

## **Course Information**

Class day and time: Wednesdays, 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm

Class location Online\*

\*Due to COVID-19 this is an ONLINE COURSE.

### **Instructor Information**

Instructor: Dr. Ahmer Arif

Email: [ahmer@utexas.edu](mailto:ahmer@utexas.edu)

Office hours: By email

Office hours will be held through Zoom at: <https://utexas.zoom.us/my/ahmer>

## **Land Acknowledgement**

We acknowledge that the iSchool sits on indigenous land. We would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on Indigenous land. Moreover, we would like to acknowledge and pay our respects to the Carrizo & Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Caddo, Tonkawa, Comanche, Lipan Apache, Alabama-Coushatta, Kickapoo, Tigua Pueblo, and all the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories in Texas, here on Turtle Island.

# Problematic and Misleading Information

In this course, we will work to understand and address the challenges of misinformation, disinformation, and strategic manipulation in online environments. First, we will work to develop a deep understanding of the problem space. We will read and discuss existing research (both historical and contemporary) on how and why misinformation and disinformation spread. Next, we will explore the process, both personal and interpersonal, by which these issues can be approached and addressed in our own lives. This will involve reflecting on our own presuppositions, beliefs, and biases about information; and doing a project in which we apply the principles of Human-Centered Design to investigate different design directions for addressing misleading information. Students will gain important contextual knowledge and hands-on design experience that they can take into future professional domains (from education to policy to technology), where they can contribute to building more trustworthy information systems.

## Student Outcomes/Learning Goals:

Taking this course will help learners develop:

- A more nuanced understanding of the “problem” of online misinformation & disinformation.
- A potential solution to one aspect of online mis- and disinformation.
- A more critical perspective on our own information diet and identify ways we can make information spaces healthier through our own participation.
- Expertise in reading and evaluating mixed-methods research that addresses problematic and misleading information.

## Course Format and Structure

This is a discussion-style course based on interactive flipped classroom pedagogical models, so participation in class is critical to individual success and to the success of the course as a whole. It is also a blended online learning course, organized around a project and series of weekly activities. Weekly activities will include assigned readings, small group discussions on Zoom and occasional short video/audio lecture presentations. Asynchronous activities will give us more time to reflect and compose reactions to course material. Synchronous activities will involve exploration and shared building of understanding. The mix of both will allow us to achieve our learning objectives as we navigate doing so amid a global pandemic. In addition, there will be a project we will work on throughout the course (as detailed below). Asynchronous activities will occur throughout the week. The course will meet for 180 minutes each Wednesday at 3:00 pm on Zoom.

## Course Requirements

Prior knowledge of the subject is not required. Students are expected to take initiative in learning or reviewing unfamiliar material. While students are welcome to take on technical projects, I will not provide support for those with less programming experience as this is NOT a required element of

the course.

## Course Expectations

As the instructor, I expect:

- A commitment to engaged learning from each and every student. This includes being present and actively involved in our synchronous class sessions. I reserve the right to reduce student grades if this expectation is not met.
- Students to act, think, and communicate with generosity and patience, and in productive and professional way
- Students to take an active role in helping shape this course because it is new
- This hybrid classroom to be a brave space for all of us to learn, explore, and discuss; while we might be dealing with power, difficult topics, and differing values, we remain respectful of others' views and experiences

Students can expect from the instructor:

- Engaged, active instruction on course content
- Quick responses to questions via email: within 24 hours during the week, and 48 hours on weekends
- Timely feedback on all assignments, which is usually 2 weeks from the due date
- A significant amount of autonomy regarding the material we cover and the topics we discuss.

