**Instructor:**
Dr. Steve Sin
Associate 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 3, Room 2225

**Office Hours:**
By appointment – Please make your appointment using my Office Hour Appointment link
(If hyperlink does not work, copy/paste this link into your browser:
https://calendly.com/steve_sin/30min)

Email: sinss@umd.edu
Phone: 301-405-6656

**Course Meeting Time and Location:**
This course will meet from August 31 to December 7, 2023, on the following Schedule:
      Class: Thursday, 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM (Noon)
      Location: Shady Grove Campus Building 3; Room 2225

**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.

**Grading and Assignments:**

*Mandatory Course Textbook:* There is one mandatory textbook for this course. The course will be using the following as the course textbook:

Bennett, W. Lance, and Steven Livingston, eds. *The Disinformation Age*. Cambridge University Press, 2021.

In this syllabus, this book will be referred to as "Bennett and Livingston" and associated chapters and/or page numbers.

*Additional Course Readings:* For some weeks, there will be additional readings outside of the textbook. Those reading materials will be uploaded to the "Readings" folder of the ELMS course space for you to access.

*Mid-term Exam:* Mid-term exam will be a "take-home" essay exam.

Mid-term Exam is due through ELMS on Thursday, October 12, 2023, no later than **12:00 PM** (noon). Students will be able to access the mid-term exam via ELMS on Thursday, October 5, 2023, at 2:00 PM.

**Mid-term exam** is worth **25%** of the final course grade.

*Final Exam:* Final exam will be a "take-home" essay exam, and it will be an accumulative exam (meaning it will cover material from the entire semester).

Final Exam is due through ELMS on Thursday, December 14, 2023, no later than **10:00 AM** as per the University of Maryland Fall 2023 Final Exam Schedule. Students will be able to access the final exam via ELMS on Thursday, December 7, 2023, at 2:00 PM.

**Final exam** is worth **35%** of the final course grade.

*Hypothesis Testing Research Paper:* All students will submit an original hypothesis testing research paper that addresses an aspect of impact mis-/dis-/mal-information has on the U.S. criminal justice system. The research paper will employ either a qualitative or a quantitative methodology to test a hypothesis that has been generated based on the student's research question. The body of the research paper will be approximately 4,000 (+/- 150) words in length.

Refer to the *Hypothesis Testing Research Paper Instructions* at the end of this syllabus for a more detailed explanation as well as the grading metrics for the assignment.

The **hypothesis testing research paper** is due through ELMS on: Wednesday, December 6, 2023, at 11:59 PM, and will account for **30%** of the final course grade.

*Class Attendance and Participation:* As the success of this course as well as the success of each student is class attendance and participation; therefore, class participation will account for **10%** 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 evaluation strategy.

*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:

*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:
o   For every medically necessary absence from class, a reasonable effort should be made to notify the instructor in advance of the class.
o   If a student is absent more than one week, the student should supply documentation signed by a health care professional.
o   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/GeneralPo- licies/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:

**Course Schedule:**

| Date | Topic | Readings | Class Activities / Assignment(s) Due |
|---|---|---|---|
| **August 31** | Introduction | None | Course Introduction |
| **September 7** | Disinformation in Political and Historical Context | Bennett and Livingston Chapter 1 | Lecture; Hypothesis Testing Research Paper Explanation |
| **September 14** | The Current Situation | Bennett and Livingston Chapter 2 | Lecture; Hypothesis Testing Research Paper Explanation |
| **September21** | | Bennett and Livingston Chapter 3 | Lecture; Hypothesis Testing Research Paper Explanation |
| **September 28** | Historical Roots of Disinformation | Bennett and Livingston Chapter 4 | Lecture |
| **October 5** | | Bennett and Livingston Chapter 5 | Lecture |
| **October 12** | | Mid-term Exam | Due: 12:00 PM (noon) |
| **October 19** | The Policy Problem | Bennett and Livingston Chapter 6 | Lecture |
| **October 26** | | Bennett and Livingston Chapter 7 | Lecture |
| **November 2** | | Bennett and Livingston Chapter 8 | Lecture |
| **November 9** | The Role of Public Broadcasting | Bennett and Livingston Chapter 9 | Lecture |
| **November 16** | | Bennett and Livingston Chapter 10 | Lecture |
| **November 23** | | Thanksgiving Break | |
| **November 30** | Conclusion | Bennett and Livingston | Lecture |

