

Fake News, Lies, and a For-credit Class:  
Lessons Learned from Teaching a  
7-week Fake News Undergraduate  
Library Course

Angie Oehrli

University of Michigan Libraries

LOEX Annual Conference

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<https://tinyurl.com/loexfakenews1>

Materials:

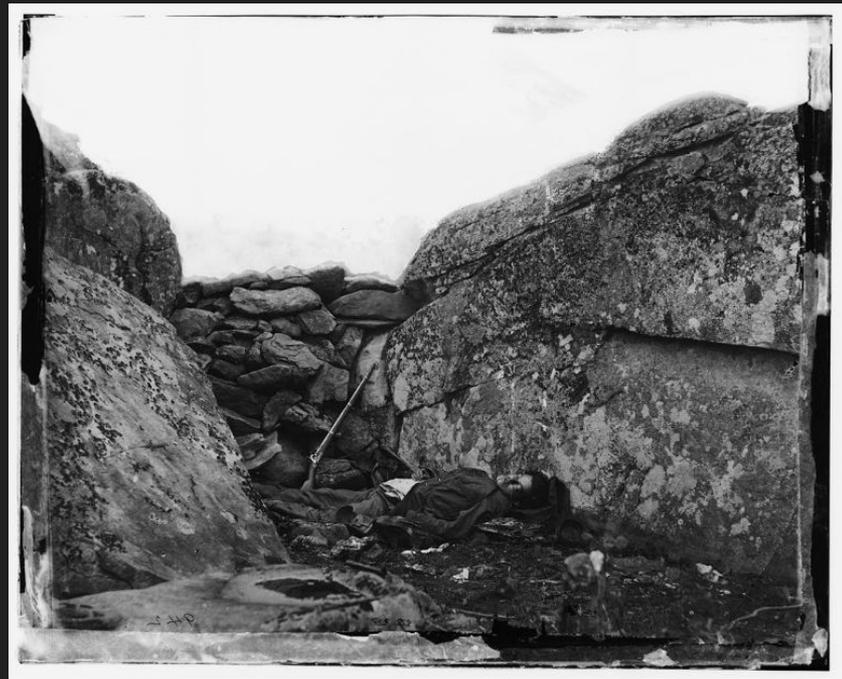
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Who Am I?

Why Am I Here?



*[two images showing the same deceased soldier on an American Civil War battlefield. The photographer has moved the body and misrepresented the death as 2 separate deaths]*



# What am I going to talk about?

- Course Proposal
- Course Development
- Instructional materials
- The Class
  - Successes
  - Challenges
- One Shot Materials



*[Image imitates the CNN logo and reads, "Fake News Network."  
From <https://youtu.be/LhvoF3eRBmI>]*

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# Course Details

- 7 Weeks, 2 hours per week, 1 credit
- Applied Liberal Arts Program in the College of Literature, Sciences, and the Arts
- “Lab” Based
- Sophomore Standing or Above
- Graded
- 12-15 students
- Fall 2017, Winter 2018, Fall 2018

# The Course Proposal

# Course Development

# Course Developers

- Doreen Bradley, Director of Learning Programs and Initiatives
- Jo Angela Oehrli, Learning Librarian
- Hailey Mooney, Psychology & Sociology Librarian
- Shevon Desai, Communication & Information Studies Librarian

# Class Themes

- Strategies for Identifying “Real” News: Evaluating Sources and Determination of Source Credibility
- Journalistic Integrity and News Production
- The Information Landscape, Media Fragmentation and Social Media
- Fact-checking Statistics and Data
- Is Reality Subjective?

# Course Proposal/Development: Challenge

How do we teach everything  
we want to with the time constraints?

