8-2022

ILS 490: Diplomacy Lab: Strategies for Identifying Mis/Disinformation Course Syllabus (Fall 2022)

Bethany S. McGowan
Purdue University, bmcgowa@purdue.edu

Matthew Hannah
Purdue University, hannah8@purdue.edu

Course Information

HONR 399: Diplomacy Lab: Strategies for Identifying Mis/Disinformation
CRN: 25058
Meeting day(s) and time(s): Classes meet every **Tuesday/Thursday (1:30-2:45 pm)**.
Instructional Modality: Face-to-Face
Classroom: Honors College & Residence North 1143
Course credit hours: 3
Prerequisites: None

Instructor(s) Contact Information

Bethany McGowan
Office: WALC 3053H
Phone: 765-494-2917
Email: bmcgowa@purdue.edu
Office hours: Student consultations available upon request.

Matthew Hannah
Office: STEW 154
Phone: 765-494-4016
Email: hannah8@purdue.edu
Office Hours: Student consultations available upon request.

Emails are read from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily and will be responded to within 24 hours. Be flexible with these times before deadlines and exams.

Course Description

The Challenge
The Operations Center (Ops) is the Secretary's and the Department's communications and crisis management center. The organization's mission is to get the right information to the right people at the right time. Open 24/7/365, Ops monitors world events, prepares daily briefings for the Secretary and other Department principals, and facilitates communication between the and the rest of the world. Ops is also the Department's crisis management hub, collecting and disseminating information about breaking events, briefing principals and facilitating a whole of government response to a crisis, including the management of 24-hour task forces. It is critical that Ops personnel push timely and accurate information to Department principals to enable diplomacy and policy decisions at the nation-state level. Ops monitors open-source reporting, including social media as well as traditional news outlets, for breaking developments affecting U.S. foreign policy interests and objectives. In an age of proliferating campaigns of malicious misinformation and disinformation, often propagated by sophisticated state actors, Ops staff need to know how to differentiate between real breaking news and disinformation quickly and accurately. It is critical that only accurate information be forwarded to the Secretary and senior Department leadership and used as a basis for making crucial foreign policy and national security decisions. Additionally, the Secretary and senior staff would benefit from the identification of common disinformation narratives, particularly those disseminated by authoritarian rivals. This would help shape counter-disinformation campaigns and prevent the advancement of strategic competitors' foreign policy objectives through the unintentional spread of their disinformation narratives.

Some questions we will address include:
- What are the differences between misinformation and disinformation, and do these differences help to identify one or the other?
- What are the hallmarks of misinformation and disinformation?

- Do you have a proposed process for evaluating information found on open-source media?
- What current and potential future tools could be used to support this process?

State Contact: Innovation Facilitation Officer, US Department of State
Office: Operations Center (Ops)
Bureau: Secretary of State
About: https://www.state.gov/about-us-executive-secretariat/
Resources from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency: https://www.cisa.gov/mdm-resource-library

Our Mission
Mis/dis/malinformation and conspiracy theories about COVID-19 demonstrate how overwhelming quantities of changing information provide openings for malicious acts that reduce public trust and sow confusion. In this Spring 2022 research project, we will work to create a report that helps Ops identify misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation online and push authentic and reliable information to the Secretary of State and other senior officials.

Learning Outcomes
- Identify sources of false or misleading information on a variety of media platforms.
- Verify information claims using online tools.
- Strategize about how to respond to mis-/disinformation online using various toolkits.
- Respond to information critically.
- Develop new tools and workflows for assessing the validity of information.

Code of Conduct
This course requires that students abide by the Purdue University Statement of Integrity and Code of Conduct. Please familiarize yourself with this document: https://www.purdue.edu/purdue/about/integrity_statement.php.