| Date | Topic | Readings | Class Activities / Assignment(s) Due |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Chapter 11 | |
| **December 7** | | Course Conclusion | Class After Action Discussion |
| **December 14** | | Final Exam | Due: 10:00 AM |

**Hypothesis Testing Research Paper Instructions**

*Basic Requirement:*

1. **Cover Page:** A cover page that contains at a minimum paper's title, student's name, and date of submission is required. At the bottom right-hand corner of the cover page, indicate the total number of words of the paper – both inclusive and body only word counts (Inclusive word count is the total word count of the entire document. Body only word count is the word count of only the body of the research paper.).
2. **Abstract:** A 250-word abstract of the paper is required on a separate page by itself (2nd page of the entire research paper package).
3. **Keywords:** Select five to six keywords that describe the paper. Place the keywords on the same page as the abstract three lines below the end of abstract text.
4. **Body:**
   a. **Margins:** 1-inch margins all around
   b. **Font:** Arial 10 or Times New Roman 12
   c. **Line Spacing:** 1.5 or 2.0
   d. **Paper Length:** 4,000 words (+/- 150 words)
   e. **Paper Style:** Choose one of the following:
   - APA Style: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/10/
   - Chicago Style: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/
   - MLA Style: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/
   f. **Citation:** In-text citation utilizing the same guidelines specified in the specific paper style you chose to use.
5. **References:** A reference page that lists all of the sources and materials the student consulted to conduct his/her research is required. Please ensure the reference pages are in the same style as the specific paper style you chose to use.
6. **Appendix:** Please attach all the quantitative data, tables, and graphs you used to conduct your research.

**NOTE:** The 4,000-word requirement for this assignment only considers the research paper body word count. Cover page, abstract, keywords, references, and appendix do not count toward the required word count requirement. They however do count toward the total word count that you will indicate on the cover page.

*Research Paper Topics/Questions:*

Students can choose any topic and research question that interest them as long as the topic and research question are relevant to the course.

Students will notify the instructor of their research question idea and receive approval to conduct research on that topic via email no later than Thursday, September 21, 2023, at 11:59 PM. If a student fails to get his/her topic and research question approved by the instructor, the resultant paper will not be graded.

### *Literature Review and Hypothesis:*

1. In order to develop a testable hypothesis, students must first conduct a literature review that is related to the research question being researched. As the students conduct the literature review, students will be able to develop a hypothesis that is testable to determine its validity in relation to the research question at hand.
2. When conducting a literature review, students must keep in mind that a literature review is NOT a list of what other authors have said on the topic. Rather, it is a well-composed argument that supports the student's central paper idea and justifies his/her hypothesis.
3. A well-written literature review should also be able to justify the relevance of the student's research paper.
4. A well-written hypothesis should be a clearly stated single if-then sentence accompanied with a short justification that summarizes the student's central argument.
5. This section of the paper should be approximately 800 – 1,000 words in length.

