

April 2020

# Truth, Deception, and Information Disorder



## Praxis Lab Final Report

Fall 2019- Spring 2020

Honors College

University of Utah

# A Word from Our Professors

In August of 2019, 10 highly energetic students began studying misinformation in all its forms, initially focusing on fake news and other forms of deliberate disinformation.

However, as the COVID-19 virus emerged in early 2020 and rapidly turned into a pandemic, the student's attention moved away from fake news and became increasingly focused on the surge of misinformation about the virus. The students came to realize that while the spread of the coronavirus would eventually run its course, the epidemic of misinformation that often accompanies elections, would remain and pose an ongoing threat to our democracy.

Powered by youthful exuberance and unburdened by the shackles of cynicism that often comes with age, the students set out to identify a meaningful way they could make a positive contribution toward fighting the spread of misinformation in our local Utah elections, both immediately and in the future. They developed a misinformation vaccine of sorts focusing on three distinct groups: middle school students who represent future voters; college students, many of whom will be voting for the first time this November, and Utah's Gubernatorial candidates, who the students believe have a unique responsibility to be leaders in the fight against election misinformation.

For the students in this Praxis Lab, this was the first time in their academic careers they had to experience the challenges of group decision-making. It was not always easy as different students had different ideas, different styles and sometimes conflicting objectives...in other words, real life! At times, this resulted in great uncertainty and frustration which was compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic which reared its ugly head about two-thirds through the course and necessitated a lot of adjustments. In the end, however, the students overcame all obstacles and produced three stunning class Projects.

This report highlights their efforts. A more detailed description of their Projects may be found on the course website at <http://www.thinkb4utweet.com>.

As their Boomer professors, we are filled with a sense of pride for their efforts and are convinced that our state's and country's future is in good hands.

Professor Randy L. Dryer, JD  
University of Utah

Professor Avery E. Holton, PhD  
University of Utah

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# Meet the Team

## The Students and Professors

Our team, composed of ten students and two professors, came from a broad range of disciplines and interests. This allowed us to tackle problems from angles that would be difficult for a less academically diverse cohort and to more quickly find solutions. It always seemed like someone had the skill (or was willing to learn) for whatever task needed to get done.

**Kate Button**, junior, English

**Mario Gonzalez**, sophomore, Film and Media Arts

**Colin Hancock**, sophomore, Chemical Engineering

**Victoria Hills**, sophomore, Political Science

**Eric Jara**, senior, Quantitative Analysis of Markets and Organizations

**Sydnee Kay**, junior, International Studies and Political Science

**Zach Mallender**, sophomore, Biology, Pre-Med

**Audrey Pozernick**, junior, Political Science and Philosophy of Science

**Sinndy Rios**, junior, Political Science and Sociology

**Wiro Wink**, sophomore, Quantitative Analysis of Markets and Organizations

**Randy Dryer**, JD

**Avery Holton**, PhD

**For a detailed  
description of our  
team, visit our [About  
Us](#) page on our  
[website](#)**





# Introduction

Praxis, from the Greek words theory and action, is a year-long, lab style course offered by the University of Utah Honors College. The goal of each Lab is to learn deeply about a specific societal problem or challenge, take that knowledge and apply it to possible solutions for the real world. Each Praxis Lab is unique, with the end result being a project designed and implemented by the students, under the guidance of two professors from different disciplines.

Our Praxis Lab struggled with a fundamental issue that has been plaguing our county over the past few years: what is truth? While that question may be unanswerable, we set out to learn all we could about truth, digital information, and the techniques malicious actors use to corrode truth and spread lies. Along the way we explored the fields of politics, social media, and social sciences; with topics ranging from virtual actors to the 2016 election. After a semester of learning and deliberation, we turned our focus towards action, eventually settling on a four-pronged project that would allow us to impact the greatest number of people in the most significant way, all within our time and budgetary constraints.



# Course & Project Overview

In August of 2019, we began studying misinformation in all its forms, but primarily focusing on fake news and other forms of deliberate disinformation. As the COVID-19 virus emerged in early 2020 and rapidly turned into a pandemic, however, our attention moved from fake news and became increasingly focused on the surge of misinformation about the virus, something the World Health Organization would eventually describe as an “infodemic.” We came to realize that while the spread of the Coronavirus would eventually run its course, the epidemic of misinformation, so easily spread and magnified through social media, would remain and resurface in other areas.

We recognized that misinformation is a global issue that will only get significantly worse if appropriate action is not taken. We noted with concern how the social media platforms, although committing significant resources to combating misinformation, were fighting a losing battle due to their sheer size and the massive volume of misinformation that is posted on their platforms.

What could we realistically do, in just a few short months and with a limited budget, to make a meaningful contribution to addressing the misinformation epidemic? We ultimately developed a misinformation vaccine of sorts that targeted three distinct local groups over which we could possibly exert some influence: middle school students who represent future consumers of digital media and voters; college students, most of whom are already robust consumers of digital information and who will be voting for the first time this November, and Utah’s 17 announced Gubernatorial candidates, who are potential generators of misinformation and who we believe have a unique responsibility to be leaders in the fight against election misinformation.

Consequently, we developed three separate, yet related, campaigns, each targeting one of the identified groups. We hoped to effect both short term and long term change. As hereinafter described, our three campaigns were our Middle School Education Campaign, our U of U Awareness Campaign, and our Gubernatorial Pledge for Election Integrity Campaign.

# An Empty Campus

During Spring Break we saturated campus with hundreds of flyers, banners, lawn signs and A-Frame billboards to dramatically promote our three projects when students returned to campus on March 16th. Unfortunately, as shown by the images below, virtually no one saw the signs as all classes were moved online and the campus was essentially closed. This forced us to quickly switch gears and promote our Projects primarily through our Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts.



# Chronology

A chronology of significant developments relating to misinformation that occurred over the course of our class.

## August

- Class begins August 22.
- Numerous news outlets report that President Trump had made at least 10,000 verifiably untrue statements during his presidency;
- the use of social media platforms to spread misinformation becomes a national debate and the tech industry is criticized by elected officials for not doing more to remove false information.

