INFORMATION LITERACY OUTREACH IN A FAKE NEWS WORLD

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OUR 'FAKE NEWS' WORLD

Let's begin with a brief bird's-eye view of "fake news" as a phenomenon.

Truth
Facts   Observation
Objectivity Humor Satire
Jokes Hoaxes Misinformation
Disinformation Propaganda
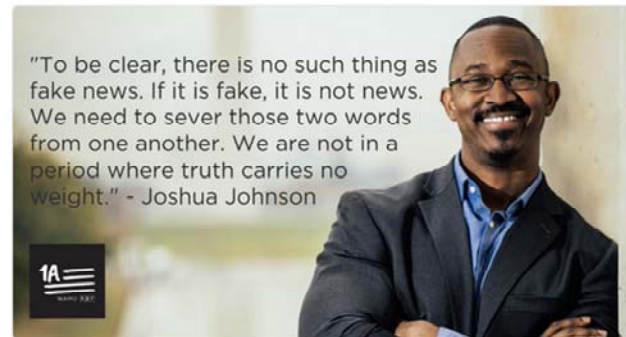Bias   Lies
_____ ...Alternative facts

The words you see here represent concepts and behaviors as old as humans and human society. It's by no means an exhaustive list. Historians and ancient philosophers tell us that human communication has included them all, and more, since long before the current moment that we inhabit.

After the 2016 Presidential election …

> If it is fake, it is not news. wamu.fm/2ikZidS #1Ashow
>
> "To be clear, there is no such thing as fake news. If it is fake, it is not news. We need to sever those two words from one another. We are not in a period where truth carries no weight." - Joshua Johnson
>
> 11:12 AM - 12 Jan 2017
>
> 470 Retweets 822 Likes

It is also the case that in our current moment in the United States, it feels like we've crossed a threshold.

As the last Presidential campaign season ramped up, "fake news" was becoming a new expression, a piece of common jargon. While "fake news" as a declaration in the face of contradictory facts isn't exclusively political, the sense of existing in a "fake news world" does seem to be closely tied to current politics and the way that those holding opposing political ideologies interact with one another.

Journalist Joshua Johnson hosts a daily news and call-in show on National Public Radio, "The 1A" – short for The First Amendment. The show is devoted to wide-ranging examination of free speech and other guarantees under this important first addendum to the constitution of the newly formed United States of America. Early in January 2017 as the inauguration of our current President was approaching, a segment aired entitled, "**Decoding Donald Trump's Testy News Conference."** Johnson declared emphatically that, "If it is fake, it is not news." He continued, "We need to sever those two words from one another. We are not in a period where truth carries no weight." Was his assertion sadly optimistic?

A recent opinion piece:

"Fake news is in large part a product of the enthusiasm — not to say rage — for transparency and absolutely free speech.

…

[The world of fake news] is created by the undermining of trust in the traditional vehicles of authority and legitimation — major newspapers, professional associations, credentialed academics, standard encyclopedias, government bureaus, federal courts, prime-time nightly news anchors."

~~Stanley Fish, legal scholar and author, NYT, 7 May 2018

'Transparency' Is the Mother of Fake News [News and opinion]. Retrieved May 8, 2018, from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/07/opinion/transparency-fake-news.html?em_pos=small&emc=edit_ty_20180507&nl=opinion-today&nl_art=11&nlid=81186798emc%3Dedit_ty_20180507&ref=headline&te=1

Just a few weeks ago, in a New York Times opinion piece, legal scholar and author Stanley Fish argued that "fake news" is the logical outcome of public demand for transparency and unfettered free speech. He traces a thread of beliefs and behaviors that have undermined public trust in the traditional vehicles of authority and legitimation. He neglects to include libraries among those vehicles – perhaps he believes that those at least are still considered somewhat reputable and legitimate? – but he mentions every other entity that librarians hold dear.

Mr. Fish concludes,
"This wholesale distrust of authoritative mechanisms leads to the bizarre conclusion that an assertion of fact is more credible if it lacks an institutional source. In this way of thinking, a piece of news originating in a blog maintained by a teenager in a basement in Idaho would be more reliable than a piece of news announced by the anchor of a major network."

Librarians' lament ~~

A Twitter post that appeared in April 2016, and again in April 2017, and again in my Facebook feed this past April 1st, puts a finger right on my concern as an educator and shaper of young adults' skills for learning and living.

A librarian's insight ~~

"We all need to *evaluate how we interact with information* before we can evaluate information."

