

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
CCJS498P: Selected Topics in Criminology and Criminal Justice
Truth and Justice in the Disinformation Era

Instructor:

Dr. Steve Sin

Assistant Research Scientist & Director, Unconventional Weapons and Technologies Division
National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism
University of Maryland

Course Meeting Times and Location:

Thursday, 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM (Noon)
Shady Grove Campus Building 4, Room 4335

Office Hours:

Fridays 1:00 – 3:00 PM via Zoom (Link listed in ELMS)

or

By appointment

sinss@umd.edu

301-405-6656

Course Meeting Time and Location:

This course will meet from September 2 to December 9, 2021, on the following Schedule:

Class: Thursday, 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM (Noon)

Location: Shady Grove Campus Building 4; Room 4335

Course Description: The spread of disinformation, deep fakes, and other types of misinformation (all a component of influence operation) have serious implications for homeland and national security. In this course, we will explore the psychological and social factors that make us susceptible to propaganda, disinformation, fake news, and conspiracy theories. We will discuss the power of false narratives in shaping what we think, how we feel, and what we do. Armed with this framework, students will explore the role of social media in legitimizing hate groups (e.g., Holocaust denial) and facilitating foreign information operations (e.g., Russian election interference and Iranian Impersonator Operations). Finally, we will examine efforts by Facebook, Twitter, and other media outlets to counter the spread of misinformation, and discuss the effectiveness of current strategies (e.g., fact-checking, improving media literacy, examining source credibility). A large component of this class will be on developing expertise at spotting, diagnosing, and responding to different types of misinformation.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, student will have developed the ability to:

- Demonstrate a broad understanding of effects influence operations have on us as individuals and as a society;
- Demonstrate basic ability to spot, diagnose, and respond to different types of influence operation methods being employed.
- Identify different influence operations methods being employed;
- Critically evaluate how individuals and entities are utilizing available technologies to initiate and propagate influence operations;
- Critically evaluate current policies implemented by the private and public sectors to combat nefarious influence operations;
- Critically evaluate the impact of mis- and disinformation on the American justice system; and,
- Design an influence operations awareness information/education material for the general public to increase understanding of the American justice system and the implications of mis- and disinformation on the justice system.

Classroom Content: Topics related to influence operations such as disinformation and misinformation can be emotionally difficult subjects to study. As we explore evolution, use, and consequences of influence operations, we may read, view, and discuss topics that are violent, divisive, and sometimes graphic in nature. While these topics can cause emotional distress, it is essential that we provide real-world examples to understand the implications of the concepts we will be discussing. Please communicate with me if the content of any course material interferes with your ability to complete any assignment or participate in class fully.

Course Design

This course employs design thinking pedagogical methodology. Group work is fundamental to courses employing the design thinking methodology, and most of the class time during the semester will be spent working in groups on the assignments and presenting group's findings to the rest of the classmates – called design challenges – rather than listening to lectures. There will be, of course, some lectures and class discussions to go over important concepts, but these will not be the central part of the semester. In order for the students, as individuals and as teams, to be successful in this class, everyone must pull his/her own weight by being engaged, doing all of the assigned readings, and doing their part on the design challenges. Otherwise, you will not be successful in this course.

Grading and Assignments

This course employs design thinking pedagogical methodology; therefore, the final grade for the course will be determined based on three (3) topical and one (1) semester-long design challenges. Group work is fundamental to courses employing the design thinking methodology; therefore, the class will be divided into several design challenge teams throughout the semester.

Course Readings. This course does not have a set textbook. All reading material for this course can be found on the course's ELMS page in the "Readings" folder (there are 2 exceptions listed on the syllabus. For these readings, links to the materials are provided on the syllabus). All reading material begins with a two-digit numeric code that corresponds to the topic area (e.g. 01 = first topic being covered in the course).

The readings are assigned on topic basis; therefore, students must read them while the topic is being discussed. In order for a student to be successful and contribute to the design challenges, however, the readings should be done towards the beginning of each topic area rather than towards the end.

Semester-Long Design Challenge Teams. The class will be assigned to Semester-Long Design Challenge teams consisting of 3 or 4 students per team. The student team assignment can be found on ELMS course site under "People." These groups will be the semester-long design challenge groups and be "permanent" throughout the semester.

At the end of the semester, each team will present its design challenge product to the class (and potentially invited external guests). For this presentation, each team will have 20 minutes to present, followed by 10 minutes of question and answer period from the audience.

The teams will present their designs on Thursday, December 2, and if needed, on Thursday, December 9. All design presentation materials are due on Wednesday, December 1, at 11:59 PM for all teams.

The **semester-long design challenge** is worth **50%** of the final course grade.

Topical Design Challenge Teams. For each topic being covered in the course, the students will be assigned to topical design challenge teams consisting of 3 or 4 students per team. These team assignments can be found on ELMS course site under "People." These teams are

“temporary” in nature, only persisting for the duration of each topic.

Topical design challenges are due on following dates:

Topical Design Challenge 1: Wednesday, October 6, at 11:59 PM

Topical Design Challenge 2: Wednesday, October 27, at 11:59 PM

Topical Design Challenge 3: Wednesday, November 17, at 11:59 PM

On the presentation days, all teams will present their design challenge products to the class. For these presentations, each team will have 5 minutes to present, followed by 5 minutes of question and answer period from the audience.

Each topical design challenge is worth **10%** of the final course grade, making the topical design challenges, **all together**, worth **30%** of the final course grade.

Design Challenge Grading Procedure. All design challenge presentation will be graded by both the instructor and the team members who worked on the design challenge. The instructor’s grading will be based on the content and innovativeness of the presentation. The team members’ grading will be an assessment of teamwork and contribution of each of the team members. Each team member will submit an assessment of teamwork and contribution of all other team members on his/her team and the assessments will be averaged to arrive at the team member assessment portion of the grade. The instructor’s grade will account for 60% of the project grade while the team assessment will account for the remaining 40% of the project grade.

Class Attendance. As the success of this course as well as the success of each student’s teammates are heavily dependent on teamwork, class attendance is extremely important; therefore, class attendance will account for **20%** of the final course grade. Unless there is an extenuating circumstance, all students are allowed 1 unexcused and 1 excused absence. Thereafter, each absence will result in reduction of 1/3 letter grade (e.g. A+ will become A – 100 will become 97). If a student has an illness and/or extenuating circumstance and has to miss multiple number of classes, the student must consult with the instructor as quickly as feasible to arrange for an alternative evaluating strategy or consider other options (e.g. withdrawal from the course in consultation with the academic advisor, receiving an incomplete, etc.)

Numerical Grade to Letter Grade Conversion. For your final course grade, numerical scores correspond to letter grades as follows:

A+	98-100	C +	78-79
A	93-97	C	73-77
A -	90-92	C -	70-72
B +	88-89	D +	68-69
B	83-87	D	63-67
B -	80-82	D -	60-62
F	0-59		

Class Policies:

University of Maryland Mask Mandate. President Pines provided clear expectations to the University about the wearing of masks for unvaccinated students. Face coverings over the nose and mouth are required while you are indoors at all times. There are no exceptions. Students not wearing a mask will be given a warning and asked to wear one or will be asked to leave the classroom immediately. Students who have additional issues with the mask expectation after a first warning will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for failure to comply with a directive of University officials.

Classroom Etiquette. Students should be respectful of their fellow peers and the instructor, and at all times feel comfortable and safe in the classroom environment. A diverse exchange of ideas is an integral part of the learning process and is essential to intellectual growth. The classroom should be a space where diverse opinions are exchanged in a non-threatening and respectful manner. No student should ever be made to feel marginalized or distressed in the classroom for any reason. If at any time a student feels uncomfortable or off ended with something that is said or presented in the classroom, please notify the professor immediately.

Student Conduct and Academic Integrity. Students are expected to adhere to the University of Maryland’s Code of Student Conduct and to treat each other with respect. Disruptive behavior of any kind will not be tolerated. Students who are unable to demonstrate civility with one another or with the instructor or teaching assistants, will be subject to referral to the Office of Student Conduct or to the Campus Police. The Code of Student Conduct is available online:

<http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/docs/v100b.pdf>.

