



BEST PRACTICES IN TEACHING MEDIA LITERACY

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Best Practices in Teaching Media Literacy

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Booklets produced for the previous competitions can be found online at:
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2019 Winning Entries:

FIRST PLACE:

Peter Brooks, University of Washington Bothell for “The Summerwind Simulation: Practicing Ethical Journalism in Real Time

SECOND PLACE:

Miglana Sternadori, Texas Tech University for “Distinguishing Fake from Real News”

THIRD PLACE:

Michelle Ciccone, Foxborough High School, Massachusetts for “Teaching Young People to Communicate (Better) Online”

HONORABLE MENTIONS:

Barbara Pearson and team, NewseumED/Freedom Forum Institute for “The Fairness Meter: Using Journalism to Improve Students’ Content Evaluation Skills”

Alison Burns, University of Maryland, College Park for “FACTS about Fake News: a Media Literacy Workshop Strategy Connecting Colleges with Communities”

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Best Practices in Teaching Diversity in Journalism and Mass Communication

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First Place

The Summerwind Simulation: Practicing Ethical Journalism in Real Time

Peter Brooks
University of Washington Bothell

Abstract: Designed to discuss the fraught feelings regarding ethics in journalism (online and print), the Summerwind Simulation tackles current issues in a real-time, course-long role-playing game influenced by media scholars (Levine 2015) and creative pedagogy (Fink 2015). Students perform the roles of editors, writers, advertisers, marketers, and social media experts while “publishing” a fictional newspaper, the *Summerwind Post*. Students navigate preset simulations outcomes, feedback from real-life journalism professionals, and their own inner-workings in order to actively engage with and reflect on contemporary ethical situations in news media. Per feedback over two courses, students appreciate the real-life feel of the activity.

Explanation: In a Critical Media Literacy class, where the class is broadly focused on Journalism, Television/Film, and New Media (social media, video games, etc.), the Summerwind Simulation is aimed at immersing students into journalistic roles in order to actualize ethical decision making. Before we start the simulation, students read “Dimensions of Digital Media Literacy and the Relationship to Social Exclusion” (Park 2012), “Media and Literacy for the 21st Century” (Levine 2015), and cultural theorists who cover gender, sexuality, and racial perspectives. Students then analyze online and print news outlets, critiquing editorial and content choices, then reflecting on what they would choose if in those positions. After a robust student discussion over two class periods, I then surprise them with the Summerwind Simulation.

The 60-90 minute-a-week in-class activity is graded upon low-stakes participation however students are informed of a high-stakes extra credit possibility depending how well the paper is “received”, measured by a combination of quantitative results (subscriptions, ad dollars) determined by randomized-gameplay mechanics students alter with decisions, and qualitative feedback provided by real-life participants who either live near our real university (and act as Summerwind residents) or are journalism professionals from other parts of the country. The low-stakes/high-stakes balance allows students to feel the weight of making ethical considerations without fear their overall grade will be negatively impacted. There are three phases to the activity.

Phase I: Students receive info about the fictional city of Summerwind and the local print/online paper, the *Summerwind Post* (see Addendum A), the 11 roles (see Phase II) within the organizational structure, and an overview of how role playing games work. After we read, we practice a series of small non-media, ethical case studies that help students understand the way action, potential results,

and final consequences work in simulated space. Next, the students create a set of six rules for their organizational meetings (held in class) and four objectives for the *Summerwind Post* (working off of examples they researched earlier). Then, students apply for 3 positions by submitting a “future resume” that imagines five years of experience after they’ve graduated. Finally, I meet with each student (about 14-18 total) assigning their role and addressing any questions or anxieties.

Phase II: The *Summerwind Post* members—five lead, editorial positions and six staff positions made up of writers, photographers, and social media experts—meet in a pitch meeting to determine what stories will be investigated and written about, what advertising will be included, and what other content or business decisions need to be made that meet their four objectives. Using a *small town* newspaper for this activity allows students to see and participate in all dimensions within a news organization. After decisions are made, students, depending on their role, either investigate/write about their chosen topic or follow up with e-mails to various stakeholders to conduct business. I and real community members play the roles of the Summerwind townspeople. For example, we may act as a family who has recently complained about several small businesses shutting down; or we may act as a religious group who would like to purchase an ad to promote abstinence and family planning (more on this later). After completing tasks, students meet again and update each other.

Phase III: Using qualitative feedback from the real-life participants regarding both article quality, objective achievement, and how they think various townspeople would react, along with preset quantitative percentages determined by the qualitative feedback and dice rolls, I then share with the *Summerwind Post* members their results. Students discuss outcomes and clarify with me about the process. I provide the extra credit update and then we repeat Phases II and III once more.

Rationale: Before introducing the scholarly influences for this activity, simply put, I want students to *feel* what it’s like making critical decisions. Having experience, and success, with creating simulations for Business Writing and Technical Writing courses, I was further inspired by a discussion regarding journalism’s current role in our tumultuous political climate. The discussion of ethical journalism became fraught with frustration: fake news, media bias, threats, etc. For most, it was “easy” to see the nobility of investigating stories where people were treated unfairly, or civil leaders made corrupt decisions. Yet, I knew that once they were in those positions, they would face a productive struggle, realizing the layers of ethical complexity regarding how stories are researched, how participants are affected, and even how they would feel being responsible for the financial side of a newspaper (lest we forget that news outlets do rely on advertising dollars).

