

ENG-W 210: Literacy & Public Life
TR 10 to 11:15am in KO 101
Fall 2017
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Dr. Paul Cook
[Office: KO 238-D](#)
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1 to 3:00pm
and anytime by appointment.



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Literacy & Public Life: Fake News & Democracy in the Digital Age

“If you wish to strive for peace of soul and pleasure, then believe; if you wish to be a devotee of truth, then inquire.”

-Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (1889)

What does an educated person need to know about information and news, opinion and fact in the digital age? This is the guiding question that will lead our exploration of so-called “fake news,” disinformation, misinformation, and other forms of problematic information this term. As we are often reminded, we now inhabit an increasingly complex and confusing hyper-fast media landscape, where traditional forms of

journalism and reporting have been radically reshaped and even supplanted by emerging forms of digital media. This course will give you the tools to engage intelligently in the major issues of our time; to analyze media of all kinds; to parse out the subtle distinctions between various kinds of problematic information; and to find credible, carefully-researched, and accurate journalism, news, and opinion on a variety of topics.

Learning Outcomes

This course will help you

- Develop a broad sense of literacy, which in this course means the capacity to think, read, and write about complex ideas and their historical, socio-cultural, and political dimensions;
- Apply your developing literacy to public life and what it means to be an engaged and well-informed citizen of a democracy;
- Speak and write intelligently and confidently about the historical, cultural, economic, and political development of [“fake news,” misinformation, disinformation, satire, “culture jamming,” and other forms of problematic information](#);
- Develop and support a compelling argument concerning fake news and problematic information as an idea in your own experience and research;
- Analyze media artifacts in order to understand how they “work”;
- Develop a basic understanding of how technology (and especially digital media) have changed how people get news, share ideas, and learn about the world and the social and cultural impact thereof;
- Recognize and understand the multidisciplinary nature of a concept like “fake news” and its connection to major questions in [epistemology](#) (i.e., the branch of philosophy that studies knowledge and various theories about how humans can know, where our opinions comes from, how we learn, etc.);
- Read and understand challenging academic texts such as scholarly articles and monographs; and
- Learn how to parse out the often subtle distinctions between various kinds of problematic information and where/how to find credible, carefully-researched, and accurate news and information of all kinds.

Textbooks

Curtis, Drew. *It's Not News, It's Fark: How Mass Media Tries to Pass Off Crap as News*. (Gotham, 2007)

Pariser, Eli. *The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web Is Changing What We Read How We Think*. (Penguin, 2011)

Postman, Neil. *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. (Vintage, 1992)

Frequently, I will post *required* readings and handouts to Canvas in the Files tab and via regular announcements. Everything I hand out in class will also be posted to Canvas, and these readings typically will be in .pdf format. Print out all readings and *always* read actively with a pen or pencil in hand.

Assignments and Grading

Discussions and SWPs (Short Writing Projects) (25%)

We will have frequent discussions via Canvas and short writing projects on whatever concept or issue we're covering for a specific class, unit, or set of readings. For detailed information regarding discussion posts, length, format/style, and other requirements, please see the handout "Guidelines for Discussions" in the Files tab in Canvas. For due dates, prompts, and other information, please see the schedule below. Each SWP will be detailed in a separate assignment sheet that will be handed out in class.

**Important reminder: All out of class work is due in Canvas before 11:30pm on the due date.*

Final Exam (25%)

We will have one cumulative final exam at the end of the semester covering all sixteen weeks of material. Be sure to start out on the right foot by taking good notes and participating actively in class discussions, activities, and readings.

Quizzes and ICWs (In-class Writing) (10%)

Some class meetings starting with Day 2 you will be asked to complete a short quiz, either in class or on Canvas. These are brief, five-item quizzes designed to test your reading comprehension and to reward those who are keeping up with the readings *and* reading actively. Active, engaged reading is key to your success not only on quizzes and ICWs, but also in terms of your overall development as a student-scholar. For more information on active reading, see the handout in the Files tab in Canvas and the section below on "Readings and How to Read Actively."