## September

- Facebook employs hundreds of fact checkers due to growing concerns with the spread of misinformation on its platform, but announces it will not fact check political ads or statements of politicians.

## October

- California governor signs into law AB 730, making doctored videos illegal within 60 days of an election;
- Mark Zuckerberg gives a speech in Washington decrying false news;
- S. J. Quinney College of Law hosts a symposium on disinformation;
- over 250 Facebook employees sign letter calling for fact checking of political ads;
- Twitter announces ban on all political ads due to concerns over disinformation

## November

- Google updates ads policy to remove deep fakes and politically significant misinformation

## December

- Class decides to pursue a three part class Project;
- UK general election occurs with several candidates making extensive use of misinformation;
- NDAA signed into law, requiring comprehensive report on foreign weaponization of deepfakes;
- Chinese government suppresses whistleblower doctor Li Wenliang, claiming his concerns over the COVID-19 virus are "false comments"

# 2019

# Chronology

A chronology of significant developments relating to misinformation that occurred over the course of our class.

## January

- Class resumes;
- first reported US case of COVID-19;
- number of tweets pushing COVID-19 conspiracy theories surpasses two million
- Congress urges Google to act against "dangerous climate disinformation" on YouTube
- Facebook executives grilled in Congressional hearings on inability to stop spread of misinformation

## February

- Misinformation spread on WhatsApp leads to a mob killing in India;
- World Health Organization declares an "infodemic" due to rampant misinformation about coronavirus pandemic;
- a 24/7 myth-busting coronavirus hotline is established;
- Whistleblower doctor Li Wenliang dies of COVID-19 in Wuhan;
- rampant misinformation about Iowa Democratic caucus highlights threat of domestic disinformation

## March

- Public launch of three class projects: U of U Awareness Campaign, Middle School Education Campaign & Pledge for Election Integrity;
- Lawn signs, banners and flyers about class Projects distributed on U campus;
- Gubernatorial candidate Chris Peterson becomes first Utah candidate to sign Election Integrity Pledge;
- malicious robocalls claiming the wrong election date circulate through Texas in Super Tuesday primary
- University moves all classes online, effectively closing campus;
- Utah elected officials impose stay at home orders;
- Daily Utah Chronicle Misinformation issue published digitally
- Tenth Utah gubernatorial candidate signs Election Integrity Pledge

## April

- Challenge winners announced on our website
- Middle School Education teaching materials featured on UEN, Google Classroom, Canvas Commons & several Home School Facebook Groups
- Local news stories published about Project
- Class ends
- Final Report published

# 2020

# Our Three Class Projects

In designing our class projects, we wanted to create something that would have an impact beyond our classroom and also have a life beyond this academic year.

After we each presented individual ideas for a class Project, the class as a whole, decided on three separate, but interrelated projects using the concepts of FISA (Feasibility, Impact, Sustainability and Achievability) as guiding principles.

1

## The U of U Public Awareness Campaign

2

## The Middle School Education Campaign

3

## The Pledge for Election Integrity



# U of U Awareness Campaign

## Overview

For our U of U Awareness Campaign, our overarching goal was to educate as many members of the University community as possible about the fundamentals of recognizing and combating misinformation. We were interested in this because the impact was potentially quite broad, but the project itself was extremely local. Additionally, this was a demographic we understood, as all of the students in the class were in fact college students.

To accomplish our goal, we undertook two separate, yet related, activities: (1) a three part online misinformation contest open to students faculty & staff at the University and (2) a special misinformation issue of the student newspaper, The Daily Utah Chronicle.

**Even though the contest is over, you can still take the challenges! Visit our website, here:**

<https://www.thinkb4utweet.com/contest-page>



The contests challenged what students knew about misinformation. This contest incorporated a misinformation quiz, an observation challenge, and a crossword puzzle. Students who completed one or more challenges were entered into a random drawing to win up to \$900 in cash prizes. The purpose of the contest was to engage a sample of college-aged participants in learning about misinformation and to bring them into a wider discussion about how and why misinformation spreads and how it can be stopped. We advertised this contest through a dozen large A-frames around campus; 60 on-campus lawn signs; numerous posters and hundreds of paper flyers distributed in campus buildings; digital ads in building video monitors; a social media campaign on our course and personal Twitter and Instagram accounts; takeovers of the University of Utah Instagram Stories; a large banner at the Student Union; ad blasts in the Daily Utah Chronicle's newsletter and website; and advertisements in the Chronicle. Ultimately, **we had over 700 entries in the three contests.**

To see our contest winners go to our website at [www.thinkb4utweet.com](http://www.thinkb4utweet.com)

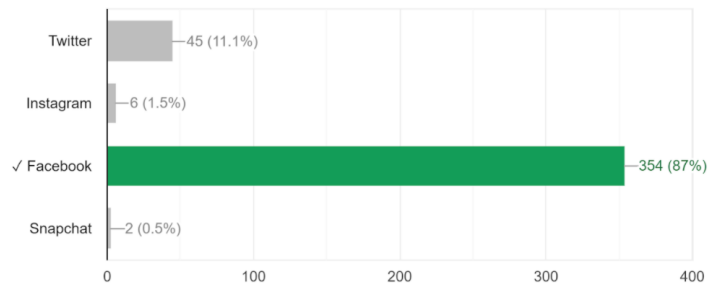
# U of U Awareness Campaign

## Challenge Results

*The first challenge was a seven multiple choice question quiz regarding "What is misinformation?" and related topics.*

In late 2019, which of the following social media platforms came under scrutiny for their decision not to remove political ads that contained misinformation?

354 / 407 correct responses

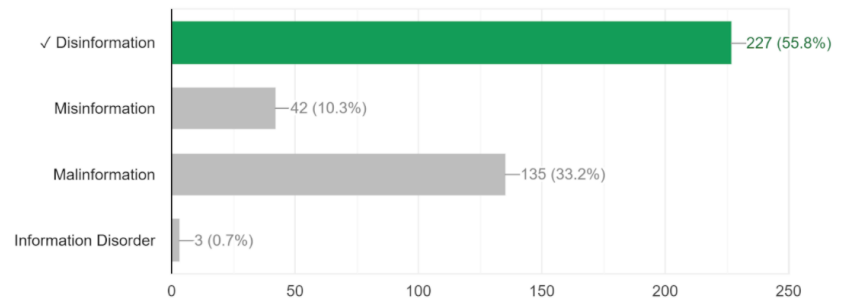


To the right are the results of three questions; the first shows that a majority of quiz takers knew Facebook was under scrutiny for their decision to not remove political ads that contained misinformation.