### *Methodology:*

1. Once the student conducts a literature review and develops a testable hypothesis, the student needs to decide how he/she will test the hypothesis. There are generally two methods to conduct this analysis – qualitative and quantitative methods – the student needs to choose one.
2. In this section, the student will explain the methodology he/she is choosing to employ in order to test the hypothesis. The student should also state why his/her chosen methodology is appropriate to test the hypothesis. Contained within the discussion of the appropriateness of the methodology, there should also be a short discussion of strengths and weaknesses of the chosen methodology.
3. Once the methodology has been discussed, the student should discuss his/her dependent and independent variables. In this discussion, the student should describe each variables that will be examined as well as a discussion of operationalization of each variable (how each variable will be measured).
4. This section also includes a description of the data/cases the student will be using to conduct his/her analysis because data and case selection is essential to conducting accurate analysis.
5. If the student chooses to employ one of the qualitative methods to conduct the analysis (test the hypothesis), then he/she needs to conduct a minimum of three case studies. In this case, the student must not only describe the three cases chosen for analysis, but also justify their selection. Ordinarily, this will be done as the student describes and operationalizes his/her variables.
6. If the student chooses to employ quantitative method to conduct the analysis, then he/she needs to have a minimum of 80 observations/cases in his/her dataset. Same requirements about description and justification apply for quantitative analysis as it did for the qualitative analysis as noted in 5e immediately above.
7. The key point of this section is to convey to the reader how the student plans to test his/her hypothesis as well as how the test(s) will be conducted and measured.
8. This section of the paper should be approximately 500 – 800 words in length.

*Completed Paper:*

1. This is where everything the student has done throughout the semester comes together. This is the full paper that contains introduction, literature review, hypothesis, methodology, analysis, conclusion, etc.
2. Again, qualitative papers will have a minimum of three (3) case studies and the quantitative papers will have a minimum of 80 observations/cases.
3. When completed, the paper's body will be between 4,000 words (this includes approximately 800 – 1,000 words written for the literature review and hypothesis as well as the 500 – 800 words written for methodology and variables).
4. The completed paper, fully assembled with all the components outlined in the *Basic Requirements* above is due by 11:59 PM on Wednesday, December 6, 2023, through ELMS.
5. The completed paper is worth 25% of the total course grade.
   6. Your grade for the completed paper will depend on the following:
   a. Do you explain your question?
   b. How well do you explain the existing research?
   c. Does your hypothesis make sense, and do you explain it well?
   d. How well do you describe your operationalization?
   e. Did you correctly perform your data analysis?
   f. Were your analysis and conclusions clearly explained?
   g. Did you include an appendix that presents your data?
   h. Is the paper coherent as a whole?

**NO EXTENSIONS** will be granted for the submission of the final paper unless the student can provide a valid medical excuse or furnish tangible evidence demonstrating exigent circumstances.

