Verifying and analysing fake news

A syllabus for Journalism & Mass Communication programmes

Erasmus+

1. Data on the programme

1.1 Field of study	Journalism / Communication and Media Studies
1.2 Recommended level *[Bachelor/ Masters]*	Bachelor
1.3 Recommended study programme/ qualification	Journalism/Media Studies/Mass Communication

2. Data on the discipline

2.1 Name	Verifying and analysing fake news
2.2 Recommended qualifications for the teacher *[practitioner, theoretician, PhD holder in a certain field of study, etc.]*	Theoretician; practitioners/journalists for seminars
2.3 Year of study *[entry level/ advanced]*	1st & 2nd
2.4. Evaluation type *[examination/ project/ portfolio/essay]*	Essay
2.5. Type of discipline [facultative, compulsory]	Compulsory

3. Total time - estimated [hours per semester of student activity]

3.1 Number of hours per week	2	From which: 3.2 course *[theory]*	1 (12 weeks)	3.3 seminar *[theory & practice]*/laboratory *[practice & laboratory]*	1 (12 weeks)
3.4 Total number of hours [3.1 X number of weeks; 12-14 weeks per semester]	24	From which: 3.5 course *[theory]*	12	3.6 seminar *[theory & practice]*/ laboratory *[practice & laboratory]*	12
Time distribution					Hours
Individual study using a manual, course support, bibliography, notes from the course					40
Documentation online and/ or on the field					40
Preparing homework: individual or teamwork, portfolios, essays, etc.					40

Tutoring	**0**
Examinations	**20**
Other activities	**0**
3.7 Total hour of individual study	**140**
3.8 Total hours per semester (3.4. + 3.7)	**164**
3.9 Number of ECTS	**5**

4. Preconditions (if applicable)

[Who are the intended students]

4.1 curriculum preconditions (recommended previous courses)	**Introductory courses in journalism and/or media studies**
4.2 competences preconditions	**NA**

5. Infrastructure needed (if applicable)

5.1 for the course	**Classroom with an internet connected computer**
5.2 for the seminar/laboratory	**The same as in 4.1 plus computers and internet access for each student**

6. Specific abilities

[What do we want students to be able to do]

6.1. Professional competencies *[job skills to be developed]*	**To acquire the skills necessary to recognize quality media content, as well as deceptive media content (facts vs fabricated content).** **To have the ability to recognize the various types of fake news in the media.** **To have the ability of recognizing reliable and unreliable sources.** **To understand how journalistic stories are created vs fake news** **To develop critical thinking skills and to understand the professional ethics standards.** **To develop the necessary skills for verifying**

	information before publication, as well as the necessary skills for fact-checking.
6.2. Transversal competencies *[team work, critical thinking, global citizenship, etc.]*	**Critical thinking** **Analytical thinking** **Media and Information literacy**

7. Discipline's objectives

[related to developing abilities & competencies]

7.1 General objective	**To improve the quality of today's news by increasing students' media literacy skills in order to raise the trust in journalism.**
7.2 Specific objectives *[Learning outcomes – observable, measurable]*	**By the end of the semester, students in this class will:** **Be able to know what fake news and misinformation are.** **Have the necessary tools to recognize real news from fake and false ones.** **Know how to distinguish the trustworthy sources from unreliable ones.** **Know how to verify the information.**

8. Content

[for 12 weeks]

8.1. Course	Teaching methods *[connected to professional & transversal competencies]*	Observations *[link among proposed teaching methods and intended competences]*

Course – week 1 Introduction of the course History of Fake News	Teaching material, lecture, discussion, questions/answers	Presenting the objectives and the structure of the course, the assignments and evaluation methods. Definitions of „fake news". History of „fake news" Ground zero in fake news – 2016 the American elections Dangers of fake news
Courses - weeks 2 and 3 What is the news? Fake news typology	Teaching material, lecture, discussion, questions/answers	Discussing about different classifications of fake news Fake news examples for each category Differences between classifications Actors of fake news
Courses - weeks 4 and 5 Journalism and Fake News. Ethics and deontology	Lecture, discussion, questions/answers	How the fake news phenomenon affects mainstream journalism Low-quality journalism How can journalism stop the development of the fake news phenomenon
Course - week 6 Digitalisation and transformation of the news industry	Lecture, discussion, questions/answers	The digitalisation of news and the introduction of a new type of audience (the digital public) Increasing online propaganda, disrupting advertising systems
Course – week 7 Sources	Lecture, discussion, questions/answers	Analysing different news and fake news from the sources point of view. Analysing the use of expert/ reputable sources, the use of direct quotes and other methods of verifying the sources
Course - week 8	Teaching material, lecture, discussion,	Why is social media a fertile ground for fake news?

