Fighting Fake News and Alternative Facts:

New Approaches to Evaluating Information Literacy

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With the casual adoption of terms like *fake news* and *alternative facts* into the modern

lexicon, it is increasingly important to ensure that younger generations acknowledge and have a

working awareness of information literacy. This means that educators, whether classroom

teachers or librarians, have an evolving responsibility as part of an ongoing "educational reform

movement" (ACRL, 2020) to equip younger generations with the tools to confidently identify—

and fight back against—mis- and disinformation.

Comedian Dave Chappelle quips in a fake campaign advertisement that has since become

a beloved meme, "modern problems require modern solutions" (2004). Both fake news and

alternative facts *are* modern problems: "fake news" was popularized in 2014 (Beaujon, 2019),

and a presidential advisor coined "alternative facts" in 2017 with regard to reporting on

presidential inauguration crowd size (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019, p. 50). While it is no doubt

difficult to keep up with the rapid flow of information being shared, especially when this

information is amplified through a loud speaker of high-speed internet and social media, it is

critical to give students the tools they need to be steps ahead of bad information, also known as

"corrupt news" (Beaujon, 2019) or "feigned news" (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019, p. 56).

If students can become more discerning about how they source and share information,

they will be more capable of confidently navigating both academic and social domains, the lines

between which have become increasingly blurred when students use the same laptop or mobile

device to *find* information as they do to *disseminate* it, whether for educational or entertainment

purposes. The most successful way to help students become more discerning and better prepared

is by "creating visual information that is easy to digest and will also catch and keep the user's

attention" (Ireland, 2019, p. 123). This does not mean that every component of an information literacy module needs to be in digestible meme format or needs to go through a marketing campaign or a dedicated graphic artist, but it does mean that the responsiveness of the intended audience should be accounted for and materials modernized accordingly.

McGeorge Content Solutions (MCS) is eager to help schools implement programs designed with an eye on modern students and their needs. This is reflected in an attention to quality content and attractive design. Not only does the content of an information literacy module need to be relevant and of high quality, but there needs to be more of an incentive for students to engage with the content. If students find the module interesting enough, they will be more likely to engage with others, contributing to a "community of learners" (Penn State Library, 2020), or students who evaluate resources in a more fluent and scrupulous way moving forward.

Resource Review

In considering this proposed business plan, it is critical to have a better sense of materials that already exist and that have the same intention as the MCS plan.

Shoreline Community College

The Shoreline Community College guide (n.d.) on evaluating resources to be used in student assignments offers a diverse array of media for students to navigate as they become more familiar with resources from the standpoint of "credibility and bias" and so they can "tell if [they] are reading fakes news as [they] browse the [i]nternet." On the face of it, the tone of the language used on this site feels a bit antiquated, but a deeper read reveals that the language is actually very straightforward and neutral, and the site provides valuable information in a variety of formats that seem relatable to the intended student audience.

Newton South Library

Like its Shoreline Community College cousin, the Newton South Library information literacy site includes quite a bit of useful information that any student would be able to use. One of the more compelling or interactive elements of the site is the actual "CRAAP Test Evaluator" slider tool that seems to be buried near the bottom of the site. This is the only real opportunity a student has to truly evaluate something and commit arbitrary numerical values to different components of CRAAP. The problem here is that the score chart does not seem to have a rationale (e.g., if an article received high scores in four categories and a zero in accuracy, it could still be seen as "average" or "good," which is problematic). Additionally, while the reference to the terms "information literacy," "post-truth," and "truthiness" and even the "old newspaper saying" at the top of the site all seem very important, there is no information included that suggests why a student should care (e.g., an infographic that highlights how many students have failed on a paper because of quoting or using unreliable sources or references).

Generally speaking, the information on both sites needs to be framed with an urgency for students that communicates how an information literacy knowledge gap can actually affect their academic and/or social lives. Table 1 (below) outlines some of the highlights and lowlights of the sites and provides some background considerations of the MCS business plan (reflected in the "suggestions" section of the table).

Table 1

Pros and Cons of Shoreline Community College and Newton South Library Resources

Pros	Cons
The sites provide diverse methodologies to help students more confidently evaluate bias and credibility (e.g., authority, SIFT, lateral reading, CRAAP test).	There are no obvious incentives to compel students to fully navigate the sites or the information they provide. The sites are good resources with no direction on how to use them.

MCS Suggestion: Provide modules/stages that can be unlocked as a student progresses through; use badges as an incentive and a way to promote a shared or understood culture of information literacy among student users.	
The sites include hyperlinks to credible, outside sources and voices (e.g., John Green, Mike Caulfield) that further delve into specific topics with a degree of authority.	The sites seem like a combination of good resources cobbled together with website built around them to house everything together.
MCS Suggestion: Design the module first, and use resources that support it (versus finding every good resource and trying to create a shell of a guide around it).	
The provided resources include a diverse array of media (e.g., videos, interactive sites, PDFs) that are attractive in their own right.	Students need to navigate so much it becomes difficult to understand which resource is more of an authority than another. The Shoreline site includes "Lateral Reading" as its own category, when it is already part of SIFT, another category.
MCS Suggestion: Use badges in a dedicated and intentional way to help break up some of the resources into more meaningful and "clear pathway[s]" so students "don't have to…go to five different websites and platforms" (Penn State University Libraries, 2020). Hyperlinking to outside sources is okay, but perhaps a single source or a dedicated group of consistent and reliable sources could be used in a particular module.	
The sites include two of the most familiar approaches to evaluating information literacy (CRAAP and SIFT.	Users have to exit to a different reading to understand that SIFT was borne out of a need to modernize the CRAAP test.
MCS Suggestion: Have more of a focus on the SIFT moves because they are more modern, and reference the evolution of CRAAP somewhere explicitly on the page so it is clear that approaches and methods change with the times. Make sure all supporting media reflect this.	

The accompanying "Fighting Fake News and Alternative Facts" practice module is geared towards late high school or early college students (i.e., students with some degree of familiarity surrounding college-level course and research expectations). The module can be used for training purposes as a standalone task embedded in a school library site, or it can be used as a jumping off point for further training. The primary format of the module—aside from introduction and conclusion bookends—is a three-slide sequence: a reminder of how to look at a resource through a SIFT lens, an opportunity to respond to SIFT-aligned questions, an and explanation of why a scenario is correct or incorrect. The sequence is very similar to

other popular formats, like those of knowmynews.com (Newsguard, 2020) and spotthetroll.org (Clemson University, 2020).

Students who successfully complete this module will receive a badge or icon to delineate ranking, similar to the digital badge system used by Penn State University Libraries (2020). Additional modules and badge systems can be created, depending on student needs and requirements of a particular information literacy program. MCS is available to develop further modules.

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