The next two questions indicate a large portion of quiz takers incorrectly knew what "disinformation" means, and what a "deepfake" is.

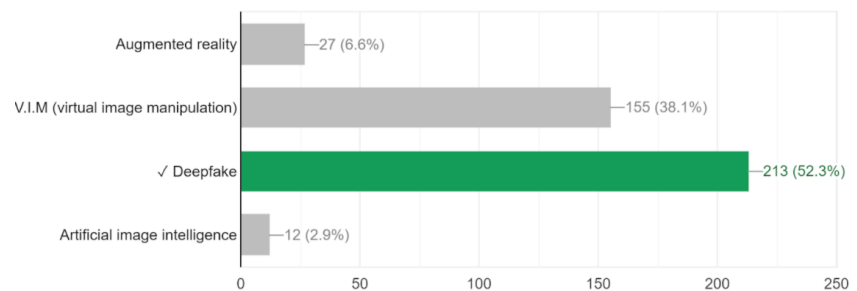
when false information is knowingly shared to cause harm.

227 / 407 correct responses



"synthetic media in which a person in an existing image or video is replaced with someone else's likeness."

213 / 407 correct responses





# U of U Awareness Campaign

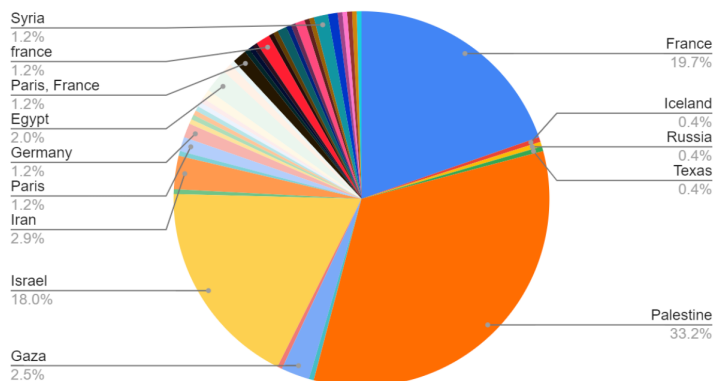
## Challenge Results

*The second challenge tested place and location identification skills. Sometimes out-of-context photos tell a completely different story than what is really happening, or where they are actually taken.*

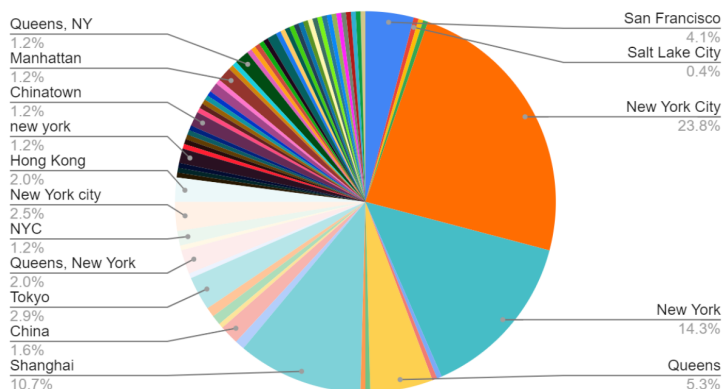
Below are the results of two questions. The first shows that the majority of quiz takers incorrectly assumed the location to be Palestine, when the photo was in fact taken in France. Answers for the second image were mostly correct, with respondents correctly identifying the city as New York City.



Count of Question 1 Name the country



Count of Question 2: Name the city



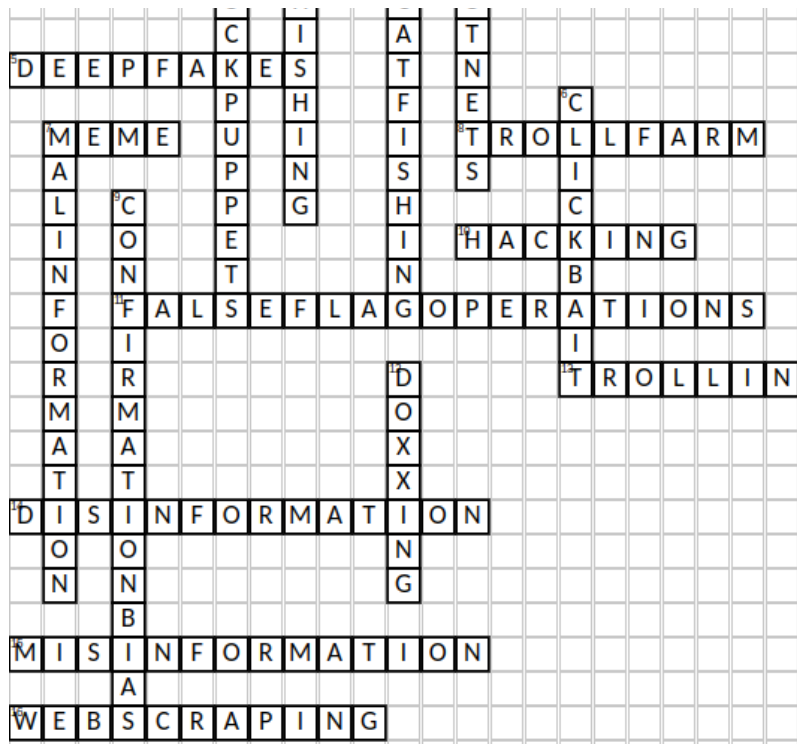
# U of U Awareness Campaign

## Challenge Results

*The third and last challenge was a crossword puzzle of terms relating to misinformation and misinformation tactics.*

**Out of 120 people who took the crossword puzzle,**

**28%** Correctly completed the puzzle



# U of U Awareness Campaign

## Marketing and Advertising

*Two of our contest advertisements that we dispersed through physical marketing and our online social media platforms.*

enter the contest.

win cash prizes.

before you

THINK BEFORE YOU TWEET

honors praxis lab and the daily utah chronicle invite you to **stop the misinformation epidemic.**

lies lies lies  
lies lies lies  
lies lies lies  
lies lies lies

**STOP THE MISINFORMATION EPIDEMIC**  
**TIME IS RUNNING OUT!**

thinkb4utweet.com

Enter our challenges by March 29  
for a chance to win \$500 cash.