Fake news and social media	questions/answers	How to detect fake news on social media Journalism on social media and the promotion of news on social media Actions taken by social media platforms to stop the spread of false news
Course - week 9 The economic dimension. Local Fake News	Lecture, discussion, questions/answers	The economic effects of fake news Clickbaits The discovery of digital fingerprints, online influencing techniques, bots Digital frauds A look at the local fake news from the countries in the project
Course – week 10 The need for digital literacy	Lecture, discussion, questions/answers	What digital literacy means Why digital literacy is more important than ever
Course - week 11 Verifying and fact-checking	Teaching material, lecture, discussion, questions/answers	How to check information, fact-checking Text, photo, video checking How to detect „fake news"
Course – week 12 Trends for tackling fake news in the future	Lecture, discussion, questions/answers	Creating a model to detect fake news on social media Web interface for detecting "sensational" headlines Other solutions to combat misinformation
8.2 Seminar/laboratory	Teaching methods *[connected to professional & transversal*	Observations *[link among proposed teaching methods and intended*

	competencies]	competences]
Seminar – week 1	Exercises, discussions	Analysing the definitions of fake news. Talking about the ground zero in fake news – 2016 the American elections. Analysing the most important fake news moments so far and the consequences of fake news.
Seminar – weeks 2 and 3	Exercises, discussions	Comparing news and fake news. Finding and analysing fake news according to the classifications. Topics for fake news. Creators, consumers, and arbiters of fake news.
Seminar - weeks 4 and 5	Exercises, discussions	Examples and analyses of low-quality journalism. Most distinct features. How can journalism stop the development of the fake news phenomenon?
Seminar - week 6	Exercises, discussions	The challenges of the news digitalisation process. The new advertising models and their impact on news/fake news. Audience expectations of the new type of news.
Seminar - week 7	Exercises, discussions	Exercise in order to find the correct information and to identify reliable/unreliable sources.
Seminar - week 8	Exercises, discussions	Analysing different fake news in social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube). Verifying the sources in social media.

		Identifying fake accounts. Analysing fake news gone viral.
Seminar - week 9	Exercises, discussions	Ways to fight fake news through media literacy Analysing subliminal messages Deconstructing media messages
Seminar - week 10	Exercises, discussions	How to find the facts - students will write a fact check report of a certain news story.
Seminar - week 11	Final discussions and preparing the final presentations	
Seminar - week 12	Evaluation	

9.1. Compulsory (core) bibliography

Barclay, Donald A. 2018. Fake News, Propaganda, and Plain Old Lies, The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, London

Dalkir, Kimiz, Katz, Rebecca. 2020. Navigating Fake News, Alternative Facts, and Misinformation in a Post-Truth World, IGI Global

Davis, Evan. Post truth: Why we have reached peak bullshit and what we can do about it. Little Brown, 2017

Edson C. Tandoc Jr., Zheng Wei Lim & Richard Ling (2018) Defining "Fake News", Digital Journalism, 6:2, DOI: 10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143

Greifeneder, Rainer, Jaffé, Mariela E., Newman, Eryn J., Schwarz, Norbert (2021): The Psychology of fake news, Routledge

Ireton, Cherilyn, Posetti, Julie (eds.) (2018): Journalism, 'Fake News' & Disinformation. Handbook for Journalism Education and Training, UNESCO, Paris

McBrayer J. (2021) – Beyond Fake News, Routledge, New York

Rusbridger, Alan (2018): Breaking News: The Remaking of Journalism and Why It Matters Now. London: Canongate

Shu, K. et al. (eds.) (2021): Disinformation, Misinformation, and Fake News in Social Media, Springer

Zimdars, Melissa, McLeod, Kembrew (eds.) (2020): Fake News - Understanding Media and Misinformation in the Digital Age, The MIT Press, Cambridge

9.2. Additional bibliography

Schudson, Michael. 2007. Why Democracies Need An Unlovable Press. Malden, MA: Polity

Jayakumar, Shashi, Ang, Benjamin, Anwar, Nur Diyanah (eds.). 2021. Disinformation and Fake News, Palgrave Macmillan

Wardle, C. 2017. "Fake news. It's complicated." UK: First Draft, https://firstdraftnews.org/latest/fake-news-complicated, accessed 6 March 2021

Winston, Brian, Winston, Matthew. 2020. The Roots of Fake News, Routledge, New York

10. How is the discipline connected to the expectations of the professional /epistemic community

Newsrooms and journalists are constantly struggling with fake and false news. However, the phenomenon has become widespread and journalists alone cannot deal with it. Thus, there is also a need for academic support. This course will help the media environment by teaching the students how to become both informed news consumers as well as trained journalists who can recognize and correct misinformation.