# The Class

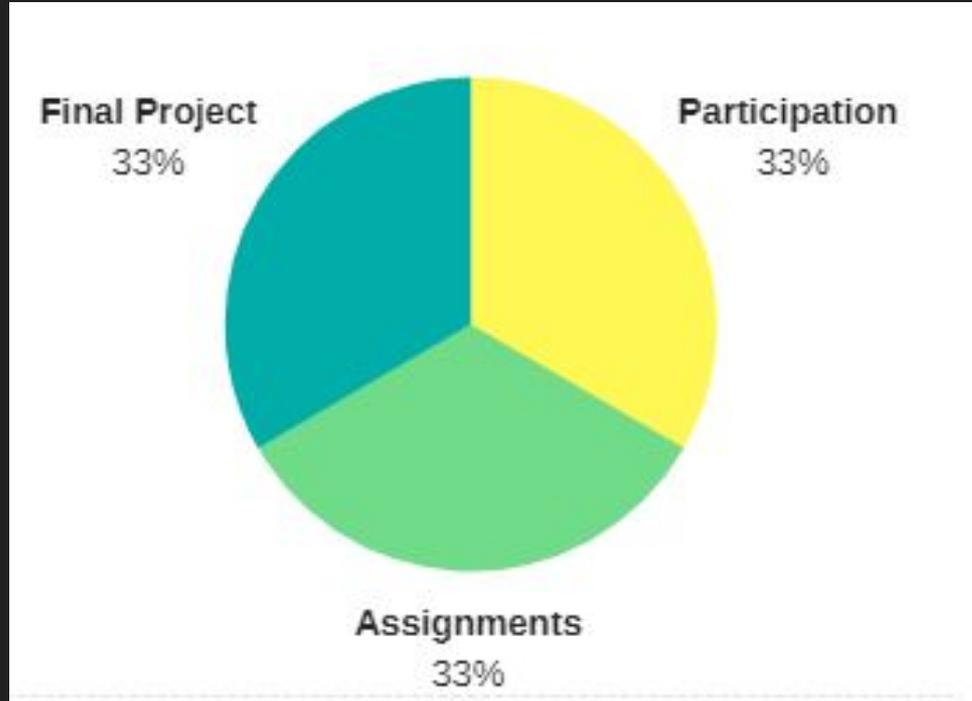
# The Class: Instructional Approach

- Critical thinking exercises and active learning activities are key to the success of the class.
- Examples of news stories allow students to apply course concepts. Use them freely.
- A Socratic and constructivist approach was applied to the instruction of the course.
- Peer-to-peer learning is incorporated throughout the course.

# Course Content

- Flexible syllabus
- Journals
- Assignments
- Final Project

# Grades



*[Image: Weight evenly distributed for grades between final project, participation, assignments]*

*“The journals are working well because they allow you to see what we are doing with our class time even if we don't speak up.”*

*“I love the openness of the instructor and the private journals we have that are included in our participation. Sometimes a point I would love to make in class is not something I can go as in-depth as I'd like to verbally, so I will put it in my journal so it doesn't go unacknowledged that I have these thoughts.”*

# The Class: Setting Up Successful Class Discussions

Journal: What are some examples of bad class discussions?

Discussion about discussions:  
Respect

*“I think the most important thing to understand is that everyone had different backgrounds going into this class. This means we all had different majors, different ages, and different interests for why we’re taking this class. That creates a small think-tank-like community where we can be completely open and honest with our thoughts and can hear different opinions, thoughts etc.”*

# Tools and Activities

- Strategy tools (IFLA, Google Chrome extension)
- Fact Checking Websites (Politifact, Snopes)
- Bias Websites (allsides.com)
- Media professional panel
- Issues & Controversies and CQ Researcher
- Scholarly Databases
- Blue Feed, Red Feed

## The Class: Activities

- Peer-to-peer Learning
- Conversational -- Room Set Up in a Circle
- See the web site

*SOME HIGHLIGHTS*

# FROM THE IFLA INFOGRAPHIC ...



*[Image that reads, "Check the Date:  
Reposting old news stories doesn't mean  
they're relevant to current events"]*