Elizabeth Boden, MLIS candidate
ACRL's "Keeping Up With … Debiasing and Fake News,"
16 November 2017

And this librarian-in-training offered some solid insights to fellow professionals in an ACRL short topics piece last November. Ms. Boden reminds us that all of us, students and educators alike, encounter the world with bias – not necessarily malicious, and very often not intentional or even conscious. We must each learn to be honest with ourselves and mindful of our own biases each time we set out to evaluate the factuality, relevance, or truth of information we encounter.

ACRL Framework for Information Literacy

"Authority Is Constructed and Contextual"

Information resources reflect their creators' expertise and credibility, and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used. Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information need may help to determine the level of authority required.

http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework#authority

Filed by the ACRL Board on February 2, 2015. Adopted by the ACRL Board, January 11, 2016.

I conclude this short overview of "fake news" within the context of promoting information literacy as a part of college education, with a shout out to the ACRL IL Framework. Whether you're a Framework fan, or still a bit skeptical of what it brings to teaching information literacy, one of the frames presciently addresses our current moment of fake news anxiety. In the document debated for several years before submission to the ACRL Board in early 2015, the "Authority is Constructed and Contextual" frame laid out a fundamental conceptual threshold that, once crossed, will help students on their journey to and through adulthood. Paraphrased in plain language, we have to keep finding effective ways to teach our students that "Who said (a thing), MATTERS." "How, where, when, or if I repeat (that thing), MATTERS."

IL OUTREACH BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

So, as a Liaison Librarian, I do plenty of in-class information literacy instruction. But purely by happenstance, 2017 encompassed a sustained series of outside-of-the-classroom engagements with outreach about "fake news" and crossing the "authority is constructed and contextual" threshold.

2017:
Experiences with outreach beyond the classroom

- Students to students
- Students online
- Faculty to faculty

For the rest of this talk I will outline my 2017 series of co-curricular and other interactions, and I invite you to think about how any of them parallel activities you've been part of in some way or might like to adapt for your own future use. By sharing highlights of these opportunities, I hope to stimulate your ideas about creative ways to take IL beyond 50 minutes in someone else's classroom!

Winter semester 2017 kicked off with GVSU's 4th annual "teach-in" as part of the celebrations for the week beginning with the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. The title for the teach-in series is "Power, Privilege and Difficult Dialogs." The intention is to dedicate an entire 12-hour day to multiple concurrent sessions addressing all types of diversity and marginalization in the smaller and larger community circles we each are a part of. The emphasis in selecting sessions is on students as presenters in collaboration with faculty and other student-engaged staff, on interactivity, and on all of us – students, faculty, staff – learning from each other.

Outreach beyond the classroom: "Teach-In" January 2017

Bias in the News: What's Real?

Kim Ranger, Cara Cadena, Jennifer Torreano & Debbie Morrow (faculty) with Francesca Golus & Audrey Yeiter (students)

- Given the speed of social media and ease of sharing, it is very easy to live in news bubbles which reflect what we already know. Professors challenge students to use authoritative sources in assignments. If GVSU students, staff, or faculty experience "information culture shock" when new reports are at odds with what we believed to be true, what do we do next? How do we understand the world when our sense of reality is challenged? How do we weigh information? What is a fact and how do we identify authority in this current climate of anti-establishment and anti-intellectualism? *Interactive workshop.*

https://www.gvsu.edu/teach-in/winter-2017-teach-in-7.htm

During Fall 2016 several librarian colleagues were aware of a heightened level of student anxiety in classes as the election season progressed and the surprising outcome became known. The time was ripe for a librarian-submitted teach-in proposal, something addressing evaluation of information when perceptions of reality were being challenged daily. Three librarians, two library student peer Research Consultants, and the consultants' coordinator put together a plan for a 75-minute workshop session emphasizing strategies for confirming truth of sources that might or might not be factual. The Research Consultants were stars, as they were able to speak from their own work experience as coaches to peers struggling to select and focus on topics, and to find and evaluate sources that help to develop their theses.

Making the point with some local lore

- Urban legend, reported in *The Lanthorn* (student newspaper)
- Handout: collected "fake news" articles
- TED-Ed: "How False News Can Spread" [on next slide]

Using a LibGuide a a vehicle for visuals, our main activity used articles from the GVSU student newspaper, The Lanthorn. In the early 1980s, a rumor or urban legend circulated among students (and still does) that the campus was going to close, and the state would be re-opening it as a women's prison. Discussion centered on the importance of looking for othr sources to confirm or refute a claim like this, and what kinds of sources those might be.

We also showed a short, very clever video that describs in simple terms how misinformation and "fake news" can all to readily become reported as facts: [next slide]

You may have seen this; I'll just play the opening minute or so.

