nazi Propaganda.” *Psychology and Society* 4 (1): 7-26.
- LaForge, Gordon. 2020. *Sweden Defends its Elections Against Disinformation, 2016 – 2018*. Trustees of Princeton University. <https://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/publications/sweden-defends-its-elections-against-disinformation-2016-%E2%80%93-2018>
- Howell, Jen Patja, Evelyn Douek, Quinta Jurecic, and Brendan Nyhan. 2020. “The Lawfare Podcast: Brendan Nyhan on the Empirical Effects of Disinformation”. *Lawfare*. Recorded February 20, 2020. Audio. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/lawfare-podcast-brendan-nyhan-empirical-effects-disinformation>
- Meyer, Will. 2017. “How to Reverse Journalism’s Decline.” *Jacobin*. January 5, 2017. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/01/journalism-newspapers-layoffs-advertising-crisis/>
- Narayanaswami, Karthik. 2011. “Analysis of Nazi Propaganda: A Behavioral Study.” *Harvard Blogs*. <https://archive.blogs.harvard.edu/karthik/analysis-of-nazi-propaganda-a-behavioral-study/>
- Newman, Nic et al. 2021. “Executive Summary and Key Findings of the Report.” *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. June 23, 2021. 9 - 33. [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Digital News Report 2021 FINAL.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Digital%20News%20Report%202021%20FINAL.pdf)
- Riefenstahl, Leni, director. *Triumph of the Will*. Reichsparteitag-Film. 1935. Excerpt. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hu-CK47NM8E>

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- Roozenbeek, Jon, et. al. 2020. "Susceptibility to misinformation about COVID-19 around the world." Royal Society Open Science. October 14, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.201199>
- Tandoc Je, Edson C., Joy Jenkins, and Staphanie Craft. 2019. "Fake News as a Critical Incident in Journalism." *Journalism Practice*. 13 (6): 673-689. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2018.1562958
- Wardle, Claire. 2018. *Information Disorder: The Essential Glossary*. Harvard Kennedy School. July 2018. https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/infoDisorder_glossary.pdf?x30563

Additional Readings

- Albig, William. 1939. *Public opinion*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Cunningham, Stanley B. 2002. *The Idea of Propaganda: A Reconstruction*. USA: Praeger Publishers.
- Ellul, Jacques. 1973. *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. New York: Random House.
- Helmus, Tod, C. E. Bodine-Baron, A. Radin, M. Magnuson, J. Mendelsohn, W. Marcellino, A. Bega, and Z. Winkelman. 2018. *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.
- Jowett, Garth S., and Victoria J. O'Donnell. 2014. *Propaganda & Persuasion*. USA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Lasswell, Harold, D. 1951. "The Strategy of Soviet Propaganda." *Academy of Political Science* 24(2): 66-78.
- Romerstein, H. 2001. "Disinformation as a KGB Weapon in the Cold War." *Journal of Intelligence History* 1(1): 54-67.

Outline of Course Content

- Topic 1 – Introduction to terminology and key concepts
- Topic 2 – Manipulation techniques
- Topic 3 – Propaganda in history I – From early ages to World War I
- Topic 4 – Propaganda in history II – Totalitarian regimes and World War II
- Topic 5 – Propaganda in history III – Cold War
- Topic 6 – Chinese propaganda
- Topic 7 – Propaganda in the 21st century

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Topic 8 – Presentation and discussion of final projects (essay topics)

Topic 9 – Fake news in times of conflict

Topic 10 – Introduction to Human-Centric Design and Social Media Project to Combat
Disinformation

Topic 11 – How to fight propaganda on state and societal level