## Course Assignments

Assignment	Due Date	%
<b>Reading Engagements</b> (Participation in Online Activities; Zoom Discussions)	Variable. Reading 1-pagers will be due on Tuesdays 23:59:59 (midnight)	30%
<b>Course Project</b>		40%
Ideation Exercise (creativity, communication)	February 10 <sup>th</sup> (2:00 pm)	2 pts
Literature Review (problem space, thoroughness, comm)	February 24 <sup>th</sup> (2:00 pm)	8 pts
Project Proposal (creativity, fit, communication)	March 10 <sup>th</sup> (2:00 pm)	8 pts
Update (progress, hits key elements, communication)	April 14 <sup>th</sup> (in-class)	2 pts
Final Presentation (hits key elements, communication)	April 28 <sup>th</sup> (in-class)	5 pts
Final Project (quality of project, quality of execution/comm)	May 4 <sup>th</sup> (2:00 pm)	15 pts
<b>Media Consumption Investigations</b>		15%
3-5 of these assignments (participation, communication):		3-5 pts each

- Media Consumption Inventory	Feb 3 <sup>rd</sup>	
- Repulsions	Mar 3 <sup>rd</sup>	
- Correct & Reflect	Mar 31 <sup>st</sup>	
- Verification Practices	Apr 14 <sup>th</sup>	
- Ethics		
	Feb 10 <sup>th</sup>	
<b>Reflections</b>	Mar 3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>15%</b>
5 reflection activities	Mar 24 <sup>th</sup>	3 pts each
	May 5 <sup>th</sup>	

## Reading Engagements

During each class meeting (weeks 1-14), we will discuss the readings that were assigned for that week. Prior to each class, you will have to:

1. Think about what came up for you in terms of what you found interesting, hard, provocative, stressful etc. Anything that you think would generate conversation in the group is fair game.
2. Go to a shared document for the reading (a google slide-deck). Claim one page and use it as a canvas – populate it with words or images that will help the group think about the reading from your perspective. This could be your perspective on what is important in the reading, how you engaged with the reading, something concrete that you think we should investigate or some thoughts you'd like to share about yourself that are brought to your mind based on the read. We will leverage these pages in our class discussions.
3. Please note that an important part of your reading engagement is being “present” to discuss your response.

## Course Project

Students will work individually on a class project that will ask you to design a “solution” that addresses some aspect of the misinformation/disinformation problem. The solution may be a small design change that helps slow the spread of misinformation on a single social media platform, or a sweeping policy change that would be implemented across all social media sites.

Since the timeline is fairly short, we will not be strictly following a HCD process, but we will be asking students to describe the problem they intend to address, identify potential stakeholders in their design, and use literature review, design ideation, rapid prototyping, and (where possible) a quick round of evaluation with potential “users” to inform their designs. In the final design solution, you will need to provide rationale (from your own research or from other sources) for each design element.

There will be several milestones for this project that you will be required to meet, and you will present your work several times to get feedback on your progress. The project is worth 40% of your grade, divided across the milestones.

## Key Dates:

Jan 27: *Brainstorm solution spaces: misinformation or disinformation; contexts; populations*

Feb 10: [Ideation Exercise](#); each person proposes 2 project ideas, 1 page total.

Feb 24: [Literature Review](#), 2 pages total.

Mar 10: [Project Proposal](#) (commit to one idea). Proposals need to be at least 4 pages including a 2-page literature review. Sketch out your project in the following terms: *What is the phenomenon, what do you propose to do, what skills will you practice/ demonstrate, what will you deliver, what will count as success (i.e., how should we grade), why is this project interesting to you, and what will be challenging.*

Apr 14: [Project Updates + Check-in with instructor](#)

Apr 28: [Final Presentations](#)

May 5: [Final Paper/ Report](#)

Please note: Students and the instructor will co-design some parts of this course activity to create more room to be innovative and direct our own learning.

## Reflections

We will be engaging in several reflection activities over the semester. Five times during the semester, you will share a short reflection on your learning experiences (e.g. what's been surprising, muddy, frustrating etc). The aim is essentially to reflect on one or more of the following topics:

- Your response to one or more of the readings
- Your response to classroom discussion
- Your reflection on some aspect(s) of the week's topics not covered by the above.

These reflections are intended to help you step outside your experiences, make sense of them and inform future learning.

## Media Consumption Investigations

In other reflection assignments, you will also be asked to investigate the use of your digital devices and apps, discovering how you might use them to consume news in healthier and more effective ways. This will help us explore how contemplative and reflective practices can offer insights and design principles for the development of new information practices and technologies.