**Paper Grading Criteria**

| | The "A" Paper | The "B" Paper | The "C" Paper | The "D" Paper | The "F" Paper |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Thesis Development and Introductions of Theories** | Excels in responding to assignment. Interesting, demonstrates sophistication of thought. Central thesis is clearly communicated, worth developing, yet limited enough to be manageable. Paper recognizes some complexity of its thesis: may acknowledge its contradictions, qualifications, or limits and follow out their logical implications. Understands and critically evaluates the sources. | A solid paper, responding appropriately to assignment. Clearly states a thesis, but may have minor lapses in development. Begins to acknowledge the complexity of central idea and the possibility of other points of view. Shows careful reading of sources, but may not evaluate them critically. | Adequate but weaker and less effective, possibly responding less well to the assignment. Presents central idea in general terms, often depending on platitudes or cliches. Usually does not acknowledge other views. Shows basic comprehension of sources, perhaps with lapses in understanding. | Does not have a clear central idea or does not respond appropriately to the assignment. Thesis may be too vague or obvious to be developed effectively. Paper may misunderstand sources. | Does not respond to the assignment, lacks a thesis or central idea, and may negelect to use sources where necessary. |
| **Coherence** | Uses a logical structure appropriate to paper's subject, purpose, audience, and thesis. Transitional sentences often develop one idea from the previous one or identify their logical relations. It guides the reader through the chain of reasonging or progression of ideas. | Shows a logical progression of ideas and uses fairly sophisticated transitional devices; e.g. may move from least to more important idea, etc. Some logical links may be faulty, but each paragraph clearly relates to paper's central idea. | May list ideas or arrange them randomly rathern than using any evident logical structure. May use transitions, but they are likely to be sequential (first, second, third) rather than logic-based. While each paragraph may relate to central idea, logic is not always clear. Paragraphs have topic sentences but may be overly general, and arrangement of sentences within paragraphs may lack coherence. | May have random organization, lacking internal paragraph coherence and using few or inappropriate transitions. Paragraphs may lack topic sentences or main ideas, or may be too general or too specific to be effective. Paragraphs may not all relate to paper's thesis | No appreciable organization; lacks transitions and coherence. |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Analysis and Support** | Uses evidence appropriately and effectively, providing sufficient evidence and explanation to convince. | Begins to offer reasons to support the paper's points, perhaps using varied kinds of evidence. Begins to interpret the evidence and explain connections between evidence and main ideas. Examples bear some relevance | Often uses generalizations to support its points. May use examples, but they may be obvious or not relevant. Often depends on unsupported opinion or personal experience, or assumes that evidence speaks for itself and needs no application to the point being discussed. Often has lapses in logic. | Depends on cliches or overgenerations for support, or offers little evidence of any kind. May be personal narrative or summary rather than analysis. | Uses irrelevant details or lacks supporting evidence entirely. May be unduly brief. |
| **Style** | Chooses words for their precise meaning and uses an appropriate level of specificity. Sentences are varied, yet clearly structured and carefully focused, not long and rambling. | Generally uses words accurately and effectively, but may sometimes be too general. Sentences generally clear, well, structured, and focused, though some may be awkward or ineffective. | Uses relatively vague and general words, may use some inappropriate language. Sentence structure generally correct, but sentences may be wordy, unfocused, repetitive, or confusing. | May be too vague and abstract, or very personal and specific. Usually contains several awkward or ungrammatical sentences; sentence structure is simple or monotonous. | Usually contains many awkward sentences, misuses words, employs inappropriate language. |
| **Mechanics** | Almost entirely free of spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors. | May contain a few errors, which may annoy the reader but not impede understanding. | Usually contains several mechanical errors, which may temporarily confuse the reader but not impede the overall understanding. | Usually contains either many mechanical errors or a few important errors that block the reader's understanding and ability to see connections between thoughts. | Usually contains so many mechanical errors that it is impossible for the reader to follow the thinking from sentence to sentence. |

**Hypothesis Testing Research Paper Grading Rubric**
The following is the point breakdown for the Hypothesis Testing Research Paper.

| Criteria | Value | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **E** | **D** | **C** | **B** | **A** |
| **Paper Submitted – 0 Points  (-10 if not submitted on time)** | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Overall Coherence | 0 -1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Overall Mechanics and Citation (to include consistency of citation formatting)* | 0 - 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ***Note:** If you do not cite your sources (i.e. your paper contains no citations at all), you will receive an automatic 0 (zero) for the assignment.* | | | | | |
| Do you explain your question? | 0 - 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 - 10 |
| How well do you explain the existing research? | 0 - 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 - 10 |
| Does your hypothesis make sense and do you explain it well? | 0 - 6 | 7 - 8 | 9 - 10 | 11 - 12 | 13 - 15 |
| How well do you describe your operationalization of the variables? | 0 - 6 | 7 - 8 | 9 - 10 | 11 - 12 | 13 - 15 |
| Did you correctly perform your data analysis? | 0 - 11 | 12 - 13 | 14 - 15 | 16 - 17 | 18 - 20 |
| Were your analysis and conclusions clearly explained? | 0 - 6 | 7 - 8 | 9 - 10 | 11 - 12 | 13 - 15 |
| Did you include an appendix that presents your data? | 0 - 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | | | | | |
| *Subtotal* | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| *Total* | | | | | |