Students are also expected to adhere to the University of Maryland’s Code of Academic Integrity and to refrain from acts of academic dishonesty.

Any student committing an apparent act of academic dishonesty will be subject to referral to the Student Honor Council. The Code of Academic Integrity is available online: <http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/docs/III-100A.pdf>.

Attendance. In addition to attendance related grades as explained above, below is the policy for this class if a student must miss a class due to an illness or extenuating circumstances:

- For every medically necessary absence from class, a reasonable effort should be made to notify the instructor in advance of the class.
- If a student is absent more than one week, the student should supply documentation signed by a health care professional.
- If an extenuating circumstances exist that requires the student to miss more than 1 class, the student must notify the instructor as quickly as feasible of the situation and actively seek to resolve the situation.

Any student submitting falsified documentation of illness will be referred to the Student Honor Council.

Class Cancellation. This course follows the university policies on closures. If the University is closed, class will not convene. Make-up classes will be scheduled, if feasible, through consensus within the students in the course. If students are not able to attend a make-up class meeting due to other class commitments, they will be allowed to complete an assignment in order to earn the participation points, and gain exposure to the course materials.

If there are scheduling changes, students will be notified at least 48- hours in advance and accommodations will be made.

COVID-19 Contingency Plan: In the event the University of Maryland changes its current in-person class guidance, or if the class must be quarantined due to potential exposure/positive COVID-19 test results, we will move the class to a fully online synchronous environment as quickly as feasible (and within the limits of everyone's health conditions). The class already has its own Zoom link to transition to the online environment, and the Zoom link will be provided to the class through ELMS and course announcement emails.

Religious Observances. The University System of Maryland policy on religious observances provides that students should not be penalized because of observances of their religious beliefs; students shall be given an opportunity, whenever feasible, to make up within a reasonable time any academic assignment that is missed due to individual participation in religious observances. Students must submit a written request to make up a

class meeting, assignment, or exam date for the purposes of religious observance by the end of the second week of classes. Please note that accommodations will not be made for travel to and from the site of religious observances. Additional information on religious observance policy is available online: <http://www.engl-pw.umd.edu/PoliciesandProcedures/GeneralPolicies/ReligiousObservances.htm>.

Disability Support Services. Any student requesting special accommodations must be registered with the University of Maryland's Disability Support Service (DSS) Office and must provide a DSS Accommodation Form updated for the current semester by the end of the second week of classes.

Students who fail to meet this deadline will not receive special accommodations. Additional information on disability support services is available online: <http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS>.

USG's Division of Student and Academic Services. All students enrolled in a course offered at the Universities at Shady Grove (USG) have the unique opportunity to receive support from both their home institution and the USG campus. The Division of Student & Academic Services (SAS) is committed to ensuring the success of all students at USG by providing services in the areas of personal, social, academic, and professional support. These services are currently being delivered in a hybrid format to offer students the flexibility of accessing services either in-person or virtually. Be sure to subscribe to [USG Weekly](#) to receive a weekly email update about upcoming events!

SAS services include:

- [Center for Counseling and Consultation](#): individual, couples, and group counseling; personal and career counseling; mindfulness and psychological wellness workshops; and other personal support.
- [Macklin Center for Academic Success](#): help with writing, coaching on study strategies and time management; understanding statistics and research methods; disability support services; and other peer support and leadership opportunities.
- [Career and Internship Services Center](#): career exploration activities, Career Connector jobs database, internships and experiential learning opportunities, Gallup Strengths assessments and coaching, networking with the regional business community, employer information sessions and recruiting events, career readiness resources and support.
- [Center for Student Engagement and Financial Resources](#): financial resources; USG scholarships; student life and organizations; student IDs; leadership programming, notary services; Grover Essentials (campus pantry); and home campus and community resource referrals.

USG's Priddy Library. USG's Priddy Library facilitates and sustains academic success, innovation, workforce readiness, and the creation, dissemination and discovery of information. Students have access to personalized resources and services at USG's Library, as well as access to resources from their home institution library.