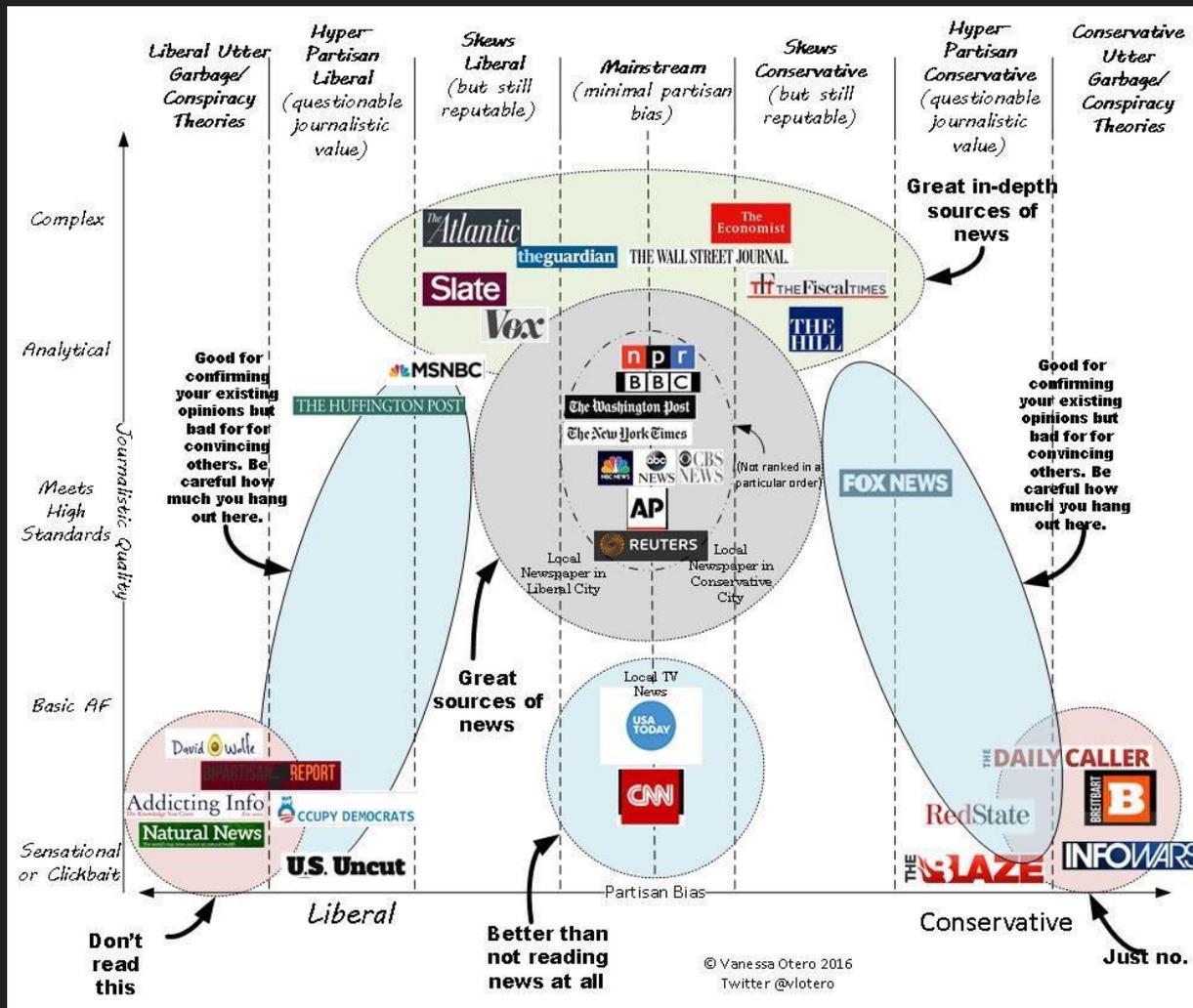
A SLIDE FROM CLASS ....

ONE MORE TIME:

You should care just as much about  
**WHAT IS NOT** in the news  
as **WHAT IS IN** it

THEN A STUDENT SAID ....

*“But, how am I supposed to know what’s  
**NOT** in the news?”*



[Infographic showing many news outlets. The creator tries to identify the political perspective of the news outlet]

Image courtesy of <https://twitter.com/lotero/status/808696317174288387?lang=en>

THEN A STUDENT SAID ....

*“Many of the news sources in the middle are **fee-based**. Does that mean that **only people who can afford it can get reliable news?**”*

Examples, Examples, Examples



**Detroit Free Press**



January 16 at 8:29pm · 🌐

Did anyone hear and/or see a meteor or a giant bang or explosion in the metro Detroit area?