Within the interactive design of the Summerwind Simulation the rigid rules of journalistic conventions meet ethical exploration. I wanted to address Levin’s call for production analysis and Park’s exploration of media access in an active way:

how do we reach readers who feel marginalized? How do democratically agreed upon objectives influence content and business decisions? How do we fairly represent multiple sides to complex stories? The activity is also influenced by Fink's (2015) work in *Creating Significant Learning Spaces* and how game scholar Jan Rune Holmevik (2012) notes the way players "charge the game with their own ethics" (146).

Outcomes: Per student feedback, I received the highest evaluations of my teaching career. In Addendum B I include some student testimonials, yet I'd like to highlight three of the most interesting discussions/reactions within the exercise. First, both years I included two advertisers: a local religious group promoting abstinence and a women's rights organization that supports pro-choice legislation. In both years, conversations arose about gender perspectives and leadership. In the first year, the Editor-in-Chief (a cisgender woman) cooperatively worked with everyone to include the pro-choice ad. In the second year, a cisgender man (and vocal Trump supporter) was EIC. The room decided against both ads to avoid bias, yet he stated he'd include it anyhow. One student contacted the Chairperson Emeritus (played by a local woman) to veto his decision.

Second, in the first year, the Advertising Director chose not to carefully read through and respond to the six local businesses who contacted him. He misspelled clients' names and undersold advertising space. A very careful conversation (handled maturely by the EIC) ensued about respectfully working with clients. Third, I took a calculated-risk to simulate a threat. I informed the Social Media Director that their Twitter account was receiving direct messages about the potential threat. The SM Director brought this up several times yet the EIC ignored the warnings. I placed flour in an envelope with a handwritten message ("enemy of the people") and gave it to the EIC. Upon him opening it, and despite his minimizing the situation, the room reacted with caution. We then processed their emotions and discussed what should be done next.

Addendum A: *Summerwind Post* & City of Summerwind Background Handout

Newspaper Background:

The initial version of the newspaper was called the *Summerwind Post-Dispatch Daily*, founded by two brothers, Reginald and Thomas Lock in about 1917, approximately 30ish years since the town's founding in 1882. In 1973, the paper was purchased from the Lock Family Trust by Kimmnet Media, a small pacific-northwest media group which also ran one of the first public access television stations in the country. The president of Kimmnet Media, Jennifer Kimmnet, changed the name to the *Summerwind Post* and formed a small board of directors from the community to help guide the paper through the second half the 20th century. Her vision was that the paper should always report on and address content—be it state, national, global—that impacts Summerwind.

In 2005, her daughter Ellie assumed the role of President. After purchasing sev-

eral other successful blogs and small market magazines, Ellie expanded the board of directors to 13 total members. Nine board members still live in Summerwind (an expectation handed down by her mother), yet the remaining four live in other states across the country (two in the Midwest, one on the Southern coast, one in the Southwest). The decision to expand and open up the board was both proactive and reactive since several regional newspaper across the country were bought out by larger media corporations or shut down for good. Ellie's mother serves as Chairperson Emeritus and, while she doesn't have direct decision making power, holds some influence, mostly over the local members. Serving Summerwind still drives most of the decision making, however, since the newspaper turned from a daily paper to a weekly one in 2011 (along with its small on-line presence in 2013) there has been increased interest in national and global news from readers.

Financially, the paper is mostly stable. Critically, the paper has actually dropped off since it's switch to a weekly. The paper used to be lauded by the AP for local coverage. The board of directors would like to see some readership increase, yet they're mostly interested in an ad revenue increase. Most members aren't looking to get rich, yet they would like to see larger profit margins in case another newspaper bubble happens. There are a total of 24,225 subscribers, with 73 of those accounting for bulk subscriptions for local businesses. Ad rates have been ranging between \$750 and \$4500.

City Background:

Summerwind, Washington is located along the Wolf River, which bisects the town, running from northwest to southeast. At approximately 59,340 people, there are multiple neighborhoods scattered around the city, with two distinct areas: Southwest or the Pines, due to the high amount of uncut pine trees, and the Northeast corridor called The Sprawl, three mostly developed commercial streets who share a nexus of the "downtownish" area that runs across the river. Geographically, The Pines is larger, yet the population density is highest around The Sprawl.

The Pines is about 85% residential, with most neighborhoods consisting of very old houses built around the forested landscape, with a few newer sub-divisions (and gated communities) that maintained some of the tree-line. There are also a few business parks, with no office building over three stories tall. Both Ft. Scot (a small Army base and armory) and the world headquarters for a successful yet young start-up company (Bosh Co., specializing in cyber security) are also located on this side of the river, yet miles apart from each other. FYI: the founders of Bosh Co. are from Summerwind, and even graduated from Indigo College, the only higher education institute in town.