Priddy Library services include:

- One-on-one consultations (email or video-conference). We can help students search databases or the internet to find relevant articles, data, and information needed for class assignments. We can also assist with preparing data visualizations and research presentations.
- Chat with library staff, from Monday - Friday.
- Workshops providing students with skills they can use now or in their future careers. Can't make it - no worries! Submit this on-demand workshop form.
- Course Reserves. Access to required print materials. Scan chapters/sections you need using library scanners.
- Curbside Pickup of library materials from Priddy Library, and other MD academic libraries!
- BSE (Building IV), Room 3118 – help near your office, classes or labs. Stop by the Library's office during our consultation hours: Tuesday, 12-2pm and Thursday 1.30-2.30pm.

Information about other USG campus resources, including the Green Grove Café and Grover Café, Campus Rec Center, Online Bookstore, Copy Center and Office of Information Technology can be found at <https://shadygrove.umd.edu/campus-resources>. Updates related to USG campus operations or health protocols due to COVID-19 will be posted on the USG Onward web page.

Course Schedule:

Date	Topic	Readings	Class Activities / Assignment(s) Due
September 2	Introduction	N/A	Introduction; Assign Semester-Long Design Challenge Teams; Assign Topic Design Challenge 1 Teams
September 9	Methods of Influence Operations	Information Operations (Guevin 2004) Information Operations in Afghanistan from 2001-2012 (Stephenson 2015) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read pp.14-15 (Section 1.7) • Read Chapter 3 (pp. 73 – 103) 	Lecture; Discussion; Work on Topic Design Challenge 1
September 16		Weapons of Mass Distraction (Nemr and Gangware 2019) Journalism, Fake News, & Disinformation (UNESCO 2018) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Module 2: Thinking about 'Information Disorder' (pp. 43 – 54) 	Work on Topic Design Challenge 1
September 23	Effects of Influence Operations	Why are People Ignoring Expert Warnings (Bhanot 2020) The Disconcerting Potential of Online Disinformation (Zerback, Topfl, and Knopfl 2020) Scientific Communication in a Post-truth Society (Iyengar and Massey 2018)	Lecture; Discussion; Work on Topic Design Challenge 1
September 30		Disinformation as Political Communication (Freelon & Wells 2020) Beyond Misinformation (Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook 2017) The Distributed Influence of Misinformation (Seifert 2017)	Work on Topic Design Challenge 1
October 8		N/A	Topic Design Challenge 1 Presentations

Date	Topic	Readings	Class Activities / Assignment(s) Due
October 14	Technology and Influence Operations	Journalism, Fake News, & Disinformation (UNESCO 2018) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Module 3: News Industry Transformation (pp. 55 – 69) 	Lecture; Discussion; Work on Topic Design Challenge 2
October 21		Big Data's Disparate Impact (Barocas and Selbst 2016) Bots, Bias and Big Data (Raub 2018) Data Voids (Golebiewski & Boyd 2018)	Work on Topic Design Challenge 2
October 28		N/A	Topic Design Challenge 2 Presentations
November 4	Countering Influence Operations	Beyond Misinformation (Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook 2017) A Picture Paints a Thousand Lies (Hameleers, et. al. 2020) Disinformation and Misinformation Triangle (Rubin 2019) A Not-So-Brief Account of Current Information Ethics (Froehlich 2017) Facebook Says It's Removing More Hate Speech Than Ever Before. But There's a Catch (Perrigo 2019)	Lecture; Discussion; Work on Topic Design Challenge 3
November 11		https://time.com/5739688/facebook-k-hate-speech-languages/ Gogle's Dangerous Identity Crisis (Feldman 2017) https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/03/googles-dangerous-identity-crisis.html Journalism, Fake News, & Disinformation (UNESCO 2018) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Module 4: Combatting Disinformation and Misinformation (pp. 70 – 80) 	Work on Topic Design Challenge 3

Date	Topic	Readings	Class Activities / Assignment(s) Due
November 18	Countering Influence Operations	N/A	Topic Design Challenge 3 Presentations
December 2	Semester-Long Design Challenge Presentation	N/A	Semester-Long Design Challenge Presentation
December 9	Flex Day		