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LOEX 2022: Misinformation and source evaluation

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LOEX 2022 (5-7 May, Ypsilanti, Michigan) had an unofficial track focused on topics related to misinformation, source evaluation, and how academic librarians approach these issues in their classrooms.

The conference began with a plenary address by Mike Caulfield (University of Washington, Seattle). Caulfield, a research scientist working at the University's Center for an Informed Public, developed the SIFT method for fact-checking which asks students to Stop, Investigate, Find better coverage, and Trace claims in the sources they are evaluating (Caulfield, 2019).

Caulfield's address was titled *Information as Experience: Propagandized Events and Online Information Literacy*. He suggests that people's emotional reactions have a greater impact on the fact checking process than is generally recognised, and that teachers can leverage this "missing piece of SIFT" (Caulfield, 2022) to best help their students. Teachers often assume that it is harder to fact check something that you have strong feelings about, but feeling is essential because it helps drive the investigation process. Rather than avoiding examples that provoke reaction, teachers should strive to use examples (and provide contexts for those examples) that will have enough "compellingness" (Caulfield, 2022) for all of their students to become engaged in applying fact checking processes and developing the habit of questioning their initial reactions to sources.

Fact checkers ask themselves if their original reaction to a source of information was appropriate or not, and then use that reaction to focus their fact checking process. "Your reaction isn't the shovel, but it shows you where to dig," according to Caulfield (2022). As humans, we often react without knowing the larger context of something, but we can go back and seek out that context and then decide if knowing that context changes our views. Many other conference presentations at LOEX followed on a similar theme, covering different aspects of how librarians approach misinformation and source evaluation in their classrooms.

In a talk titled *Social Media, the Public Sphere, and the Rhetoric of Information Evaluation*, Lane Wilkinson from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga detailed an intriguing strategy for helping students evaluate information. Noting that the traditional way we teach source evaluation is either checklist based (like the CRAAP test) or heuristic based (like SIFT), Wilkinson proposes that evaluation could also be rhetorical as well. He makes connections between the way first-year composition students are often taught to write and analyse writing using the rhetorical concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos, and proposes adapting those concepts for use in source evaluation. Using examples from social media postings and especially their comments can help students better understand the ways in which information can be convincing or persuasive to others (or not). When evaluating sources for their own assignments, students can ask themselves whether or not the sources they have found would be convincing to the audience they are addressing (which is most often their professor). This would not necessarily replace the need for more traditional source evaluation processes but could be a powerful addition to those tools.

Ayanna Gaines from Woodbury University in Burbank, California, offered important and compelling reasons for librarians to move away from using one traditional source evaluation processes, the CRAAP test, for teaching source evaluation in her presentation titled *Hearing the Silenced Voices: White Supremacy Culture and the CRAAP Test*. Gaines drew connections between the steps and outcomes of the CRAAP test and the characteristics of white supremacy culture as defined by the scholar Tema Okun (2020), and how this can adversely impact all students. Gaines pointed out that the CRAAP test promotes either/or thinking, which is one of the characteristics of white supremacy culture noted by Okun. The CRAAP test encourages students to think of all sources as being either good or bad, without leaving room for complexity and nuance. The CRAAP test also asks students to evaluate authority using markers of authority from the majority culture rather than asking students to consider other types of authority. Using SIFT instead of CRAAP to teach source evaluation can help avoid these problems, but students can also benefit from being introduced to both, comparing them, and learning about how the characteristics of white supremacy culture that show up in the CRAAP test can adversely affect their source evaluation processes.

Elizabeth Ellis, Meghan Webb, and Amanda Kaufman from Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, discussed many different aspects of teaching about the social context of misinformation in their talk, *Misinformation, Algorithms, and Privacy: Helping Students Situate Info Literacy Issues Within Wider Social, Cultural, Political and Tech Contexts*. The presenters noted that librarians often teach students how to avoid misinformation, but less often teach the larger context of information disorder. Their presentation covered five different contexts of information disorder and how the presenters cover them in their credit-bearing information literacy classes: social and cultural context, historical context, economic context, political context, and technological contexts. Each one of these contexts would have made a compelling presentation on their own, but in this presentation, it was possible to see how they all worked together to create a larger picture of the issues. The presenters shared their approaches to teaching these contexts, as well as recommended resources and activities, and discussed how understanding these larger contexts greatly benefits their students.

Finally, Camille Abdeljawad from Park University in Parkville, Missouri shared the compelling results of a study she conducted in her presentation, *Perceived Authority, Real Consequences: Research-informed Practices to Teaching Students about Authority and Misinformation*. Abdeljawad's research question was: How do students understand authority? To find out, she asked a sample of students at her institution to evaluate the authority of different types of information and then indicate whether they would share that information with others. One unexpected finding was that even when her students knew the information they were looking at was inaccurate, they often said they would share it with others anyway, because it was funny or because they didn't think anyone would actually believe it. Students did not see the harm of sharing false information. This led Abdeljawad to ask: How can we teach students about their social responsibility to share accurate information? She recognised that students used social media for fun, not for research; and as a place to be creative, not as a place where they go to analyse information. However, students encounter misinformation on social media and need to realise the importance of evaluating the information they find there. She recommended activities to help them do this and emphasised the importance of not moralising over social media, but instead teaching students to ask whether the information they find there meets their needs.

Even though misinformation and source evaluation were not an official conference theme, they were topics that echoed throughout many of the sessions at LOEX 2022. Overall, these presentations about misinformation provided fantastic opportunities for discussion and idea

sharing throughout the conference, as well as providing new ways for librarians to approach and address these problems and issues in both theory and practice.

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