

NewsReel2

2020-1-HU01-KA203-078824

Debunking disinformation

A syllabus for Journalism and Media
Studies programmes



Erasmus+

New Teaching Fields for the Next Generation of Journalists

NewsReel2



1. Data on the programme

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

2. Data on the discipline

2.1 Name	Debunking disinformation
2.2 Recommended qualifications for the teacher [<i>practitioner, theoretician, PhD holder in a certain field of study, etc.</i>]	Academic, Journalist, PhD
2.3 Year of study [<i>entry level/ advanced</i>]	Intermediate level
2.4. Evaluation type [<i>examination/ project/ portfolio/essay</i>]	Portfolio
2.5. Type of discipline [<i>facultative, compulsory</i>]	To be decided at Faculty level

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

3.1 Number of hours per week	2	From which: 3.2 course [<i>theory</i>]	2, for 4 weeks	3.3 seminar [<i>theory & practice</i>]/laboratory [<i>practice & laboratory</i>]	2, for 6 weeks
3.4 Total number of hours [<i>3.1 X number of weeks; 10 weeks per semester</i>]	20	From which: 3.5 course [<i>theory</i>]	8	3.6 seminar [<i>theory & practice</i>]/ laboratory [<i>practice & laboratory</i>]	12
Time distribution					Hours
Individual study using a manual, course support, bibliography, notes from the course					28
Documentation online and/ or on the field					20
Preparing homework: individual or teamwork, portfolios, essays, etc.					28

Tutoring	2
Examinations	2
Other activities	
3.7 Total hour of individual study	76
3.8 Total hours per semester (3.4. + 3.7)	100
3.9 Number of ECTS	4

4. Preconditions (if applicable)

[Who are the intended students]

4.1 curriculum preconditions (recommended previous courses)	Not needed
4.2 competences preconditions	Not needed (Recommended – news gathering techniques; news writing)

5. Infrastructure needed (if applicable)

5.1 for the course	Laptop, Projector, Screen, Audio System, Internet access
5.2 for the seminar/laboratory	Laptop, Projector, Screen, Audio System, Internet access

6. Specific abilities

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

6.1. Professional competencies <i>[job skills to be developed]</i>	<p>Debunking disinformation is a course developed in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To know and understand the main concepts and theories related to disinformation, virality and debunking ● To get solid knowledge regarding the mechanisms used for debunking fake news and disinformation
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop a journalistic piece in order to debunk disinformation • To develop the skeleton of an inoculation campaign
6.2. Transversal competencies <i>[team work, critical thinking, global citizenship, etc.]</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking • Teamwork

7. Discipline's objectives

[related to developing abilities & competencies]

7.1 General objective	The objective is to teach the future journalists to be able to decide what pieces of information are dangerous and should be debunked and how to elaborate a journalistic piece focused on debunking disinformation, which might be effective at least on a fraction of the intended audience.
7.2 Specific objectives <i>[Learning outcomes – observable, measurable]</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the end of the semester, students in this course will: • Be able to identify viral pieces of disinformation • Understand the social and psychological mechanism that lie behind viral mis-, dis- and mal-information and that support effective debunking • Use online and offline sources and tools to verify information and create attractive and easy to follow debunking articles and social media posts.

8. Content

[for 10 weeks]

8.1. Course	Teaching methods <i>[connected to professional & transversal competencies]</i>	Observations <i>[link among proposed teaching methods and intended competences]</i>
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<p>Course - week 1</p> <p>What is debunking. Fake news, conspiracy theories, mis, dis and mal-information. The differences among debunking, verifying and fact-checking. Why is debunking important in a democratic setting.</p> <p>Understanding online virality. Filter bubbles and echo chambers. What research says about online audiences</p>	<p>E-learning, Ex Cathedra, Tips, Open discussion</p>	<p>The conceptual foundations of the course</p> <p>Students understand how internet and social media changed the news environment</p>
<p>Course - week 3</p> <p>The psychology behind information disorders. Cognitive biases. Polarisation. The inoculation theory of resistance to influence</p>	<p>E-learning, Ex Cathedra, Tips, Open discussion</p>	<p>A short introduction to behavioural economics, to increase the understanding of online publics and possible causes for resistance to debunking.</p>
<p>Course - week 5</p> <p>Tracking viral disinformation online: CrowdTangle; poorly curated social networks; online groups, and trolls; video, memes, personal stories, rumours, non-expert advice</p>	<p>E-learning, Ex Cathedra, Tips, Open discussion</p>	<p>A deep dive into viral incorrect content</p>
<p>Course - week 7</p> <p>Crossing sources for debunking. The scientific approach. Cross verification. Experimentation. Reverse search image and geolocation.</p> <p>Proper debunking: Fact – Myth – Fallacy - Fact. Distribution of debunking pieces.</p> <p>Resilience – creating messages to inoculate people against disinformation</p>	<p>Ex Cathedra, Tips, Open discussion</p>	<p>Newsgathering techniques for debunking</p> <p>Newsriting techniques for debunking</p>
<p>8.2 Seminar/laboratory</p>	<p>Teaching methods</p> <p><i>[connected to professional & transversal competencies]</i></p>	<p>Observations</p> <p><i>[link among proposed teaching methods and intended competences]</i></p>
<p>Seminar – week 2</p> <p>A discussion on debunking cases – sources, intended audiences, effects</p>	<p>Workshops and hands-on practice</p>	<p>A clarification of concepts, using real life examples</p>