**#THINKB4UTWEET**

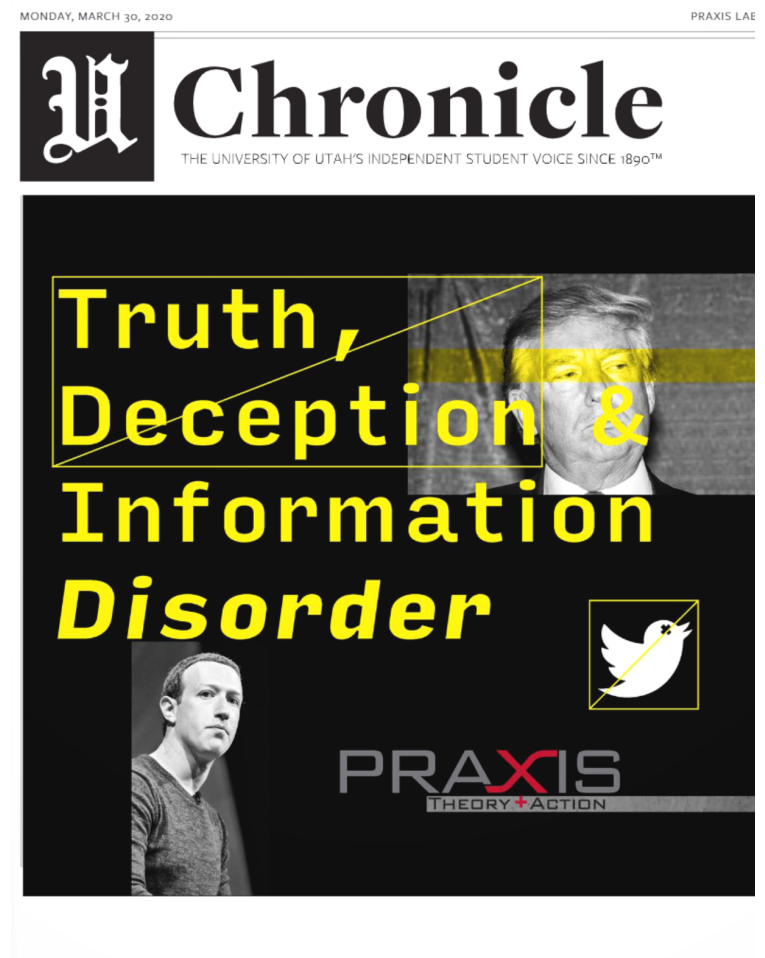
THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH  
Honors College

The Daily Utah Chronicle

# U of U Awareness Campaign

## The Chronicle Collaboration

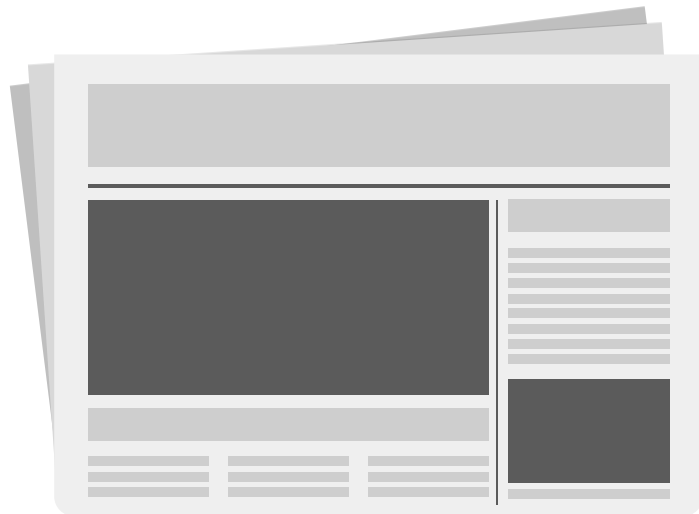
The second project designed to reach the University of Utah community involved a collaboration with the Daily Utah Chronicle, the University's student newspaper. After several weeks of meeting with editors and writers at the Chronicle, we jointly created a 28 page special issue of the Chronicle centered around the theme of misinformation and promoting the Contests. Originally, the printed issue was to be distributed on campus on March 30th, but unfortunately the coronavirus prevented distribution of a print edition as campus was closed earlier in March. However, the special issue was published online with articles ranging from misinformation in the Iowa Caucus to the role of art in stopping misinformation to a recap of pending legislation to combat manipulated media. All told, there were 12 articles in the themed issue written by Praxis Lab students and Chronicle reporters.



# U of U Awareness Campaign

## The Chronicle Collaboration

A selection of graphics from the 28 page special Misinformation issue together with the 12 articles written by the Chronicle staff and Praxis Lab students may be accessed by scanning the QR code below, which will take you to the course website. A PDF version of the issue is also available to view and download on the website.



[www.thinkb4utweet.com/awarenesscampaign](http://www.thinkb4utweet.com/awarenesscampaign)

# Middle School Education Project

Our Lab also wanted to have a Project focused on educating middle school students about misinformation, and giving them skills they need to combat it.

We did this in three ways:

1

**Educational Mini-course** - We produced a mini-course in misinformation by creating five independent modules. These were then posted in several locations and sent to a number of organizations

2

**On-Campus Workshop** - We hosted a 30-minute on-campus workshop on misinformation for about twenty students from Dixon Junior High. The workshops were hosted through Define Your Path, a program at the University of Utah.

3

**UCET Conference** - Students attended the annual Utah Coalition for Educational Technology conference in March at the Utah Valley Convention Center to present and share the five modules to educators from across the state– and further!

# The Mini-Course

We prepared five sets of lesson plans, presentations, and activities each centered around a subtopic of misinformation. These "modules" were then uploaded to the Utah Education Network website, the public access course page on Instructure's Canvas, and Google Classroom. Our five modules were...

