

# Propaganda and Society

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## Course Description:

This course explores mass persuasion and propaganda in a developmental context with an emphasis on understanding approaches and techniques. It traces the emergence of strategic persuasive communication and propaganda from its origins to the present day. The basic principles, philosophy, and techniques of mass persuasion in different periods are considered, with an emphasis on contemporary contexts. Students will learn to identify different propaganda techniques and will gain the tools to evaluate and debunk propaganda campaigns. A developmental approach is used in order to allow the opportunity to see aspects of continuity and change in approaches. A combination of classic and contemporary texts in the area of propaganda and disinformation will be studied. Various approaches to propaganda will be examined across a variety of media, with an emphasis in the second half of the course on emerging computational and participatory propaganda.

## Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes:

### Specialist knowledge:

*Students will be able to:*

- Comprehend the philosophical, historical and functional underpinnings of propaganda; - Trace the history of mass persuasion from ancient civilization to today's global technological society;
- Identify and discuss criteria that are indicative of a media propaganda campaign; - Explain how and why particular major media of communication have been used for mass persuasion in different societies at different times;
- Identify and explain contemporary methods of computational propaganda and disinformation

### Specialist skills:

*Students will be able to:*

- Recognize and critically evaluate propaganda campaigns;
- Analyze and explain the role of audience analysis and goals and objectives in the development of persuasion materials

- Examine applications of persuasion in the "emerging technologies" and explain their possible effects on the present and future users of these technologies;
- Conduct basic independent research on propaganda;
- Become knowledgeable with some key academic literature on propaganda and persuasion.

### Course Requirements:

**Engagement:** Engagement is similar to participation, but it means more than just active involvement in class activities (although that is a basic tenet). Being engaged means demonstrating the following knowledge and skills: (a) being accountable and taking responsibility; (b) leadership; (c) integrity and honesty; (d) being engaged with the topic and the class; (e) striving for excellence in all endeavors. Specifically, it means things like following up without being told to follow up; doing what you are supposed to do when you are supposed to do it and as well as you can do it; arriving on time and ready to "work;" keeping the faculty member aware of any situations that might impinge upon your performance; and fostering a relationship of mutual respect.

**Disinformation Case Study:** During the course, students will present a case study of the disinformation environment of another country. The focus in the course will be the Czech Republic and Central Europe, but contemporary hybrid warfare is global. The aim of this task is to share knowledge with the class about the situation in other countries, allowing us to compare and contrast the situation.

**Propaganda Defence Analysis:** In the second half of the course, students will conduct an independent analysis of an organization that tries to prevent the flow of propaganda and disinformation to the public, in order to assess the effectiveness of their work. The result will be a report due on the last day of class.

**Exams:** Two examinations will be taken, one during week seven of the course and a final exam covering all course content during the final examination period. Test format may combine a mixture of short answer, true/false, matching, sort answer, and one or two essay questions covering all readings, lecture, hand-out and class discussion content.

## Grading Policy:

The course will be graded on the basis of:

| Criteria                    | Value | Due Date    |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------------|
| Engagement                  | 15%   | Weekly      |
| Disinformation Case Study   | 20%   | TBA         |
| Midterm                     | 20%   | 30 October  |
| Final Exam                  | 25%   | 11 December |
| Propaganda Defence Analysis | 20%   | 4 December  |

## Mandatory Completion Policy

Note that all mandatory assignments and exams must be completed to the best of your ability in order for your final grade to be issued. Failure to complete a mandatory assignment or exam may result in a failing grade.

| Letter Grade | Percentage | Description  |
|--------------|------------|--|
| A+           | 97-100     | Excellent Work   |
| A            | 93-97      | Outstanding Work   |
| A-           | 90-92      |  |
| B+           | 87-89      | Good work  |
| B            | 83-86      |  |
| B-           | 80-82      |  |
| C+           | 77-79      | Acceptable Work  |
| C            | 73-76      |  |
| C-           | 70-72      |  |
| D+           | 67-69      | Work that is significantly below average                             |
| D            | 63-66      |  |
| D-           | 60-62      |  |
| F            | 0-59       | Work that does not meet the minimum standards for passing the course |

#### **AEP Academic Integrity Policy**

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are not tolerated. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the development of knowledge and learning is encouraged at many stages of the learning process. While we value technology for educational purposes, we also value originality and the retainment of knowledge, and thus using AI for assignments and examinations, even if rephrased, is strictly prohibited and considered an academic integrity violation, unless the instructor explicitly allows for it in the context of evaluated work

#### **AEP Non-Discrimination/Harassment Policy**

The AEP program in Prague promotes a diverse learning environment where the dignity, worth, and differences of each individual are valued and respected. Discrimination and harassment, whether based on a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or other legally protected characteristics, are repugnant and completely inconsistent with our objectives. Retaliation against individuals for raising good faith claims of harassment and/or discrimination is prohibited.

