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Lecture:

Newsroom:



Description

The proliferation of misinformation has become a global concern in recent years. Questionable rumours, dubious claims, fake photos and videos, conspiracy theories, propaganda, and other types of falsehood and deliberately manipulative content are now all part of what people consume every day.

Worldwide, there has been a steady increase of fact-checking efforts to counter the trend. The expansion of this field in Asia has been dramatic. The latest research conducted by the Annie Lab team in late 2020 shows there are more than 100 active fact-checking outlets in the region, including not only media organizations but also charitable foundations, academic institutions, civil societies, and even governments. The number has more than doubled in two years.

This hands-on course is offered in a lab environment that simulates a **working newsroom called Annie Lab**. It is meant to be a training ground for future journalists because we believe these skills are now essential part of our profession. Annie Lab follows strict editorial guidelines, labelling systems and standards that adhere to the Code of Principles set by the International Fact-checking Network (IFCN) at Poynter Institute.

Our office is Eliot Hall G18 (located next to the student lounge). We work **Monday through Friday between 10:00 and 13:00** (morning shift), and **14:30 and 17:30** (afternoon shift). **Each student is expected to cover at least two shifts per week** during the semester after the initial training (normally three weeks). We publish our daily verification/fact-checking stories on our news website (<http://annielab.org>).

Annie Lab became a member of the [#CoronaVirusFacts Alliance](#) led by IFCN in February 2020. Our work has also been recognized by [Duke Reporters' Lab](#) as one of the global fact-checking sites. In October 2020, an online news media [眾新聞 \(Hong Kong Citizen News\)](#) began cross-posting Annie Lab's articles on its website and social media platforms for wider audience as well.

Academic Integrity

All work for this course must be entirely your own. Plagiarism – using someone else's work and presenting as your own – won't be tolerated. Use of any material without attribution to the original work or author is considered plagiarism. Intentional or not, such misrepresentation in your assignments may result in failure of the course.

JMSC6122 Fact-checking tools and techniques for journalists

Intended Learning Outcomes

On completing the course, you will be able to:

1. Analyze information and evaluate its authenticity by employing online verification tools and fact-checking skills.
2. Identify falsehood and demonstrate precisely why it is erroneous.
3. Understand how the misinformation ecosystem works and forms a network of influence.
4. Produce quality work of journalism in the field of fact-checking.
5. Put together case studies on the process of verification and present it journalistically.

Assessment Tasks

1. **Newsroom duty** (20%) –You will be assigned to work in the newsroom in shifts.
2. **Monitoring/Story pitch** (20%) – You are required to monitor social media platforms throughout the semester and flag potential fact-checking/verification items. You will then pitch a story idea in writing.
3. **Verification stories** (30%) – You will be producing three or more fact-checking and verification stories in the newsroom with your classmates (group work).
4. **Case study** (30%): An investigative case study that explains the steps taken to evaluate the authenticity of information in a news report, social media messages, videos or another widely available media. This report must have more depth than the daily stories you produce while working in the newsroom.

Attendance and deadlines

You are expected to attend each class / newsroom shift and *to be on time*. Every lecture and newsroom duty rely on your active participation and collaboration. Attendance and timeliness will be recorded and contribute to newsroom performance evaluation. Deadlines are sacred in this course. No excuses for late assignments will be accepted; all late submissions will be heavily penalized.

Editorial integrity

As of December 31, 2020, Annie Lab has published 116 stories since its inception in October 2019, out of which 79 articles are in English and 37 articles are in traditional or simplified Chinese (translated stories included).

We follow strict editorial guidelines, labelling systems and standards. The following online document is your guide throughout the semester.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Llw8EmULNKRlmjC1QQt8PkYeznT8OwzsHi1wXMOJJ4M/edit?usp=sharing>

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Grade Descriptors

Each of your assignments will be assessed on the following criteria.