Assignments
This course will follow an "ungrading" philosophy. We are more interested in meaningful conversations about what you learn, and how you reach your goals than an attempt to minimize all of your learning into a single symbol. The university still requires grades, so you will be leading the evaluation of your work. This will be completed with the instructors in four stages, at the end of weeks 4, 8, 12, and 16. In each stage, you will reflect on what you have accomplished thus far, how it has met, not met, or exceeded expectations, based both on rubrics and personal goals and objectives. At each of these stages, you will receive feedback on your assessments. By the end of the semester, you should have a clear vision of your accomplishments and growth, which you will turn into a grade. As the instructor-of-record, I maintain the right to disagree with your assessment and alter grades as I see fit, but any time that I do this it will be accompanied by an explanation and discussion. These personal assessments, reflecting both honest and meaningful reflection of your work will be an important factor in final grades.

Your learning will be assessed through a combination of participation, group work, projects, and weekly reflection papers. Details on these assignments, including a schedule of due dates, rubrics to guide evaluation, and guidelines on discussion participation and evaluation will be posted on the course website.

Assignments	Due
In-Class Participation	Throughout the semester
Weekly Reflection Papers	Throughout the semester
Fake News Toolkit	Toward the Middle
Social Media Assessment	Toward the Beginning
User Report	Toward the End

Implementation Team	Throughout
Policy Assessment	Toward the Beginning

Assignments Description

Fake News Toolkit: Find and apply one open-source tool for assessing the validity of Fake News. In your report on this tool, review its capacity for operationally assessing or identifying fake news, misinformation, or disinformation. How effective is the tool? Who built it and why? What might improve the functionality of the tool? In 2-3 pages, write a review of the tool assessing its strengths and weaknesses.

Policy Assessment: What policies are being considered or passed that influence the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news? Consider local/county, state, and national levels.

Social Media Assessment: Social media platforms have increasingly tried to intervene in the debates about mis-/disinformation. Choose one social media platform (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube) and look into their attempts to prevent the viral spread of mis-/disinformation. What specific tactics have they deployed? Have they been effective? If not, why not? Draft a 2-3 page (double-spaced) report to the CEO of that company detailing further steps that should be taken to prevent mis-/disinformation on the platform.

User Report: In the middle of the semester, you assessed open-source tools for assessing fake news and misinformation. Now, you will review the toolkit we developed with students in Spring 2022 to determine ways in which it might be improved. Test out the toolkit/workflow and assess how you might expand it. Draft a user report in which you identify possible expansions of the tool.

Implementation Team: Working with a team, design and implement expansions to the Spring 2022 toolkit. What can be improved, expanded, or scaled?

Attendance Policy

This course follows Purdue's academic regulations regarding attendance, which states that students are expected to be present for every meeting of the classes in which they are enrolled. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class and lateness will be noted. In addition to in-class attendance, students will be required to regularly meet with their assigned team to complete the project deliverables. When conflicts or absences can be anticipated, such as for many University-sponsored activities and religious observations, the student should inform the instructor of the situation as far in advance as possible. For unanticipated or emergency absences when advance notification to the instructor is not possible, the student should contact the instructor as soon as possible by email or phone. When the student is unable to make direct contact with the instructor and is unable to leave word with the instructor's department because of circumstances beyond the student's control, and in cases falling under excused absence regulations, the student or the student's representative should contact or go to the Office of the Dean of Students website to complete appropriate forms for instructor notification. Under academic regulations, excused absences may be granted for cases of grief/bereavement, military service, jury duty, and parenting leave. For details, see the Academic Regulations & Student Conduct section of the University Catalog website.

Academic Guidance in the Event a Student is Quarantined/Isolated

If you must miss class at any point in time during the semester, please reach out to one of the instructors via Purdue email so that we can communicate about how you can maintain your academic progress. If you find yourself too sick to progress in the course, notify your adviser and notify me via email or Brightspace. We will make arrangements based on your particular situation. Please note that, according to Details for Students on Normal Operations for Spring 2022 announced on the Protect Purdue website, "individuals who test positive for COVID-19 are not guaranteed remote access to all course activities, materials, and assignments." However, we will try our best to accommodate your needs.

