

COMM 438: Propaganda
Spring 2020

Dr. Mercieca
Office: 202G Bolton Hall
Office Hours: T/TH 10:00-11:00 and by appointment.
Email: mercieca@tamu.edu

Course Description:

We will examine issues relevant to the public sphere, citizenship, and democracy by examining propaganda in American political discourse. Our readings and discussions will focus on four topics: 1) understanding propaganda; 2) propaganda message creation and analysis; 3) propaganda circulation and amplification; and, 4) whether or not it is possible to debunk propaganda. Our course readings, class discussions, and written work will examine the importance of propaganda in American political discourse.

This course may contain disturbing content, although I've tried to limit it as much as possible. Propaganda often relies on fear appeals and its effects can be gruesome. I have tried to select historical and current examples from all sides of the political spectrum because propaganda is used everywhere and by everyone (even by you).

Course Objectives:

Through discussing the course readings and participating in class activities students will learn how propaganda shapes American political discourse, including how to analyze and debunk political propaganda.

Learning Outcomes:

- **Critical Thinking Skills** - to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information
- **Communication Skills** - to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication
- **Social Responsibility**: to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities

Required Readings & Materials:

1. All course reading materials are available as pdf files on ecampus (<http://ecampus.tamu.edu/>) you are also required to watch videos online. Find the links on your course calendar.
2. You may also need a Composition Book (or similar), if you choose to handwrite your Commonplace Book.
3. You will need to submit your in class assignments via turnitin on ecampus.

Attendance

Attendance is REQUIRED. You are expected to attend and participate in in-class assignments and activities every single class period. Whether your absence is excused or not, you must make up all missed in class assignments or lose the points for that assignment.

How absences are excused: Please refer to <http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07> for a listing of excused absence scenarios. Please note that I may verify any documentation for excused absence requests.

Evaluation:

Your final grade will be based on the following assignments, due at the end of each class period:

Assignments & Grading:

1. Propaganda Show & Tell (6 points) **SIGN UP FOR DATE**

Short in-class presentation in which you lead the class in a discussion of some piece of propaganda (either current or historical). Create a presentation in which you describe the propaganda. Who has produced it? What messaging techniques do you see being used? How does it circulate? How is it amplified? Can it be debunked? You may not repeat anyone else's propaganda!

2. Daily Commonplace (24 points, 1 point **daily** when there is a reading/watching assignment. See calendar below.)

Bring your Commonplace Book (see Appendix A) to class each day and be prepared to read your Commonplace entries for each assigned reading/video to the class. Be prepared to explain why you thought that quotation was interesting/thought provoking/confusing and how it might relate to your Propaganda Analysis Paper.

3. Propaganda Analysis Paper: Topic Declaration/Statement of the Research Problem (5 points) **DUE: February 4**

You will turn in a typed Topic Declaration and Statement of the Research Problem for your end of the semester Propaganda Analysis Paper. In this short paper (less than 1 double spaced page) you will describe what propaganda you will study and what your initial research question will be. This will allow me to give you feedback on your project at its inception, which will help you to think about your research strategies. Turn your paper in via the turnitin link on eCampus by the end of class.

4. Propaganda Analysis Paper: Previous Research (10 points) **DUE: February 25**

You will turn in a typed review of the previous research on your topic, minimum 5 **academic sources (retrieved from the library)**, 3-5 double spaced pages, annotated bibliography style (summarize each source in 3-5 sentences). The previous research may come from Communication scholars, sociology, history, economics, psychology or any other related field. This paper will give you the opportunity to learn what other scholars have written about your propaganda, which will both help you to better understand the propaganda and to formulate your own argument. Turn your paper in via the turnitin link on eCampus by the end of class.

5. Propaganda Analysis Paper: Research Method Plan (5 points) **DUE: March 17**

Turn in a 1-2 page typed double spaced paper in which you answer the following questions:

1. What primary source propaganda texts will you study?
2. Where are these propaganda texts located, do you have access to them?
3. What kind of analysis will you use to understand your propaganda?
4. How will your research strategy help you to answer your research question?

This paper will help you to develop the structure necessary to effectively complete your research paper. Turn your paper in via the turnitin link on eCampus by the end of class.

6. Propaganda Analysis Paper: Primary Source Analysis (10 points) **DUE: April 7**

Turn in a 3-5 page typed, double spaced propaganda analysis. Apply the research strategies that you developed in your Research Method Paper and report your results and conclusions. You should **describe** the propaganda (message, circulation, amplification, debunking), **analyze** that propaganda, and **judge** the effectiveness or appropriateness of the propaganda for achieving the propagandist's goals. This paper will help you to develop your argument about the propaganda and will help you to answer your research question. Turn in via turnitin link on eCampus.

7. Propaganda Analysis Final Paper (40 points) **DUE: May 5** (it may be due sooner if you are a graduating senior)

Your final paper will draw from the previous papers, but IS NOT merely cutting and pasting the old papers together into a new paper. Your paper should have a section for each of the previous papers (statement of the problem/research question, previous research, method/texts, and analysis) in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. Your paper will be 8-10 double spaced pages in length, free from punctuation and spelling errors, and will clearly identify your research question and make an argument based upon previous scholarly research and your own analysis. Turn your paper in via the turnitin link on eCampus.

Good citizenship:

1. You are in class on time every day
2. You are ready to discuss readings
3. You are prepared for classwork.

Points will be assigned as follows:

Propaganda Show & Tell	6
Commonplace Book	24
Topic Declaration Paper	5
Previous Research Paper	10
Research Method Paper	5
Analysis Paper	10
Propaganda Analysis Final	40

Total possible points = 100

Grading Scale:

90-100: A; 80-89: B; 70-79: C; 60-69: D; 59 and below: F

Special Accommodations:

Texas A&M University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact Disability Resources in the Student Services Building or at (979) 845-1637 or visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>. Disabilities may include, but are not limited to attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability related needs with Disability Resources and their instructors as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity Statement:

"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal or tolerate those who do." All syllabi must contain a section that states the Aggie Honor Code (as stated above) and refers the student to the Honor Council Rules and Procedures on the web: <http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor>.

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality

Texas A&M University and the College of Liberal Arts are committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws provide guidance for achieving such an environment. Although class materials are generally considered confidential pursuant to student record policies and laws, University employees – including instructors – cannot maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues that jeopardize the health and safety of our community. As the instructor, I must report (per Texas A&M System Regulation 08.01.01) the following information to other University offices if you share it with me, even if you do not want the disclosed information to be shared:

Allegations of sexual assault, sexual discrimination, or sexual harassment when they involve TAMU students, faculty, or staff, or third parties visiting campus.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In many cases, it will be your decision whether or not you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting, you are encouraged to make an appointment with the Student Counseling Service (<https://scs.tamu.edu/>).

Students and faculty can report non-emergency behavior that causes them to be concerned at <http://tellsomebody.tamu.edu>

Daily Calendar and Assignments

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUE	PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL
January 14	Course Introduction & syllabus.	Read the syllabus.	NONE
January 16	<p>Commonplace Book Discussion and Creation (bring your Commonplace book to class daily)</p> <p>Read: Jacobs, "'Commonplace Books': The Tumblers of an Earlier Era," (1 page)</p>	<p>See discussion of "commonplacing" in Appendix A below and begin your Commonplace book. Choose a form (paper or electronic), style, categories.</p>	NONE
January 21	<p>Resources for Studying Propaganda (archives, techniques)</p> <p>Read: browse the resources folder to see what kinds of propaganda sources are available to study or find your own project elsewhere.</p>	<p>Examine the resources available in your ecampus folder (or, anywhere else). What interests you? Find two possible projects and bring your ideas to class to discuss.</p>	NONE
January 23	<p>Overview 1: We are all Propagandists Now</p> <p>Read: 1) Mercieca, "Preaching Civility Won't Save American Democracy," 1-6. 2) Umberto Eco, "Ur Fascism," 1-10.</p> <p>Watch: "Who are the Public? Public Sphere, Opinions, Moods & History." (10:00)</p>	<p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p>	
January 28	<p>Overview 2: Propaganda for Propaganda</p> <p>Read: Edward Bernays, <i>Propaganda</i>, 19-31.</p> <p>Watch: Edward Bernays, "Torches of Freedom." (6:30)</p>	<p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p>	

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUE	PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL
January 30	<p>Overview 3: Kinds of Propaganda</p> <p>Read: Jacques Ellul, "Categories of Propaganda," 61-87.</p> <p>Watch: "George Creel, The Salesman" (1:37) and "Frank Capra's 'Why We Fight' Propaganda Films" (4:39)</p>	<p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p>	
February 4	<p>Overview 4: Outrage Industry</p> <p>Read: "The Outrage Industry," 3-26.</p> <p>Watch: "Outrage Culture Explained." (8:20)</p>	<p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> <p>Topic Declaration DUE</p>	
February 6	<p>Overview 5: Propaganda is Fascist</p> <p>Read: Jason Stanley, "Propaganda," How Fascism Works, 24-35.</p> <p>Watch: Jason Stanley, "If you're not scared about fascism in the U.S., you should be." NYT. (5:02)</p>	<p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p>	
February 11	<p>Overview 6: A History of Now</p> <p>Read: Peter Pomerantsev, "The Greatest Information Blitzkrieg in History," 80-108.</p> <p>Watch: "How Russian Bots Invade our Elections" (5:03)</p>	<p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p>	

