

# Fake News:

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Taking News Evaluation Out of the Classroom and into the Fire

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# Workshop Start and Contents

Susan Slaga-Metivier

Head of Reference & Instruction

# Central Connecticut State University (CCSU)

- Located in New Britain, Connecticut
- A regional, comprehensive public university.
- Over 9,500 undergraduates and over 2,300 graduate students.
- Large commuter population and most students work in addition to going to school.

# CCSU Fake News Workshops

- Who spreads fake news? Can college students evaluate information sources well?
- Partnered with Journalism Department. Started at CCSU and offered to students, staff, and librarians in a computer classroom.
- We then received invitations to do the workshop at public libraries in Middletown, CT, Wallingford, CT, Trumbull, CT and Glastonbury, CT.

# Fake News Workshop Contents

- No politics.
- Evaluate sources and provide reactions.
- Confirmation bias and filter bubbles.
- History of fake news and news literacy.

# Controversy - "A Dog's Purpose" Movie



# Fake News Workshop Handouts

Evaluating Information Source (Video, Meme, Newspaper article, etc.)

- Your emotional reaction:
- Check the URL:
- A date and author?
- Type of language used:
- Where do facts come from?
- Examine images, graphics and/or source link:
- Visit the "About" page:
- Try a Google search (to verify info.)

(adapted from The News Literacy Project's "Ten Questions for Fake News Detection")

# “A Dog’s Purpose” Controversy Information Sources

Video from TMZ <http://www.tmz.com/2017/01/18/a-dogs-purpose-german-shepherd-abuse-video/>

Blog post

Meme from TMZ

<https://pics.onsizzle.com/tml-do-not-support-a-dogs-purpose-they-forced-this-12359578.png>

Newspaper Article

<http://www.post-gazette.com/pets/2017/02/11/American-Humane-says-says-no-animals-harmed-in-making-of-A-Dog-s-Purpose/stories/201702110004>



# Workshop Wrap Up

Gave attendees American Humane report regarding “A Dog’s Purpose”

<https://www.americanhumane.org/press-release/independent-investigative-report-on-a-dogs-purpose-finds-edited-video-mischaracterized-what-happened-on-the-set/>

Asked attendees to reflect on what was covered during the workshop?

Did their perspective change from the beginning to the end?

What did they think of the evaluation process?

# Libguide/Survey Results

Libguide: <https://libguides.ccsu.edu/fakenewsworkshop>

- Tech issues/ presentation structure
- Foundational knowledge
- Expectations and evaluation

# Problem: Technical Issues and Structural Issues

Theodora Ruhs

Assistant Professor, Journalism



**TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES  
PLEASE STAND BY**

# Problem: Technical issues

Where we failed, a few quotes:

- “Unfortunately the visual wasn't projected.”
- “Did a fine job considering we could not see items on screen.”
- What would you like to see at future events?: “Deeper in-depth exploration with better technology”

# Technical issues: Why we failed

- Program designed for specific location.
- Assumed shared understanding of technology.
- Built program too much around use of technology.
- Didn't have a back-up plan.

# Problem: Structural issues: Where we failed

Where we failed, a few quotes:

- "I'm still confused about fake news."
- "Additional info is needed to set the why fake news is such a problem today."
- "Be more strict about having questions at the end for those who want to add to theirs."

# Structural Issues: Why we failed

- Tried to cover too much without focusing on understanding of a few key concepts.
- Worked through analysis of 4 different media items, which cut into time without adding enough additional value.
- Didn't leave enough time for Q&A, and didn't necessarily facilitate Q&A effectively.
- It's hard to avoid a charged topic.



# Failing Forward: How can these issues be fixed?

## Technical Readiness:

- Don't assume!
- Have a back-up plan.
- Push for more clarity between location and presenters.

## Program Structure:

- Don't try to do everything in an hour. Sometimes less is more!
- Focus on analyzing fewer items and providing more context.

# Problem: Foundational Knowledge

Briana McGuckin

Reference & Instruction Librarian

# Problem: Foundational Knowledge



Image source:

<http://www.farrismarketing.com/2015/03/were-not-in-kansas-anymore-toto-the-consumer-market-has-changed-drastically/>

“I don’t think we’re on campus anymore.”