**What is Misinformation?**

Covered the definition and nuances of misinformation and the forms it can take

**Truth & Social Media**

Covered the forms misinformation can take on social media.

**Trusting Journalism**

Covered the relationships between news, misinformation, and journalism.

**Civic Engagement**

Covered how politicians and public figures can sometimes fall for and promote misinformation.

**"Hate Speech", Inclusivity, and Kindness**

Related all of the information about misinformation to personal relationships and general kindness.

**View and download our modules here:**

<https://www.thinkb4utweet.com/educationalcampaign>



# The Mini-Course

## What is Misinformation?

By: Honors Praxis Lab – 2019-20

## Trusting Journalism

Democracy's Key Ingredient

## Truth on Social Media

## Civic Engagement

What is misinformation? What are politics? And what the heck even is fake news?

## "Hate Speech", Inclusivity, and Kindness



# On Campus Workshop

We hosted a 30-minute on-campus workshop on misinformation for about twenty students from Dixon Junior High. The workshops were hosted through Defining Your Path, a program at the University of Utah through the Office of Engagement.



“The Defining Your Path workshop went better than I could have imagined. It was both fascinating and inspiring to see young minds explore topics that are still actively being researched. The students were most engaged when given an activity to do or when asked about their own experiences with regards to misinformation. By bringing up what non-truths they have seen online, the students were able to reflect and engage in an interesting dialogue with their teachers, their peers, and us. It was in these moments that the workshop truly fell together and the students excelled in detecting and describing false information. Having now seen genuine interest in the faces of bright young students, I believe that what we were able to accomplish, was legitimately educational.”

- Colin Hancock

# UCET Conference

**In an effort to share our mini-course with teachers across the state, two of us attended the 2020 UCET Conference in Provo, Utah on March 10th as presenters.**

One of our objectives was to create an educational tool that would continue being taught and built upon even after our Praxis Lab concluded. The Utah Coalition for Educational Technology Conference is an annual conference that brings together educators from all across Utah. This conference provides many hands-on breakout sessions on ways to utilize technology in teaching and learning. We were invited to present our educational campaign at this year's conference in March. In a science-fair style presentation, we shared our modules with educators with a hope to provide new curriculum to supplement already-taught digital literacy and citizenship. Students Zach Mallender and Victoria Hills attended the conference with Professor Randy Dryer. Zach and Victoria spoke to upwards of 50 educators to give an in-depth description of our course and encourage them to share it with their fellow educators. It was a very fulfilling experience. Thank you to all the encouraging comments on our project!



You can find information about UCET here:  
<https://www.ucet.org/>

Information on our UCET session at  
<https://ucet2020.sched.com/event/ZxeN>

# The Pledge for Election Integrity

## A pledge to avoid misinformation tactics in Utah gubernatorial campaigns.

Much has been written about foreign actors such as Russia and Iran who have and are spreading false information about U.S. elections. Indeed, 13 Russians were indicted for using social media to manipulate the 2016 election. Ironically, U.S. candidates for public office and their supporters are also in the business of spreading disinformation...either about an opponent or spreading misinformation in the furtherance of a fundraising initiative. Social media manipulation, often in misleading ways, is becoming a staple of campaigns and candidate supporters. "Black-Hat" PR firms now openly market their expertise in developing disinformation campaigns.

These efforts have led to smear campaigns using deep fakes, GIFs and other manipulated media; the use of imposter Twitter, Instagram and Facebook accounts to spread false information; and the use of bots and troll farms to magnify the spread of misinformation. These tactics have led to organized efforts to have candidates and political parties promise to voluntarily reject such tactics. One such effort is the "Pledge for Election Integrity" developed by the non-profit Alliance for Democracy. Two candidates for President, Joe Biden and Elizabeth Warren signed the pledge. We developed a local version of the Pledge For Election Integrity and challenged each of the candidates for Utah Governor to sign the Pledge.



# The Pledge for Election Integrity\*

As a candidate seeking public office in Utah, I, and my campaign organization, will not engage in campaign communications which are knowingly false or misleading or otherwise undermine the integrity of the election process and will not aid and abet others who engage in such communications.

**Specifically, by signing this pledge, I and my campaign organization, will**

**NOT** create, share or otherwise use for disinformation or propaganda purposes information, data or materials that is intentionally misleading and/or falsified, fabricated, doxed or stolen;

**NOT** disseminate manipulated images, audio or videos that impersonate other candidates, including deep fake videos;

**NOT** employ disinformation tactics such as the use of fake social media accounts, fake websites, trolls and troll farms;

**MAKE** transparent the use of bot networks or other automated systems to disseminate campaign communications;

**AVOID** using bots and other automated systems or networks to attack opponents or using third-parties or proxies to undertake such actions;

**TAKE** appropriate steps to train my campaign staff in media literacy and cybersecurity; and

**ENCOURAGE** those who support my candidacy to adhere to the letter and spirit of this pledge.

Dated:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Candidate

\*This Pledge was prepared by the students in the University of Utah Honors College Praxis Lab on Truth, Deception and Information Disorder and was adapted from the Pledge for Election Integrity developed by the Alliance of Democracies. For more about the Truth Praxis Lab and its projects related to misinformation go to <https://www.thinkb4utweet.com/>

# The Pledge for Election Integrity

*Our Pledge was endorsed by the League of Women Voters of Utah, Action Utah and Mormon Women for Ethical Government.*

**Ten of the 17 Candidates for Utah Governor had signed the pledge by the time this report was prepared (names listed in alphabetical order).**

- **Jason Christensen**
- **Jan Garbett**
- **Neil Hansen**
- **Ryan Jackson**
- **Zachary Moses**
- **Chris Peterson**
- **Nikki Pino**
- **Mark Smith**
- **Aimee Newton Windor**
- **Thomas Wright**



Candidates were each contacted three times before we contacted the press and news organizations with information on the Pledge. There were undoubtedly disruptions to campaigns from the COVID-19 pandemic, and we hope that the Pledge for Election Integrity will be signed by the remaining seven candidates by the November 3, 2020 Utah Gubernatorial Election.

