



Truth and Post-Truth in Communication, Media and Society



Problem and Need

We live in a post-truth era where misinformation abounds, and scientific evidence is often supplanted by alternative facts, pseudoscience, fake news, and conspiracy theories. Oxford Dictionaries recently named “Post-Truth” as their Word of the Year, defining it as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” While intentional lying, especially by political leaders, is likely as old as civilization itself, we have entered a new era where truth, objective facts, and science are increasingly under assault.

The growing disregard for facts by the public and political leaders has serious consequences for policymaking, inhibiting evidenced based decision-making to protect our planet, address social problems, and alleviate human suffering around the globe. We must develop a better understanding of the causes and consequences of post-truth dynamics. To that end, we propose a small PASS workshop to bring together an international set of scholars studying various dimensions of the problem, as well as political and NGO leaders who face the day-to-day reality of decision-making within this context of widespread distrust of evidence and disputes over basic facts. The workshop will include four panels with four presenters each.

Presentations will be thirty minutes, followed by a solutions-oriented group discussion.

I. Post-Truth Society

This panel will address definitional questions about “Post-Truth” society and how we might understand it in philosophical and historical perspective. What are the different manifestations of post-truth thought? How widespread is it? Which institutions perpetuate it?

II. Media and Politics

What are the evolving roles of the Internet, news media, and echo-chambers in a post-truth society? This panel will turn to scholars, journalists, and politicians to discuss the impacts on political and civil systems.

III. Health and Environment

Here panelists will focus specifically on human health and the environment, with particular emphasis on climate change.

IV. Societal Response: Science, Faith, Politics

The final panel will present integrative solutions, drawing on the overlapping efforts of scientists, faith communities, and advocacy groups.

Organizer: Justin Farrell, Yale University