GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY | Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning

# Faculty Conversations About Teaching

## Promoting Critical Thinking & Critical Reading

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In 2017, she won the Master Teacher award from the George Mason College of Health and Human Services (CHHS).

Her research interests include maternal child health, social marketing, and social media and health.

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### Julianna W. Miner, M.P.H., Adjunct Professor, Global and Community Health, College of Health and Human Services (CHHS)

**What I've Tried**

After deciding that more traditional approaches weren't working, I read a study by Sam Wineburg and Sarah McGrew (Stanford History Education Group). 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. 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.

**Questions I'm Exploring**

- How do social media impact the ways in which we acquire and interpret new information?
- Do new media impact social learning in ways that support existing theoretical frameworks (particularly 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?

**Recommended Resources**

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, International Journal of Communication 4: 468–494. In this article, the authors discuss specific ways in which our students use the internet and how students assess the reliability of search results.

# Faculty Conversations about Teaching: Promoting Critical Thinking & Critical Reading

Psyche Z. Ready regularly teaches Advanced Composition (ENGH 302) face-to-face and online.

She is passionate about evidence-based information, and connecting students with the tools to identify it.

Her other areas of research are Folklore and Gender Studies.

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## Psyche Ready, M.A., Term Faculty, Department of English, College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS)

### What I've Tried

I have taught the information cycle—where data come 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.

During the 2016 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.

### Questions I'm Exploring

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.

### Teaching Tip

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.

## TRY IT!

**How might you apply these ideas, tips & best practices to a course you are currently teaching?**

**What additional information or resources might you need in order to try it?**

**For info and guidance, please contact the Stearns Center for Teaching & Learning (4th Floor, Innovation Hall)**