Social Media and Big News: Fact or Opinion?
Low Stakes Assignments for Understanding Credible Sources
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Rationale for Assignments

Unit 1 in English 1302, Research and Writing, has traditionally been dedicated to learning how to validate sources. This course is the second in the freshman year sequence of English courses. In prior years, we have spent a lot of time looking at just academic sources for research and writing. With the pandemic, moving courses to online modalities, and the advent of "fake news" it seemed an appropriate time to integrate social media content into the "Credible Sources" unit of the course. Social media is where many community college students get their information therefore incorporating this into understanding credible sources help them make connections about credible sources. All of the mini-assignments come after students have engaged with learning about how to CRAAP test a source (Currency, Relevance, Accuracy, Authority, Purpose).

In student reflection assignments at the end of each unit where students reflect on the value of the assignments they have just completed, the addition of these mini-assignments has helped them have a better understanding of what kind of information they are exposed to on a daily basis. They appreciate that we have taken the time to address different forms of "sources" for information. Students have also commented that applying the CRAAP method to social media influences and understanding the bias of Big Media has helped them better understand why things like peer-reviewed sources are so important in academia.

As an instructor, I believe I have a civic responsibility to help students analyze the information they are exposed to through social media and Big Media outlets. In a community college, many of our students do not transfer to 4-year universities therefore, they are not always exposed to more academic research. Giving students the opportunity to apply the CRAAP method to the information they shown more regularly, helps them find value in the more academic, peer-reviewed sources we encourage them to use for their writing.

These mini-assignments align with our SLO (Student learning Outcome) "Analyze, interpret, and evaluate a variety of texts for the ethical and logical uses of evidence"

Mini Assignment #1

We get our news, or just general information, from so many places right now. How do you determine what to believe? What is Fact? Fiction? Who are the sources?

1. Find your "favorite" person/outlet to get info from on social media (TikTok, Insta, Snap, FB, news anchors, correspondents) and search them up- what are their actual credentials? What makes them credible to give us information? Why should we (or should we) trust the information being produced?
2. Make a decision: should we believe the information we get from these individuals? Why or why not? You can call on the previous unit's explanation of Credible Sources (CRAAP) to help guide your decision making.
3. Post your findings on the discussion board. Read through what your classmates have found, and comment on what you think connects with your own findings

Student Example: @teachertaylorj on TikTok likes to share information and is a middle school and high school history teacher. I can find her instagram and her LinkTree pretty easily. She is somewhat of an influencer and has a blog and promotes certain skin care lines. After watching several of her "history" videos and doing some basic research, her info is generally correct, albeit pretty simplified. Would I consider her info "credible?" Sure, but you still need to do some research on your own and keep in mind, the purpose of her information is also to promote her own links.

Mini Assignment #2

1. Now that you have looked into the people you follow, consult with your group to research one of the Major News Outlets (NBC, ABC, FOX, BBC, ALJAZEERA, CNN, CBS, etc.)
2. Investigate the parent company. Is there evidence of a political affiliation or party affiliation? Where does the money come from? (Look into who advertises with them). Is there any language in company policy that shows bias? The idea is to find evidence (or not) of any bias that may come through in their news broadcasting. Advertising should give you a lot of insight into this (who is allowed to advertise on their network).
3. As a group, post your findings on the discussion board. Please comment on other group posts for what surprised you.

Mini Assignment #3

1. Now that we have a better understanding of the information that we are given by individuals and by major news outlets, let's look at public statements to determine if they are fact versus opinion (Online, I give the statements and students post on the discussion board. In class, we do this via the projector and white board).

Mini Assignment #4

1. In your groups, go back to your individuals from MA#1 and your major news outlet from MA#2, and find 4-5 statements that you want to test to see if they are fact or opinion. (Online, we post the statements and analysis of the statements on discussion boards. In class, the groups present via PPT)