Class Participation and Engagement (15%)

You will receive two class participation grades: one at around midterm (Week 8) and the other at the end of the semester (Week 16). ***Baseline ("C"-level or 70) participation requirements are that you come to class every time we meet, complete ICWs, take notes, and complete all assigned readings and in-class activities.***

Contributing thoughtful comments and asking questions will raise your participation grade to a "B" (80) Consistently contributing interesting and insightful comments and ideas and providing academic leadership in class discussions will earn an "A" (90 or 100).

Media Artifact Analysis Teaching Projects (25%)

For detailed information, ideas to get you started, list of requirements, and a grading rubric, see the Files tab in Canvas. Teaching Projects will be shared with the rest of the class in Unit III (see below), but you should start thinking and talking about these projects now. We will spend some class time in the early part of the semester discussing and workshoping these projects.

Readings and How to Read Actively

The weekly reading assignments in this course will be challenging and occasionally quite long. We will be reading texts ranging from contemporary academic scholarship to journalist pieces and podcasts and—of course—"fake news." These readings are fun and exciting, but they will require you to practice a mode of patient, careful, *attentive* reading to which you may not yet be accustomed.

For instance, when you come across a word you don't understand, look it up in an online dictionary (the *Oxford English Dictionary* is best and free for IU students at www.iuk.edu/library). When you find a concept or

reference with which you're unfamiliar, look it up on Wikipedia.org and read the entry until the passage you're wrestling with starts to make sense. (*Pro Tip: Wikipedia can be a useful active reading resource, but it is not [yet] considered a fully-credible research resource and is in no way a scholarly source.) Mark any and all passages in your books that you would like to discuss in class, that you think are particularly noteworthy, or that don't make sense to you. We will discuss these passages in class. In short, you will need to read closely, carefully, and *slowly*.

You should expect to *read*—in the manner I've just briefly described—between *25 to 50 pages* for each class meeting. And a few times the reading load will be heavier. Please get into a weekly if not daily reading habit that works for you and stick to it. This will be key to your success and learning in this course. If ever you have any questions or concerns about our readings, please don't hesitate to let me know.

Attendance and Participation

While there will be some lecture in this course, this is definitely *not* a lecture-only course. Ongoing, stimulating class discussions and in-class group activities are vital to the success of this course and to your overall learning experience. In short, it's important that you come to class each time we meet, complete all assigned readings each week, take time to reflect on what you've read (and then go back and re-read), take careful notes on the readings (in your notebook and textbook), ask questions, and participate actively and enthusiastically in class discussions and in-class exercises.

When you miss class, you miss important information, activities, ideas, ICWs, instructions, videos, interactions, etc. that simply can't be "made up." (It's sort of like missing a birthday party or celebratory dinner and then asking everyone to reconstruct the experience for you in words or e-mails. Like other social phenomena, classroom learning just doesn't work that way.)

Furthermore, when you miss class, your classmates and I miss your input and ideas. ***If you are absent, you are responsible for finding out what we covered in class and for submitting in advance any assignments due on that day.*** I reserve the right to change the course schedule at any time, and it is your responsibility to stay on top of these changes. If ever you do miss class, you should use the "Questions about the Course" Discussion in the "Discussions" tab in Canvas to find out what you missed. See "**Getting in touch with me...and each other**" below for more information.

Your course grade will drop by one letter grade (10%) if you miss more than 10% of our classes (**or 2 class meetings**); you will fail the course if you miss more than 25% of our classes (**3 class periods**). If a *bone fide* emergency forces you to miss several class periods, or if you have a nonrefundable vacation package or something, you need to speak with me as soon as possible. Excessive, annoying lateness will not be tolerated.

Smartphones and other distractions

Here's the straight dope on mobile devices, folks: *be courteous and sensible* with your smart phones, laptops, tablets, and other mobile devices. You might think you have to be imminently available to everyone in your social network, family, neighborhood, whatever, or that you constantly have to be checking your e-mail, texts, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, or whatnot, but you really don't.

There are important, practical advantages to be gained by “unplugging,” by experiencing the passage of time as well as conversation and interaction the way previous generations did: face-to-face and in real-time. [Research suggests](#) that students who leave their mobile devices and laptops in their bags actually perform better academically. Opportunities to unplug from the matrix are increasingly rare; let’s pledge to use our time together this summer for discussion, reflection, and exploration, not Candy Crush Saga and idle Facebook stalking.

