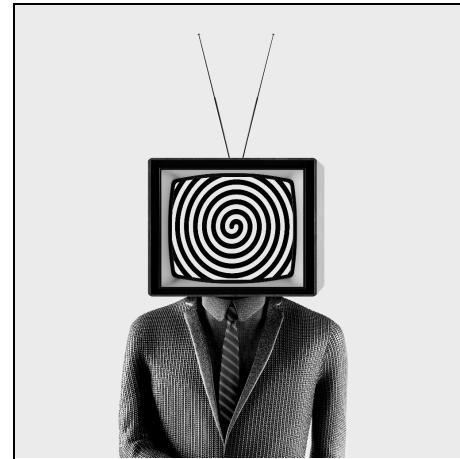


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PHIL 5500 A
Topics in Contemporary Philosophy
Misinformation



Winter 2026
Course Outline

I. Admin

Instructor: Gabriele Contessa

Office Hours: Monday, 2:35pm–3:25pm or by appointment

Zoom Link to Virtual Office: See Admin section in Brightspace

Zoom Link to Virtual Seminar Room: See Admin section in Brightspace

E-mail: gabriele_contessa@carleton.ca

II. Description

According to a popular narrative, we live in a world increasingly awash with information and misinformation; and ordinary people ill-equipped to distinguish between the two, which has significant negative consequences at the individual, social, and political levels. In this seminar, we will explore some of the key questions related to this narrative, which might include: What exactly is misinformation? How does it differ from disinformation? What explains the spread of misinformation? And what are the best approaches to addressing it? Is it possible to study misinformation and its spread scientifically?

III. Prerequisites

Registration in a Philosophy Master's Program.

IV. Readings

All of the readings for this course will be made available on Brightspace.

V. Grading

1. Take-Home Exam (Essay) (25% of your final grade);
2. Essay Proposal (5% of your final grade);
3. Discussion Questions (20% of your final grade);
4. Attendance and Participation (50% of your final grade).

All final grades are subject to the approval of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

VI. Course Organization and Course Policies

Overview. In a seminar, the role of the instructor is to lead and facilitate the discussion among students (instead of lecturing them). Seminars encourage students to adopt a more active approach to learning, to engage more directly with the issues discussed, and to take responsibility for their own learning. This approach is supported by empirical studies that suggest that, while lecturing might give students a false sense of understanding, actively engaged students actually learn more (see, e.g., [\(Deslaurier et al 2019\)](#) and [\(Carpenter et al 2020\)](#)). However, the success of a seminar partly depends on everyone doing their part. This includes, among other things, doing the readings, submitting thoughtful and relevant discussion questions, and making constructive contributions to the discussion in class.

Attendance and Participation. Attendance and participation are crucial to the success of a seminar. You are strongly encouraged to

contribute to the class discussion. For every session you attend, you will receive a participation grade based on the quantity and the quality of your contributions to the class discussion (see table below). If your only contribution to the class discussion is asking your discussion question and giving your tentative answer, then your participation level is considered 'Minimal'. In order to receive a Satisfactory grade or above, you have to contribute to the class discussion more than just to ask your discussion question and give your tentative answer. While the most important way for you to contribute to the discussion is by speaking in class, contributions you make to the discussion forums on cuLearn will also count towards your participation grade.

Please note that, unless exceptional circumstances (e.g. illness) prevent you from attending, failure to attend a session will result in an 'Absent' for that session, which is equivalent to 0%.

Take-Home Exam (Essay). Your Take-Home Exam will consist of an essay of up to 2,500 words (but shorter essays are welcome). The Essay should develop the ideas on your Essay Proposal in light of the feedback I have given you on the Essay Proposal (see below). While there is some latitude as to the topic of the essay, the essay must (i) engage directly with some of the ideas and the arguments we have encountered in the readings for the seminar, (ii) have a clear thesis, and (iii) have a clear argument in support of that thesis. The Essay should be submitted through Brightspace by the last day of the exam period.

Failing to submit your Final Essay will result in a 0% on that component of your final grade. Late Final Essays will receive a 5-point penalty for each day they are late.

Essay Proposal. The essay proposal presents an outline of the Essay you plan to write for your Take-Home Exam. Minimally, it should include the thesis of your Essay as well as outline your argument in support of that thesis. The word limit for the Paper Proposal is 500 words. The Essay Proposal is to be submitted through Brightspace.

Please note that Failing to submit your Essay Proposal will result in a 0% on that component of your final grade. Late Essay Proposals will receive a 5-point penalty for each day they are late.