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUE	PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL
February 13	<p>Message Creation 1: Hitler's Rhetorical Strategies</p> <p>Read:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Excerpts from Hitler, <i>Mein Kampf</i>, 1-4. 2) Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle," 1-14. 3) Snyder, "How Hitler Pioneered 'Fake News'," 1-9. <p>Watch: "Don't be a Sucker," (17:25)</p>	Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.	
February 18	<p>Message Creation 2: On Framing & the "Overton Window."</p> <p>Read:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Russell, "An Introduction to the Overton Window of Political Possibilities," 1-6. 2) Lakoff and Duran, "Trump has turned words into weapons. And he's winning the linguistic war." 1-10. <p>Watch: Vox, "How Trump makes extreme things look normal." (7:24)</p>	Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.	
February 20	CLASS CANCELLED		NONE

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUE	PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL
February 25	<p>Message Creation 3: Hypnosis and Wizardry</p> <p>Read:</p> <p>1) Cavna, "Donald Trump will win in a landslide. The mind behind 'Dilbert' explains why." <i>Washington Post</i>, 1-9.</p> <p>2) Antsand, "How To Be A Wizard - Lessons From Master Persuader Scott Adams," 1-12.</p> <p>Watch: "Dilbert Creator Scott Adams on Trump's 'linguistic kill shots'." (7:49)</p>	<p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> <p>Previous Research Paper DUE</p>	
February 27	<p>Message Creation 4: Trump's Rhetorical Techniques</p> <p>Read:</p> <p>1) Tilove, "Six Rhetorical Devices that have served Trump well," 1-7.</p> <p>2) Mercieca, "The Rhetorical brilliance of Trump the demagogue," 1-6.</p> <p>Watch: "7 Public Speaking Tips We Can All Learn From Donald Trump" (6:51)</p>	<p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p>	

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUE	PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL
March 3	<p>Message Creation 5: Disinformation Techniques</p> <p>Read: 1) Center for European Policy Analysis, "Kremlin's Disinformation Techniques," 1-3. 2) "Disinformation For Hire: How A New Breed Of PR Firms Is Selling Lies Online," 1-13.</p> <p>Watch: "The war on truth happening all around us," (13:14)</p>	Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.	
March 5	<p>Message Circulation 1: Rallies & Meetings</p> <p>Read: 1) Bytwerk, "The Rhetorical Aspects of a Nazi Meeting," 307-318. 2) Bosmajian, "The Nazi Speaker's Rhetoric," 365-371.</p> <p>Watch: "A Night at the Garden" (7:04)</p>	Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.	
March 10	SPRING BREAK		NONE
March 12	SPRING BREAK		NONE
March 17	<p>Message Circulation 2: Radio, TV & Film</p> <p>Read: Chomsky, "Media Control," 5-58.</p> <p>Watch: "The 5 Filters of the Mass Media Machine" (4:46)</p>	Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class. Research Plan DUE	

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUE	PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL
March 19	<p>Message Circulation 3: New Media spaces</p> <p>Read: Farkas and Neumayor "Disguised Propaganda from Digital to Social Media," 1-25.</p> <p>Watch: "Fake News Stories Thriving on Social Media" (3:05) and "Here's How Fake News Works" (2:49)</p>	Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.	
March 24	<p>Message Circulation 4: Education</p> <p>Read: Giroux, "Educational Leadership and the Crisis of Democratic Government," 4-11.</p> <p>Watch: "How Southern socialites rewrote Civil War history" (6:55)</p>	Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.	
March 26	<p>Message Circulation 5: Images/Memes</p> <p>Read: 1) Giese, "It's Time to Embrace Memetic Warfare," 1-8. 2) Boyd, "Truth is a Virus: Meme Warfare and the Billionaires for Bush (or Gore)," 1-8. 3) Watts, "How Every Campaign Will Have a Troll Farm of Its Own," 1-9.</p> <p>Watch: "Tracing a Meme from the Internet's Fringe to a Republican Slogan," (interactive)</p>	Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.	