There isn't really a specific, one-stop, downtown area in Summerwind. The most centrally located space is Four Founders Park, a 35,000 sq. ft. green space with a few trees and a small, artificial pond. However, the three major streets that web

off the park are known as **The Sprawl** because each developed on its time and contributed to the most to the growth of the city. The oldest street/section, appropriately named **Founders Street**, contains a lot of “ma and pa” small business shops that have been around since the town’s founding in 1882. Founders Street hosts an annual local business meet and greet called “Founders Days” closing down the street for a weekend while simultaneously holding a small festival at the park.

Lock Street, which runs in the opposite direction, represents more modern shops and stores. The street begins at the south end of Four Founders Park, where the Sunset Building (currently housing the *Summerwind Post*) is located. The decision to remodel and update the street was a contentious one in 2007. The city put in a bid to host a conference for Washington state, tech start-ups, sponsored by Microsoft. Yet, the lack of hotel and conference space caused the city leadership to reinvest Lock Street. Now, high-end shops, hotels, and a conference center adorn the street and the surrounding area. Some are not happy and claim the two eight-story hotels interrupt the Summerwind Skyline.

Finally, **Columbia Ave.**—geographically the longest of the three streets—connects the downtown area to the campus of Summerwind’s private, regional university: Indigo College (enrollment of 11,000). Sometimes called the “Dining District” as it has the most amount of restaurants, it’s also called “Drunkards’ Downfall” by the older population due to the highest concentration of pubs and bars. There are some apartment buildings along the street where, as it approaches the college, are more aimed at the college students than lifelong Summerwind citizens.

Citizens:

Demographically, the identity make-up of Summerwind follows many other cities that are in and around the Seattle Metropolitan area (even though Summerwind is located northeast of Seattle). However, there is a gigantic age gap because of the increasing enrollment of Indigo College and the planned growth of Bosh Co. Many of the people who were born and raised in Summerwind in the early 20th century stayed to have families of their own. While Summerwind has been twice recognized by the Great American Main Street Association (in 2003 and 2006) it has not been considered a family friendly community in recent years (even with the crime rate being low). The Chancellor of Indigo College attempted to work with the local common council in order to correct this image; however, he’s questioned if the negative reception is a result of the business growth.

Addendum II: Student Testimonials from Evaluations
(minimally edited for context)

The [macro-community] presentation and the summerwind stuff [helped me learn] bc it stretches the thinking of many other students not just myself. Summerwind represent the way how the real life scenario would look like if we were to live the

life of journalism or other that are similar.

Yes, Professor Brooks took a different approach than what I'm used to by making a simulation where students had to work together to meet a mutual goal. It gave me an idea of what a career involving teamwork would take. The simulation also made me apply my critical analysis of media to determine what decisions our team should make.

Second Place

Distinguishing Fake from Real News

Miglena Sternadori
Texas Tech University

Abstract: This assignment requires students to research six randomly ordered news stories, presented with only an image and a headline (as they would appear on social media), and determine whether they are “fake” or “real.” Two stories come from satirical sources, *The New Yorker’s* Borowitz Report and *The Beaverton*. Two are created by the professor using The Fake News Generator (www.thefakenewsgenerator.com). The last two stories represent published news about climate change and an American’s support for ISIS. Students are then asked to describe their degree of certainty in the correctness of their answers and what they learned from the assignment.

Explanation: Students are presented with the following six combinations (below) of an image and a headline, and asked to conduct research on the web to determine whether the stories are “fake” or “real.” Stories #2 and #5 are previously published news reports; #4 and #6 come from satirical sources (*The New Yorker’s* Borowitz report and *The Beaverton*); and #1 and #3 were created by the professor using The Fake News Generator (www.thefakenewsgenerator.com). To understand the nature of “fake news” not as disliked stories but as deliberately created misinformation, at the start students are asked to watch a TED talk titled “Inside the fight against Russia’s fake news empire, by Ukrainian journalist Olga Yurkova, and read a story from *The Guardian* titled “What is fake news? How to spot it and what you can do to stop it,” by Elle Hunt.

1



German Chancellor Angela Merkel Facing Criminal Charges over Secret Service

BERLIN—A high-ranking aide of the Bundestag is investigating evidence that Chancellor Angela Merkel used an escort service whose purpose is to steal intelligence sources from foreign officials.

CBSNEWS.COM

2



Indiana Mom Who Followed Husband to ISIS Helped Arm, Fund Terror Group, Feds Say

THE DAILY BEAST.COM

3



Muslim Refugee Rapes, Kills 42-Year-Old Disabled Woman in France

PARIS—An Iraqi Syrian refugee has been charged with assaulting and killing a hospice patient in the western Southern France town of Carcassonne. Police say he attacked the woman in the name of Allah.

THEIRAGUARDIAN.COM

4



Queen Offers to Restore British Rule Over United States
“This two-hundred-and-forty-year experiment in self-rule be...”

THE NEW YORKER.COM

5



Climate change cuts the shipping route between China and Europe by 8,000 kilometres | The Star

6



Palestinians recognize Texas as part of Mexico
JERUSALEM — In response to US President Donald Trump’s r...