During planning for the teach-in session, I had begun collecting citations to all kinds of potentially related news and information from library newsletters, news broadcasts, and social media. Some of these became the content for a handout in the workshop. Following the teach-in, I suggested to the two Research Consultants from our session, that perhaps they'd be interested on taking on more serious curation of the 40 or so items in the folder, and developing a "fake news" LibGuide, one "for-students-by-students." We mapped out a fairly meaty project that included learning to navigate Zotero and a Zotero shared folder, applying tags to items in the folder, reviewing and evaluating the folder contents, accessing a new blank LibGuide, outlining contents for one or more pages, and building the LibGuide. While they made good headway on the initial curation and selection of possible items to include in a guide, you may not be surprised to learn that their classes and regular job responsibilities for the semester took precedence, and the guide was never completed. But I still think it's an idea with legs, and my Zotero folder is much larger now!

Outreach beyond the classroom: "Teach-In," November 2017

Fact vs. Fake: Defining "Fake News" and Learning to Spot It
Debbie Morrow (faculty) with Natalie Loewengruber (student) & Ruth Ott (student)

- Untrue and non-factual information is nothing new. Human communication is complex and nuanced, and throughout human history the communication of facts, opinions, feelings, learning and lore has included the potential for misinformation and disinformation as well as truth. In our present environment, from the personal and local to the societal and global, we are grappling with the intensifying effects of the Internet and social media in altering how we know, what we think we know, and how we talk about what we know or believe. The popular shorthand today for what a person finds unbelievable or unacceptable is "fake news" -- a label that has exploded from the fringes of social media has become a common term in personal and media communications in little more than the last year. In this session, a Librarian and two of the Library's peer Research Consultants will present and lead discussion on some examples of "fake news" and non-factual information, and discuss strategies students can use to inspect and evaluate information sources. *Workshop/Discussion.*

The 5th annual GVSU Teach-In was scheduled for Fall semester, early in November instead of January of 2018. The Library was approached by the planning committee about submitting another "fake news" session proposal – by summer of 2017 faculty across campus were cognizant of the "fake news"-related issues students were experiencing, and also of the support librarians can provide in building student survival and success skills in this area. Since "fake news" had become somewhat of a theme for me for the year, I found two more of our Research Consultants, and the three of us planned and proposed another workshop session. The session we facilitated was very active and interactive, and Ruth and Natalie took the lead in most of it. We were thrilled with an audience of nearly 40 – a mix of students (the majority) and some faculty and staff, at tables of 6-8 each. Discussion during each activity and reporting out in between were very energetic and engaged!

Making the point with games and strategies

- Online 'Factitious' game (http://factitious.augamestudio.com/#/)
- Word list and definitions
- CRAAP test worksheet (Juniata)
- News Bias Chart, ver. 3, by Vanessa Otero [on next slide]

We started with the "Factitious" online app – a game set up a little like an online dating app. Read the blurb, then swipe-right for True or left for Fake! The content hasn't been updated or expanded in over a year, but the game element made for good discussion opportunities.

We passed out a word list similar to the one of the beginning of my slides, and invited groups to come up with definitions and share them.

Many of you are no doubt familiar with the CRAAP Test – even with its flaws and limitations, it still supports the idea of interrogating a source intentionally for its academic value.