Course Schedule

Week	Topic & Readings	Assignments
Tuesday, Week 1: August 23	Intro to Information and Digital Citizenship	Introduction to Diplomacy Lab Activity: Course Pre-Assessment
Thursday, Week 1: August 25	Module 1: Social Media Challenges	Read: Suciu, "Spotting Misinformation on Social Media" In Class: Sinan Aral, "How we can protect truth"
Tuesday, Week 2: August 30	Module 1: Social Media Challenges	Read: Hook and Verdeja, "Social Media Misinformation" In Class: How do *YOU* social media?
Thursday, Week 2: Sept. 1	Module 2: Conspiracy Theories	Read: Berkowitz, "A Game Designer's Analysis of QAnon"
Tuesday Week 3: Sept. 6	Module 2: Conspiracy Theories	Read: Hannah, "QAnon and the Information Dark Age"
Thursday, Week 3: Sept. 8	Module 3: Information and American Democracy	Read: Lai, "Data misuse and disinformation: Technology and the 2022 elections"; Auxier, "Pew Research Center" **Social Media Personal Assessment Due**
Tuesday, Week 4: Sept. 13	Module 3: Information and American Democracy	Read: Luceri, et. al., "Evolution of Bot and Human Behavior During Elections"
Thursday, Week 4: Sept. 15	Module 4: Misinformation and the Global Infodemic	Read: WHO, "Managing the COVI-19 Infodemic: Call for Action"
Tuesday, Week 5: Sept. 20	Module 4: Misinformation and the Global Infodemic	Read: Mheidly and Fares "Leveraging media and health communication strategies to overcome the COVID-19 infodemic"
Thursday, Week 5: Sept. 22	Module 5: Diplomacy and the Global Spread of Disinformation	Activity: Develop 1-2 questions to ask Theresa Dixon
Tuesday, Week 6: Sept. 27	Module 5: Diplomacy and the Global Spread of Disinformation	Read: Nagasako, "Global Disinformation Campaigns and Legal Challenges" In class: "The History of Russia's Election Meddling in Four Minutes"

Thursday, Week 6: Sept. 29	Module 6: Misinformation Outlets and the 'Fake News' Cycle	Read: Fowler, "Fake News, Its Impact and How Tech can Combat Misinformation"
Tuesday, Week 7: Oct. 4	Module 6: Misinformation Outlets and the 'Fake News' Cycle	Read: Pennycook, et. al., "Shifting Attention to Accuracy can Reduce Misinformation Online".
Thursday, Week 7: Oct. 6	Diplomacy Lab Engaged Digital Citizenship	Activity: Discuss the role of citizenship in global information networks.
Tuesday, Week 8: Oct. 11	Fall Break	**NO CLASS**
Thursday, Week 8: Oct. 13	Discuss Diplomacy Lab project Review prior semester's work Assign project teams	**Fake News Toolkit Due**
Tuesday, Week 9: Oct. 18	Information Verification Strategies	Activity: Open-Source Toolkits in Class; What does it mean to be a "digital citizen"?
Thursday, Week 9: Oct. 20	Diplomacy Lab: Co-Design Workshop	
Tuesday, Week 10: Oct. 25	Diplomacy Lab: Co-Design Workshop	
Thursday, Week 10: Oct. 27	Diplomacy Lab: Co-Design Workshop	
Tuesday, Week 11: Nov. 1	Diplomacy Lab: Co-Design Workshop	
Thursday, Week 11: Nov. 3	Diplomacy Lab: Co-Design Workshop	
Tuesday, Week 12: Nov. 8	Diplomacy Lab: Co-Design Workshop	
Thursday, Week 12: Nov. 10	Diplomacy Lab: Co-Design Workshop	
Tuesday, Week 13: Nov. 15	Diplomacy Lab: Presentations for Peer Review	During Class: Present update on your team's project deliverable; peer review each team's project deliverables
Tuesday, Week 14: Nov. 22	Thanksgiving Break	**NO CLASS**
Thursday, Week 14: Nov. 24	Thanksgiving Break	**NO CLASS**