THE BEAVERTON.COM

Rationale: I created this assignment because I was curious whether students in communication-related majors have difficulty identifying misinformation, considering how many news consumers appear to struggle with this problem. For example, in 2016, over 2.2 million Facebook users in the U.S. engaged with a story claiming that Obama signed an order banning the Pledge of Allegiance in schools¹, and nearly 1.8 million reacted to a story claiming that a woman defecated on her boss's desk after winning the lottery² (Statista, 2019). **The rationale** for this assignment is that its successful completion would enable students to distinguish verified news (typically published by more than one source, under a different headline) from satire and misinformation. The use of only an image and headline offers a realistic simulation of the way in which news is typically shared on Twitter and Facebook. If students follow the directions (conduct a Google search for the headline, the news source, and – if they find a story – the names of the people mentioned in it), the assignment provides them with some minimal practice in information verification. Furthermore, the inclusion of stories created with The Fake News Generator offers examples of misleading use of website names (e.g., cbsnews.us and theassociatedpress.com) in ways that mimic existing news sites.

Outcomes: The outcomes are sometimes disappointing but have provided an opportunity for an important discussion. When students in a face-to-face lecture course work in groups, more than 90% of the groups identify all stories correctly. When students work individually (in an online course), between 40% and 60% identify all stories correctly in each semester. In the Spring 2019 semester, 15 of 30 students identified correctly all stories, and four identified correctly all but one of the stories. The students who make the most mistakes are often very confident in their answers. Some claim to have “read” the non-existent stories represented by only an image and a headline generated through The Fake News Generator. Others make mistakes because they:

- find one of the published news stories (about climate change) but mark it as “fake” because they are unaware that 5,000 miles is the same distance as 8,000 kilometers;
- view *The New Yorker* is a credible news source (but fail to account for news satire);
- believe the Associated Press and CBS News would not publish a fake story but fail to check the websites, which simply mimic those of the Associated Press and CBS News

The students who identify all stories correctly tend to do so after extensive web searching. They are often flabbergasted to discover the existence of The Fake News Generator, and some express concerns about the accuracy of their answers.

1 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/657757/most-viewed-fake-news-election/>

2 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/620117/fake-crime-news-facebook-engagement/>

Excerpts from Students' Reflections on the Assignment in Spring 2019

- I thought that this was a fun little assignment to do. Something that I noticed is that it is very easy for somebody to fake a news story and sell it as real. And unfortunately, people will believe it. I would say that the easiest story to tell was real was the one about the Indiana mom. Likewise, the easiest story to tell was fake was the one about the Queen of England (probably because I had heard that one before). The most difficult story to guess on (before researching) was probably the one about the Muslim man raping the elderly woman. However, that is not because of some internal bias against Muslims. So much bad stuff happens in our world and atrocities are committed everywhere by every group of people. It just seemed likely to me that somebody had committed that crime. It had nothing to do with the story being about a Muslim refugee. I do think that all of my answers are correct. I looked up each story and some of the stories that I labeled fake had no results come up when I googled them (100% success rate in identifying the stories).
- I would like to think that all of my answers are correct. The stories that were the easiest to judge as real or fake were the ones with the misspelled/altered website names. What confirmed my assumptions about these sites was the fact that the domain sent me straight to a fake news generator. Of course, the hardest one to figure out was the site that was created mainly for satirical purposes. Those sites in general look like any other official news site, but it is not until you actually read them carefully that you realize they are not serious in putting out real news.(100% success rate)
- Fake news is out there to target those uneducated about the media and technology. It can be used as a weapon not only macro to micro (media to person), but micro to micro. As a younger generation, I have stated facts multiple times and been accused of believing "fake news" by older people because instead of debating the facts It was decided I didn't truly understand the fact nor the way the media works. It is extremely frustrating, but I am extremely grateful to have some better insight and understanding to the extent to which a "fake news" article can be taken (83% success rate).
- Reputation plays a big part in whether a news story comes off as believable in any way. Sources like The Guardian have a clear bias and those are hard to believe as reputable. We can also tell that places like CNN, CBS News, etc can all be trusted for the most part due to their reputation as an established, credible news source. I feel completely confident that all of my answers are correct. (67% success rate)
- From this assignment, I have learned that it is very difficult to determine what information you find on the internet is real, and what is fake. Another thing that I learned is that it is sometimes difficult to find different types of information, or at least different perspectives or interpretations of that information.

In other words, it seems that all of the information that is found on a particular subject, tends to all share a common perspective. One-sided. It is difficult to find actual legitimate objections to the popular opinion, even though we know they exist, and are quite plentiful (67% success rate).