Late Assignments

Late work will not be accepted under most circumstances. If a *bona fide* emergency forces you to miss class, please let me know as soon as is reasonable so that we can discuss your options.

Getting in touch with me...and each other

You will have several avenues of communication for this course:

- If you have **general questions about the course** (assignments, due dates, course policies, etc.), please post your questions on the “Questions about the Course” Discussion in the “Discussions” tab. I will check this Discussion regularly (usually twice a day from Monday through Friday and at least once on the weekend) and answer any questions you may have. If you have a question that concerns the entire class, please use this space.
- “The Coffee House Lounge” site in the Discussions tab will be an **informal space for you to meet your fellow students** and get to know one another over the course of the semester. This is a **social gathering place**. I will not monitor this site on a regular basis unless students express concern to me about the content being posted.
- If you have questions of an **individual or personal nature** that you do not wish to share with the rest of the class, you can contact me by sending a message through the message center in Canvas (in the “Messages” tab). ***This is the best way to get in touch with me.*** You are also always welcome to visit me in my office (during and outside of office hours) or even call me in my office during office hours (765/455.9229).
- I want to discuss the class and your work with you, and using my office hours is an excellent way for us to address any concerns you might have about the class, your progress or performance, and/or any of your questions about the course material and your projects and interests.

Technical Requirements and Student Accessibility Services

This course requires that you have access to the IU Kokomo computer network, access to the Canvas course management system, and some basic familiarity with Canvas. The IU Kokomo Instructional Technology department (IT) provides guidelines for hardware and software for all students. This course requires primarily word processing (MS Word 2007 or newer), printing capabilities, and access to Canvas. See <http://iuware.iu.edu> for free downloads and discount prices on hardware and software exclusively for IU students.

Students should contact the IU Kokomo Helpdesk with any and all technical questions. The Helpdesk offers superb technical support to faculty, staff, and students for all IT-related requests. The Helpdesk provides assistance to users, as well as maintains a tracking system that places each user’s request into a queue. You can send an e-mail request to the Helpdesk at kohelp@iuk.edu or call 765/455.9315. Local phone and walk-up support at the Helpdesk in the Library is available Monday through Friday from 8:00am to 5:00pm. If you’re

having any technical difficulties, please contact both me and the Helpdesk right away so we can get your problem solved.

Students requiring accommodations for disabilities or special needs should contact the [IU Kokomo Office of Accessibility Services](#). If you have a documented disability on file, it is imperative that you let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss arrangements for your success in this course.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

The Indiana University Code of Student Ethics states, “A student must not adopt or reproduce ideas, words, or statements of another person without an appropriate acknowledgement. A student must give due credit to the originality of others and acknowledge an indebtedness whenever he or she does any of the following: (a) quotes another person’s actual words, either oral or written; (b) paraphrases another person’s words, either oral or written; (c) uses another person’s idea, theory, or material unless information is common knowledge.” (Note that “intent” is not a factor here.)

“**Double dipping**,” or submitting a writing project for two or more courses (whether they’re IU Kokomo courses or not), constitutes plagiarism and will result in a grade of zero and possible disciplinary action. If you have an idea for a writing project from another class that you would like to further develop in this class, please consult with me. I’m more than willing to help you develop your ideas and plan writing projects that will do work for you, but simply *submitting the same essay for multiple classes is not acceptable under any circumstances*.

Knowing the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable uses of other’s work, texts, or ideas can be tricky sometimes, and we will spend some time in class discussing the boundaries of acceptable use, the nature of research, and when, where, and how to appropriately document source materials.

Writing Center (Student Success Center: Library/KA)

Don’t forget to utilize the Writing Center that your tuition dollars support! The IU Kokomo Writing Center is open Monday through Thursday, 9am to 7pm, Friday, 10am to 2pm, and Saturday, 12:30 to 4:30pm.

Remember, many of IU Kokomo’s best students understand that seeking out a response to their writing is a necessary part of the learning/writing process. Several of the staff who presently work in the Writing Center have or are currently working toward teaching credentials, and many are graduate students. Stop by or call for a 30-minute appointment: 765/455.9425, Option #1.

