

University of Waterloo
Department of Psychology
PSYCH 470
Topics in Applied Psychology: Fighting Pandemic Misinformation
Winter 2022
Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:00–11:20am, QNC 1506

Instructor and T.A. Information

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Please include 'PSYCH 470 Office Hours' in subject line

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Course Description

The internet democratized access to information. Social networks make it easier for people to inform and be informed (of the content algorithms delivered to each user), and messaging applications allow individuals to spread information to a mass audience with a single click. Unreliable sources and misperceptions, amplified by the speed of the internet, can play a pivotal role in our lives, from the outcome of an election to controlling the spread of a virus. How can we fight misinformation in a polarized society of influencers and fake profiles empowered by social networks? In this course, we will explore the phenomenon of misinformation and how it impacts the pandemic response, review literature on attitudes and persuasion, identify the challenges of legal coercion versus voluntary compliance, and outline strategies to fight misinformation and stop the spread of COVID-19.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- A. Identify the main sources of information on the internet and how the news disseminates.
 - Analyze the phenomenon of information disorder
 - Understand the differences between misinformation and disinformation
- B. Recognize the impacts of misinformation to combat COVID-19.
 - Collect data about transmission rates and economic impacts
 - List and describe the main reasons for vaccine hesitancy
- C. Apply theories of Attitudes and Persuasion to fight misinformation.
 - Propose the best persuasion strategies
 - Reflect on the effectiveness of Psychological interventions and Legal frameworks

- D. Research and evaluate policies adopted by different countries.
- Compare the approaches of countries in all continents
 - Make recommendations on the best strategies to fight COVID-19 misinformation

Required Text

This course does not have a textbook, but different readings every week, which are available online.

Readings Available on LEARN

Given the rapidly evolving situation of the pandemic, readings will be added monthly as new findings become available. The readings for the month of January are listed below. The ones for February will be available on LEARN on January 26, and the ones for March will be posted on February 16. All readings are available online.

Course Requirements and Assessment

Assessment	Date of Evaluation (if known)	Weighting
Participation	Ongoing	10%
Tests (or quizzes)	Jan 31, Feb 28, Mar 30	15%
Group presentations	Mondays in February and March	30%
Research paper:		
Proposal	Jan 26	15%
Final paper	Apr 02	30%
Total		100%

Assessment 1

Students are expected to attend all classes (both online and in-person ones, on Mondays and Wednesdays, on campus, on Microsoft Teams or on LEARN). To receive the maximum amount of points, students must participate by asking questions or making comments. The participation mark is worth 10% of their final grade. Each student can miss up to four classes without any deduction, and each subsequent absence will result in a deduction of 0.5%.

Assessment 2

Students will write three multiple-choice tests worth 15% of their final grade:

January 31 – First test covering content from Weeks 1-4

February 28 – Second test covering content from Weeks 5-7

March 30 – Third test covering content from Weeks 8-11

If classes continue to be online, quizzes will be administered on LEARN.

Each test (or quiz) is worth 5% of the student’s final grade, has 10 questions (each) and takes 30 minutes, with a grace period of 10 minutes (total 40 minutes to submit the test).

Students are expected to write the tests in a solitary manner, after learning the material, but are allowed to use the open book feature for reassurance purposes.

Valid documentation (e.g. Verification of Illness Form) is required to receive accommodation for a missed test or quiz.

Assessment 3

In the first week of classes, students will form groups and choose a topic to present on Monday sessions in February and March, which will take place in class or on Microsoft Teams if classes remain online – in this case, groups are allowed to record their presentation and deliver it on Monday at 10am, so we can watch and discuss it. Completion of the presentation will be graded at 50%, and the remaining 50% will reflect accuracy, effort, and presentation quality.

Assessment 4

Individual research paper addressing a topic of interest to be determined in class. The paper proposal is due on January 26 and worth 15%. The final paper is due on April 02 and worth 30%.

Course Outline

Wednesday classes will have discussions based on the readings. Monday sessions may have presentations by the instructor, TA, groups of students, and we will dedicate time to supervise the students' work in progress.