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUE	PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL
March 31	<p>Message Circulation 6: Secret Spaces</p> <p>Read: 1) Neudert, "Future elections may be swayed by intelligent, weaponized chatbots," 1-9. 2) Menegus, "How a Video Game Chat Client Became the Web's New Cesspool of Abuse," 1-7. 3) Tufekci, "YouTube, the Great Radicalizer," 1-4.</p> <p>Watch: "How Russian Trolls Collected Americans' Personal Information" (5:39)</p>	<p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p>	
April 2	<p>Message Amplification 1: The War for Your Attention</p> <p>Read: Rose-Stockwell, "This is how your fear and outrage are being sold for profit," 1-31.</p> <p>Watch: Tristan Harris, "Social Media's Dark Side" (9:20)</p>	<p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p>	
April 7	<p>Message Amplification 2: Russian Trolls</p> <p>Read: 1) Thompson and Lapowsky, "How Russian Trolls Used Meme Warfare To Divide America," 1-14. 2) Chen, "The Agency," 1-16.</p> <p>Watch: "How Russian Bots Invade our Elections" (5:03) and "A Former Russian Troll Explains how to Spread Fake News" (5:49)</p>	<p>Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.</p> <p>Primary Source Analysis DUE.</p>	

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUE	PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL
April 9	<p>Message Amplification 3: Domestic Trolls</p> <p>Read: 1) Timberg, "As a conservative Twitter user sleeps, his account is hard at work," 1-10.</p> <p>2) Schwartz, "The Trolls Among Us," 1-11.</p> <p>Watch: "World's Greatest Internet Troll Explains His Craft." (8:06)</p>	Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.	
April 14	<p>Message Amplification 4: Conspiracy</p> <p>Read: 1) Muirhead and Rosenblum, "The New Conspiracists," 1-9. 2) Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," 1-9. 3) Grassegger, "The Unbelievable Story Of The Plot Against George Soros," 1-11.</p> <p>Watch: "We, the paranoid: A history of U.S. conspiracy theories" (14:48)</p>	Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.	
April 16	<p>Message Debunking 1: Recognition.</p> <p>Read: 1) Institute for Propaganda Analysis, "How to Detect Propaganda," 49-55. 2) Taxonomy of Influence Strategies (interactive).</p> <p>Watch: "The Worldwide War on Truth" (17:27)</p>	Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.	

DATE	READ/WATCH	DUE	PROPAGANDA SHOW & TELL
April 21	<p>Message Debunking 2: Is it actually possible to debunk propaganda?</p> <p>Read:</p> <p>1) Nyhan, "Political Knowledge Does Not Guard Against Belief In Conspiracy Theories," 1-5.</p> <p>2) MIT, "On Twitter, False News Travels Faster than True Stories," 1-4.</p> <p>3) Frankovic, "Russia's impact on the election seen through partisan eyes," 1-4.</p> <p>4) Dale, "Donald Trump voters: We like the president's lies," 1-6.</p> <p>5) Heffernan, "Social Media Makes Us Soldiers in the War Against Ourselves," 1-4.</p> <p>Watch: "Motivated Reasoning in Politics," (3:07)</p>	Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.	
April 23	<p>Summary: Propaganda is Weaponized Communication</p> <p>Read:</p> <p>Mercieca, "Dangerous Demagogues and Weaponized Communication," 264-279.</p> <p>Watch: "Did You Know Democrats Met To Censor Conservatives & That Alex Jones Crashed The Event?" (10: 14 NOTE: works on Firefox, three versions are also posted on ecampus)</p>	Commonplace two quotations from each assigned reading/video. Be prepared to share with the class.	
Final Exam Date	May 5, 1:00-3:00	Final Paper DUE 3pm (submit via ecampus)	

Appendix A: On Commonplacing

You must come to class with TWO new entries in your Commonplace Book for each day's assigned "reading" and "watching." You will be asked to share at least one of your entries with the class (read out loud) and tell

us why you chose to commonplace that quotation each day as well as submit your daily commonplaces on ecampus.

According to historian Joseph Adelman, “commonplacing was a common practice during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in both the North American colonies and England in which an individual would create a book of quotations that they found meaningful in their reading. Creators of such books used them to copy down (by hand, of course) passages that they found enlightening, enriching, and occasionally confounding. Commonplacers then typically offered their own commentary about what they had read, reacting to texts, creating a conversation, or explaining why they had chosen it. Commonplace books frequently also included indexes so that their creators could easily locate quotations relating to common themes or issues.”

What to commonplace? Copy passages that are interesting to you for some reason: they make a clear claim, state the author’s central thesis, use evocative language, state an eternal truth, or even state something confusing or something with which you disagree.

You may choose how to make your Commonplace Book. You may choose to handwrite it or to keep an electronic version – that is up to you. You may also choose your categories of quotations or themes. Since this is your book, I want it to be useful to you. Your final assignment asks you to use your Commonplace Book to analyze some piece of propaganda, so this book will be most useful to you if you focus your entries on things that could possibly related to your research project. In other words, your Commonplace Book will be a collection of quotations that you will use in your Final Paper.