



<b>Course title:</b>	Social Work Practice in the Era of Fake News	
<b>Course #/term:</b>	796 – 002, Fall 2018	
<b>Time and place:</b>	Wednesday, 6 – 9 p.m. room 2752 SSWB	
<b>Credit hours:</b>	1	
<b>Prerequisites:</b>	none	
<b>Instructor:</b>	Darlene Nichols	
<b>Pronouns:</b>	She, her, hers	
<b>Contact info:</b>	<b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:dpn@umich.edu">dpn@umich.edu</a>	<b>Phone:</b> 734-936-2362
	You may expect a response within a day or less	
<b>Office:</b>	2752	
<b>Office hours:</b>	tba & By appointment	

## 1. Course Statement

---

### a. Course description

This course presents advanced topics in both micro and macro social work practice. The topics may include emerging cross-cutting practice methods, advanced application of methods covered in other required methods courses, and applications of methods in specific populations.

### b. Course content

The term “post-truth,” the Oxford Dictionaries 2016 Word of the Year, reflects an era where everyone is a few clicks away from information that supports any goal, belief, or outcome desired whether or not that information is factual. Evaluating information and recognizing “fake news” is a critical skill for everyone. For social workers, advocates, policy makers, and others responsible for human well-being, it’s essential to find reliable data and other evidence to promote best practice and avoid the dangers of inaccurate information. Skill in locating and evaluating information can also help a practitioner work with clients and others who bring incorrect information into an interaction. This mini-course will address the following:

- Understanding the phenomenon of fake news in the information landscape
- Building strategies for spotting fake news
- Addressing best approaches to locate “real” news
- Learning how to fact-check data and statistics

- Ways in which information is organized, structured, and delivered to support the dominant social narratives in the U.S.

**c. Course objectives and competencies**

- Critically evaluate information sources, focusing on currency, relevance, replicability, accuracy, authority, and purpose. 4.2
- Identify the social impact of “fake news” and other fabricated or grossly biased information on decision-making and help-seeking behavior. 4.1, 6.2
- Understand how one’s own biases, media consumption practices, and worldviews can alter how one searches for and selects information for personal and professional use. 1.2, 1.5, 4.2, 4.4
- Assess how the dominant social narrative shapes what we hear and see through news media. 4.1

**d. Course design**

This course is designed to continue the development of critical thinking skills about information, how it is retrieved, utilized, and understood by ourselves and those with whom we work. While there will be some short lectures, we will engage with the material primarily through guided discussion and engagement with the materials. Students will be encouraged to bring their own observations about “fake news” and its manifestations online and elsewhere to enhance all of our understanding of fake news in today’s world.

## 2. Class Requirements

---

**a. Text and class materials**

Readings, video links, and other course material will be linked in Canvas at least one week prior to the class for which it will be assigned. Reading or viewing materials before class will be essential in order to best engage with class discussions.

**b. Class schedule**

Date/Time	Agenda	Required Readings & Assignments
Week 1 October 18	Introductions Course plan Using dialogue  Defining Fake News	Read “Lexicon of Lies” Complete assignment 1 before first class meeting

	Finding credible sources	
Week 2 October 25	<p>Becoming a News Spotter</p> <p>Developing strategies for finding credible evidence (continued)</p> <p>Understanding where fake news comes from &amp; why</p> <p>Identifying fake news</p> <p>Correcting misinformation</p> <p>The role of cognition &amp; bias</p>	<p>Read page from FAIR: <a href="http://fair.org/take-action-now/media-activism-kit/how-to-detect-bias-in-news-media/">http://fair.org/take-action-now/media-activism-kit/how-to-detect-bias-in-news-media/</a></p> <p>Apply criteria from this page to selected topic (week one brainstorm; further details on Canvas)</p> <p>Read: Lewandowsky, S, Ecker, U.K.H., &amp; Cook, J. (2012). [in Canvas]</p>
Week 3 November 1	<p>Literacy Beyond the Written Word</p> <p>Data &amp; statistical literacy</p> <p>Information literacy</p> <p>Algorithmic literacy</p> <p>Understanding information marketing</p>	<p>Read selections posted in Canvas from <i>Truth Decay</i>, and <i>Propaganda in the Helping Professions</i>.</p>
Week 4 November 8	<p>Media and Information Institutions</p> <p>How these sustain dominant social narratives &amp; myths</p> <p>News outlets</p> <p>Publishers</p> <p>Journal editors</p>	<p>View video: "Framing an Execution"</p> <p><a href="https://umich.kanopy.com/video/framing-execution-media-mumia-abu-jamal">https://umich.kanopy.com/video/framing-execution-media-mumia-abu-jamal</a></p> <p>Think about the questions listed on Canvas for this video as you watch it; be prepared for discussion</p>
Week 5 November 15	<p>Social Fragmentation and societal impact of "fake news"</p> <p>Privilege and access to information</p>	<p>Complete assignment three</p>

c. Assignments

Assignment	Due date
Assignment 1: Think about the different ways “fake news” is described in the reading. How do you define this concept? What terms make sense to you? How do you identify “fake news”?	Oct. 18
Assignment 2: Select an issue or topic (we will brainstorm in the first class) relevant to your work or interests. Look for news, websites, or other information sources that represent different perspectives. Look for misinformation related to the topic. Keep notes on how you found your samples and how you assessed them based on that and previous weeks’ discussions. These notes do not need to be lengthy. They will be used for discussion in each class.	Weekly
Create a “fake news” or misinformation piece related to your selected topic; include a paragraph on what elements you used to make it seem as “real” as possible; more details to come	November 15

d. Attendance and class participation

To get the most out of this class, attendance and participation is essential. If you will need to miss a class, please let the instructor know as soon as possible.

[Policy on Class Attendance](#)

e. Grading

- This class is graded Pass/Fail
- Late assignments will be permitted under special circumstances and in consultation with the instructor
- School of Social Work Policies
  - [Grades in Academic Courses and in Field Instruction](#)
  - [Policy for grading in special circumstances](#)
  - [Student Grievance procedures](#)