11. How is the discipline connected to the rest of the journalistic / communication studies curriculum

This course is related to almost all the other journalistic/communication studies curriculum: Deontology and media ethics, Media Writing, Reporting Methods, Researching Techniques, News editing and management, Digital communication. To know how to differentiate between facts and fiction, how to verify the information or how to recognise credible sources are some of the basic elements in the study of journalism and communication studies.

12. Evaluation

[How to measure students' acquired abilities, through different instruments, such as: tests; analyses of existing journalistic examples; essays; suggested portfolio]

Type of activity	12.1 Evaluation criteria	12.2 Evaluation methods
Course	Class participation (10 %)	Knowledge of compulsory reading, ability to answer questions during the lecture or/and discuss topics.
	Individual assignment – Essay (40 %)	Written academic essay (max. 10 pages) focused on one of the topics of the course.
Seminar/ laboratory	A case study and its	A written presentation on the selected topic

	presentation (50%)	from the course subjects

12.3 Minimum performance standard *[linked to specific objectives/ learning outcomes]*

60 % of the overall score; all tasks must be finished and submitted/performed.

13. Rationale

Benchmarking courses

https://www.umu.se/en/education/exchange-students/propaganda-journalism-and-fake-news/

https://mediactive.newscollab.org/

https://writingcommons.org/courses/courses-overview/composition/syllabus-fake-news/

https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/meta/393210/global-journalism-searching-truth-age-fake-news

https://apps.precollege.brown.edu/catalog/course.php?course_code=CEMS0918

https://www.conted.ox.ac.uk/courses/fake-news-a-history

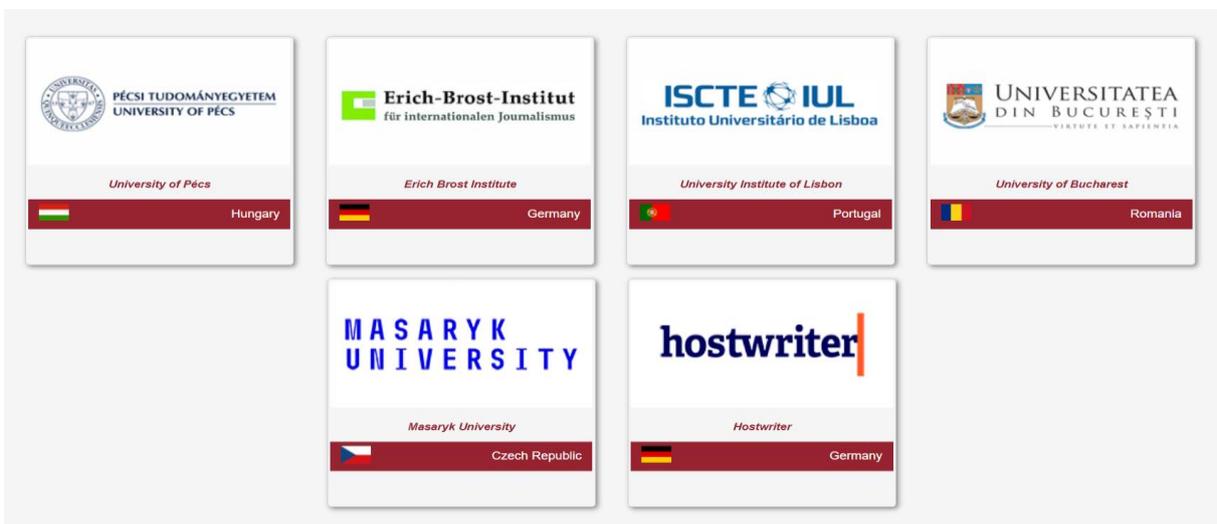https://www.conted.ox.ac.uk/courses/teaching-in-a-digital-world-promoting-digital-literacies-elt?code=O21I421MJC

https://www.conted.ox.ac.uk/courses/data-science-and-fake-news?code=O21P207COJ

https://wwwi.unige.ch/cursus/programme-des-cours/web/teachings/details/2021-7417I

https://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/course/fakenews

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