

**UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**  
**CCJS498P: Selected Topics in Criminology and Criminal Justice**  
**Truth and Justice in the Disinformation Era**  
**Fall 2025**

**Instructor:**

Dr. Steve Sin

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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 3225

**Office Hours:**

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

Email: [sinss@umd.edu](mailto:sinss@umd.edu)

Phone: 301-405-6656

**Course Meeting Time and Location:**

This course will meet from September 4 to December 11, 2025, on the following Schedule:

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

Location: Shady Grove Campus Building 3; Room 3225

**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 no mandatory textbook for this course. All reading materials for this course are either available on ELMS or via hyperlink on this syllabus.

***Semester-Long Team Project:*** Students will be divided into groups of 4 (may be larger or smaller depending on the class size) to work on a semester-long team project.

The project is to design and be ready to implement a public-facing multimedia disinformation awareness campaign. Options include, but are not limited to:

- A series of short videos designed to be put on various media platforms capable of streaming (e.g., YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, etc)
- Infographic/meme set
- Interactive website
- Workshop curriculum for high school students

Deliverables for this project will be:

1. Project proposal (Team submission) – **Due Thursday, September 18 by 9:30 AM**
2. Midpoint status report (Team submission) – **Due Thursday, October 23, by 9:30 AM**
3. Final presentation (Team submission / presentation) – **Due Wednesday, December 10, by 11:59 PM**
4. Reflection paper (Individual submission) – **Due Wednesday, December 17, by 11:59 PM**

**Semester-Long Team Project** is worth **50%** of the final course grade.

***Weekly Skills Exercises:*** All students will participate in skills exercises during the class period for most of the week throughout the semester. Each student will complete a small assignment associated with each skills exercise.

**Weekly Skills Exercises** will account for **30%** of the final course grade.

***Class Participation and engagement:*** As the success of this course as well as the success of each student is class participation and engagement; therefore, class participation 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 evaluation strategy – yes, this means just by emailing me that you had issue getting to class does not automatically excuse you from class or missed assignments.

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***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

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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](http://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.

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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:**

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**Course Schedule:**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Class Activities / Assignment(s) Due</b>
<b>September 4</b>	Introduction	<a href="#"><u>"Fake News. It's Complicated A Short Guide to the History of "Fake News" and Disinformation POV: America's Greatest National Security Threat</u></a>	Overview, team assignments, disinformation scavenger hunt
<b>September 11</b>	How Influence Works	<a href="#"><u>Why We Fall for Fake News: Hijacked Thinking of Laziness?</u></a> Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds (On ELMS) <a href="#"><u>No Simple Answer for Why People Believe in Conspiracy</u></a>	Psychological manipulation, cognitive bias exercise
<b>September 18</b>	Digital Tools of Influence	<a href="#"><u>The Grim Conclusions of the Largest-Ever Study of Fake News</u></a> <a href="#"><u>A Russian Bot Farm Used AI to Lie to Americans. What Now?</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Science &amp; Tech Spotlight: Combating Deepfakes</u></a>	Deepfakes, bots, algorithms; tech demonstration  <a href="#"><u>Project proposal Due (Team submission) – Due Thursday, September 18 by 9:30 AM</u></a>
<b>September 25</b>	Narratives & Memes	<a href="#"><u>Weaponized Narrative is the New Battlespace</u></a> <a href="#"><u>How Memes are Becoming the New Frontier of Information Warfare</u></a> <a href="#"><u>A Deadly Trifecta: Disinformation Networks, AI Memetic Warfare, and Deepfakes</u></a>	Analyzing persuasive narratives & meme warfare
<b>October 2</b>	Influence and Identity	<a href="#"><u>Escape the Echo Chamber</u></a> The Misinformation Campaign Was Distinctly One-Sided (On ELMS)	Hate speech, identity politics, echo chambers



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		Black Voters are being targeted in Disinformation Campaigns (On ELMS)	
October 9	Disinformation in Criminal Justice	<a href="#">As I See It: Disinformation &amp; the Justice System</a> <a href="#">The Real Cost of “Nad News”: How Misinformation is Undermining Youth Justice Policy in Baltimore</a> <a href="#">The Battle Against Misinformation and Disinformation Campaigns: Is Your Police Department Prepared?</a>	Case studies
October 16	Fact-Checking and Verification Tools	<a href="#">The Global Effectiveness of Fact-Checking: Evidence from Simultaneous Experiments in Four Countries</a> <a href="#">The Debunking Handbook 2020</a> <a href="#">Does Fact-Checking Work? What the Science Says</a>	OSINT, Google Fact Check Tools, InVID, etc.
October 23	Simulation: Red Team Influence Ops	<a href="#">JUST IN: Startup Creates Simulator for Info-Warfare Ops</a> <a href="#">On the Report of the Aspen Commission on Information Disorder</a> <a href="#">Fake News: A Roadmap</a>	Students conduct mock influence campaign  Midpoint status report Due (Team submission) – Due Thursday, October 23, by 9:30 AM
October 30	Simulation Debrief + Counter-Strategy Brainstorm	<a href="#">Countering Disinformation Effectively: An Evidence-Based Policy Guide</a> <a href="#">Aspen Institute Commission on Information Disorder Final</a>	Feedback and pivot

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Date	Topic	Readings	Class Activities / Assignment(s) Due
		<a href="#">Report – Read Executive Summary &amp; Recommendations</a> <a href="#">Confronting Health Misinformation: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory</a>	
November 6	Public Policy & Platform Regulation	<a href="#">United States Code 47, Section 230 Explained</a> <a href="#">A Guide to the Digital Services Act, the EU’s New Law to Rein in Big Tech</a> Governing Online Speech: From “Poasts-as-Trumps” to Proportionality and Probability (On ELMS)	TikTok bans, Facebook governance, SEC rules
November 13	Ethics & Legal Issues	<a href="#">A Brief History of Disinformation and What to Do About It</a> The existential threat from cyber-enabled information warfare (On ELMS) <a href="#">Eugene Volokh Testimony to Senate Judiciary Committee</a>	First Amendment, privacy, platform responsibility
November 20	Workshop: Building a Public Awareness Campaign	None	Studio session
November 27	Thanksgiving Break		
December 4	Campaign Studio + Feedback Roundtables	None	Peer critiques of multimedia/public products
December 11	Final Presentations: Disinformation Awareness Campaigns	None	Deliver public projects + postmortems  <a href="#">Final presentation Due (Team submission /</a>

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Date	Topic	Readings	Class Activities / Assignment(s) Due
			presentation) – Due Wednesday, December 10, by 11:59 PM
<b>December 17</b>	Semester-Long Project Reflection paper (Individual submission) – Due Wednesday, December 17, by 11:59 PM		