Verification stories / Case study

Criteria/Grade	Excellent	Proficient	Average	Poor
Depth of investigation	Investigates the source of information, its legitimacy, and motives of the creator using tools discussed in class and others as needed. When required, thoroughly followed leads and made attempts from different angles to investigate.	Investigation of the information's source, legitimacy, and motivation are adequate, but there are some additional steps that could have been taken to verify.	Investigation is limited and attempts to find legitimacy, source, and motivations were not thorough or there were angles that could have been followed that were not.	Does not investigate the source of the information, its legitimacy, or the motives of its creator using tools discussed in class.
Clarity of explanation	All of the explanations of the story/information, how it was verified, and what was uncovered is clear. No or very few reasonable questions were left unanswered.	The explanations of the story, the verification process, and conclusion is explained fairly well, but additional explanation or clarification would be helpful.	Some attempt was made at explaining the verification process and what was found, and the steps taken, but the explanation is not thorough or does not clearly explain.	Ideas do not flow at all, usually because there is no argument to support. No explanation is made of either how the investigation was performed, what steps were taken, what were the outcomes, or what the information was that was being investigated.
Fairness of conclusion/argument	All conclusions are firmly supported by the evidence provided and verification. There are no assertions, or any assertions are based on carefully considered likelihoods.	Conclusions are supported by the verification and analysis described in the paper. Some additional angles or conclusions could have been explored, but the conclusion is fair.	Some or many of the conclusions do not seem to be based on evidence, or there was not enough verification done to support parts of the conclusion.	The conclusion is not justified by the verification process, or there is not enough evidence to support the conclusion. There are significant points that were not considered in the conclusion or it is not coherent.
Importance and impact of findings	The importance and impact are clear, and the explanation shows a solid understanding of what the importance and impact are.	The importance and impact of the verification is more obvious, but they could have been explained more clearly.	The attempt to explain importance and impact is there, but it is not a convincing argument.	The importance or impact are not explained well, and it is difficult to understand why the story or information verified was chosen.

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Monitoring

Criteria/Grade	Excellent	Proficient	Average	Poor
Identifying the issues	Identifies and addresses clearly the main problem(s) and the subsidiary, embedded, or implicit aspects, addressing their relationships to each other.	Identifies and addresses the main problem(s) and most of the subsidiary, embedded or implicit aspects.	Identifies and addresses the main problem(s) and some of the subsidiary, embedded or implicit aspects.	Identifies part of the main problem(s) and a few of the subsidiary, embedded or implicit aspects but only addresses them partially.
Clarity of argument	Examines the question/issue/problem from all important perspectives. Overall logic is clear. Premises or evidence strongly support conclusions. Counter-evidence or rival positions addressed. Arguments fit together and build a compelling case.	Examines the question/issue/problem from most of the important perspectives. Expresses own position, and argumentative structure is clear and logical, but some arguments underdeveloped, or some considerations overlooked.	Examines the question/issue/problem from some of the important perspectives. Not all relevant arguments and counter arguments are fully examined. Offers own position but reasoning is sometimes impaired by weak, emotive, or inconsistent argumentation.	Examines things from a single perspective. Only minimal examination of relevant arguments and counterarguments. Offers own position, but the arguments are not put forward explicitly and not sufficiently supported.
Importance and impact	The importance and impact are clear, and the explanation shows a solid understanding of what the importance and impact are.	The importance and impact of the data is obvious, but they could have been explained more clearly.	The attempt to explain importance and impact is there, but it is not a convincing argument.	The importance or impact are not explained well, and it is difficult to understand why the data or report was chosen.

Newsroom duty

Criteria/Grade	Excellent	Proficient	Average	Poor
Intellectual contribution	Consistently demonstrates a thorough understanding of, and engages constructively with, assigned duties. Invariably provides insightful analyses, raises critical points, and advances verification process.	Mostly, demonstrates a good understanding of, and engages constructively with assigned duties. Frequently provides helpful points or asks questions that advance verification process.	Demonstrates a basic understanding of most of assigned duties and engages with them, though not always successfully. Sometimes makes positive contributions.	No attendance. Or little or no understanding of assigned duties, lacks engagement, or makes little or no effort to contribute.
Newsroom participation	Participates actively and constructively all the time. Consistently appreciates others' contribution and engages with their ideas sensitively. Plays an active role in the newsroom.	Participates actively most of the time. Generally, appreciates others' contribution and engages with their ideas sensitively. Plays a supportive role in the newsroom.	Participates most of the time but sometimes requires prompting. Attempt to appreciate others' contribution and to engage with their ideas sensitively, with some success.	Little or no engagement even with prompting. Shows no appreciation of others' knowledge and skills. Fails to engage with others' ideas. Plays a passive or negative role in the newsroom.
Communication of ideas	Ideas are clearly and fluently articulated at all times.	Ideas are clearly articulated most of the time, with occasional lack of clarity.	Meaning is clear most of the time even though the student has some difficulty in articulating ideas.	Hard to understand the ideas and the meaning is rarely clear.

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Assessment, learning outcome and weighting

Assignments	Learning Outcome	Weighting
Case study / Verification posts	1,2,3,4,5	30 / 30 points
Monitoring	1,2,3	20 points
Newsroom duty	1,2,3	20 points

Course Grading Scale

Total points	Overall grade
96-100	A+
93-95	A
90-92	A-
86-89	B+
83-85	B
80-82	B-
76-79	C+
73-75	C
70-72	C-
65-69	D+
60-64	D
<60	F