Seminar – week 4 Recognizing cognitive biases	Workshops and hands-on practice	Workshop based on behavioural economics
Seminar – week 6 Tracking viral disinformation online	Workshops and hands-on practice	Identifying possible viral, dangerous messages online for a given community
Seminar – week 8 Crossing sources for debunking	Workshops and hands-on practice	Practicing newsgathering techniques for debunking
Seminar – week 9 Debunking pieces of news	Workshops and hands-on practice	Practicing newswriting techniques for debunking – debunking messages
Seminar – week 10 Inoculation messages	Workshops and hands-on practice	Practicing newswriting techniques for debunking – inoculation campaigns
EXAM _ Final projects on chosen topics (issue identification; debunking; inoculation strategy)	Workshops and hands-on practice	

9.1. Compulsory (core) bibliography

- Bounegru, L., Gray, J., Venturini, T., & Mauri, M. 2018. A Field Guide to "Fake News" and Other Information Disorders: A Collection of Recipes for Those Who Love to Cook with Digital Methods. Amsterdam: Public Data Lab. Retrieved from <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3097666>.
- Chan, M. P. S., Jones, C. R., Hall Jamieson, K., & Albarracín, D. 2017. Debunking: A meta-analysis of the psychological efficacy of messages countering misinformation. *Psychological science* 28(11): 1531-1546. doi: 10.1177/0956797617714579.
- Compton, J. A., & Pfau, M. 2005. Inoculation theory of resistance to influence at maturity: Recent progress in theory development and application and suggestions for future research. *Annals of the International Communication Association* 29(1): 97-146. doi: 10.1080/23808985.2005.11679045.
- Ireton, C. & J. Posetti (Eds.), *Journalism, 'fake news' & disinformation: handbook for journalism education and training*, 85-100. Paris: UNESCO.
- Fletcher, R. 2020. The truth behind filter bubbles: Bursting some myths. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Retrieved from <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/risj-review/truth-behind-filter-bubbles-bursting-some-myths>.
- Humprecht, E. 2020. How Do They Debunk "Fake News"? A Cross-National Comparison of Transparency in Fact Checks. *Digital Journalism* 8(3): 310-327. doi: 10.1080/21670811.2019.1691031.
- Kahneman, D. 2011. *Thinking, fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Kavanagh, J. & Rich, M. D. 2018. *Truth decay: An initial exploration of the diminishing role of facts and analysis in American public life*. Rand Corporation.
- Lewandowsky, S., Cook, J., Ecker, U. K. H., Albarracín, D., Amazeen, M. A., Kendeou, P.,..., & Zaragoza, M. S. 2020. *The Debunking Handbook 2020*. Retrieved from <https://sks.to/db2020>. doi:10.17910/b7.1182.

- Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K., Seifert, C. M., Schwarz, N., & Cook, J. 2012. Misinformation and its correction: Continued influence and successful debiasing. *Psychological science in the public interest*, 13(3): 106-131. doi: 10.1177/1529100612451018
- Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. 2018. The spread of true and false news online. *Science* 359(6380): 1146-1151. doi: 10.1126/science.aap9559
- Zollo, F., Bessi, A., Del Vicario, M., Scala, A., Caldarelli, G., Shekhtman, L., ... & Quattrociocchi, W. 2017. Debunking in a world of tribes. *PLoS one*, 12(7): e0181821. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0181821

9.2. Additional bibliography

- Berry, J. M., & Sobieraj, S. 2013. *The outrage industry: Political opinion media and the new incivility*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Betsch, C., & Sachse, K. 2013. Debunking vaccination myths: strong risk negations can increase perceived vaccination risks. *Health psychology* 32(2): 146-155. doi: 10.1037/a0027387.
- Brennen, J. S., Simon, F., Howard, P. N., & Nielsen, R. K. 2020. *Types, sources, and claims of COVID-19 misinformation*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Retrieved from <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/types-sources-and-claims-covid-19-misinformation>.
- Flaxman, S., Goel, S. & Rao, J.M. 2016. Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80 (S1): 298–320, <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfw006>.
- Fletcher, R., & Nielsen, R. K. 2018. Automated serendipity: The effect of using search engines on news repertoire balance and diversity. *Digital Journalism*6(8):976-989. doi: 10.1080/21670811.2018.1502045.
- Gorman, S. E., & Gorman, J. M. 2016. *Denying to the grave: Why we ignore the facts that will save us*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Graves, L. 2016. *Deciding What's True: The Rise of Political Fact-Checking in American Journalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Graves, L., & Cherubini, F. 2016. *The Rise of Fact-Checking Sites in Europe*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.
- Livingstone, S. 2004. Media literacy and the challenge of new information and communication technologies. *The communication review* 7(1), 3-14. doi: 10.1080/10714420490280152
- Simon, H. A. 1976. *Administrative Behavior. A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organization* (ed. IIIa). New York, The Free Press.