You can now instant message the tutors your quick questions (grammar, citing, etc.) using campus contacts. Visit our [website](#) where you can

- Ask a more detailed question online by using Ask a Tutor email option.
- See a list of *Grammar Girl* podcasts on hundreds of usage and other English language concerns.
- Discover which helpful documents and other sources are available at the Center.
- Find out when your favorite tutor is scheduled to work.
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Course Schedule

I reserve the right to alter reading assignments and due dates depending on how quickly we're moving and other considerations. I will *always* give advance notice of any changes to the course schedule through a Canvas announcement and, wherever possible, during face-to-face class meetings. Click [here](#) for the IU Kokomo academic calendar for Fall 2017.

Unit I: Digital Media Literacy 101: The Basic Terms & Concepts

T, 8/22: Introductions, icebreakers, course syllabus overview, how to read for college courses, "What is your information diet?", etc.

R, 8/24: [Jack, "Lexicon of Lies: Terms for Problematic Information"](#) (Quiz01)

T, 8/29: Pariser, pp. 1-20 in *The Filter Bubble* and watch ["The Filter Bubble" TED Talk](#)

R, 8/31: Postman, pp. 3-20 in *Technopoly* (Quiz02)

T, 9/05: Miller, pp. 12-21 ("Key Elements of Digital Media") *Canvas handout

R, 9/07: Miller, pp. 21-30 ("Key Elements of Digital Media") *Canvas handout (Quiz03)

T, 9/12: Miller, pp. 30-45 ("Key Elements of Digital Media") *Canvas handout

R, 9/14: Unit I Review session (Quiz04) and **SWP01 due in Canvas before 11:30pm EDT**

Unit II: The History of "Fake News" and Disinformation

T, 9/19: [Soll, "The Long and Brutal History of Fake News" \(Politico.com\)](#) and [Uberti, "The Real History of Fake News" \(CJR.org\)](#)

R, 9/21: Pariser, pp. 21-46 (Quiz05)

T, 9/26: Pariser, pp. 47-76

R, 9/28: Pariser, pp. 77-107 (Quiz06)

T, 10/03: Pariser, pp. 109-35

R, 10/05: Pariser, pp. 137-64 (Quiz07)

T, 10/10: Pariser, pp. 165-215

R, 10/12: Pariser, pp. 189-243 (Quiz08)

T, 10/17: **Fall Break (no classes)**

R, 10/19: Unit II Review session and **SWP02 due in Canvas before 11:30pm EST**

Unit III: The Subtle Complexities of our Digital Media Ecosystem*

(*Or, How to Protect Yourself from Misinformation, Disinformation, Propaganda, “Fark,” “Fake News,” & Problematic Info)

T, 10/24: Final Exam Practice and Curtis, pp. 1-17 (Quiz09)

R, 10/26: New Media Artifact Analysis Teaching Projects (Day 1), Readings announced in Canvas (Curtis)

T, 10/31: New Media Artifact Analysis Teaching Projects (Day 2), Readings announced in Canvas (Curtis)

R, 11/02: New Media Artifact Analysis Teaching Projects (Day 3), Readings announced in Canvas (Curtis)

T, 11/07: New Media Artifact Analysis Teaching Projects (Day 4), Readings announced in Canvas (Curtis)

R, 11/09: New Media Artifact Analysis Teaching Projects (Day 5), Readings announced in Canvas (Curtis)

T, 11/14: Readings from Curtis TBA throughout Unit III—see New Media Artifact assignment for details (Quiz10)

R, 11/16: Unit III Review session and **SWP03 due in Canvas before 11:30pm EST**

Unit IV: Bringing it all back home... (Semester Review & Exam)

T, 11/21: **Study/Review Day (no class)**

R, 11/23: **Thanksgiving Holiday (no class)**

T, 11/28: Documentary film screening (*Manufacturing Consent* or TBA) and Postman, pp. 21-55

R, 11/30: Documentary film screening (*Manufacturing Consent* or TBA) and Postman, pp. 56-91

T, 12/05: Postman, pp. 123-43

R, 12/07: Last day of class, course evaluations, and Final Exam review session.

****Final Exam: T, 12/12 from 10:00am to 12:00pm in KO 101***