

NMC 341: Media Spin and Deception Detection Ecampus Version

Fall term 2020

3 credit Ecampus class

Instructor: Finn J.D. John

Office: 30-J Snell Hall

Office hours: Group meeting: 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesdays. Coffee and cookies served. Feel free to bring your lunch. Individual meetings: By appointment.

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This class combines roughly 90 hours of lecture, reading and essay writing for 3 credits.

Course Description:

This course examines common ways media is used to deceive, and how media scholars and creators can avoid falling prey to spinners, platformed prevaricators, and purveyors of "fake news" using knowledge of production techniques, logic, and other skills.

Learning objectives:

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Identify media inputs that are at risk of carrying deceptive messaging;
- Recognize fact patterns that characterize deceptive media messaging;
- Use knowledge of production techniques to confirm or falsify deceptive media messaging;
- Estimate the likelihood of deception or deceptive intent in a media input;
- Recognize the symptoms of various types of deceptive media;
- Identify the major psychological, sociological, and financial sources and motivations of media deception.

Grading:

- **10%: Low-stakes exercises:** In each weekly module there will be one or two exercises designed to flex your detection muscles.

- **40%: Module quizzes:** Eight of them, worth 5 percent each.
- **30%: Final essay:** 30 percent. In this project, you will find a major work of nonfiction media — a book, a documentary film or a magazine article of at least 9,000 words — that you suspect is deceitful, or that many people have challenged as deceitful (but which you think is legit) and release your analysis and findings in a five- to eight-page paper, due during Finals Week.
- **20%: Discussion board participation:** 20 percent. Evaluated based on thoughtful and useful questions, attendance, and information sharing on the discussion board.
Warning: If you don't participate on the discussion board, you won't get any of these points.

Grading scale:

- Percentage-score performance in this class is mapped to letter grades according to the following formula:

	A:	92.5%-100%	A-:	90.0%-92.4%	
B+:	88.5%-89.9%	B:	82.5%-88.4%	B-:	80.0%-82.4%
C+:	78.5%-79.9%	C:	72.5%-78.4%	C-:	70.0%-72.4%
D+:	68.5%-69.9%	D:	62.5%-68.4%	D-:	60.0%-62.4%
F:	0%-59.9%				

Prerequisites:

None.

Required books:

- Callahan, David. *The Cheating Culture*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004 (also available on audio).
- Huff, Darrell. *How to Lie with Statistics*. New York: Norton, 1954.
- Holiday, Ryan. *Trust Me, I'm Lying: Confessions of a Media Manipulator*. New York: Penguin, 2013
- Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, 2011.
- Frankfurt, Harry. *On Bullshit*. Princeton: PU Press, 2005 (only buy this one if you want it as a souvenir; otherwise, you can get full text via OneSearch)

Miscellaneous:

Late assignments and midterm make-ups are accepted only by special arrangement. Most of the time (almost always), I allow assignments to be completed late, subject to the standard

penalty, **if a request is made before the deadline**. The standard late penalty for graded work (that is, the midterm, final and essay) is 10% per 24-hour block of time. In most circumstances, I apply a grace period of several hours, but again, only if you contact me before the deadline comes.

Accessibility:

Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities: Accommodations for students with disabilities are determined and approved by Disability Access Services (DAS). If you, as a student, believe you are eligible for accommodations but have not obtained approval please contact DAS immediately at 541-737-4098 or at <http://ds.oregonstate.edu>. DAS notifies students and faculty members of approved academic accommodations and coordinates implementation of those accommodations. While not required, students and faculty members are encouraged to discuss details of the implementation of individual accommodations.

Diversity:

The School of Arts and Communication strives to create an affirming climate for all students including underrepresented and marginalized individuals and groups. Diversity encompasses differences in age, color, ethnicity, national origin, gender, physical or mental ability, religion, socioeconomic background, veteran status, sexual orientation, and marginalized groups. We believe diversity is the synergy, connection, acceptance, and mutual learning fostered by the interaction of different human characteristics.

Religious holidays:

Oregon State University strives to respect all religious practices. If you have religious holidays that are in conflict with any of the requirements of this class, please see me immediately so that we can make alternative arrangements.

Expectations for Student Conduct:

For details of expectations for student conduct in this and other classes, including official policies when cheating is suspected, please see <https://beav.es/codeofconduct> .

Reach Out for Success:

University students encounter setbacks from time to time. If you encounter difficulties and need assistance, it's important to reach out. Consider discussing the situation with an instructor or academic advisor. Learn about resources that assist with wellness and academic success at oregonstate.edu/ReachOut. If you are in immediate crisis, please contact the Crisis Text Line by texting OREGON to 741-741 or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Course schedule of topics:

- Week 1: Harry Frankfurt and the Ten Red Flags.
- Week 2: How to Lie with Statistics.
- Week 3: Propaganda and fake news.
- Week 4: Media Richness Theory, Trust Markets, Logical Fallacies.
- Week 5: Ryan Holiday, "Trading Up the Chain."
- Week 6: Cheating Culture, the Bad Apple Fallacy, Signalling Theory
- Week 7: Visual deception, Groupthink
- Week 8: Heuristics manipulation, Information Cascades
- Week 9: Peer-review manipulation, academic research. Second midterm.
- Week 10: Laboratory