Discussion Questions. Before each meeting, you are expected to submit one discussion question for each of the readings to be discussed that day (i.e., article or chapter). Discussion questions can be either interpretive (e.g. 'What does the author mean in this passage?') or evaluative (e.g. 'Do you think that the argument that the author gives in this passage works?'). Discussion questions need to be posted on Brightspace before the start of the meeting. Regardless of whether your question is specific (i.e. a question that refers to a specific passage) or general questions (i.e. a question about the reading in general), it has to make *clear* and *explicit* reference to the relevant reading. If your question refers to a specific passage, please give a clear reference and please provide a full quotation of the passage in your post. Generic questions (i.e. questions that do not clearly and explicitly relate to the reading but only to the general topic of the reading) are *not* acceptable and will not receive full credit. During the meeting, students will take turns asking their discussion questions and giving tentative answers to their own questions (e.g. 'I don't think that the argument works because...'). Your tentative answer to your question does *not* have to be submitted with your discussion questions but will count as part of your participation mark (see below for details). If, for whatever reason, you are unable to attend either of the meetings of the week, you should still submit your discussion questions if possible.

Please note that, unless exceptional circumstances (e.g., illness or family emergency) prevent you from submitting a discussion question, failing to submit a discussion questions on time will result in an 'Incomplete', which is equivalent to a 0%.

If exceptional circumstances (e.g., illness or family emergency) prevent you from submitting a discussion question, please notify me by email as soon as possible.

Academic Integrity. You are responsible for ensuring that you understand the nature of academic offences (such as plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration), as defined in the [Undergraduate Calendar](#), and to avoid both committing them and aiding or abetting academic offences perpetrated by other students. Please be aware that I am bound to report any suspected academic offence directly to the Office of the Dean.

Copyright. Carleton University is committed to compliance in all copyright matters. Noncompliance is a violation of the Canadian Copyright Act. In addition to any actions that might be taken by any copyright owner or its licensing agent, the University will take steps against any breach of this policy. In Canada, copyright for a work is given automatically to the creator of the work. The work does not need to be marked or declared as copyrighted in order to be copyrighted. The majority of works in Canada are copyrighted. It is important for students to understand and respect copyright. Copyright determines your usage rights for a particular work, which includes textbooks, web pages, videos and images, both electronic and hard copy. Students may not photocopy entire or major portions of books or other works, even if it is only for their personal use. Fair dealing makes some allowances for copying small portions of works. See Carleton's Fair Dealing Policy for more information. If journal articles or portions of works are available through the library, either as hard copies or electronically, students may make a single copy for their personal use. Students may not distribute copies of works that are under copyright. For more information, please see the Carleton's Fair Dealing Policy and the library's copyright website: www.library.carleton.ca/copyright.

VII. Seminar Schedule

The seminar schedule can be accessed through Brightspace.

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2025-26)

Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. We no longer allow hard copies to be placed in the department's essay box.

Evaluation:

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Exams:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar's Office](#) for further information.

Plagiarism:

The University Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as '*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own.*' This includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source.

Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, artworks, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT);
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one's own;
- failing to acknowledge sources with proper citations when using another's work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor.

The Associate Dean of the Faculty follows a rigorous [process for academic integrity allegations](#), including reviewing documents and interviewing the student, when an instructor suspects a violation has been committed. Penalties for violations may include a final grade of "F" for the course.

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the full meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. ([Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations](#))

Statement on AI:

As our understanding of the uses of AI and its relationship to student work and academic integrity continue to evolve, students are required to discuss their use of AI in any circumstance not described in the course outline with the instructor to ensure it supports the learning goals for the course.

Mental Health:

As a student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. For more information, please consult <https://wellness.carleton.ca/>.

Academic Accommodation:

Carleton is committed to providing academic accessibility for all individuals. You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. The accommodation request processes, including information about the Academic Consideration Policy for Students in Medical and Other Extenuating Circumstances, are outlined on the Academic Accommodations website (students.carleton.ca/course-outline). Examples of special arrangements include:

- *Pregnancy or religious obligation:* write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the [EIC](#) website.
- *Academic accommodations for students with disabilities:* The [Paul Merton Centre](#) for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- *Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy](#).
- *Accommodation for Student Activities:* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

Important Dates:

Sept. 3	Classes start.
Sept. 16	Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Oct. 13	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 20-24	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 21	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.
Dec. 5	Last day of fall term classes. Classes follow a Monday schedule. Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for a fall term course.
Dec. 6-7	No classes or examinations take place.
Dec. 8-20	Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 20	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 5	Classes begin.
Jan. 16	Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Feb. 16	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 16-20	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 15	Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses.

Mar. 25 Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.

Apr. 3 Statutory holiday. University closed.

Apr. 8 Last day of two-term and winter term classes. **Classes follow a Friday schedule.** Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.

Apr. 9-10 No classes or examinations take place.

Apr. 11-23 Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.

Apr. 23 All take-home examinations are due.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:

www.carleton.ca/philosophy

520-2110

Registrar's Office:

www.carleton.ca/registrar

520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:

www.carleton.ca/academicadvising

520-7850

Writing Services:

<https://carleton.ca/csas/support/>

520-3822

MacOdrum Library

<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>

520-2735