I. Course Description
Why do people believe in conspiracy theories, hold on to misinformation even in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary, and/or spread political and social rumors that may have little basis in fact? Why are these beliefs so difficult to change or correct? Who is most vulnerable to political misinformation and conspiracies? What are the normative and political consequences? This course explores the psychological, political, and philosophical approaches to the study of the causes, consequences, and tenacity of misinformation, political rumors, and conspiracy beliefs, as well as possible approaches that journalists and government officials could employ to combat misperceptions.

II. Course Objectives
This course will introduce you to various scholarly explanations for misinformation and the influence on political beliefs and behavior. Like many political science courses, the aim of this class is not to teach you what to think about politics nor to provide a venue for you to attempt to convince others of your political views. Rather, the goal of this class is to teach you how to think about how people think about politics in the United States, e.g., through information search, social media outlets, casual conversations…etc.

By the end of this course, you will be able to:
• Critically analyze political inputs (public opinion, polls… etc.) and outputs (claims made by political elites, the media… etc.)
• Identify psychological factors that promote belief in misperceptions
• Understand why conspiracy theories often arise under conditions of uncertainty or anxiety
• Discuss how elites may promote false or unsupported claims
• Evaluate approaches to countering misperceptions and conspiracy theories
• Assess implications for democracy

III. Required Course Readings
REQUIRED TEXT (E-BOOK VIA GOULD LIBRARY):
RECOMMENDED TEXTS:


ACADEMIC ARTICLES, BOOK CHAPTERS, NEWS ARTICLES, PODCASTS, AND BLOG POSTS:
- All readings will be available on Moodle or through e-book. This means that material for paper responses will come from the required text (e-book) and from lectures and Moodle readings.
- For some topics, recommended enrichment readings are listed. These will be provided along with the required readings for each week, but are NOT required. However, students may find them to be useful in gaining additional perspectives or helpful for their papers.
- As we will be applying contemporary context, I also strongly encourage you to pay attention to a quality daily newspaper (recommended papers include *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Hill*, and *The Wall Street Journal*).
- Other fact checking websites and resources may be of interest: [https://www_factcheck_org/](https://www.factcheck.org/), [https://www.politifact_com/](https://www.politifact.com/), [https://www.snopes_com/](https://www.snopes.com/), along with @MediaWise training through Poynter. Org, NPR’s efforts to combat mis- and disinformation, and Harvard Misinformation Review.
- Reliable podcasts are also recommended (and your recommendations are always welcome)!
- I recognize the potential financial burden of book purchases, course fees, supply requirements, and travel costs. If you are in need of assistance to cover expenses, please speak with me.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOW TO GO ABOUT READING COURSE MATERIAL:
- Be an active reader: take notes, jot down questions that occur to you as you are reading, highlight passages that you find particularly interesting, troubling, or surprising. Note similarities or inconsistencies across the various readings. Think about the implications of the readings for understanding current political contexts and material covered in other weeks.

IV. Class Structure and Expectations
This term, most classes will consist of the following structure, but we will be flexible if particular events or topics need more attention. If schedules work out, we will also have some guest speakers occasionally join us throughout the term. However, you are expected to attend all classes and exams and participate actively in all discussions. Please do not record or share any class sessions, lectures or conversations from this course.
- Current Events Discussion
- Lecture
- Class Discussion

I expect you to complete and understand the assigned readings before each class. I also expect you to seek to apply our course material to new contexts, e.g., current events. You can also expect me to arrive to class on time, to return assignments in a timely manner, and to be accessible during my office hours. I will strive to make this course understandable and accessible for all students. If you have any questions about the content or structure of the course or about specific assignments, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am always happy to help if you come to me before assignments or exams are due. Please do not wait to ask for help until after the due date – come talk to me before.
V. Course Requirements and Grading

The requirements for this course involve both the completion of assignments on your own outside of our class meetings and your active and informed contributions to our discussions in class. Some of your assignments will be submitted electronically. It is your responsibility to make sure the file is not corrupted (you should be able to download and view the file after you upload it to Moodle). If you use .pages, rather than Word (.doc or .docx) please convert to .pdf before submitting completed assignments. Corrupted files will be treated as though they are late until they are correctly uploaded. Your grade will be based on the following requirements:

**DISCUSSION LEADER AND REFLECTION ESSAYS:** (15% EACH; 30% TOTAL) Each student will complete two single-paged reflection essays on the readings for a specific day. You will have an opportunity to pick the class sessions that you would like to write about. Along with the response essay, each student should turn in at least three discussion questions about the readings for us to talk about that you would like to pose to the class.