# By the Numbers

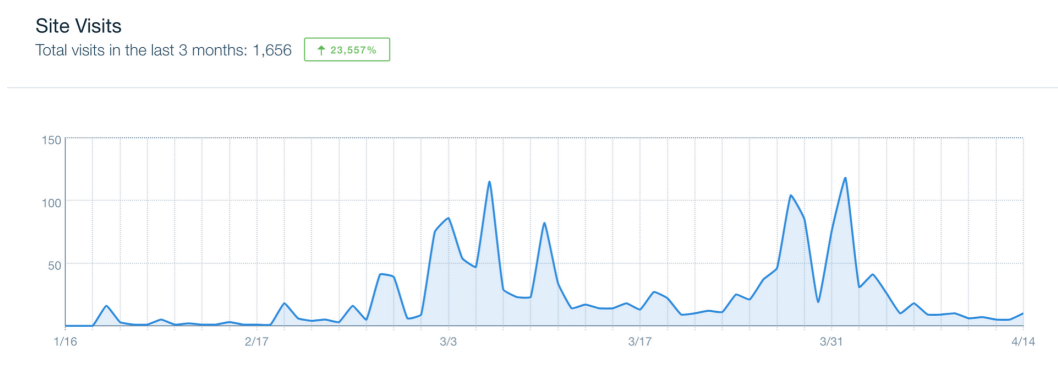
*By the end of the semester, we were able to reach tens of thousands of people through our three Projects, despite the fact our initial physical marketing campaign on campus was interrupted due to closure of the University.*

## Media Exposure

Stories about our Projects were published or aired on several local news outlets, both print and broadcast and appeared in various University platforms.

WE also had readership for the Daily Utah Chronicle Special Misinformation issue.

## Online Presence



Our course website [www.thinkB4Utweet.com](http://www.thinkB4Utweet.com) had almost 2000 views by persons in more than 20 states, including New York, Florida, California and Texas. One visitor came from as far away as China.

Our social media accounts on our course Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts had hundreds of posts, likes and retweets. The University also promoted the Projects on its social networks with tens of thousands followers.

# By the Numbers

## The Pledge for Election Integrity

**10** of **17**

candidates for Utah Governor signed the Pledge.

## Middle School Education Project

Our course materials were featured on the Utah Education Network, Google Classroom, Canvas Commons and several Homeschooling Parent Facebook Group pages, making them available to thousands of teachers and homeschooling parents. **The UEN website averages thousands of visits per week.**

## Contest Participants

There were more than **700** entries in our

three Misinformation Contests for the U of U Awareness Campaign.

## Chronicle Readership

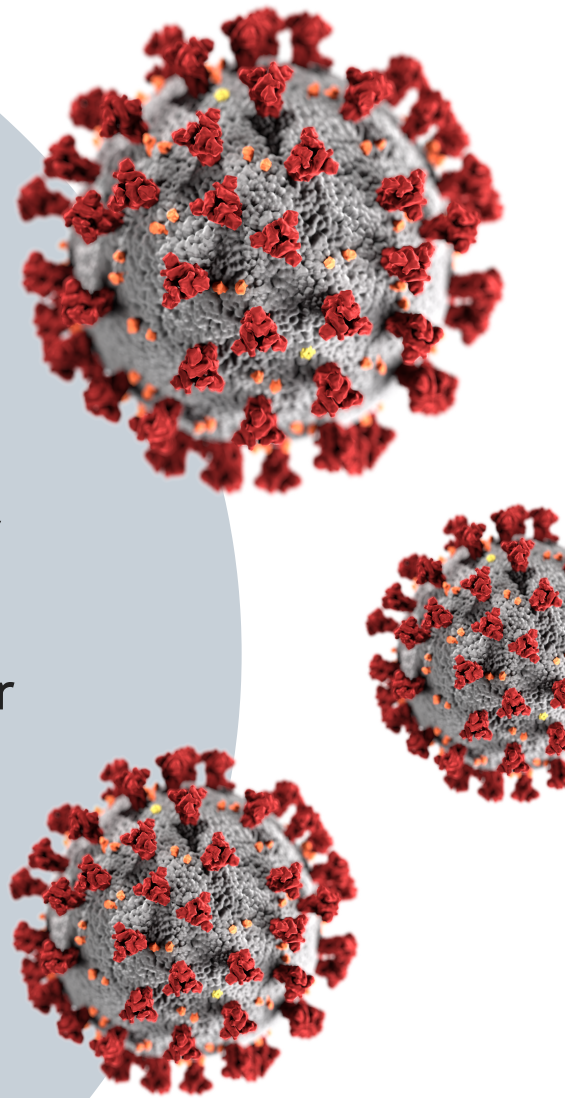
There were more than **2,200 views**

of various articles in our special Misinformation issue with the Daily Utah Chronicle.



# Obstacles & Challenges

In March of 2020, our class was no longer able to meet in person due to the drastic effects COVID-19 had on everyday life. Social distancing and stay at home orders were mandated and we moved to online classes for the remainder of the semester. As noted on the following pages, this proved to be a significant, but not insurmountable challenge and was not the only obstacle we faced.

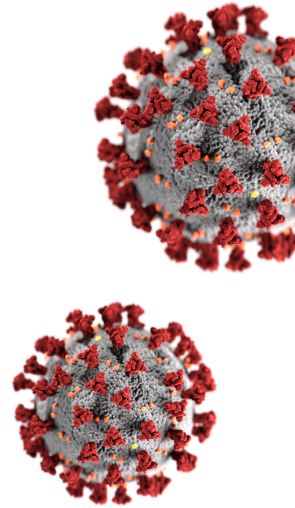
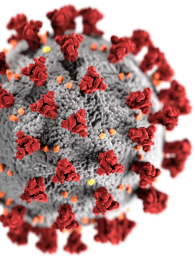