# Problem: Foundational Knowledge

## Examples of Feedback:

- “Expand on what was covered today.”
- “Greater detail regarding ‘filter bubbles’”
- [something learned] “Meme definition”
- [something learned] “I can search for images”

## Attendees needed:

- 21st-century research skills
- context for academic concepts (information literacy, for example)

# Problem: Foundational Knowledge

## Examples of Feedback:

- “Where are the editors?”
- “...need more info on how people make money from fake news...”

## Attendees needed:

- Understanding of the Internet as a publisher
- Understanding of economy behind viral/shared content

# Problem: Foundational Knowledge

## Examples of Feedback:

- “I abhor social media... looking for real news...”
- “...focus more on print...”
- “...news [stations, publications] reporting bias”
- “I realize you couldn’t tackle anything truly political... but it’s what I was hoping for.”

## Attendees needed:

- Understanding that source types are not right or wrong, just different
- Understanding that evaluative tools are adaptable to any topic/of any scope

# Problem: Foundational Knowledge

## Foundational Knowledge Needs:

- 21st-century research skills
- context for academic concepts (information literacy, for example)
- Understanding of the Internet as a publisher
- Understanding of economy behind viral/shared content
- Understanding that source types are not right or wrong, but different
- Understanding that evaluative tools are adaptable to content on any topic, of any scope

# Failing Forward: Foundational Knowledge

Spending less time on:

- Theory
- Different example sources



# Failing Forward: Foundational Knowledge

## Supplemental Materials

- Exploring biases
- Information literacy
- News literacy

# Failing Forward: Foundational Knowledge

Stress and Interweave:

- Academic perspective/goal: skill-based
- Role and value of social media
- Scalability and adaptability of evaluation across media, at different scales

# Problem: Assumptions and Information Evaluation

Martha Kruey

Reference, Instruction and Assessment Librarian

# Problem: Presenters' False Assumptions

- Presenters' Assumption: Public library attendees could - or would want to learn - how to evaluate information at a foundational level:
  - Many attendees prone to blanket skepticism
    - "Fake news is everywhere." - Attendee Survey Comment
- Presenters' Assumption: Public library attendees would be comprised of young adults/recent college graduates:
  - Three of 68 (.4%) of attendees reported their age as between 26-39 years;
  - 12 of 68 (17%) of attendees reported their ages as between 40-59 years;
  - 53 of 68 (78%) of attendees reported their ages as 60+ years.



Image Credit: CNN. <https://goo.gl/images/3kqKLc>

# Problem: Attendees' False Assumptions

- Attendees' Assumption: Topic would be President Trump's accusations that journalists were propagating "fake news."
- Attendees' Assumption: Presenters would provide sources that would validate/invalidate news information (e.g., Snopes, factcheck.org) for them (over-dependence on technology).
- Attendees' Assumption: "Fake News" presentation was going to be like attending a college class, including more audience participation (like questions and discussion).



The Financial Express: <https://goo.gl/images/cJa6zY>

# False Assumptions: Why We Failed

- We did not know who our audience was (basic demographics).
- We did not translate academic presentation for multi-generational or multiple levels of education represented by public library attendees.
- We spent too much time covering the evaluation of multiple source formats (videos, electronic news articles, memes, websites).
- Limited time in schedule for attendees to apply information literacy skills and discuss issues (need to provide more eval practice and discussion time).
- Assumptions of both attendees and presenters were mismatched!

# Problem: Information Evaluation Process Complexity



Acquisition of information evaluation skills takes more than one hour (or even 1.5 hours).



Mastery of information evaluation requires practicing application of techniques (i.e. presenter/audience interaction - lots of it).



Technology is overvalued and considered the answer to problems, instead of its true role as a tool to create the answer.



Social Media is used by the majority of the suburban population (according to Pew: <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/>), and tends to be the culprit for unintentional republication of “fake news” in this country.

# Information Evaluation Process Complexity: How We Failed



Time Management Issues!



Incorporating more interactive exercises for attendees (while we did guide audience through one exercise, they needed so many more opportunities).



Omitted discussion of information technology's role in evaluation of information (e.g., Internet as a delivery platform for *all* information).



While some public library patrons did understand the public's responsibility for republishing incorrect information, not enough emphasis was placed on role of public's responsibility for evaluating information before sharing it.



# Contact Us

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