Reflection essays and discussion questions are **due to me by 8:00 AM on the day of class.** Discussion leaders will offer a brief summary of the readings for the class. However, the use of a slide deck is not required. More information will be provided in class.

**FOUR PAPERS:** (15% EACH; 60% TOTAL) You will be required to complete four papers throughout the term. More information will be provided in class.

**PARTICIPATION:** (10% TOTAL)
The final portion of your grade is based on your ability and willingness to contribute to our class. What does this require of you? Each class you’ll be asked to do background reading that sets the stage for class lectures and discussions. I expect that you’ll complete the readings before each class, and that you’ll be prepared to engage in thoughtful discussion about the readings. Please prepare for, attend, and participate meaningfully in class. “Meaningful” participation comes in a number of forms: asking questions to clarify course topics, answering questions that are posed in class, drawing connections between course topics and current events, and participating respectfully in class discussions. In other words, good participation is simply being a good member of our class community. Everyone’s experience in this course is enhanced by regular attendance and active participation; conversely, everyone’s experience suffers if individuals do not participate. Remember that a sincere question often adds as much (if not more) to our understanding of the course material as an explanation of the week’s readings. Don’t be afraid to speak up!
GRADING SCALE. The course will follow a standard grading scale:

A: Achievement outstanding relative to the basic course requirements
   A  93 or higher
   A- 90-92

B: Achievement significantly above the basic course requirements
   B+ 87-89
   B  83-86
   B- 80-82

C: Achievement meeting the basic course requirements
   C+ 77-79
   C  74-76
   C- 70-72

D: Achievement worthy of credit but below the basic course requirements
   D+ 67-69
   D  63-66
   D- 60-62
   F  Below 60

ADDITIONAL GRADING POLICIES:
1. I will not consider grade complaints if more than one week has passed after the assignment has been returned to you. Before I review your grade, you must first:
   • Wait 24 hours from when I return the assignment.
   • Schedule a time to meet with me to discuss your grade.
   • Submit a formal appeal in writing (email is sufficient—but be clear that it is the appeal in the subject heading) that clearly identifies content in the assignment and the reasons why you think your grade should be changed. These appeals should refer to specific things in the assignment, and not vague reasons like “I worked really hard.” The second grade, whether higher or lower, will become your grade on the assignment.

2. Late assignments will not be accepted unless official documentation is provided. Your grade will be lowered 10 percentage points for each day it is late. That is if the assignment is due on Monday at 1:50 p.m. and you turn it in sometime between 1:50 p.m. and Tuesday 1:50 p.m., the highest grade you can achieve is 90/100. This comes into play with the new grading policy such that if the assignment is late multiple days, the assignment may not be counted as completed and satisfactory.
   • The only acceptable (not penalized) excuses for not completing an assignment on time are family emergencies or illnesses. However, in these cases, I will arrange to give you extra time only if you communicate with me before the assignment is due and/or you provide documentation of the circumstance.

VI. Notes
You are expected to read the entire syllabus at the beginning of the term. While you are encouraged to print out a hardcopy to read and reference through the term, you will also want to have an electronic version to access external websites and resources. Depending on class dynamics or campus emergency, the information on this syllabus may be modified by the instructor. Students will be notified promptly of any changes via Announcements on the course Moodle page.
VII. Academic Honesty
In writing course papers, students must document all passages, paraphrases and/or ideas that are borrowed from any source, and direct quotations must be placed within quotation marks. Similarly, papers must represent research conducted for the course in which they are assigned and no other; it is not appropriate to submit a paper that has already been or will be submitted to another course. Finally, papers must be the product of students' own work. Papers written by anyone other than the student, including those purchased from commercial research services, are unacceptable.

All work is expected to be your own. Cheating, plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without properly citing them), and all forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated and will be strictly handled according to university policy. If you are uncertain, cite your sources! A discussion of plagiarism may be found at: https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/doc/integrity/.

VIII. Electronics in Class
You are responsible for taking notes in class, whether by computer or by pen and paper. Occasionally, we may use laptops (or mobile devices) in class to access the Internet for in-class activities. However, I expect you to be responsible in your use of electronic equipment if you use a laptop in class: please avoid visiting social networking sites, or browsing the internet on sites unrelated to the course. This can be distracting to your colleagues around you. I also recommend you read the discussion (including comments) in “The Distracted Classroom” from The Chronicle of Higher Education posted on Moodle to think about pros and cons of using computers in a classroom setting. Individuals who abuse this privilege will find their participation grade reduced and/or will be asked to move to the last row. Also, please turn off or silence phones during class.
IX. Course Schedule

Below, you’ll find a list of all readings and weekly topics we will discuss. In the event that deviations from this schedule are necessary, they will be posted to Moodle under Announcements.