## Dialog with the Instructor

I will meet with each member of the class individually at least three times during the semester. The first meeting (30 minutes long) will take place during the first two weeks of the course. This meeting is meant to allow us to get to know one another--more than the "normal" online classroom setting usually permits. I am eager to hear what you're hoping to accomplish in the iSchool, what you're hoping to do afterwards, and also to answer any questions you might have--about the course, about me, or about anything else.

The second meeting will take place during the middle of the semester. This is meant to allow us to discuss your project and participation. The third meeting will take place towards the end of the semester to discuss what you learned in the course, and your suggestions for improving the course in the future. I will also ask you for input on your final grade.

## Course Policies

### Grading and Evaluation Policy

Grades in graduate school are necessarily crude. The most important outcomes should be what you learn, how it impacts what you want to study or do in the future, and your ability to think clearly and express your ideas and research activities logically. Your grade will be based on the assignment breakdown described above in the Course Assignments table.

I have very strong expectations of participation because the class format requires shared attention and active discussions. I reserve the right to reduce a student's grade if they do not meet my expectations around participation.

This course uses the iSchool Standard Grading Scheme, which converts percentage grades into 4.0 grades. You will receive a decimal grade for this class. General grading information for graduate students is available in the University's General Information Catalog.

Your written work will be graded based on its clarity, organization, balance, amount of pertinent detail included, depth and clarity of evaluative and analytical comments, and preparation. It will also be graded on the extent to which a good understanding of the material presented in the course is shown and on the extent to which directions are followed. If evaluative or analytical comments are required, they should be supported by factual evidence, either from readings or other documents. Other aspects of individual assignments may also be included in the grading.

Written work that shows a lack of understanding of subject matter, is unclear or poorly organized, contains few or irrelevant details, does not follow directions, contains little or unsubstantiated evaluative commentary, or is poorly written, prepared (e.g. typos, grammatical errors), or documented will receive low grades.

Students are encouraged to take drafts of their writing assignments to the University Writing Center for assistance. Information on scheduling an appointment can be found [here](#).

**Evaluation of Student Work:** You may expect to receive comments on and evaluations of assignments and submitted work in a timely fashion. All work from the course will be returned, with comments, within two weeks of the last class of the semester.

**Late Assignments:** Late assignments will receive reduced credit, unless the student has made prior arrangements with the instructor.

### Guidelines for Remote Participation

Due to Covid-19, this course will be fully online. This is my first time teaching online, so I reserve the right to update these guidelines as we go.

I am going to try to make this class as educational and engaging as possible. I am committed to your learning and to making this an extremely high quality educational experience for you. But there will inevitably be some unexpected wrinkles along the way, and we will try to roll with them as well as we can.

I understand that there is a lot going on behind the scenes where each of you are. And I understand that wifi connections are variable. So I will not require that everyone run their audio and video at all times. And indeed sometimes, we will ask that you mute your audio.

But I will ask that if/when you can, that you keep your video active during the class. Being able to see you all REALLY helps me present and manage discussions. My energy feeds off your energy, so seeing you is really important to me. I will also maintain the expectation that students will activate their audio to ask questions and make comments during class discussions and participate in small group activities and team meetings.

During class, I ask that you present yourself in a professional or semi-professional manner. Please make sure that you are wearing appropriate clothes and are seated or standing in an upright position while participating.

## **Additional Course Policies**

You are responsible for reading and following these course policies.

**Instructor Communication:** E-mail is the official mode of communication for the university and the most reliable means of contact for me. It is always helpful if your e-mail includes a targeted subject line that begins with “INF XX.” Do not use the messaging facilities in Canvas; these messages do not arrive in my e-mail inbox. Please allow a 24-hour window for email responses and plan accordingly. If you would prefer to meet with me, please email me to arrange an appointment.

**Copyright Notice:** These materials may be protected by copyright. United States copyright law, 17 USC section 101, et seq., in addition to University policy and procedures, prohibit unauthorized duplication or retransmission of course materials.

**Statement on Classroom Recording:** To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student’s own private use. Due to COVID-19 we may record course content. Class recordings are reserved only for the use of members of this class (students, TAs, and the instructor) and only for educational purposes. Recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form. Violation of this restriction could lead to Student Misconduct proceedings.