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

Debunking is a type of fact-checking that targets incorrect and misleading claims and widely held opinions, relevant to a community.

Our news environment changed with the increased usage of the Internet and of social media, which allowed users to become content producers that can be massively distributed at negligible costs. As a result, debunking is a process interested in disinformation, misinformation and viral hoaxes that may have as sources and as disseminators not only public figures, but also private individuals, online trolls and fake accounts on social media.

The aim of the debunking process is to warn communities and to provide corrections for misleading information, erroneous claims, false rumours or modified photos or videos. The best sources of debunking are professional media workers, such as journalists and fact-checkers, as they are, in general, perceived by their audiences as neutral sources of reliable information.

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

Newsgathering and newswriting techniques are part of the basic training for journalist students. This course, debunking disinformation, is an intermediate level course, adapted to the evolutions of our news environments. Recent crises linked to politics, to public affairs and to the public understanding of science showed debunking skills become an essential part of journalistic training and are essential for today's newsrooms.

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	Bonuses for active participation	Ongoing evaluation
Seminar/laboratory	Portfolio: 50% Debunking pieces of news 50% Inoculation messages	Group and individual assignments
<p>12.3 Minimum performance standard [linked to specific objectives/ learning outcomes] for a passing grade (5, for example, in a 1 to 10 grading system)</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding of the main concepts and theories related to disinformation, virality and debunking</p> <p>Solid knowledge of newsgathering and newswriting techniques linked to debunking</p> <p>Producing a publishable journalistic debunking piece</p> <p>Developing the skeleton of an inoculation campaign</p>		

13. Rationale

Benchmarking courses (links)

<https://conspiracytheories.eu/education/syllabuscollection/>

Course design:

<http://www.washington.edu/teaching/teaching-resources/preparing-to-teach/designing-your-course-and-syllabus/>

Distinction among Learning Goals/ Objectives and Outcomes:

<https://provost.asu.edu/sites/default/files/page/1595/student-learning-outcomes.pdf>

Transversal competencies:

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002465/246590E.pdf>

Professional competencies:

<http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/effective-teaching-practices/revised-blooms-taxonomy>

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS):

One credit point means 25-30 hours of workload

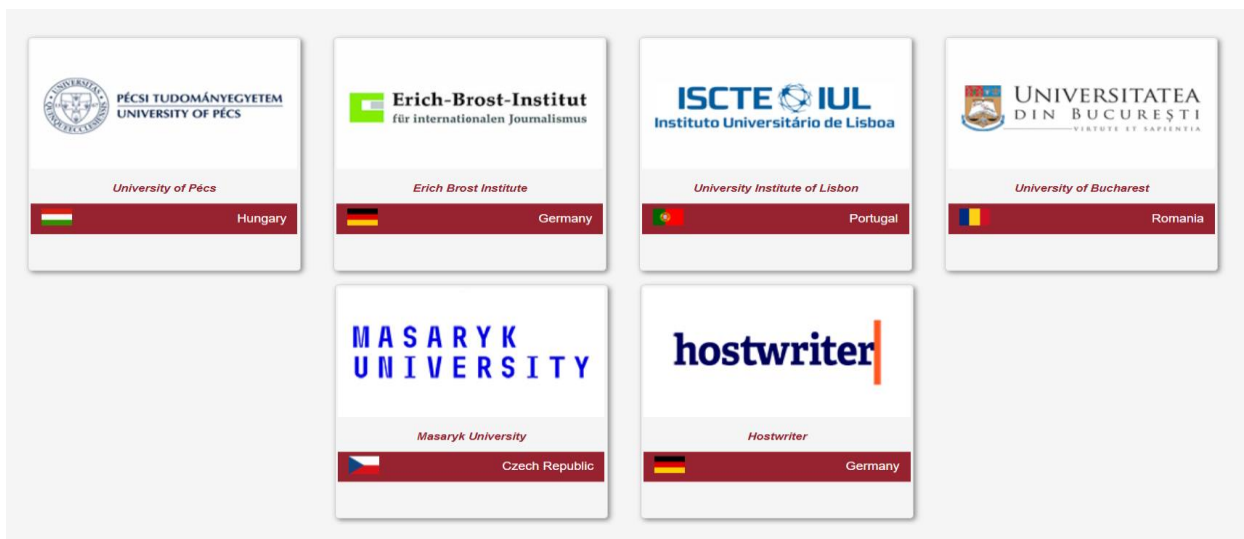
https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources/european-credit-transfer-accumulation-system_en

Experiential learning, journalism:

<http://www.zurnalai.vu.lt/files/journals/6/articles/72/public/zt-nr2-3.pdf>



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