

# Faculty Conversations About Teaching

*In our faculty conversation, we will discuss strategies to teach & promote students' critical thinking and critical reading. How can we help our students "dig deeper" in what they are reading or viewing or hearing? How may we guide students in processing information, communicating information, and in crafting arguments?*

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## **My Opening Idea or Definitions**

*Provide a 50-150 word opening statement with your understanding of the most interesting or important aspects of this topic (to you and your teaching).*

To support students in their roles as emerging researchers and scholars, we have to help them learn to determine the reliability of sources. That task is much more confusing than one might assume, and it's become worse during the last 6 months. Students use the internet to inform and direct almost every aspect of their lives. The overwhelming availability of digital information, combined with the proliferation of "fake news" and "alternative facts" makes it difficult for students to feel confident that they can assess the credibility of the information they find online, no matter how digitally savvy they may be.

## **What Have I Tried?**

*Summarize 3-4 approaches, emphases, scenarios, or assignments, each briefly explained (50-100 words each) so that participants can envision your past and/or current teaching experiences, whether successful or still evolving.*

I've used a variety of methods to help students understand the difference between evidence-based information and the results of a Google search. Every semester for the past five years, I've dedicated a 30 minute discussion to the topic of "what constitutes a reliable source for an undergraduate research paper." This has consisted of many students rolling their eyes and sighing at having to cover this topic in yet another class. They would generally respond to discussion questions by saying "But we already know this" and yet every semester, several of those same students would turn in research papers citing Wikipedia, random blog posts, and websites like [AltHealth.org](http://AltHealth.org).

In 2016, Global and Community Health began piloting an assignment across multiple sections of the same course, taught by multiple faculty, intended to teach students new to our major how to conduct a basic literature review and to write an annotated bibliography. Part of this assignment included an in-depth discussion on the differences between results from a Medline search versus a Google search with multiple real-world examples, and what the differences mean. The assignment made an impact on student learning, yet students continued to mistake Men's Health Journal as a legitimate source for undergraduate research.

About the same time I decided the more traditional approaches weren't working, I read the phrase "fake news" for the first time. I also read a study by Sam Wineburg and Sarah McGrew with Stanford History Education Group discussing how students at Stanford were having the same issues. I reached out to them with questions and found an opportunity to adapt and pilot some of their tasks with my students. The result of this was an incredible learning experience, both for me and for my class.

This experience provided concrete information on how my students seek out and interpret information and identified their areas of greatest weakness about conducting good online research. It also mirrored the experiences of Stanford undergraduates, which from an epistemological and teaching standpoint was fascinating. The students who participated in this activity were highly engaged (and at times shocked) by what they learned. Their perceptions and the processes they used to acquire information online were subject to thoughtful reevaluation, which they viewed as profoundly helpful to them both as students and citizens.

### **What Am I Exploring? What Am I Interested In?**

*Provide a list of 3-4 questions, activities, or options that you have been considering as you continue to adapt your teaching approaches.*

### ***How do social media impact the ways in which we acquire and interpret new information?***

Digital media in general and social media in particular have changed how we think about and respond to information. For example, Facebook is now considered the world's most influential news source. Traditional media has historically been both a reflector and director of public opinion, but there was little meaningful interactivity. Passively watching a news story on television or reading it in a newspaper is not as interactive as acquiring that information online. If you leave a comment, click "like" or share, you are engaging with that content and with those in your network, in a way that may impact what you will see (and learn) next.

***Do new media impact social learning in ways that support existing theoretical frameworks (particularly health behavior models)?***

The way in which we formulate opinions on world issues, political candidates, culture, and our health are influenced not only by what appears in our social feeds but by how our network presents that information. A consistent positive (or negative) framing of an issue may cause you to re-evaluate your opinion. If you are neutral on an issue (for example, the HPV vaccine) but the majority of your social network is strongly in favor of (or opposed to) that issue, the information that you see (often over and over again) may influence your perspective on that issue through a shifting of your perceived social norms. I'm interested to see learn how these types of social learning work within existing theoretical frameworks and health behavior models.

***How can social media be utilized and leveraged to improve public health and increase people's sense of agency in making positive health behavior changes?***

There are many reasons for concern regarding new media's possible influence on health outcomes, particularly measures of mental health and well-being. This technology, however, is not going anywhere. I'm researching ways that social media can be used to enhance positive health outcomes, increase self-efficacy, and improve well-being. My research currently focuses on adolescents.

## What are some Best Practices, Tips, or Resources I'd Like to Share with Other Faculty?

*If you could recommend a list of 3 core values, teaching tips, and/or resources (articles, books, links) that faculty across disciplines could find helpful for inclusive teaching in their courses, what would your list include?*

**Tip 1:** Spend some time perusing the Stanford History Education Group's website (<https://sheg.stanford.edu/>). There are great resources there, including lessons, tasks and activities that are easily adaptable across disciplines. I also suggest reading research like Hargittai et al. (2010) "Trust Online: Young Adults' Evaluation of Web Content" which discusses specific ways in which our students use the internet and assess the reliability of search results.

**Reference:** Hargittai, E., Fullerton, L., Menchen-Trevino, E., & Thomas, K. Y. (2010). Trust Online: Young Adults' Evaluation of Web Content'. *International Journal of Communication* (19328036), 4468-194.

**Tip 2:** Spend time every semester discussing specific best practices for finding information online and double-checking its reliability. Review with students the best types of resources and data within their discipline and how that data or research is collected, analyzed, and evaluated. Help them to clearly understand why some types of evidence are better than others. Assign tasks and assignments that reinforce this understanding. Ask students throughout the course of the semester to describe the methods they used to check the quality of their sources and citations.

**Tip 3:** Just as the University holds students accountable for "ethical practices, academic integrity and high standards of personal conduct," we should also expect and encourage our students to use the highest possible standards, as scholars and as citizens, to responsibly use and share information.



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