#### **AEP Diversity Policy**

AEP is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming community that values diversity in all its forms. We believe that one of the most meaningful lessons of studying abroad is learning to navigate and appreciate differences with curiosity and an open mind. While engaging across differences can sometimes be challenging or uncomfortable, these moments are essential for growth and learning. We recognize that every member of our community, even with the best intentions, may occasionally make missteps. Our commitment is to provide a supportive environment where respectful and honest dialogue helps us learn from these experiences, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive and broaden their perspective.

## Weekly Schedule

### Week 1

*CEE Introductory Lecture Series*

AEP Introductory Lecture Series

### Week 2

*Introduction to Propaganda & Persuasion*

Exploring what propaganda and persuasion are, approaches to defining them, characteristics, models, and more. The overall purpose of this first week is to form a base upon which to build over the next few weeks.

### Week 3

*Propaganda until the 20th Century*

Looking back into history to see the origins and development of propaganda. Why? So that we can see how practices emerged, progressed, solidified, and adapted to technological and societal change over time.

### Week 4

*Mass Society and Mass Propaganda*

Exploring the connections between propaganda, the emergence of the mass media, and the needs for self-identity and self-validation in mass society. We will consider each mass medium for its propaganda potential, since it is never as simple as harnessing a medium and sending a message that has impact.

### Week 5

*Prop and Psychological Warfare 1900-1950*

Looking at the propaganda activities which spawned an entire field of study, with particular emphasis on atrocity propaganda, and one legendary paradigm for analyzing propaganda.

## **Week 6**

### *Prop and Psychological Warfare 1950-2000*

Although the field of study had receded, and the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were relatively silent in terms of attention to the study of propaganda, propaganda campaigns were roaring in the background. This week we take a look at the nature of propaganda after almost fifty years of development.

## **Week 7**

### **Midterm Exam**

Celebration of learning!

## **Week 8**

### *Theory of Propaganda and Persuasion*

We start the second half of the semester with one of the most important themes: what do we actually know about how are people affected by propaganda after 100 years of research?

## **Week 9**

### *Computational Propaganda*

This session we get to the nitty gritty of contemporary online propaganda. We examine what activities are taking place, where they fit into the propaganda model and process, and try to assess the importance.

## **Week 10**

### *Disinformation in Detail*

This session we continue our examination of contemporary online propaganda. After last session's foundations in computational propaganda and basics of disinformation we continue, looking in depth at what it is, and how it works. We will think about if, when, and how it succeeds, how it spreads, and more.

## **Week 11**

### Participatory Propaganda

This week we will look at participatory propaganda, and think about how we actively participate in the spread of it, not like in the top-down approach of the past.

## Week 12

### *The Decline of Institutional Authority*

Is disinformation the problem, or a symptom of a larger problem?

## Week 13

### **Final Exam**

Final celebration of learning!

## Readings:

Core readings listed in the schedule will be located in the course space in Moodle in the corresponding week of class. Most of the readings are taken from these titles:

- Jowett G. & O'Donnell V. (2018). Propaganda and persuasion (7th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Cull N. J. Culbert D. H. & Welch D. (2003). Propaganda and mass persuasion: a historical encyclopedia 1500 to the present. ABC-CLIO.
- Baines P. O'Shaughnessy N. J. & Snow N. (2020). The sage handbook of propaganda. SAGE Publications.
- Bennett W. L. Livingston S. & Cambridge University Press. (2021). The disinformation age: Politics technology and disruptive communication. Cambridge University Press.

| # | AGENDA   | READING   |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | <b>Orientation week</b>                        | <b>N/A</b>  |
| 2 | Introduction to Propaganda and Persuasion      | Encyclopedia of Propaganda (Cull, Culbert, Welch)   |
| 3 | Propaganda until the 20 <sup>th</sup> Century  | Propaganda Through Ages (Jowett & O'Donnell)  |
| 4 | Mass Society and Mass Propaganda               | Advertising The Ubiquitous Propaganda (Jowett & O'Donnell) + Ellul's Propaganda                           |
| 5 | Propaganda and Psychological Warfare 1900-1950 | 7 Devices (Sproule) + Atrocities, Investigations & Propaganda (Lawson)                                    |
| 6 | Propaganda and Psychological Warfare 1950-2000 | Information-Age Conflict in the Post-Cold War Era (Taylor) + Propaganda in the Cold War (Cull & Mazumdar) |
| 7 | <b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>                            |   |
| 8 | How Propaganda and Persuasion Work             | Propaganda and Persuasion Examined (Jowett & O'Donnell)   |
| 9 | Computational Propaganda: Form and Format      | Computational Propaganda and the Rise of the Fake Audience (Delwiche)                                     |

|    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 10 | Participatory Propaganda and the Role of the Audience | The Audience is the Amplifier: Participatory Propaganda (Wanless, Berk)   |
| 11 | Disinformation: Methods and Objectives                | From Disinfo. to Fake News: Forwards into the Past (O'Shaughnessy)        |
| 12 | Propaganda and the Decline of Institutional Authority | Info Wars and the Decline of Institutional Authority (Bennet, Livingston) |
| 13 | <b>FINAL EXAM</b>                                     |   |