You may also have seen a version of Venessa Otero's 'News Bias Chart' [next slide]
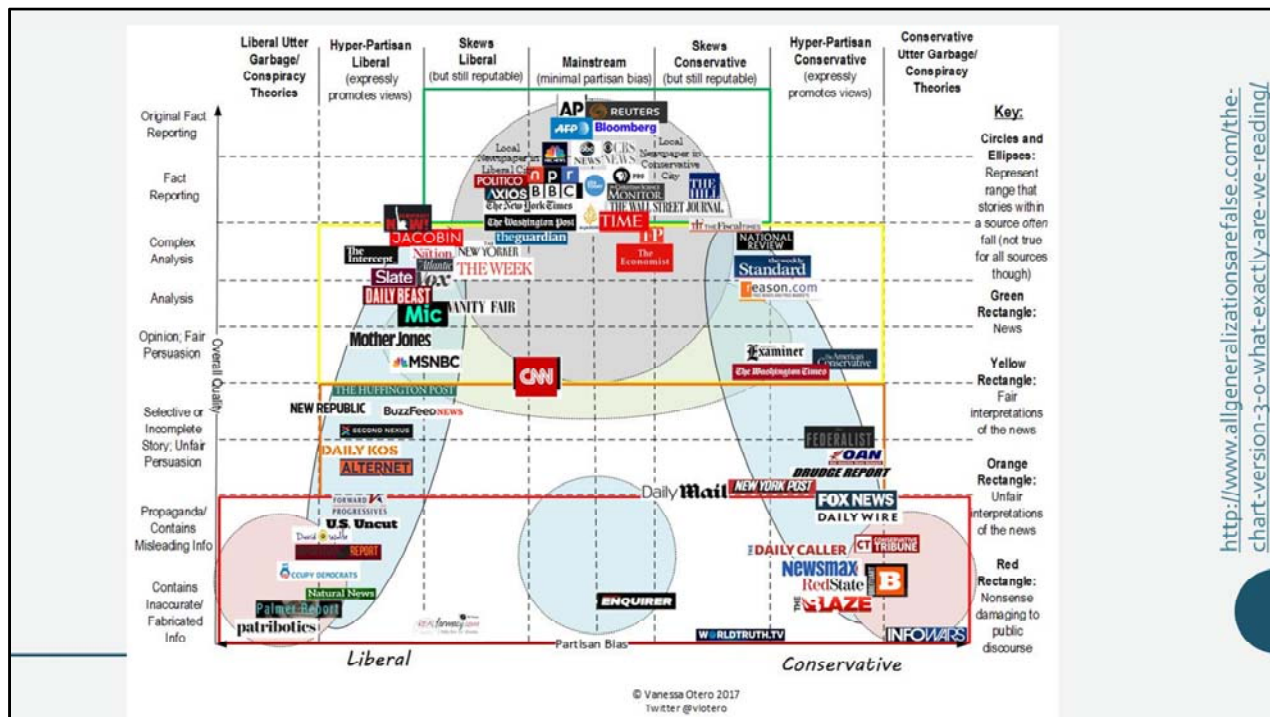
One exercise included handing out this chart, along with blank labeled grids. Groups at tables were invited to discuss where on the grid they would plot some of their usual go-to news sites, and why. The author explains in the blog post accompanying this Version 3 of her chart that what she has plotted out is only her opinion, and others may very well place sources differently. But she also explains the top to bottom dimension on the grid, (with the left/center/right horizontal axis being political and ideological), and how she has evolved her typology over three versions based on continued reading and listening to the media, and on feedback from readers of her earlier posts. It's informal and not "scientific," but it does provide some very useful perspective to students (and others) on how to think about the purpose and validity of different sources of information.

Outreach beyond the classroom: FTLC Faculty Learning Community, Fall 2017

Evaluating Resources, Misinformation, and Fake News: Promoting Advanced Information Literacy in the Classroom

- In a "post-truth" society how do we know what we "know" – how can we tell what news is "fake" and which facts are "alternative"? Moreover, how do we educate students to evaluate the information they encounter in a variety of contexts and disciplinary conversations?
- We'd like to explore approaches to teaching information literacy skills such as evaluation of information and understanding the nuances of authority and credibility, especially given the ubiquity of these issues in modern media and politics. Ideally, the group that comes together will represent a wide variety of disciplines, in order to enable mutual exploration of familiar and unfamiliar contexts in our discussions.

Facilitators: Debbie Morrow & Hazel McClure

https://www.gvsu.edu/ftlc/current-faculty-learning-communities-63.htm

2017 also offered some faculty-to-faculty exploration of fake news and information evaluation. For our scheduled in-library workshops an audience of 3-5 has long been the norm. So my colleague Hazel McClure and I submitted a proposal to the GVSU Faculty Teaching and Learning Center to facilitate a Faculty Learning Community based on exploring classroom strategies for teaching information evaluation. Our rationale was that gathering with 3-5 faculty for at least three 1-1/2 to 2-hour discussions grounded in common reading would maximize impact well beyond a conventional 60-minute workshop! In addition to the two of us co-facilitators, we four participants: three from the Writing Department and one from English. I would have been excited by a more cross-disciplinary group and the discussions that might arise. But as Liaison Librarian to the Writing and English departments, Hazel was able to deepen some excellent connections with the other group members. In particular, one member is also the Writing 150 Coordinator; she and Hazel have gone on to plan facilitation of another FLC specifically focusing on teaching information literacy to WRT 150 students in the current political and ideological climate. Another member of the group will also be teaching in GV's new Digital Studies minor – DS201, Digital Communities and Identities. She anticipates drawing from our reading and discussions as she prepares and embarks on that class.

Books we considered:

- **Speculative Fiction**

  Brown, B. & Radford, P. I. (Eds.). (2017). *Alternative Truths*. B Cubed Press.