# Obstacles and Challenges

## ***COVID-19 Obstacles***

The rise of SARS-CoV-2 and the disease it causes, COVID-19, will likely create permanent and fundamental changes within our society. The speed and thoroughness of both the infection and the lockdown response are on a scale the likes of which have never been seen before in modern society. While only time will tell how our society changes due to these unique challenges, our project had to change in a rapid and extensive way in order to cope with the new realities of social distancing. Both the U of U education and the middle school education facets of our project relied heavily on physical presence: we had invested thousands of dollars into on campus physical advertising, and the backbone of the middle school education was meeting with field trip groups. However, over the period of spring break, we completely lost both those avenues of connection. This was difficult, especially so late in the class, when we had invested much of our resources and time into arranging these crucial aspects of the project. The outbreak had the added difficulties of increasing the stress level of our team, as logistical choices forced people to physically move and abruptly choose a path that would have consequences for the next several months. On top of that, the inability to meet physically hampered our ability to communicate in a quick and concise manner. While the situation was far from ideal, we did what we could to make the best of a difficult situation. Zoom helped with our difficulties in long distance connection, and we learned new patterns of communication to ensure we were heard and understood. We did our best to support each other and understand that everyone had additional stressors in this time of crisis. Most dramatically, we banded together and pushed hard to convert or project to a digital medium, finding ways to achieve what we still could without being able to physically meet anyone. While the final form of our project wasn't what anyone expected, we all feel that given the uncertainty and difficulty of this time our project was a solid success.



# Obstacles and Challenges

## ***Non-Covid-19 Obstacles***

An early obstacle that impacted both the Education Campaign and the U Awareness Campaign was a lack of enthusiasm from potential local sponsors after we reached out to them. We realized that partial success of our project rested on whether certain people would reply to our requests to form partnerships. In effect, there were times where our progress was stagnant because so much depended upon how successful our outreach strategies were. To overcome this obstacle, our Lab moved toward a more assertive communication strategy. We also needed to be more flexible regarding the final vision of our project, knowing it was contingent on what reliable partners we could acquire such as Granite School District and the Daily Utah Chronicle, and what they could contribute.

Another notable obstacle we faced was how and when we were going to market our work product to both the campus community and Utah middle school teachers. The Awareness Campaign overcame this obstacle through social media outreach when it became apparent that few people would be seeing our on-campus signs and TV monitors. We created and strengthened personal contacts within the University Marketing and Communications department and the Daily Utah Chronicle.

The Chronicle opened up various advertising opportunities, including ads in their paper. This partnership was not easy to cultivate, however, since there was pushback regarding our initial idea to test students' ability to recognize

misinformation by placing pieces of harmless disinformation in regular articles. However, to compromise with the editors who were not on board with this plan, we dropped the idea and instead proposed a themed issue centered around misinformation. Kate Button, a writer for the Chronicle and a member of our team, became our link to a successful partnership as she engaged in meetings with editors to advocate for the benefits both sides could gain from the collaboration. Once the hesitation from the Chronicle settled and final compromises and plans were set, our partnership continued smoothly.

The Education Campaign faced a challenge of how to reach and market to our target audience. To overcome this barrier, we reached out to organizations and individuals that were already connected to middle school teachers and students, such as the Utah Education Network, the Defining Your Path program, and the Utah Coalition for Educational Technology. To make our modules as accessible as possible, we decided to post them on our website for anyone interested in utilizing our lessons on misinformation.

No matter what obstacles we faced as a class, we were able to overcome them through flexibility persistence in our communications as we formed the partnerships that defined our project in all its elements.

# Student Reflections

**KB**

Over the academic year that we have spent dedicating ourselves to the study of misinformation, the topic slowly but surely took over our lives as the coronavirus spread and eventually stopped our class from meeting in person. The theories and examples of misinformation that we had studied in the fall came to the forefronts of our minds as we saw false reports and fear-mongering take hold in the gaps of knowledge surrounding COVID-19. Nevertheless, our class persisted. At the beginning of 2020, we began to work on our project, and the obstacles and challenges we met taught us resiliency and flexibility — skills which became even more invaluable as we navigated completing our projects from a virtual platform. None of us could have imagined the semester ending the way it did, but because we were able to remain flexible about our vision and come to compromises with our partners and collaborators, we were still able to succeed and accomplish our goals. No matter the changes that we encountered — including classes moving to online, dealing with earthquakes and aftershocks, and moving out of dorms or changing housing arrangements — we remained dedicated to our goal of spreading awareness around misinformation.

- Kate Button

**MG**

Media is an ever present thing in our society, and influences everything in it. As a person who is interested in media and society, this class was very meaningful to me. Throughout the first semester of our class, we learned the ins and outs of misinformation and the ways it is spread. To be frank, I was very overwhelmed. The staggering negative effects and social inequality perpetuated are things I constantly stress over. Thankfully, our class is not solely about learning the material. Our second semester allowed us to put our theories into practice, and I truly think we made something worthwhile. Of our three pronged approach, I primarily worked on the education campaign. The 'Combating Misinformation' course we created is an informative way to bring substantial change to those who read it. I appreciate that we had many avenues to share the course with the public at large, even through networks of homeschooled children. The significance of our project is very important to me, as I really want to productively address the problems within our society. This class is something really important to me, and I hope it will be important outside of the class as well.

- Mario Gonzalez

# Student Reflections

CH

Perhaps the most meaningful thing I experienced in this Praxis Lab was seeing how a community and its members excitedly rally around an issue that is important to them. At every step of the way we had interested parties and those who wanted to help us. From Logan Myers to Chris Larsen, we got help from some amazing people and much of our project depended on their contributions. It was further incredible to see how a project, once initiated, will just kind of follow its own path and adapt to the needs and actions of the community it affects. Not only did we, the project coordinators, change and adapt the project when needed, but members of our community often inspired us to direct our attention in other directions. This Lab also gave me a realistic vision of how projects work in professional contexts. While most school projects, even (and often especially) university projects, are completed entirely by one or two individuals, this project felt pretty evenly split labor-wise. It felt more like a job, I suppose - something you could commit your work to knowing full well that you are only responsible for certain aspects of the project's completion. All this to say that this Lab gave me a realistic and refreshingly community-driven view of project development and completion.