- When reading the website title, you can see what is reliable and what is fake news. You can also tell a fake story by the terrible writing of the title. One of the stories in this assignment says “Feds Say”, which basically is saying they got their information from “the Feds”. I think the easiest one to decide if it was real was the story from cbsnews.us, just simply because of how credible CBS News is. By also looking at the picture of the article, you can easily see which pictures were taken for the articles and which pictures were just chosen on Google (50% success rate).
- From this assignment I learned that we as a society need to take a closer, and more in depth look at new stories before we share the content. After researching these stories online, I found the German Chancellor Angela Merkel news to be easiest to be discovered as a real story. The reason I believe this to be real is because when I typed in the heading, many links came up supporting the same information. I found the Indiana mom story to be somewhat difficult to determine if it was accurate or not. They included a picture of her but since it was taken from Facebook, that information is accessible to anyone. I am confident in my answers but some took longer to research compared to others which made me second guess myself on several occasions (50% success rate).
- The first thing I looked at was the website the stories came from. After coming up with an idea of which ones were real or fake I went and googled all the stories. Reading the stories is what helped insure my decision on what was real or fake. I can tell by how it was written and by the facts presented in each story. Some of these stories had solid facts to back up their story others seemed to be fabricated. Like the story about Palestinians recognizing Texas as a part of Mexico. I think all my answers are correct based on the readings and what I learned from this unit (50% success rate).
- I honestly learned a lot from this assignment. I ended up thinking that most of the stories were fake except for the last one about the Palestinians recognizing Texas as a part of Mexico. I mainly thought this one can be real because it mentions things that are going on today in the United States. It mentions the wall being built and how many people in Texas speak Spanish which is very true. I do not see this story being made up and it's not too dramatic like the other stories are. The main story I was very iffy about is the ISIS story. What got me the most though was how the wife donated \$10,000 to ISIS. If that were the case it would be broadcasted everywhere. All the other stories just seemed super dramatic to me for them to be real. (50% success rate)

- I learned from doing this assignment that there can be a lot of leads and news reports about an incident, however, they can all have the story wrong; it's by word-of-mouth. The easiest story to tell if it was real or fake was the "German Chancellor Angela Merkel Facing Criminal Charges over Escort Service" because of the website it came from, CBSNEWS. CBSNEWS tends to be a very reliable source and the news is true. The hardest story to figure out, in my opinion, was the "Climate change cuts the shipping route between China and Europe by 8,000 kilometers" because I found several news articles over this but also found where some news outlets stated that there was 5,000 miles. I'm not too positive that my answers are correct; this was a tough assignment to read but I liked how it challenged me (50% success rate).

Third Place

Teaching Young People to Communicate (Better) Online

Michelle Ciccone
Foxborough High School, Massachusetts

Abstract: Communicating online effectively, positively, and powerfully is essential, for personal and professional success, as well as for the forward movement of society. This media literacy teaching practice develops the online communication skills of young people by simply getting them to practice and reflect.

Explanation: The premise of this set of activities is simple: create guided classroom-based opportunities for young people to practice engaging in challenging digital conversations with one another. Simple, but rarely tackled in K-12 schools. Most K-12 schools take a “digital citizenship” approach to preparing young people for engagement online, but the focus from this perspective is often on “kindness,” when that’s only a start. To effectively communicate online you must be respectful, true, but you also need to be informative, persuasive, savvy, etc. The set of activities described here aims to increase digital communication skills by going beyond a watered-down, reductionist sense of “kindness.”

I developed a five-lesson sequence for my 12 week 8th grade digital literacy class (what other middle schools might call a “specials” class). Each activity follows a basic formula: the teacher reveals a prompt, students prepare a response and converse with each other in a digital space, and then — perhaps most importantly — a week or so later students look back at the digital conversation and reflect on their contributions. Each digital conversation is centered around a high-interest conversational prompt that is related to curriculum content. Prompts include, “Should access to the Internet be a human right?” “Are you being brainwashed by the way that the Internet works?” “Do robots deserve rights?” and “Will increased automation make us more or less human?” The specific prompts used are not important, but they should be authentically (and developmentally appropriately) controversial, so as to recreate the online communication environment where users are engaged in conversation around charged topics. It is important to provide adolescents the opportunity to practice managing their emotion-based, gut impulse to reject ideas when participating in these challenging conversations.

Complexity is added with each activity. For the first activity, students are asked to simply compose an original post that is informative and persuasive. After the activity, as a class we articulate what made certain posts particularly informative or persuasive. Commenting functionality is added for the second activity, where students are directed to not only compose an informative and persuasive original

post but to also comment at least twice on classmates' posts in a way that moves the conversation forward. After this second activity, as a class we articulate what made certain comments move the conversation forward better than others. The third activity involves sharing thoughts and questions while co-watching a video, mimicking the YouTube comment section. The final activities allow students to show growth in their digital conversational skills.

Importantly, students revisit each digital conversation a week or two after they occur. So many interactions online can feel ephemeral because we never have to do this — they effectively disappear. This lesson sequence forces students to reflect on the impact of their contributions to the conversation, and identify what they can do better this time. This moment to revisit past contributions is essential, as distance can encourage honest reflection and assessment of positive — and not so positive — moments of communication.

Teachers of any content area and any grade can adapt the principles presented here for their context. These activities just require an engaging prompt, a free collaborative tool such as Padlet or VideoAnt, and a willingness to help young people navigate the messy realities of communicating with others online.

