

# Political Science 5360-01: Misinformation, Propaganda, and Politics

Summer 2022

Online

CRN: 41610

Credit Hours 3

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## Course Description

This class will examine the varied ways propaganda and misinformation is produced in American politics and why it is used. We will cover how propaganda is used to influence political outcomes in the areas of protest, terrorism, and radical ideologies. At the end of this course, students will be able to identify propaganda when they see it, evaluate sources for propaganda, and take the steps needed separate propaganda from truth.

## Course Material

**There are no required textbooks for this course.** Instead, readings for each week will be posted as PDFs to the course Blackboard page. Students are responsible for reading the assigned articles during the week they are assigned.

Each week, you will see a new folder appear in the “Weekly Assignments” section of the course Blackboard page. That folder will have all of the reading assignments you will need for the week, as well as directions and links to the week’s assignments.

## Assignments

**Analysis Memo:** 5 points each

Writing is an essential skill in any profession. In addition to helping you interpret the readings for each week, these assignments are designed to help you practice your analytic writing in a way that allows me to give you regular feedback. Ideally, you should do one of these for each reading, since it will allow you to condense the important points of each article. **You only need to turn in one memo of an article of your choice each week.** For example, if there are five articles assigned for the week, you only need to upload one memo to the Blackboard assignment.

Each memo should include:

- 1) The name of the selected reading (i. e. an article, book or a book chapter)
- 2) Primary research question(s) from the readings
- 3) Brief statement of the prior research on the topic
- 4) Existing research gap that the article or book intends to fill
- 5) Major hypotheses and a short summary of the authors' theory
- 6) Methodologies utilized in the study
- 7) Finding(s)
- 8) Relationship between the finding(s) and the research question
- 9) Possible avenues for future research on the topic.

Memos are due each Sunday at 11:59pm.

**Discussion Board:** 2 points each

Normally, graduate seminars involve meeting once a week with the instructor so that everyone can discuss the week's content. Since this is an online class, and you are all busy, posting in weekly discussion boards will be essential to interacting with each other and with me.

Each week, I will post a few guiding questions for the week, which you will need to answer yourselves. They will ask you to apply the readings to a real world situation, ask about potential problems in our understanding of propaganda or misinformation, or otherwise ask you to expand upon what you read with your own thoughts.

Posts must be completed by 11:59pm on the Sunday after which they are assigned.

**Final Case Study:** 10 points

We will cover many topics related to propaganda and misinformation in this class, and the literature on these topics is far from complete or perfect. It will be essential that you can apply what you've learned in this class to real examples of political propaganda and misinformation, and you will probably be doing some version of this in your future careers.

Over the course of the semester, you will write a 3-5 page case study on a chosen use or "narrative" of propaganda or misinformation. You'll need to go into the causes and consequences of your event and describe how our theories of political violence help to explain it (or fail to explain it). More detail will be provided later in the semester.

**Grading Scale**

A: 90-100

B: 80-89

C: 70-79

D: 60-69

F: Below 60

## **Blackboard**

All communication for this course will be conducted via the course's Blackboard site and University email. Any supplementary material, assignments, or changes to the course structure will be made available on this site. Each student should ensure that they have access to these materials and are able to receive emails through their student account. Please note that I cannot accept or respond to student emails that come from a non-university address.

## **Information and University Policies**

### **Academic Dishonesty:**

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

[http://www.shsu.edu/~slo\\_www/](http://www.shsu.edu/~slo_www/)

### **Student Absences on Religious Holy Days Policy:**

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: "a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20...." A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/861001.pdf>

### **Students with Disabilities Policy:**

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these

programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936-294-3786, and e-mail [disability@shsu.edu](mailto:disability@shsu.edu)). They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dotAsset/7ff819c3-39f3-491d-b688-db5a330ced92.pdf>

### **Copyright on Lecture and Course Materials**

Copyright 2022 (Christopher Patane) as to this syllabus and all lectures. During this course, students are prohibited from selling notes or being paid for taking notes by any person or commercial firm without the express written permission of the instructor teaching this course.

### **Emergencies, Crises, and Mental Health**

Sometimes the study of Political Science involves dealing with difficult material. In some cases, these may reflect or reference your own personal, family, or group experiences. Other times, life events may interfere with your ability to succeed in class. We do not want to neglect our own health or well-being. If you need support, the Counseling Center can be reached at 936-294-1720. The [website](#) also contains self-help resources, and those services available in the Huntsville community.

## **Class Outline**

### **Week 1: June 1-3**

Defining Propaganda and Misinformation

Topics: What is propaganda? Why can't we agree on what it is? Is propaganda ok if the "good guys" do it?

### **Week 2: June 6-10**

A Brief History of Propaganda

Topics: Making sure we all have some common examples.

### **Week 3: June 13-17**

Government Propaganda and Fake News

Topics: When and how does the government use propaganda and misinformation?

### **Week 4: June 20-24**

Misinformation in Political Movements

Topics: How do non-governmental political movements use propaganda and misinformation?

### **Week 5: June 27-July 1**

Does Propaganda Work?

Topics: Does propaganda actually work? Why can't people tell its propaganda? If they could, would they care? Why didn't the internet fix all this?

### **Week 6: July 4-8**

Propaganda and Data

Topics: When are statistics lies? How can we tell? What do we do about it?

### **Week 7: July 11-15**

Radicalization and Political Violence

Topics: What is the role that misinformation and propaganda plays in extremist American politics? When and how does it influence political violence?

### **Week 8: July 18-22**

Conspiracy Theory in American Politics

Topics: When and why are conspiracy theories so popular in American Politics? Who uses them and why? What does it imply about our government and political discourse?

**Week 9: July 25-29**

Refuting and Debunking Propaganda and Misinformation.

Topics: How do we counteract propaganda? Does that even work? How do we tell the truth safely?

**Week 10: August 1-3**

Finals week and course wrap-up.

Memos, Discussion Board posts and Case Study due at 11:59pm on Wednesday August 3.