

Inaugural Symposium on Disinformation Studies

Theme: Framing Disinformation

Swarthmore College is hosting the first regional Symposium on Disinformation Studies. The purpose of the Symposium is to situate Disinformation Studies at the intersection of academic disciplines and professional fields to foster nuanced understanding of contemporary processes of disinformation and generate interdisciplinary solutions to the problems caused or exacerbated by modern information warfare. The Symposium is designed to bring together scholars and practitioners from a diverse spectrum of sectors and industries and bridge gaps in our understanding of the mechanisms, devices, and strategies of 21st-century disinformation.

Amid eroded and polarized trust in the media, heightened scrutiny of counter-disinformation policies, degeneration of language and common meaning, pervasive media illiteracy, and the emboldened stirring of left- and right-wing autocratic elements worldwide, there is an urgent need for a thorough investigation of all aspects of disinformation, its causes and effects, its probable evolution, and potential counter-measures and solutions.

Our inaugural Symposium will be governed by the theme of “Framing Disinformation.” We invite specialists unbound by industry, sector, or background to identify the lenses through which contemporary information warfare should be evaluated. Scholars and practitioners from the arts and sciences are welcome to diagnose the mechanisms and effects of information warfare across platforms, media, nations, disciplines, and cultures. We are interested in cross-cultural case studies as much as in theories, interpretations, and applications.

The Symposium will additionally focus on the following broad sub-themes:

- **Disinformation, Media, and the Arts.** For centuries, media and the arts—from literature to paintings, from radio, cinema and television to the internet—have served as a prime battleground in information wars, and we welcome presenters to identify how the arts and media are being used today. Furthermore, we welcome discussion of the role of arts and humanities education in promoting media literacy and combating disinformation.

- **Disinformation and the Sciences.** The problem of disinformation requires comprehensive and surgical technological solutions. How can we immunize ad algorithms on social media against being abused by malign actors intent on subverting democracy? What can we learn from the SEO of platforms like Yandex and TikTok, which successfully weaponize the search function as part of state propaganda efforts? What benefits and drawbacks are augured by ever-advancing natural language processing? What can we glean from the attempts by authoritarian regimes to fragment the internet and (fire)wall off its segments?
- **Bridging the Counter-Disinformation Policy Gap.** In the United States, the chief federal law governing digital crimes is the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, which was passed in the 1980s. The two most prominent U.S. counter-disinformation laws today are in woeful need of reform. Various democracies are grappling with how best to codify counter-disinformation policies. Consequently, we encourage presentations on new, interdisciplinary, cross-sector approaches to counter-disinformation policymaking. Moreover, policymaking is not contained to the public sector, and we invite discussion of policies that the private sector should enact and issues with which it must contend.

The Symposium will be held on the scenic campus of Swarthmore College—located just outside Philadelphia and its numerous world-class museums, restaurants, and historic spots—over two days (**April 1-2, 2022**). While it will be in-person, registered participants will be able to access the events virtually. Though we encourage in-person participation by speakers, those who are unable to attend physically may still present virtually. Kindly send all presentation proposals (including presentation title, abstract of maximum 350 words, short bio) to swatdisinfostudies@gmail.com by December 20, 2021.

You can find more information about the Symposium and the planned Disinformation Studies program here: <https://disinformation-studies.domains.swarthmore.edu/>. Please bear in mind that the site is still under construction.