Rationale: People communicate online everyday, for both important and unimportant reasons. People use social media, message boards, email, messaging apps, and more to share their own points of view, to hear the points of view of others, to stay up to date with current events, to communicate with far-flung affinity groups, and to stay in touch with family and friends, among countless other objectives. People use these tools to define and express their identity, as well as share messages meant to entertain, inform, persuade, provoke, etc. Some users do this very effectively in a way that positively contributes to these online communities, while others do not, either for reasons of skill, inexperience, or motivation. As a secondary school teacher, I see almost every day how some young people already have the requisite skills that make them effective and positive communicators online, and some just really do not. It is my job to help them develop these skills so that they can successfully and effectively navigate these spaces and fully engage with these powerful tools for mass communication.

Media literacy is concerned with the presentation of ideas and message. When engaging online, we are constantly bombarded with and (knowingly and unknowingly) constructing our own messages. The lesson sequence described here starts from the assumption that all messages shared and viewed online by users are loaded with context and bias, and in order to be an effective communicator and consumer of these messages we must examine our own contributions as online communicators. Media literacy education is also creative: it gets students creating messages of their own. This teaching practice builds on these traditions of getting students to participate in message-generating online spaces and then stepping back to reflect on the way in which these messages

contributed to a shared experience among the students/users.

Outcomes: This lesson sequence engaged more than 150 8th grade students over the course of a year and a half. This means that these students went from having no structured, guided digital conversation experience to each having at least four. Qualitative observations showed time and again that the depth of the conversation and the meaningful back and forth between ideas grew with each conversation. But perhaps the best illustration of the impact of this work is actually when things went wrong. Inevitably a student or two would disrupt an otherwise productive conversation with a stream of memes or off topic jokes. In those instances I would sit back and wait for the other students in the class to grow frustrated. Inevitably students would turn to the troll in their midst and say, "Stop trolling! Stay on topic!" When else will a troll get that sort of face-to-face feedback?

I can recall one instance in particular. During the second digital conversation one trimester, when we were focused on commenting, a situation brewed in one thread. A female student approached me quietly and said, "Noah is saying some inappropriate things." It was the end of class so I changed the settings on the Padlet, asked students to clean up, and dismissed the class. I looked at Noah's contributions, which were upsetting: borderline racist and misogynistic. I called home to alert Mom to this incident, and she was upset. "Noah does this when he's chatting with people as he's gaming. I don't know where he gets this from!" This confirmed my assumption, that what comes out in these classroom conversations are shades of what these young people are engaging in at home. At the end of the day I invited Noah to my office to have a conversation about his contributions. I very purposefully read out loud his comments, and there was something so powerful about voicing what was once just words on a screen; Noah became immediately uncomfortable. "Noah, what was your intention?" I asked. He said he wanted to be funny. "Did your classmates laugh?" I asked. He thought, and then admitted no. I added, "Actually your classmates were pretty upset. A couple approached me at the end of class about it." I was careful to recognize and affirm his desire to entertain, but after talking it through Noah agreed that his comments were not in fact entertaining. From that moment on did Noah become nothing but a positive contributor within his gaming community? I can't say. But I do know that in the following two classroom digital conversations he stayed on script. We at least laid the groundwork for transforming a troll.

Honorable Mention

FACTS About Fake News: a Media Literacy Workshop Strategy Connecting Colleges with Communities

Alison Burns
University of Maryland, College Park

Abstract: This entry into the AEJMC Best Practices competition details a strategy for workshops college journalism students and instructors are delivering to middle and high school students to help them recognize and appreciate “good journalism” and identify and stop the spread of “fake news.”

Explanation of activity: A headline about Snoop Dogg grabbed the attention of a high school student scanning social media. It said the rap artist shot a clown who was dressed as Donald Trump. The student wanted to share the story with friends, but first did a quick online search to see if any familiar news outlets were also reporting it. It was easy to find the original source: a music video in which the rapper pretends to shoot the costumed Trump character with a toy gun. That type of fact checking before sharing is the “new normal” for high school students who took part in a three-session “FACTS about fake news” workshop.

A PhD student, who is also a teacher and broadcast journalist, created the active-learning workshop around the acronym FACTS with the goal of empowering students in middle and high school to recognize the value of journalism and make the fight against fake news their own. Here’s how it works:

F – Facts about “fake news” – The workshop begins with a warning to students about how a “toxic stew of misinformation” online is “threatening to poison their thoughts, manipulate and fool them.” Students watch a video from NBC News about teenagers from other countries who are cashing in by writing fake stories to fool what the writers call “gullible” Americans. The students read reports from U.S. intelligence agencies alleging that Russia tried to sabotage the election by planting fake stories. They also read research about fake news and learn that fake stories generated more interest on Facebook ahead of the 2016 election than real news. Students write their own definitions of “fake news” and work in small groups to discuss and list the potential consequences of being fooled by fake stories.