- Colin Hancock

VH

Part of the reason I applied for the Honors College as a freshman was to be able to participate in Praxis Labs. In fact, in my college application essay I wrote about my interest in social media's effect on the US political climate, as I had watched fake news imbed itself in every aspect of journalism and politics since the 2016 Presidential Election. This Praxis Lab has been so fulfilling in furthering my knowledge and understanding of misinformation and its impact on society in every sphere. I loved worked with the students in my class— every single one of my peers brought such an interesting perspective to the class through their varying disciplines which really made my experience so much more exciting! Our professors did a wonderful job leading our discussions and introducing us to new topics. They were SO supportive of our project and helped us achieve the success that we have. I am so proud of the work we did together, and the impact we've had on so many levels through our Education Campaign (which was my main focus), our U of U Awareness Campaign, and our Pledge for Election Integrity. I strongly believe that education is the first step in creating change; being able to directly teach young students about misinformation will prepare them for the world we live in today. Thank you to all my peers, professors, and other partners for all the amazing work!

- Victoria Hills

# Student Reflections

EJ

During the past school year, we've learned a lot about misinformation, the dangers of it, and ways to prevent/fact check. Personally, I have learned a lot about the issue, other people, myself, and have gained some experience that will help me in my future projects. First off, the issue itself is more common than I had originally thought. After learning about the issues I was able to recognize where I have been at fault when getting information through social media, and when my family has fallen for misinformation. During the Spring 2020 semester, especially, we saw a lot of misinformation come up about COVID-19 and the Magna Utah earthquake sequence. This made the class feel real to me and my family. I had to teach my family where to get reliable information, who to trust, and warn them about fake articles written by random people. During various parts of the project, I also learned a lot about my way of working and my network. Overall, it was a great learning experience.

- Eric Jara

SK

I have loved being part of our Praxis Lab this year. I've been exposed to the subtleties of what truth really means, and I've also come to appreciate some of the complexities associated with educating people to identify misinformation. I applied for this Praxis Lab because I've been involved in both national and local politics while here at the University of Utah, and I'm interested in the ways that misinformation affects campaigns and elections. At the beginning of our course, I was able to simultaneously watch misinformation affect Salt Lake City's election for mayor and learn about the spread of misinformation. It was frustrating to see misinformation spread and not be able to do anything to stop it. For that reason, it was so satisfying to create a project to combat misinformation! I was especially involved in our Pledge for Election Integrity, and I'm excited to see whether it creates a positive impact on Utah's gubernatorial election. We have experienced several setbacks to this project because of COVID-19, but I hope that we'll see the remaining seven gubernatorial candidates sign the pledge once the pandemic calms down.

- Sydnee Kay

# Student Reflections

ZM

This lab was an excellent learning experience, a situation where we had a set goal, a specific amount of time, and the support network we needed to overcome many of the challenges that we faced. I personally learned how to be more persistent and effective with communication, as well as how to trust a team and play off my teammates strengths to make an overall better outcome. COVID-19 presented a unique challenge to every student on the university campus, but it affected our project in a particularly severe way. We had poured a lot of resources into physical advertisements, and intended to launch a tabling campaign to finish off the project. With the startling rise of COVID-19, this quickly became impossible. However, this too was a learning opportunity, as we shifted focus to a digital effort to spread awareness for our campaign, eventually gaining almost 2,000 unique visitors to our website. Through this unexpected shift, we learned the importance of flexibility and the persistence of a positive attitude. Even in the face of a global pandemic, reasonable goals were within reach.

-Zach Mallender

AP

Being a part of a mission-focused group dedicated to understanding how misinformation can be utilized by social media platforms, I started to understand the complexity of who and what determines what our social truths are. As a student aiming for law school, I was curious to see how federal and state law evolves along with society's technological advances. Yet, while my knowledge about how misinformation was being utilized as a tool for profit on social media platforms grew, so did my concern for children ages 13-14 who are statistically likely to start their entrance into the world of social media. I wanted to pass on the knowledge that I learned about how to spot misinformation and why it exists on to middle school children about to transition into high school. Learning that the current digital literacy curriculum was out of date and did not discuss misinformation on social media, only heightened my concern. I am glad that this praxis lab was able to offer a short term solution by creating a misinformation campaign with lesson modules that can easily be accessed online by middle school teachers and homeschool parents. Looking back at what we have accomplished, even with the difficulties faced by the Covid-19 shutdown, I can honestly say that I am very proud to have been a part of such a charismatic team that showed me how a group of college kids can make a difference.

- Audrey Pozernick

# Student Reflections

SR

As an Honors student, I heard the great impact praxis labs have on students' undergraduate journey. I wanted to experience this myself. This particular lab stood out to me because of the relevance in society. I hope to attend law school to become an immigration attorney. The immigrant community in the United States is deeply affected by misinformation. Misinformation conveys a false narrative that hurts the community, and so, I wanted to contribute to tackling this issue. I never expected the year to end this way. COVID-19 altered some of the goals of our praxis lab, however, as a class we accomplished impactful projects that reached multiple areas across the nation. As the education team worked on the curriculum we grew aware of the importance of creating thorough and enjoyable material. Being part of the education team left me hopeful and inspired by the upcoming generation of leaders that will be critical to the information presented to them. This praxis lab showed me the power students have in making a change. The passion everyone brought to our projects made this one of the most memorable experiences at the U.

- Sinndy Rios

WW

This class did more than teach me about misinformation. In a way, I was living it through my daily experiences. First, there was a constant stream of current events that related to the topics we discussed throughout the year. I was able to navigate these news stories through a unique lens which allowed me to better dissect and understand them. Second, we got to embark on a project of our choosing and try to make a difference. We worked really hard this semester to bring our plan into action and seeing the fruits of our labor is very exciting. During the project I learned how important it is to divide up the work, but also take responsibility for the specific aspect you are assigned to. Accountability and communication are probably the most important elements of any group project. It was really interesting to see how everyone dove into their respective tasks and made them their own. Overall, I think we did a good job finding the balance between talking the talk and walking the walk. Despite the times it seemed we had a mountain of work in front of us, we got everything done on time. COVID-19 presented a massive hurdle for our project, especially since the majority of our budget was allocated to on campus advertising. Despite this challenge, we were able to boost our online presence and reach the target number of website visits. Looking back on the project, it's amazing how quickly it flew by. I still remember the first class we had back in September like it was yesterday. I will dearly miss my professors and fellow colleagues, but I can't wait to see the great things we accomplish from here on out!

- Wiro Wink



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