Tuesday, Week 15: Nov. 29	Diplomacy Lab: Co-Design Workshop	Activity: Finalize outputs
Thursday, Week 15: Dec. 1	End-of-Semester Project Deliverable Presentations with Peer Feedback	During Class: Present project deliverable to State Dept.
Tuesday, Week 16: Dec. 6	Diplomacy Lab	Activity: Make final edits
Thursday, Week 16: Dec. 8	Final Presentations	During Class: Final Project Presentations Course Post-Assessment

* Schedule and assignments subject to change. Any changes will be posted via email.

See the Purdue Academic Calendar for key University dates for the Spring 2022.

Classroom Guidance Regarding Protect Purdue

Any student who has substantial reason to believe that another person is threatening the safety of others by not complying with Protect Purdue protocols is encouraged to report the behavior to and discuss the next steps with their instructor. Students also have the option of reporting the behavior to the Office of the Student Rights and Responsibilities. See also Purdue University Bill of Student Rights and the Violent Behavior Policy under University Resources in Brightspace.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is one of the highest values that Purdue University holds. Individuals are encouraged to alert university officials to potential breaches of this value by either emailing integrity@purdue.edu or by calling 765-494-8778. While information may be submitted anonymously, the more information is submitted the greater the opportunity for the university to investigate the concern. We expect students to abide by *Purdue's Honor Pledge: "As a Boilermaker pursuing academic excellence, I pledge to be honest and true in all that I do. Accountable together - we are Purdue."*

Nondiscrimination Statement

Purdue University is committed to maintaining a community that recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters tolerance, sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among its members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her potential. In pursuit of its goal of academic excellence, the University seeks to develop and nurture diversity. The University believes that diversity among its many members strengthens the institution, stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and enriches campus life. A hyperlink to Purdue's full Nondiscrimination Policy Statement is available: *Nondiscrimination Policy Statement*

Accessibility

Purdue University is committed to making learning experiences accessible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability, you are welcome to let me know so that we can discuss options. You are also encouraged to contact the Disability Resource Center at: drc@purdue.edu or by phone: 765-494-1247.

Mental Health/Wellness Statement

If you find yourself beginning to feel some stress, anxiety and/or feeling slightly overwhelmed, try WellTrack**.** Sign in and find information and tools at your fingertips, available to you at any time.

If you need support and information about options and resources, please contact or see the Office of the Dean of Students. Call 765-494-1747. Hours of operation are M-F, 8 am- 5 pm.

If you find yourself struggling to find a healthy balance between academics, social life, stress, etc., sign up for free one-on-one virtual or in-person sessions with a [Purdue Wellness Coach at RecWell](). Student coaches can help you navigate through barriers and challenges toward your goals throughout the semester. Sign up is completely free and can be done on BoilerConnect. If you have any questions, please contact Purdue Wellness at [evans240@purdue.edu]().

If you're struggling and need mental health services: Purdue University is committed to advancing the mental health and well-being of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of mental health support, services are available. For help, such individuals should contact [Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)]() at 765-494-6995 during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or by going to the CAPS office on the second floor of the Purdue University Student Health Center (PUSH) during business hours.

CAPS also offers resources specific to COVID-19 on its [website](). Topics range from "Adjusting to the New Normal" to "How to Talk with Professors about Personal Matters."

Basic Needs Security
Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. There is no appointment needed and Student Support Services is available to serve students 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Considering the significant disruptions caused by the current global crisis as it relates to COVID-19, students may submit requests for emergency assistance from the [Critical Need Fund.]()

Emergency Preparation
In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances beyond the instructor's control. Relevant changes to this course will be posted onto the course website or can be obtained by contacting the instructors or TAs via email or phone. You are expected to read your @purdue.edu email on a frequent basis.