A – Assessing accuracy – Workshop participants watch a short video from Factcheck.org outlining simple fact-checking strategies: Is there a byline? What are other publications saying about the story? Do the sources seem biased or credible? Is it satire or a joke? Are the facts based on evidence or opinions? The students read fake stories on the fact-checking site Snopes and compile their own lists of clues that a story might not be credible. Among the clues that a story is fake (aside from being debunked by a fact-checking site): the headline is mis-

leading, the author is anonymous, the site hosting the story has a name similar to a more recognized news site (for example, abcnews.com.co instead of abcnews.com), and other stories on the site are overtly biased or exaggerated. The students discovered grammar problems, misspellings, and overuse of exclamation points are a few other telltale signs of fake stories!!!

C – Caring about credibility – Workshop participants watch examples of powerful reporting about community safety issues, discuss the value of journalism and write down what they want and expect in a credible news story. They create their own lists of “essential ingredients of real news,” including evidence-based facts, unbiased reporting, and a variety of sources. By establishing their own gold standard for credibility, students have a personal benchmark for news quality. They also discuss the ideal professional qualities of journalists and specify the virtues and traits of journalists compared to writers of deceptive stories, i.e. journalists admit mistakes and follow standards of ethics.

TS – Taking a stand – At the conclusion of the workshop, students write their own personal pledges to assess the accuracy of stories before sharing them. One student wrote, “I pledge to only share reliable news, and to never cite or share suspicious news I haven’t fact checked.”

After one of the workshops at a high school, students completed a questionnaire. All of the students said the workshop was effective. Among the comments: “it opened my eyes,” “now I know several good fact checking sites that I can visit,” and “the classes gave me more concrete ideas of what to look for when deciding if a story is likely to be fake.” Students had largely similar definitions of “fake news,” including “misinformation designed to intentionally mislead the reader,” “news that is not true,” and “news that presents false-facts.”

Most of the students who participated in the workshop said they were very concerned about fake news because of its potential influence on people other than themselves, “because a lot of people believe that ‘fake news’ is real.” One student wrote “[I’m] very concerned because fake news can affect people’s opinions if they are unaware of the news being fake or not.” Another student wrote, “I am very skeptical of articles, so I am not worried about falling for them. I am concerned, however, for people who are less skeptical.” Most of the students said they were very confident in their own ability to detect fake news, yet they had not used fact-checking sites like Factcheck.org or Snopes.

Nearly all of the students who participated in the workshop said it had a positive effect on their view of journalism. Among the comments: “I think free press is a founding principle of this country and fake news infringes on that,” and “The classes have only strengthened my previously held beliefs. I still think journalism and getting the truth out is super important because having an uninformed population is dangerous.”

The workshop includes elements commonly taught as part of a news literacy curriculum, including journalistic fact-checking techniques, a discussion of how to identify bias, and a review of the motivators for the authors of fake news. News literacy researchers have also emphasized the importance of finding ways to motivate students to care about the credibility of news content. This workshop not only encouraged students to recognize the potential benefits of good journalism, but also helped them discover the potential dangers of fake news.

Letting teens know how they're being duped and manipulated is a proven way to get them to pay attention, as anti-smoking groups discovered in the late 1990's when they launched the "Truth" campaign that revealed how tobacco companies were manipulating kids. Anti-smoking advocates and health researchers credited that campaign with a significant drop in teen smoking rates.

Even though the students who participated in the workshop generally seemed to believe people other than themselves are more vulnerable to fake news than they are, empowering young people to appreciate "good" journalism and play a role in stopping the dissemination of fake news is a boost for credible news outlets and a step toward a healthier democracy.

The workshop strategy could easily be expanded as a tool for colleges to use to connect with local communities with a media literacy message.

Honorable Mention

The Fairness Meter: Using Journalism to Improve Students' Content Evaluation Skills

Barbara McCormack
NewseumED/Freedom Forum Institute

Abstract: Navigating today's changing media landscape can be daunting to students. Many players on many platforms often make it hard to distinguish fact from opinion, and politicians and partisans incessantly accuse the media of bias. Educators tell us students have trouble recognizing bias and some have come to accept it as the industry norm. Our media literacy lesson, *Is It Fair?*, borrows concepts of fairness from journalism to help students understand the importance of identifying bias. Unlike many lessons on bias, we set the conversation at the positive – the idea of what fairness looks like – instead of what's wrong.

Teaching Activity: This free online lesson, written for middle school through college classes, provides concrete steps for students to evaluate what fairness looks like across media types. It introduces three key indicators to measure how straight or slanted a story is: word choice, context and counterpoints. We call it "The Fairness Meter."

The 60-minute lesson provides all the support materials to examine fairness: teacher instructions, student worksheets, an interactive *News or Noise?* media map that allows students to analyze contemporary and historical stories, and a friendly "Fairness Meter" infographic/tipsheet.

The lesson begins with a discussion of what students have heard about fairness – or bias – in the media, and a definition of what fairness is. To illustrate what fairness in news coverage might look like and why it matters, our first activity uses a safe and entertaining entry point: the beloved fairy tale of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. A handout offers several possible headlines for the story, such as "Spoiled Little Girl Trashes Family Home and Flees." Students discuss which of the headlines they think are fair, which are not, and why. How might the different versions influence their view of the events? They then weigh the fairness of the headline by identifying examples of 1) neutral or leading language (word choice); 2) context that deepens understanding of what happened; and 3) counterpoints showing different perspectives or responses to accusations.