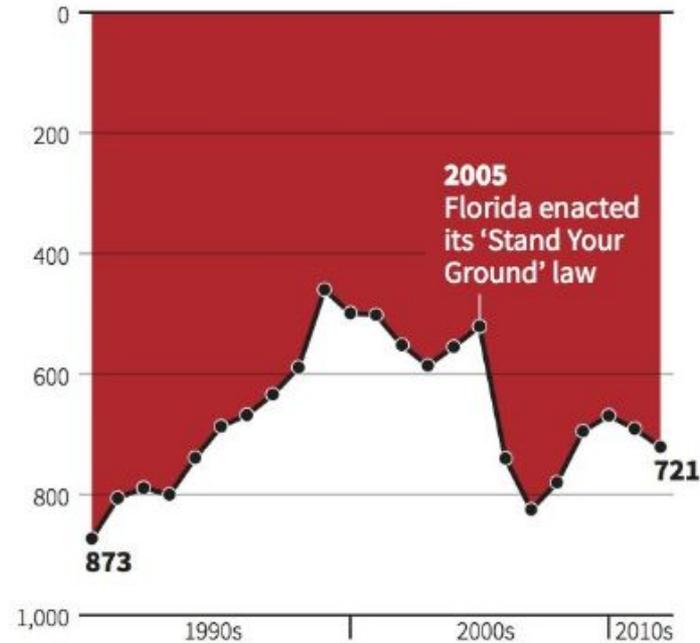
   You and 1.3K others

Top Comments ▾

*[Image of a Facebook post from the Detroit Free Press on January 16, 2018 at 8:29 pm. The post reads, "Did anyone hear and/or see a meteor or a giant bang or explosion in the metro Detroit area?"]*

# Gun deaths in Florida

Number of murders committed using firearms



Source: Florida Department of Law Enforcement

C. Chan 16/02/2014

REUTERS

[Graph entitled Gun Deaths in Florida. The y axis is zero at the top of the infographic rather than at the bottom so that years in which gun deaths increased appear to be years in which gun deaths decreased]

"Pence: 'Michelle Obama Is The Most Vulgar First Lady We've Ever Had'"

*[Image: Web page headline that reads, "Pence: Michelle Obama is the most vulgar First Lady we've ever had"]*



331 likes

livingthelifeof\_blackgirlmagic Ummmmthats the US Army football team. So are they unpatriotic too. Just asking for a friend? 🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔

*[Instagram Image from a U.S. Army football game. Players are kneeling on the field. The caption reads, "331 likes. Livingthelifeof\_blackgirlmagic Ummmmthats the US Army football team. So are they unpatriotic too. Just asking for a friend?" The caption ends with 6 Faces with Tears of Joy emojis]*

# The Class: Successes

# Critical Thinking

*“The class is discussion and question driven, which I think is powerful. We’re not being told how to find fake news, but rather being given the tools and thought processes to analyze it ourselves. This differentiates the class from other classes as we can’t just memorize the course material, we have to actually come up with our own ideas and own opinions about things which is awesome.”*

Student Driven

*“This course is unique because it doesn’t teach us some specific knowledge but more of a way of critical thinking, learn how to identify fake news, reflect on our experience, common sense, opinion and biases.”*

# The Class: Challenges

# Challenges: Our Ever Changing World

- Fake news is proliferating and you want to acknowledge that
  - Las Vegas shooting
  - Houston flood
  - Stoneman Douglas High School
- Research is evolving and you want to incorporate it ([MIT study](#))

## Challenges: The Amount of Course Topics

*“I wish that we could sometimes slow things down because I love a lot of the topics but we go by so briefly. Maybe the speed of the class is because it's a mini course.”*

# Challenges: Bias

- Class discussion activity
- Build rapport
- Journals allow students to express disagreement that may or may not be based on bias
- Use examples from across the political spectrum
- Try something and if it doesn't work, keep trying!
  - Center for Research on Learning and Teaching
  - Library Diversity Officer
- Students will bring up bias on their own before you get to it later in the semester (Blue Feed, Red Feed; Climate Change activity in Week 3)

# One-Shot Applications

# One Shot Applications

- Compare Blue Feed Red Feed to an “issues” library database: How is what you find on the internet different from what you find in a library database
- Use one of research examples in Week 5’s content about data literacy as an ice breaker/anticipatory set
- Use fake news as a search topic: Students love talking about it and it’s interdisciplinary
- Evaluating Sources: Use bias exercises to help students define and illuminate bias
- Re-envision the journal idea: Use free-writes and comment on them

Why is this important?

This is a class about  
engaging with **all news**

This is a class about figuring out  
what's going on in the world

*“I want educators to understand that this class is not about just fake news and how to be less gullible. I see it as a complex discussion about the nature of being a person in today’s climate and who is constantly exposed to media from all sources- it’s a way for people from all walks of life to figure out how to navigate this complex world and modify their perspective to understand how the information they are presented with is going to help them and enrich them, but also how to be skeptical of what they hear and learn so they can be a more educated citizen who understands their world and how to understand everyone else. I took this class because as a member of a group who is often targeted by misinformation and I want to help people understand that what they are reading is fake and is not what reflective of me or anyone else.”*

## Contact Info

[jooehrli@umich.edu](mailto:jooehrli@umich.edu)

## Materials

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Questions?