Week	Date	Topic	Readings Due
1	Jan 05 & 10	Introduction s. Course overview. Group selection	Misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2021/statcan/45-28/CS45-28-1-2021-4-eng.pdf
2	Jan 12 & 17	Sources of information and dynamics of the spread	Information Spread in a Social Media Age - Modeling and Control Chapters 1-3 https://ocul-wtl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_WTL/vk29fk/alma999986718915605162
3	Jan 19 & 24	Causes of misinformation and emergence of the infodemic	The causes and consequences of COVID-19 misperceptions https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/the-causes-and-consequences-of-covid-19-misperceptions-understanding-the-role-of-news-and-social-media/
4	Jan 26 & 31	Dealing with misinformation in Science. First test	Misinformation in and about science https://www.pnas.org/content/pnas/118/15/e1912444117.full.pdf
5	Feb 02 & 07	Attitudes and Behavior versus Legal Coercion	TBD

Week	Date	Topic	Readings Due
6	Feb 09 & 14	Transmission rates and Economic impacts	TBD
7	Feb 16 & 28	Vaccine hesitancy. Second test	TBD
8	Mar 02 & 07	Policy Analysis: Approaches in Asia	TBD
9	Mar 09 & 14	Policy Analysis: European Approaches	TBD
10	Mar 16 & 21	Policy Analysis: North American Approaches	TBD
11	Mar 23 & 28	Policy Analysis: Approaches in Africa and Oceania	TBD
12	Mar 30 & Apr 02	Challenges and conclusions. Third test. Research paper submission.	TBD

Late Work

Students will have two "grace days" to use over the course of the term. Once a student has no grace days left, late work will be penalized 5% per day up to a maximum of 35% (7 days). Late work will only be accepted up to 7 days after the due date, unless the student has grace days to use. Valid documentation (e.g. Verification of Illness Form) is required to receive accommodation for assessments.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes (both online and in-person ones) and will be assessed through a participation grade.

Remote online class sessions from January 5, 2022 until at least January 27, 2022

The University of Waterloo announced that classes will be conducted online from January 5, 2022 until at least January 27, 2022. During this period, all sessions of this course will be conducted online on the officially scheduled days and times. A Teams link along with login instructions will be posted on the official LEARN site for this course. Students are strongly encouraged to attend these sessions live. However, these online classes will be recorded and posted online for students who are unable to attend the synchronous sessions due to technical issues or other circumstances.

All assessments including quizzes and writing assignments will be conducted online through the course LEARN site. This online assessment process will continue even after we resume in person classes. Each quiz can be accessed on its scheduled completion date by logging onto the LEARN site, clicking on the 'Quizzes' link under the 'Submit' drop down menu, and selecting the name of whichever quiz you are seeking to complete. Each assignment can be submitted on by logging onto the LEARN site, clicking on the 'Dropbox' link under the 'Submit' drop down menu, and selecting the name of whichever assignment you are seeking to submit.

Arrangements when in-person classes resume

In-person classes will resume as soon as possible based on public health guidelines. As soon as we receive notification from the University of Waterloo that in-person classes can resume, we will post an announcement on LEARN notifying students when and how we will shift to the in-person format for this course. When in-person classes resume they will be held on the course's officially scheduled meeting days/times and in the assigned building and room.

All assessments including quizzes and writing assignments will continue to be conducted online even after in person classes resume.

Please note that some adjustments to the dates of particular lecture topics and/or activities may need to be made in order to provide flexibility during the transition to the in-person format. If any such adjustments need to be made then students will be notified as soon as possible.

Accommodation for absence in online classes

Students who miss online classes can watch the recordings on Teams. Valid documentation (e.g. Verification of Illness Form) is required to receive accommodation for assessments.

Accommodation for students who are unable to attend in-person class due to self-isolation

Please self-declare your illness by following these instructions:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/quest/help/students/how-do-i/self-declare-my-illness>. In-person classes will not be recorded, but material will be available on LEARN. Valid documentation (e.g. Verification of Illness Form) is required to receive accommodation for assessments.

Alternate arrangements in case there is a short or long-term (e.g., one-week) cancellation of in-person classes, whether for the particular course or University-wide

If after in-person classes resume there is a need for another short-term (e.g., 1-2 week) cancellation of in-person classes, then the classes will be held online at the officially scheduled date and time. A backup recording of online-delivered lectures will also be provided through LEARN. Details for how to access the course online will be provided if this situation arises.

Alternate arrangements in case there is a longer-term cancellation of in-person classes, whether for the particular course or University-wide

If after in-person classes resume there is a need for a longer-term cancellation of in-person classes, then the course will shift back to online class sessions and recordings of these sessions will be provided through LEARN. In this case, the classes will be delivered online at their officially scheduled dates and times. A backup recording of online classes will also be provided through LEARN. Details for how to access the course online will be provided if this situation arises.

Electronic Device Policy

Students should avoid using any electronic devices that could lead to distraction during classes.

Academic Integrity

In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. See the [Office of Academic Integrity webpage](#) for more information.

Discipline

A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing an academic offence and to take responsibility for his/her actions. Check [the Office of Academic Integrity](#) for more information. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71 - Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

Grievance

A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances](#), Section 4. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Appeals

A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72 - Student Appeals](#).

Note for Students with Disabilities

[AccessAbility Services](#), located in Needles Hall, Room 1401, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.