Next, students go beyond the theoretical and apply the skills to real news stories, either current or historical. A class of middle school students, for example, evaluated different press coverage of the Children's Crusade in Birmingham, Ala., in 1963. Many noted that stories of the harsh police tactics on the young demonstrators had only one perspective – law enforcement's – and made the black kids look bad. Discussion prompts for this activity include: Why is it important to weigh

the fairness of the content you come across in your daily life? How can you tell the difference between colorful language that helps paint a vivid scene and unfair language that shapes a reader/viewer's opinion of the story? If a news story is biased, should you discount all of the information in it? What next steps should you take?

"Is It Fair?" is part of "Fact Finder: Your Foolproof Guide to Media Literacy," a suite of 11 flexible, multimedia lesson plans and accompanying resources to help students find the information they need to avoid the fakes, hoaxes and misinformation clogging their news feeds.

Rationale: This lesson is inspired by the 5-E's constructivist instructional model (engage, explore, explain, elaborate, evaluate), a proven framework that has been evaluated and peer reviewed. We also believe in blending media literacy and the First Amendment. Developing one's own "fairness meter" by evaluating word choice, context and counterpoints empowers students to be better media consumers and creators. It also gives them an appreciation for the power of a free press to shape our understanding of and engagement with issues of our time.

Outcomes: There's a tendency for people to cry "That's not fair," but when pushed are unable to explain their gut feeling. Our lesson provides a path to methodically analyze content. Educators who have used the lesson say it met their learning objective of helping students identify key indicators of fairness/bias in the media they consume. "I will never, ever, ever teach the Headlines & News Stories Unit without using this first," says Dr. Leelanee K. Malin of Howard University's School of Communications. "I saw a major difference in student work produced this semester versus the work produced last semester after using this tool. This will matter in the long run for them as they build their portfolios and for me with grading. Many of the common errors about subjective language aren't appearing."

Malin says one student said she wished she had been exposed to the tool prior to taking a Fundamentals of Journalism class because she could have produced better writing samples.

Seventh-grade teacher Liza Esser says the lesson's content will be applied to a research project assignment in which her students must argue a point of view. "This will help them to find quality source material and the three ideas of context, word choice, and counterpoints can help during the writing phase of their papers," she says.

Malin appreciated the use of a fairy tale to learn concepts. It "automatically removed students' bias about a news headline in order for them to truly connect with the content about evaluating bias."

At Georgetown University, students concluded after the Goldilocks activity that “the most ‘fair’ and balanced of the headlines was not the one we’d likely click on,” says journalism teacher Ann Oldenburg, a former USA Today reporter. “Words like ‘spoiled’ and ‘vulnerable’ are more enticing, but aren’t fair or accurate.”

And lest you think the Goldilocks activity is beneath college students, Oldenburg notes: “I think every student will always remember that we talked about Goldilocks, but will also remember *why* we were talking about her and how important it is to consider all sides of the story. ... It all made for some lively discussions that got everyone talking and laughing. It was fun, while also being informative — and that makes it a winner.”

Excerpts from two “Is It Fair?” reviews from college educators

*Ann Oldenburg, Georgetown University
Introduction to Journalism Class*

The various pieces (of the lesson) — starting with the conversation about what fairness means and what fairness looks like in a story, then moving into the Goldilocks headlines, the video, the fairness meter graphic and the analysis — all dovetailed nicely to provide for a solid 60 minutes of conversation and discussion.

We have talked about fairness in stories and the ethics of getting comments from the other side in a story for balance and accuracy. We have not discussed bias, per se, in our class yet this semester. I don’t think that concept was new to anyone, but it was valuable to put it into this framework and identify these specific areas to look for — word choice, context and counterpoints. We also talked about story choice, such as Breitbart constantly writing about crimes committed by immigrants, which doesn’t really fall into one of these categories.

In the past I’ve only really had guest speakers — Glenn Kessler of *The Washington Post* talked about fact-checking, Eugene Scott of *The Washington Post* talked about identity politics and being mindful of bias in that reporting, Cal Borchers of *The Washington Post* talked about slanted views in reporting, etc. I haven’t had a good lesson plan, so thank you for this one!

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*Dr. Leelanee K. Malin, Howard University
Public Relations Writing Class*

[My students] are all already exposed to elements of writing and reporting as well as a very independent view of current events, therefore this exercise made everyone really get back to the basics of what is fair and what isn’t.

I had already introduced the concept of writing using the inverted pyramid and explained the difference/elements of hard news and feature news stories. But this lesson plan allowed me to extend their learning by not only providing tangible examples but also a road map in the decision-making process of what should and shouldn't be written when reporting.

I have noticed a significance difference in the level of student's writing after using this lesson plan. ... Students seem to really pay attention and take care in not including biased language. After turning in first drafts of a hard news story, students peer edited each others' stories to check for bias using the Is It Fair Meter. They were quick to correct each other where needed.

