1. Course Information:
   **FIMS9328 [Special Topic]: Misinformation and Viral Deception**
   Informational website: [http://victoriarubin.fims.uwo.ca/teaching/misinformation-and-viral-deception/](http://victoriarubin.fims.uwo.ca/teaching/misinformation-and-viral-deception/) (accessible to all)
   Course website: [http://courses.fims.uwo.ca/rubin/9328](http://courses.fims.uwo.ca/rubin/9328) (accessible to enrolled students)
   Location: FIMS & Nursing Building, Room 2230
   Classes: Fridays, 9:00-11:50 a.m.

2. Instructor Information:
   **Prof. Victoria Rubin, Ph.D.**
   Associate Professor
   Faculty of Information and Media Studies
   Office: FIMS & Nursing Building, Room 4046
   E-mail: [vrubin@uwo.ca](mailto:vrubin@uwo.ca) Tel.: 661-2111 ext. 88479
   Website (with a video self-introduction): [http://victoriarubin.fims.uwo.ca/about/](http://victoriarubin.fims.uwo.ca/about/)

3. Course Description:

   Objectives:
   - To develop an in-depth understanding of general principles of misinformation and disinformation behaviors and understanding of viral spread of inaccurate, incorrect, false or otherwise misleading information.
   - To discuss and develop interdisciplinary appreciation for existing content verification and quality assessment methodologies, their benefits and limitations.
   - To aggregate and critically evaluate best practices for preventative or corrective interventions for misinformation/disinformation, information verification, and information/media literacy.
   - To develop an ability to communicate the concepts related to misinformation, disinformation and broader information manipulation clearly and effectively to users, colleagues, paraprofessionals and other stakeholders in and across various disciplinary communities.

   Problem Statement:
   Recent controversies over “fake news” and concerns over entering a “post-truth” era, highlighted the need for deeper understanding of the problematical information that circulates in contemporary technologically-mediated environments. Such information may be inaccurate, misleading, inappropriately attributed, or altogether fabricated and it has a potential to disrupt politics, business, and culture (Jack, 2017). Everyday life decision-making, behavior, and mood are influenced by the quality of information we receive. When professional analysts sift through the news, their future forecasts, fact and pattern discovery depend on veracity of the information in knowledge management and curation areas. It is critical to distinguish truthful, credible information from deceptively manipulated one. Few verification mechanisms currently exist, and the sheer volume of the information requires systematic guidelines and novel technological approaches (Rubin, Chen, & Conroy, 2015). This course will discuss deception, as a deliberate effort to create false beliefs or conclusions, in contrast with other closely related phenomena such as misinformation (Fox, 1983) and disinformation. While both terms refer to misleading information, misinformation is usually used to imply no deliberate intent to mislead, while disinformation implies knowing deception.
The significance of the course material to the information professional is four-fold:

1) Analytical methods complement and enhance the notoriously poor human ability to discern information from misinformation.
2) Credibility assessment of digital sources will be addressed.
3) Metrics of information quality assessment will be discussed.
4) The mere awareness of potential digital deception constitutes part of new media literacy and can prevent undesirable consequences.

Course Content (Subject to Modifications and Refinement):

- Introduction to misinformation, deception and information manipulation.
- Philosophical and ethical foundation of morality. Information quality.
- Psychological basics of deceptive and deviant behaviors.
- Deception in computer-mediate environments.
- Credibility assessments in law enforcement and related information policies.
- Digital environments specificity (“fake news” controversy, fake social network and dating profiles, fudged online resumes, fake product reviews, “butler lies” in texting, “gaslighting”, spam and phishing, astroturfing and “xuanchuan”, i.e., flooding conversational spaces with positive messages or attempts to change the subject).
- Organizational concerns (forged science and misinterpretation of data).
- Case studies from broad selections of disciplines (politics, civics, health insurances, etc.)
- Methodological advancements in prevention, detection and deterrence.
- Text analytics for information verification.
- Best practices, guidelines, workflows and polices.
- Special cases: practitioners in education, libraries, news production, law enforcement.

Assignments:

The students will be asked to write a short critical paper, a case study description, and a guidelines for preventative measures/best practices for content verification suitable to their home discipline, domain of choice and professional context. The final paper is cumulative and is built-upon previous sequential assignments (but with an additional component). The students’ work will be presented in a brief in-class presentation and the end-of-class poster session.

4. Course Materials:

There is no required textbook for the course. Readings for this course will be pulled from various disciplines: psychology, philosophy, communication and media studies, journalism, information technology, computer science, library and information science literature (see References at the end). Students will be assigned a selection of book chapters, scientific articles, or critical pieces which will be provided either via reserve shelves in the Graduate Library, or digitally on the course website, or both. Case studies will be drawing on popularized science articles, current and archived news (legitimate and fabricated), and possibly, some publicly available court proceeding records and reports (white papers).

Electronic Resources and Communications:

The course website (http://faculty.fims.uwo.ca/rubin/) will contain selected course materials such as this syllabus, select readings, and classroom handouts. The handouts will be posted prior to each lecture in the course of the term. Please visit the web-site before each lecture to print the corresponding handout and bring it to class with you. Students will not be able to modify these materials electronically. There will be no electronic submissions of assignments via this website.

The course listserv is set up for electronic communications with the whole class (including the Instructor). Any sent messages will arrive to you regular UWO e-mail inbox. The Instructors will also use the listserv for announcements.
**Class Policies:**
Class attendance is mandatory. Marks may be deducted for late arrivals or unexcused missed classes, etc. Extra marks are not awarded for attending tutorials.

**Academic accommodation** will be made only on medical or compassionate grounds and for religious holidays. For religious holiday accommodation, the student must notify the Instructor at least one week in advance (please check all class dates and assignment deadlines and notify us as soon as possible if there is any conflict).

Laptops, cell phones, and other hand-held electronic devices are permitted in the classroom, provided that you do not disturb your colleagues or disrupt the class. Students are not permitted to carry on a cell phone conversation in the classroom. If you anticipate an important call, please make appropriate arrangements (e.g., set the phone to vibrate, sit close by the door, leave the room with minimum disturbance to the class).

**5. Methods of Evaluation:**
- Critical analysis (short paper) (10%)
- Case study (short paper) (15%)
- Aggregated best practices/preventative measures/verification strategies (short paper) (15%)
- Final paper (cumulative paper with revisions of previous short papers & an added component) (25%)
- In-class presentation (10%)
- Poster presentation (15%)
- Participation (10%)

**6. Statement on Academic Offences:**
**Plagiarism:** In accordance with policy at UWO, students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see The Section on The Scholastic Discipline for Graduate Students from the Rights and Responsibilities in the Academic Handbook [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)).

**Statement on Academic Offences:** Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf).

**7. Support Services**
**Statement on Mental Health:** Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western [http://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html](http://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

**References / Sample Readings:**