**Sharing of Course Materials is Prohibited:** No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class unless you have my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. It is a violation of the University’s Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty. I am well aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to Student Conduct and Academic Integrity in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in sanctions, including failure in the course. On original work:

cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. If an assignment turned in for credit is found to have been plagiarized, you will receive a grade of 0 points and a formal reprimand in your student file. You will be subject to the University's disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course.

**Style manual:** Please use the American Psychological Association's style manual. In particular, please be sure to follow its citation formats and rules on language bias.

## **Guidance for students taking this course outside the United States**

Faculty members at U.S. universities – including The University of Texas at Austin – have the right to academic freedom which includes presenting and exploring topics and content that other governments may consider to be illegal and, therefore, choose to censor. Examples may include topics and content involving religion, gender and sexuality, human rights, democracy and representative government, and historic events.

If, as a UT student, you are living outside of the United States while taking courses remotely, you are subject to the laws of your local jurisdiction. Local authorities may limit your access to course material and take punitive action towards you. Unfortunately, the University of Texas has no authority over the laws in your jurisdictions or how local authorities enforce those laws.

If you are taking UT courses outside of the United States, you have reason to exercise caution when enrolling in courses that cover topics and issues censored in your jurisdiction. If you have concerns regarding a course or courses that you have registered for, please contact your academic advisor who will assist you in exploring options.

## **University Policies**

You are responsible for reading and following these University policies.

**Religious holy days:** A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence.

**Use of E-mail for Official Correspondence:** All students should become familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in their e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is recommended that e-mail be checked daily, but at a minimum, twice per week. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/help/utmail/1564>

**Documented Disability Statement:** You will need to provide documentation to the Dean of Students Office so the most appropriate accommodations can be determined. Specialized services are available on campus through Services for Students with Disabilities (SSB 4.104, 471-6259). Any student who requires special accommodations must obtain a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement (471-6259 voice or 471- 4641 TTY for users who are deaf

or hard of hearing). Present the letter to the professor at the beginning of the semester so that needed accommodations can be discussed. The student should remind the professor of any testing accommodations no later than five business days before an exam. If you plan to make use of specialized services through SSD please inform me before the second class meeting. For more information, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

**Title IX and Texas SB 212 Reporting requirements:** Title IX is a federal law that protects against sex and gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, unprofessional or inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature, dating/domestic violence and stalking at federally funded educational institutions. UT Austin is committed to fostering a learning and working environment free from discrimination in all its forms. When unprofessional or inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature occurs in our community, the university can:

1. Intervene to prevent harmful behavior from continuing or escalating.
2. Provide support and remedies to students and employees who have experienced harm or have become involved in a Title IX investigation.
3. Investigate and discipline violations of the university's [relevant policies](#).

Beginning January 1, 2020, Texas Senate Bill 212 requires all employees of Texas universities, including faculty, report any information to the Title IX Office regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking that is disclosed to them. Texas law requires that all employees who witness or receive any information of this type (including, but not limited to, writing assignments, class discussions, or one-on-one conversations) must be reported. If you would like to speak with someone who can provide support or remedies without making an official report to the university, please email [advocate@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:advocate@austin.utexas.edu).

Although graduate teaching and research assistants are not subject to Texas Senate Bill 212, they are still mandatory reporters under Federal Title IX laws and are required to report a wide range of behaviors we refer to as sexual misconduct, including the types of sexual misconduct covered under Texas Senate Bill 212. The Title IX office has developed supportive ways to respond to a survivor and compiled campus resources to support survivors.

For more information about reporting options and resources, visit <http://www.titleix.utexas.edu/>, contact the Title IX Office via email at [titleix@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:titleix@austin.utexas.edu), or call 512-471-0419.