Readings should be completed BEFORE the lecture. Please bring the day’s readings to class.

**WEEK 1 – INTRODUCTION, HISTORICAL CONTEXT, AND DEFINITIONS**

03/29 INTRODUCTION AND SYLLABUS REVIEW

03/31 HISTORICAL CONTEXT, AND DEFINITIONS


Uscinski & Parent (Chapters 1 and 2)


**CASE STUDIES/EXAMPLES/FUN**


Lytvynenko, Jane. 2017. “If You Get 41/55 On This Quiz, Fake News Didn’t Fool You This Year,” *Buzzfeed*,


“Quiz: How well can you tell factual from opinion statements?” Pew Research Center, [https://www.pewresearch.org/quiz/news-statements-quiz/](https://www.pewresearch.org/quiz/news-statements-quiz/)

***DUE SUNDAY (04/03): BRIEF CLASS SURVEY FOR PAPER #1 ***

**WEEK 2 – PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS (DON’T PANIC… MOST ARE SHORT!)**

04/04 PART I

Uscinski & Parent (Chapters 3 and 4)


**PART II**


04/07 NO CLASS – MPSA CONFERENCE (STILL READ PLEASE!)

*** DUE FRIDAY (04/08): PAPER #1, PART I ***

PART III


SUPPLEMENTAL READING


WEEK 3 – POLITICAL SCIENCE EXPLANATIONS (AGAIN DON’T PANIC… MOST ARE SHORT!)

04/12 PART I


04/14 PART II

Uscinski & Parent (Chapters 5 and 6)


CASE STUDIES/EXAMPLES

SUPPLEMENTAL READING


WEEK 4 – THE POLITICS OF SCIENCE
04/19 PART I – CLIMATE CHANGE


04/21 *** DUE THURSDAY: PAPER #1, PART II ***
PART II – HEALTH (VACCINES AND HEALTH BEHAVIORS)


**CASE STUDIES/EXAMPLES**

How to Avoid Misinformation About COVID-19


**SUPPLEMENTAL READING**


**WEEK 5 – MISINFORMATION, FACTS AND FAKE NEWS**

04/26 PART I


04/28 *** DUE THURSDAY: PAPER #2 ***

PART II

**Watch via Netflix and Read Debunking “What the Health”, Vox**


SUPPLEMENTAL READING


"How to Fix Fake News" *(The New York Times)*


Debunking Handbook:

https://www.climatechangecommunication.org/debunking-handbook-2020/


Guess, Andrew, Dominique Lockett, Benjamin Lyons, Jacob M. Montgomery, Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. 2020. “Fake news’ may have limited effects beyond increasing beliefs in false claims.” Harvard Misinformation Review. https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/fake-news-limited-effects-on-political-participation/

OR


CASE STUDIES/EXAMPLES


SUPPLEMENTAL READING


WEEK 7 – CTs and Misinfo: Is the Political Right More Susceptible?

05/10  MOST LIKELY


MAYBE


05/12 MAYBE (CONT’D)


PROBABLY NOT


CASE STUDIES/EXAMPLES


SUPPLEMENTAL READING


WEEK 8 – RUMORS
05/17 PART I


05/19 PART II *** DUE THURSDAY 05/19: PAPER #3 ***


CASE STUDIES/EXAMPLES


WEEK 9 – IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY
05/24 PERCEPTIONS OF VOTER FRAUD
Uscinski and Parent (Chapter 7)


SUPPLEMENTAL READING


05/26 CONSEQUENCES FOR DEMOCRACY


CASE STUDIES/EXAMPLES


**WEEK 10 – WRAP-UP WEEK**

05/31  WRAP-UP

06/02  Reading Days  (06/02-06/03)

**WEEK 11 – FINALS WEEK**

06/06  ***DUE: FINAL PAPER (UPLOADED TO MOODLE BY NOON)***
X. Additional Carleton Policies and Student Support

COURSE MATERIALS ASSISTANCE
I recognize the potential financial burden of additional course fees, supply requirements, and travel costs. If you are in need of assistance to cover course expenses, please speak with me by the end of the second week of classes.

