

Ethics and Fake News

Compiled by Sheila Jones, JEA Mentor for her mentees, November 2016

Even before the recent outcry about fake news, I had been considering this topic for a mentoring webquest. Events of the last month have moved this topic higher on my priority list. With CSMA now offering a series on weekend sessions on press law, with the first scheduled for this Saturday, Dec. 3, along with law and ethics the focus of their Winter Thaw conference for advisers on Jan. 25, 2017, now is the time.

Then, last week Stanford University released the results of a study that shows a significant majority of students from middle school to college are unable to distinguish real news sources/stories from fake ones (see #1 below).

It's easy for students, and adults too for that matter, to be misled by untrue news. I recall the year one of my best sophomore honors students (who in her senior year was editor of our school paper and graduated as class salutatorian) used statistics from an article she had found online from The Onion as the foundation for her research paper. She did not know The Onion is a satiric news site. As I began grading the papers over Winter Break, I recognized her error, called her, and gave her the choice of redoing the paper before school started again in January or taking an "F" for the paper. At the time, my school required that students pass a research proficiency in order to graduate. Basing research on an Onion article would not get her the "pass" she sought. This past election cycle I found many who bought into fake news just as easily as my student did.

The results of the Stanford study, combined with a [Pew Research Center](#) study from May 2016 that reveals that 62 percent of Americans rely on social media for delivery of their news, show that it's time for publication advisers to ensure that their students are media literate. Today's student journalists should not only write accurate stories but also conduct their research and provide transparency for their readers with equal accuracy, credibility, critical thinking, and ethical intentions.

Some of the links below are opinion pieces. You may or may not agree with them, but I believe they raise some interesting challenges and perspectives that you as an adviser should be aware of. You can then decide your own positions on the issues, as well as how to address them with your students. Some are appropriate for the classroom. Others may be too highbrow for students. One even comes with a warning about disturbing images and language. You know best whether or not your students should read them. Whether you choose to offer direct instruction on the law and ethics of fake news or whether you decide to let this become a ribbon of content that runs through your production cycle, I do strongly encourage you to make it a part of your curriculum.

1. Stanford study finds students unable to identify fake news:

http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/11/23/503129818/study-finds-students-have-dismaying-inability-to-tell-fake-news-from-real?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_term=nprnews&utm_content=2054

2. Resources and tips for identifying fake news websites

- <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/five-tips-how-spot-fake-news-online-n687226>
- https://docs.google.com/document/d/10eA5-mCZLSS4MQY5QGb5ewC3VAL6pLkT53V_81ZyitM/mobilebasic
- <http://www.commonplaces.com/blog/what-is-a-verified-social-media-account-and-why-does-it-matter/>

This article does a good job of explaining how Facebook using blue checkmarks to identify verified social media accounts.

3. Challenges online news and social media face in controlling fake news

http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2016/11/17/495827410/from-hate-speech-to-fake-news-the-content-crisis-facing-mark-zuckerberg?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_term=nprnews&utm_content=2044

4. An example of how click bait headlines can lure readers to false information. This would be a good one to share with your students. It has a twist – watch for it! Relatedly, you might ask your students how often they notice people sharing something they haven't even read. This, I believe, has become one of my newest pet peeves.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/bernie-sanders-could-replace-president-trump-with-little_us_5829f25fe4b02b1f5257a6b7

5. What role(s) should educators take in promoting student media literacy?

- <http://mediashift.org/2016/11/journalism-educators-need-look-responsibilities/>
- <http://knowledgequest.aasl.org/school-librarians-educators-obligation-address-social-change/>

Hope these help! Looking for something on other topics? Check out previous webquests on my website – jonesclassesonline.weebly.com. Also, just request a topic, give me a brief description, and I'll research it for you.