E-Learning Design Project Part 2: Course Syllabus

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EDTC 6325: Educational Communications

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Course Description

"Fake news" is a real problem in today's bitterly polarized political climate. Disinformation campaigns are designed to manipulate people and to harm individuals, businesses, and civics. This course is designed for teens and adults who want to avoid being manipulated – who wish to become more savvy consumers of online news and social media posts. This course offers the real scoop on fake news and teaches learners how to critically evaluate online media content, how to fact-check, and how to determine whether or not images are authentic.

Instructional Goal

Learners will identify the key terms, tactics, consequences, and mechanisms of disinformation campaigns, and they will critically evaluate online media content for validity and impartiality.

Sub-Goal 1: Learners will identify the key terms, the tactics, and the consequences of disinformation campaigns.

- Objective 1.1: Given descriptive lists of psychological and emotional manipulation tactics, the learner will label misleading headlines, media posts, and video clips with the tactics they utilize, with 80% accuracy or higher.
- Objective 1.2: Given a hypothetical scenario in which opposing fake news articles circulate around the local community, the learner will predict real-world consequences, with high proficiency as determined by a scoring rubric.
- Objective 1.3: The learner will independently identify the key terms, the tactics, and the consequences of disinformation campaigns on a quiz, with 80% accuracy or higher.

Sub-Goal 2: Learners will identify the mechanisms that amplify manipulation in disinformation campaigns.

- Objective 2.1: Given a sample social media post and comment section, the learner will identify the manipulation mechanisms at work and will cite examples, with 80% proficiency or higher as determined by a scoring rubric.
- Objective 2.2: Given real-life examples, the learner will discuss observed patterns in their own social media accounts (e.g. in their news feed, suggested

videos, and targeted ads) that suggest engagement-based algorithms are at work, with high proficiency as determined by a scoring rubric.

- Objective 2.3: The learner will independently identify the mechanisms that amplify manipulation in disinformation campaigns on a quiz, with 80% or higher accuracy.

Sub-Goal 3: Learners will classify news organizations into the categories of neutral, slightly biased, or highly biased; and will classify headlines and quotes into the categories of probably true or probably false.

- Objective 3.1: Given an online tool to check media bias ratings, the learner will sort news organizations into the categories of neutral, slightly biased, or highly biased, with 80% accuracy or higher.
- Objective 3.2: Given an online fact-checking site, the learner will classify headlines and quotes as "probably true" or "probably false," with 80% accuracy or higher.
- Objective 3.3: Given a discussion prompt, the learner will predict or describe real consequences in their family life or community if a family member or friend only ever watched the news as portrayed by an organization with a high bias rating, with high proficiency as determined by a scoring rubric.

Sub-Goal 4: Learners will classify images as authentic or altered/fake.

- Objective 4.1: Given a list of visual clues and a reverse image searching tool, the learner will classify images as authentic or altered/fake, and will describe their origins, with 80% accuracy or higher.
- Objective 4.2: Given a hypothetical scenario, the learner will predict real-life consequences if a malicious deepfake video circulated around their community, with high proficiency as determined by a scoring rubric.
- Objective 4.3: Given several images and told that only one image is authentic, the learner will identify the authentic image and explain their process of elimination, with high proficiency as determined by a scoring rubric.

Required Text(s)

There are no required texts for this course. Text excerpts needed for lessons and activities are available in the online course materials.

For recommended reading, please see the References section at the end of the syllabus.

Computer Technical Requirements

The course is fully online. Each learner needs a device such as a laptop or tablet with internet access. Headphones or earbuds are also recommended if learners are together in a group setting, as the course is self-paced and includes video clips. The instructor should ensure that learner devices are able to access Canvas, the LMS for the course, and that learners with accessibility needs have their accommodations set up, such as speech to text or language translation. The instructor should also check beforehand that the online tools mentioned in the course, such as snopes.com, are not blocked by a local filter.

Assignments

Lesson 1: The Real Scoop About Fake News	Activity	Provided pop up lists of manipulation tactics, label misleading headlines, media posts, and video clips with the tactics they utilize.	10%
	Discussion Question	Given a case scenario in which two political parties introduce opposing fake news articles to your community, discuss the real-world consequences if people believe and spread the fake news.	5%
	Quiz	Multiple choice about key terms and consequences; then matching tactics to misleading headlines.	10%
Lesson 2: Why Fake News is Always on the Move	Activity	Read a social media post and an excerpt from its comment section. Identify the mechanisms you see at work and cite examples.	10%
	Discussion Question	What patterns do you see in your own social media accounts (e.g. in your news feed, suggested videos, ads) that suggest engagement-based algorithms are at work?	5%
	Quiz	Multiple choice and matching items about the mechanisms that amplify manipulation.	10%

Lesson 3: How to Fact-Check a Post	Activity 1	Use a media bias tool online to locate the bias ratings for several news organizations. On the assignment page, click and drag the organizations' logos into place on a linear scale of their bias ratings. Then discuss your findings. Which news organizations are reliably neutral? Which ones should you read with caution because they lean slightly right or left? Which ones should you avoid altogether, due to high bias ratings?	5%
	Activity 2	Use a fact-checking site (e.g. Snopes or FactCheck.org) to verify sample headlines and quotes.	5%
	Discussion Question	What could be real consequences in your personal life or community if a family member or friend only ever watched or read news from an organization with a high bias rating?	5%
	Quiz	Using online tools, classify news organizations as having low or high bias ratings. Classify memes, headlines, and quotes into "probably true" or "probably false" categories.	10%
Lesson 4: How to Spot a Fake Image	Activity	Given a list of visual clues, label fake images with the clues that tell you they're fake. Then, run images through a reverse image search to determine their origins.	10%
	Discussion Question	A deepfake is a video of a person in which their face or body has been digitally altered so that they appear to be someone else, typically used maliciously or to spread false information. What could be some real-life consequences in your community if a malicious deepfake video was allowed to spread?	5%
	Quiz	Given six images, only one is authentic. Which image is real? Explain your process of elimination for choosing it.	10%
		COURSE TOTAL = 100%	

Grading Policy

All graded assignments, including activities, discussion questions, and quizzes, comprise percentages of the total grade for the course.

The categories are as follows:

Activities	40%
Discussion Questions	20%
Quizzes	40%

      COURSE TOTAL = 100%

Students, the teacher who assigned you this online course will let you know how the grade(s) will be weighted and reflected in your GPA for their class. Please assume that your teacher's usual late work policy also applies to this course, unless they tell you otherwise.

Independent adult learners, please utilize the instructor materials (answer keys and scoring rubrics) to gauge your proficiency on your new skills.

Topical Outline

Lesson	Topic	Sub-Topics
1	**The Real Scoop About Fake News.** *What is it? Why do we believe it? What happens when we do?*	→ Key terms to know about disinformation campaigns. → Psychological and emotional manipulation tactics. → The real-world consequences of fake news.
2	**Why Fake News is Always on the Move.** *What behind-the-scenes tricks make it spread like wildfire?*	→ Confirmation bias + engagement-based algorithms = echo chambers. → Other mechanisms that amplify manipulation.
3	**How to Fact-Check a Post**. *Be aware before you share!*	→ How to check media bias ratings using online tools and decide which news organizations to trust. → How to use online fact checker tools.
4	**How to Spot a Fake Image**. *Not every picture is worth a thousand words – or shares.*	→ Visual clues that an image has been photoshopped. → Visual clues that an image was generated by A.I. → How to use an online reverse image search tool to verify the origin of images.

References

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      challenges, and opportunities.

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