

# CET Syllabus of Record



**Program:** CET Prague

**Course Code / Title:** (PR/COMM 370) From Propaganda to Post-Truth: A History of Fake News

**Total Hours:** 45

**Recommended Credits:** 3

**Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings:** Communications / Political Science, History, Media Studies

**Language of Instruction:** English

**Prerequisites/Requirements:** None

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## Description

What is news? What is fake news? And what can these concepts tell us about the societies that employ them? In this course, students will explore the varied social actors and media forms that have historically been linked with the dissemination of “the truth.” The class will consider when, and to what ends, different media have been utilized to confer a veneer of truth upon information its authors knew to be false. Students will also examine historical modes of truth and falsehood assessment, asking who has historically been credited with the ability to discern fact from fiction. This class focuses primarily on European and North American examples of “fake news,” while in no way aiming to suggest that particular societies are more mendacious than others. Examples of media hoaxes, propaganda, misinformation, and spoofs will – additionally – form the basis of an introduction to source analysis offered by this course.

The first four weeks of the course provide a theoretical introduction to the subject, offering students a number of approaches to the study of “fake news.” Thereafter, the course takes a chronological approach, beginning in the early modern period and concluding in the age of post-truth.

## Objectives

Students become familiar with both canonical and contemporary approaches to media history. They develop their own opinions on the extent to which audiences’ perceptions are shaped by the technology they use and, conversely, how audiences’ use of technology might shape media themselves. Additionally, students consider:

- How claims made about media intersect with other claims to power; how media empower certain constituencies while disempowering others
- The question of whether the present constitutes a unique era in terms of media use and abuse
- The advantages and disadvantages of viewing history in large chunks of time (also called the “longue durée”), and of using a category such as “the West” in order to do so.

## Course Requirements

Students write short, weekly response papers and deliver one 10-minute presentation in class on a syllabus topic of their choice. In addition, students are graded on their class participation and a final project that explores a theme from the course in greater depth. Students are expected to abide by CET’s attendance policy.

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### Methods of Evaluation

Class participation	20%
Weekly response papers (1-2 pages)	30%
In-class presentation (8-10 minutes)	10%
Written accompaniment to the class presentation (2-4 pages, counts as the response paper for the week of the presentation)	10%
Final project (10 pages):	30%

### Primary Texts

Patryk Babiracki, "Why Americans Keep Falling for Russian Propaganda." *The Washington Post*.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2017/09/13/why-americans-keep-falling-for-russian-propaganda/?utm\\_term=.7f43b7872550](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2017/09/13/why-americans-keep-falling-for-russian-propaganda/?utm_term=.7f43b7872550)

Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller" in *Illuminations* (Schocken, 2007)

Bertolt Brecht, Excerpts from *War Primer* (Verso, 2017)

Susan Carruthers, *The Media at War* (Palgrave, 2011)

Susan Carruthers, *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, and Brainwashing* (California, 2009)

Robert Darnton, "The True History of Fake News." *The New York Review of Books*.

<http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2017/02/13/the-true-history-of-fake-news/>

Nick Davis, *Flat Earth News* (Random House, 2009)

Colin Dickey, "The New Paranoia." *The New Republic*. <https://newrepublic.com/article/142977/new-paranoia-trump-election-turns-democrats-conspiracy-theorists>

Maria Do Carmo Picarra, "Empire Cinema: Propaganda and Censorship in Colonial Films during the Portuguese Estado Novo" in *Journal of African Cinemas* Vol. 8, No. 3 (2016)

Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (Knopf, 1973)

Richard Farmer, *The Food Companions: Cinema and Consumption in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945* (Manchester UP, 2011)

Melissa Feinberg, *Curtain of Lies: The Battle over Truth in Stalinist Eastern Europe* (Oxford UP, 2017)

Mark Feldstein, "Wallowing in Watergate: Historiography, Methodology, and Mythology in Journalism's Celebrated Moment" in *American Journalism*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Fall 2014)

Joseph Goebbels, "Radio as the Eighth Great Power" And "Knowledge and Propaganda". Calvin College German Propaganda Archive. <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive>

Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge, 2004)

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Edward S. Herman & Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of The Mass Media* (Pantheon, 2002)

Guy Richard Hodgson, "Nurse, martyr, propaganda tool: The reporting of Edith Cavell in British Newspapers, 1915-1920" in *Media, War & Conflict*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (August 2017)

Kristopher Imbrigotta, "History and the Challenge of Photography in Bertold Brecht's *Kriegsfiel*" in *Radical History Review*, No. 106 (Winter 2010)

Claire Konkes & Libby Lester, "Incomplete Knowledge, Rumour and Truth Seeking: When Conspiracy Theories Become News" in *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 7 (2017)

Gustav Le Bon, *The Crowd: Study of the Popular Mind* (Penguin, 1992)

Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (Routledge, 1996)

George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language" in *The Orwell Reader* (Harcourt Brace, 1956)

George Orwell, "The Principles of Newspeak." Appendix of 1984.  
[http://orwell.ru/library/novels/1984/english/en\\_app](http://orwell.ru/library/novels/1984/english/en_app)

Peter Pomerantsev, "Disinformation and the Decay of Nations." *The American Interest*  
<https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/10/20/disinformation-decay-nations/>

Pope Francis, "Fake News and Journalism for Peace," January 24, 2018  
<http://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/fake-news-and-journalism-for-peace/>

Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (Penguin, 2005)

Rosa Salzberg, *Ephemeral City: Cheap Print and Urban Culture in Renaissance Venice* (Manchester, 2014)

Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Penguin, 1977)

Louise Spence & Vinicius Navarro, *Crafting Truth: Documentary Form and Meaning* (Rutgers, 2011)

Mitchell Stevens, *A History of the News* (Oxford, 2006)

### Supplementary Texts

John Frankenheimer (dir.) *The Manchurian Candidate*. 1962.

*Future Imperative*, Czechoslovak Radio Docu-Drama. 1959

Kurt Geron & Karel Pečený (dirs.) *Theresienstadt (The Fuehrer Gifts the Jews a City)*. 1944

Ben Goldacre, *Bad Science* (Harper, 2009)

Peter Hyams (dir.) *Capricorn One* (1977)

Barry Levinson (dir.) *Wag the Dog* (1997)

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Alan Pakula (dir.) *The Parallax View* (1974) and *All The President's Men* (1976)

Additional articles, films, and websites as assigned.

### **Outline of Course Content**

*Week One* - The News versus The Story

*Week Two* - Media Forms and Claims to Truth

*Week Three* - New Media, New Media Scares

*Week Four* - Susceptible Audiences?

*Week Five* - Print Culture & Pamphlets

*Week Six* - Witchcraft & Denunciation

*Week Seven* – Revolutions

*Week Eight* – Conspiracies

*Week Nine* - World War One

*Week Ten* - World War Two

*Week Eleven* - The Cold War

*Week Twelve* - End of History, End of Truth?

*Week Thirteen* - Field Trip - Visit to *The Center Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats*