

# 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).*

The skills developed in English Composition are more important, perhaps, than ever before. "Fake news" has been in the headlines nearly every day during 2017. College students, in order to participate in intelligent conversations for both their personal and professional well-being, need the skills to be able to evaluate and assess information, especially web-based information, and to understand the significance of evidence-based arguments. Instructors who attend this session will leave with a customizable lesson plan based on recent data on web literacy designed to give students of all majors an effective way to develop these skills and to engage as active participants in the world.

## **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.*

Traditional methods of instruction around credibility involve giving students a list of indicators of credibility: the CRAAP test, for instance. I tried this method, but was unhappy with students' inability to connect the lesson to their actual web research.

I have taught the information cycle—where data comes from and how it becomes news—and have engaged students in broader discussions of how knowledge is generated. I have also asked students to read scholarly articles in their discipline and consider (rhetorically) how the authors constructed and supported their arguments.

After the 2016 election, a wealth of resources (and think-pieces) emerged on “Fake News.” Bringing these conversations into our classroom helped students to invest in these conversations of credibility: the real-world implications of unsupported or exaggerated claims were evident and significant.

During the election, I developed a lesson plan with a few parts. I presented two egregious pieces of fake news—one about each candidate—and asked students to analyze the flaws and risks around these pieces. I then engaged them in a group activity developed from a KQED news lesson plan, “The Honest Truth about Fake News.” This activity used evidence from the recent groundbreaking study from the Stanford University History Education Group, “Evaluating Evidence: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning.” The lesson plan leads them through a number of instances of clickbait headlines, misleading claims, and fake news, and asks students to evaluate these using Google and Wikipedia skills, and to report back to the class on what they discovered, and how they discovered it.

Finally, I ask students to evaluate somewhat credible and very credible sources and how they use information and how their arguments are supported with evidence. I also ask them to research and read scholarly and news articles in their own discipline, so they get a sense of how knowledge is generated in their field.

### **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 is knowledge generated?*** This difficult question, central to Advanced Composition, encourages students to reflect on the nature of knowledge and information; to understand that behind the facts we learn in college is years of experimentation, research, and hard work; that information is always in the process of evolving and growing as our work progresses.

***What information can we trust?*** While it’s a popular understanding that young adults believe everything they read on the internet, in my classroom experience I’ve come to believe that this tendency actually stems from their lack of awareness that there is evidence-based information out there—we just need to know how to recognize it.

## 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?*

(1) Faculty from different fields can work together to encourage students to seek out accurate and evidence-based information. Lessons in credibility learned in ENGH 302 are bolstered by discipline-specific conversations in major classes: *How is knowledge generated in our field? What unique challenges do we face in our field around misinformation?*

Connecting these lessons with subject matter they are interested in is much more effective. Together, we can help them to help each other stem the flow of misinformation in their field and beyond.

(2) Read the results of the Stanford Study. This study encourages us to reevaluate how knowledgeable our students are in identifying misinformation, and how interested they are in evaluating for credibility.

Reference: Stanford History Education Group, Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation (2016). Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning: Executive Summary.

(3) In your classes, present students with two texts in your area of study: one based on evidence and clearly and appropriately argued, and one with flaws. If you want to spend more time on this, give them a few sources that fall somewhere on the spectrum of credibility. Encourage them to evaluate the sources using Google and Wikipedia. Afterward, discuss the implications of the claims in the least credible sources.



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