### **University Resources for Students**

The university has numerous resources for students to provide assistance and support for your learning, use these to help you succeed in your classes

#### ***The University Writing Center***

The University Writing Center offers free, individualized, expert help with writing for any UT student, by appointment or on a drop-in basis. Consultants help students develop strategies to improve their writing. The assistance we provide is intended to foster students' resourcefulness and self-reliance. <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

#### ***Counseling and Mental Health Center***

The Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) provides counseling, psychiatric,

consultation, and prevention services that facilitate students' academic and life goals and enhance their personal growth and well-being. <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

**Basic Needs Security:** Any student who faces challenges of affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believe this may affect their performance in the course, is encouraged to contact the Office of the Dean of Students – Student Emergency Services (SES) for support. Please notify the instructor if you are comfortable doing so and I will make efforts to provide any resources that I may possess to help you navigate issues of food insecurity or residential displacement.

- SES Concerns and Emergencies:  
<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/concernsemergencies.php>
- SES Food Pantry:  
<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/pantry.php>
- SES Confidential Advocacy and Support:  
<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/advocacysupport.php>

### ***Student Emergency Services***

<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

### ***ITS***

Need help with technology? <http://www.utexas.edu/its/>

### ***Libraries***

Need help searching for information? <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/>

### ***Canvas***

Canvas help is available 24/7 at  
<https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/633028/pages/student-tutorials>

## **Important Safety Information**

**Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL):** If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal> .

**Emergency Evacuation Policy:** Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform me in writing during the first week of class.

- In the event of an evacuation, follow my instructions or those of class instructors. Do not re-enter a building unless you are given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.

**Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty:** Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Student Judicial Services web site at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/>

**University of Texas Core Values and Honor Code:** The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community. As a student of the University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity.

## **COVID-19 Information for students**

### **Safety and Class Participation/Masks:**

We will all need to make some adjustments in order to benefit from in-person classroom interactions in a safe and healthy manner. Our best protections against spreading COVID-19 on campus are masks (defined as cloth face coverings) and staying home if you are showing symptoms. Therefore, for the benefit of everyone, this means that all students are required to follow two important rules.

### **Every student must wear a cloth face covering properly in class and in all campus buildings at**

**all times** . If a student is not wearing a cloth face covering properly in the classroom (or any UT building), that student must leave the classroom (and building). If the student refuses to wear a cloth face covering, class will be dismissed for the remainder of the period, and the student will be subject to disciplinary action as set forth in the university's Institutional Rules/General Conduct 11-404(a)(3). Students who have a condition that precludes the wearing of a cloth face covering must follow the procedures for obtaining an accommodation working with Services for Students with Disabilities.

For the safety of our community, **every student is strongly encouraged to do daily symptom screening**, which is available using the Protect Texas Together app. Once the symptom screening is completed, it will inform students whether they are cleared to come to campus. Students should only come to campus if the symptom screening app clears them to do so. Otherwise, students should isolate and contact a medical professional for further guidance before coming to campus again.

If a student is not wearing a cloth face covering properly in the classroom (or any UT building), that student must leave the classroom (and building). If the student refuses to wear a cloth face

covering, class will be dismissed for the remainder of the period, and the student will be subject to disciplinary action as set forth in the university's Institutional Rules/General Conduct 11-404(a)(3). Students who have a condition that precludes the wearing of a cloth face covering must follow the procedures for [obtaining an accommodation](https://orientation.utexas.edu/students-with-disabilities) (<https://orientation.utexas.edu/students-with-disabilities> )

Students in need of assistance are encouraged to contact Student Emergency Services . Students who need computer equipment or reliable internet access for online classes should complete the Student Emergency Fund application , and share specific information about their needs.

The Counseling and Mental Health Center will continue to provide counseling and psychiatric services to support students throughout this time, though our services will be delivered over the phone.

If you have any IT needs (computer hardware, software, cameras, headphones, etc.) that might be necessary for you to attend online classes, please email the iSchool IT Team at [help@ischool.utexas.edu](mailto:help@ischool.utexas.edu).

International Students and Scholars are encouraged to reach out to Texas Global for specific information regarding your status at [hotline@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:hotline@austin.utexas.edu). Make sure to include your EID and name in all communications.

Students interested in learning about Coronavirus-related refunds or reimbursements should go to: <https://coronavirus.utexas.edu/refunds-reimbursements>

Info about Student Health Insurance extension after graduation can be found here: <https://global.utexas.edu/iss/insurance/enroll> .