INCLUSION
I strive to create an inclusive and respectful classroom that values diversity. Our individual differences enrich and enhance our understanding of one another and of the world around us. This class welcomes the perspectives of all ethnicities, genders, religions, ages, sexual orientations, disabilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, regions, and nationalities.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES - HELPDESK
The ITS helpdesk is a centralized support center for all students, staff and faculty on campus. For students, we support their personally-owned devices including a drop-off repair service for software and some minor hardware issues. The helpdesk also supports and maintains 13 public computer labs and their associated printers across campus. To contact the ITS helpdesk, go to: https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/its/services/helpdesk/ or you can call, email, or contact the helpdesk directly by phone at 507-222-5999 (x5999 from on campus). Phone is best for time-sensitive requests. You can also email helpdesk@carleton.edu (any email sent here automatically opens a support ticket) or contact the Web Help Desk: https://helpdesk.carleton.edu/.

QUANTITATIVE SKILLS & REASONING
The Quantitative Resource Center (QRC) offers remote and in-person help for students working with numbers in their non-Math/Stats classes. Chat, drop in, or make an appointment with a trained peer tutor for help with: graphs, charts, and writing with numbers; Excel, R, and statistical analysis; and math up through Pre-Calculus.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
Carleton College is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Office of Accessibility Resources (Henry House, 107 Union Street) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations. If you have, or think you may have, a disability (e.g., mental health, attentional, learning, autism spectrum disorders, chronic health, traumatic brain injury and concussions, vision, hearing, mobility, or speech impairments), please contact OAR@carleton.edu or call Sam Thayer (*10), Director of the Office of Accessibility Resources (x4464), to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES: TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS
The Assistive Technologies program brings together academic and technological resources to complement student classroom and computing needs, particularly in support of students with physical or learning disabilities. Accessibility features include text-to-speech (Kurzweil), speech-to-text (Dragon) software, and audio recording Smartpens. If you would like to know more, contact aztechs@carleton.edu or visit go.carleton.edu/aztech.
LEARNING STRATEGIES AND TIME MANAGEMENT
Steve Schauz, Academic Skills Coach, is eager to help you develop learning strategies that work in the Carleton context. His goals are to heighten your awareness of your personal strengths and to offer different ways you can approach your academic work so you’re more efficient and effective. For details and resources: Learning Strategies & Time Management. If you prefer to learn these skills and strategies on your own, visit "Helpful DIY Resources."

LIBRARY RESOURCES
Your librarian for this course and for Political Science is Sean Leahy. You may also email reference@carleton.edu. Librarians are excellent sources of assistance with your research in this class. Library staff can help you find and evaluate articles, books, websites, statistics, data, government documents, and more. You can make an appointment with a librarian, get help via chat 24/7 from any page on the library’s website, email, or call. The Library building has lots of great study spaces, and we’d love for you to visit! For more information and our hours, visit the Gould Library website at carleton.edu/library.

WRITING SUPPORT
The Writing Center a space with peer writing consultants who can work with you during any stage of the writing process (brainstorming to final proofreading). Hours and more information can be found on the writing center website. You can reserve specific times for conferences by using their online appointment system.

TERM-LONG PROGRAM FOR MULTILINGUAL WRITERS
If English is not your first language and you believe you might benefit from working regularly with a writing consultant this term, email Melanie Cashin, Multilingual Writing Coordinator, at mcashin@carleton.edu. She can arrange once- or twice-a-week meetings between you and a specific writing consultant throughout the term.

STUDENT WELL-BEING
Your health and well-being should always be your first priority. At Carleton, we have a wide-array of health and wellness resources to support students. It is important to recognize stressors you may be facing, which can be personal, emotional, physical, financial, mental, or academic. Sleep, exercise, and connecting with others can be strategies to help you flourish at Carleton. For more information, check out Student Health and Counseling (SHAC) or the Office of Health Promotion.

TITLE IX
Carleton is committed to fostering an environment free of sexual misconduct. Please be aware all Carleton faculty and staff members, with the exception of Chaplains and SHAC staff, are “responsible employees.” Responsible employees are required to share any information they have regarding incidents of sexual misconduct with the Title IX Coordinator. Carleton’s goal is to ensure campus community members are aware of all the options available and have access to the resources they need. If you have questions, please contact Laura Riehle-Merrill, Carleton’s Title IX Coordinator, or visit the Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response website: https://www.carleton.edu/sexual-misconduct/.