

# JUMBO

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## PATRICIA BLUMERIS

ENGINEERING EVERYTHING  
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COMMUNITY AT TUFTS

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WE BREAK DOWN THE CONCEPT  
OF DEMONSTRATED INTEREST





**During her research sabbatical last year, Professor Greenhill devoted her time to learning about the idea of “fake news.” As she continues to ask questions, she encourages her students to do the same.**

“What the heck?” This question was the recurring theme behind my conversation with Associate Professor Kelly Greenhill and, as I learned during our conversation, the question that also spurs her research. Professor Greenhill’s academic interests are, in her own words, “problem oriented”—and never tied down to a certain geographical area.

Professor Greenhill is fascinated by the sociopolitical patterns that occur throughout our global history and affect our present reality, and her research is concerned with tying together the threads in those patterns. Her current research (and upcoming book) is, in part, a continuation of her 2010 book *Weapons of Mass Migration*, which examined the use of forced migrations as an instrument of foreign policy and coercion. This time around, Greenhill is concerned with the ever-present reality of what she calls “extra-factual information”—or what the public might now consider “fake news.”

Greenhill was fascinated by this subject area long before the term “fake news” constantly began flashing across our screens and newspapers. Originally, her interest in this topic was spurred by a *New Yorker* article detailing the public hysteria

that unleashed with the rise of “invasion literature” during the WWI era. Having spent the past academic year on a research sabbatical, Greenhill devoted much of her time to considering the ways in which public perceptions of threats are often not driven by objectivity. In her research, Greenhill dove into specific moments in history, such as the United States’ attitudes toward Japan in the late twentieth century, but also looked at the post-9/11 environment in which we now live. Through her research, Greenhill has found that the public’s beliefs, fears, and anxieties are not organic, but willingly manipulated by outside sources to achieve *something*—thus their status as a political tool, or weapon.

The idea that information is always in flux is reflected in her classes, including courses like *Migration, Refugees, and Citizenship in a Globalized World* and *Better than the Truth: Extra-Factual Information in International Politics*. Greenhill says that she is constantly rewriting her syllabi to reflect timely topics—which themselves are in a constant state of evolution. The change takes on a different kind of constancy when examined alongside sociopolitical patterns throughout time, allowing Greenhill

and her students to find the root of present problems in the past. By exploring problems that are relevant to all of us, Greenhill makes her classes a space where students are encouraged to ask, “What the heck?”

Talking about her students, Professor Greenhill raves about their intelligence, relying on the stereotypical Bostonian phrase “wicked smaht” as a descriptor of the Jumbos she has taught. She appreciates that her students never challenge ideas purely for challenge’s sake, but are always “trying to take an ongoing conversation and move it to the next level, or explore tangential ideas and concepts from required readings to find broader implications.”

This is the nature of the courses she teaches, which concern themselves with asking good questions about the world we live in—questions that might not yield readily available answers. Professor Greenhill says, “It’s challenging, but in some sense it sells itself—‘Why should I care about political science?’” She answers her rhetorical question with a laugh, “Because it’s happening! And it’s going to affect all of our lives.”

—DESMOND FONSECA '20

# KELLY GREENHILL

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND DIRECTOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS PROGRAM

PHOTO BY KATHLEEN DOOHER