- **Journalism & Media Studies**

  Gladstone, B. (2017). *The Trouble with Reality: A Rumination on Moral Panic in Our Time*. New York: Workman Publishing Company.

  Hemmer, N. (2016). *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- **Social & Evolutionary Psychology**

  Haidt, J. (2012). *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (1st ed.). New York: Pantheon.

- **Behavioral Neuroscience**

  Levitin, D. J. (2016). *A Field Guide to Lies: Critical Thinking in the Information Age*. New York, New York: Dutton.
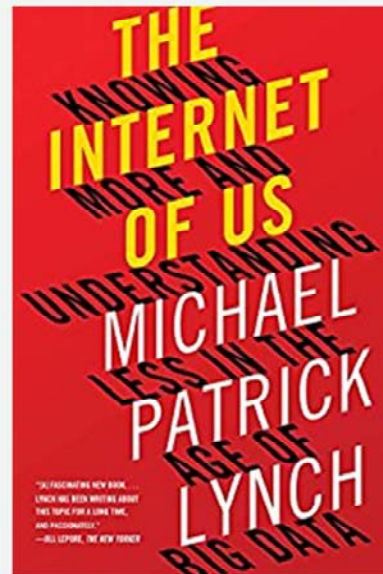
- **Philosophy**

  Lynch, M. P. (2016). *The Internet of Us: Knowing More and Understanding Less in the Age of Big Data* (1 edition). New York: Liveright.

Since we started our FLC proposal with a topic in mind already, we still had to decide on articles or a book that we wanted to use as a grounding or focus. We wanted something accessible and engaging, something that would offer us a better understanding of the reality that we each inhabit, of the world as it appears to each of us. As you can see, books we considered come from a variety of perspectives and disciplines, any one of which could be a fascinating approach to the topic at hand.

Reading for grounding:

"…our digital form of life has, indeed, increased transparency in some ways—but not in all. It has increased transparency for those who already desire and value it. But as the use of sock puppets and bots demonstrates, the ability of the Internet to allow deceptive communication leads in precisely the opposite direction" (p.85)

Michael Patrick Lynch, *The Internet of Us: Knowing More and Understanding Less in the Age of Big Data*. Liveright, 2016.

Hazel and I ultimately chose *The Internet of Us: Knowing More and Understanding Less in the Age of Big Data*, by philosophy professor and writer Michael Patrick Lynch. The author presents a very engaging and digestible overview of how we understand what it is to "know" something, from the times of ancient philosophers to the present. He discusses how the dimensions of "knowing" have changed over 3000 years, especially in the digital environment that has escalated in the last 3 decades. This book doesn't take any political or social position, allowing us to focus on technology as a significant factor in the information ocean we and our students swim in, regardless of any particular ideological biases one may bring to teaching, and to reading, research, and writing.

Outreach beyond the classroom: CLAS Teaching Roundtable, November 2017

The CLAS Teaching Roundtables bring together faculty from across the college for lunch, round table discussions, and sharing of ideas about effective teaching. Faculty members will present teaching techniques in small group settings to encourage discussion.

- Table 4. Fake news and evaluating sources? Evaluating Resources, Misinformation, and Fake News: Promoting Advanced Information Literacy in the Classroom (Debbie Morrow & Hazel McClure)

- In a "post-truth" society how do we know what we "know" – how can we tell what news is "fake" and which facts are alternative"? Moreover, what strategies can we use and refine to educate students to evaluate the information they encounter in a variety of contexts and disciplinary conversations? This session will explore approaches to teaching information literacy skills such as evaluation of information and understanding the nuances of authority and credibility, especially given the ubiquity of these issues in modern media and politics. Ideally, the group that comes together will represent a wide variety of disciplines, in order to enable mutual exploration of familiar and unfamiliar contexts in this roundtable discussion. This topic is essentially the basis for our Fall '17 Faculty Learning Community, minus the book the FLC is reading and discussing as well.

https://www.gvsu.edu/clas/clas-teaching-roundtables-264.htm

On the strength of our new identities as The Fake News Librarians, Hazel and I had one more outreach opportunity when we were invited in late fall of 2017 to facilitate a discussion table at the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences fall semester Teaching Roundtables event. Since that college encompasses disciplines across the spectrum, we were very excited to accept, anticipating an interestingly different discussion from the one we had with English and Writing Faculty in our FLC.

Our small group included:

- Kevin Strychar, **Marine biology**, Annis Water Resources Institute
- Pablo Mahave-Veglia, **Music**
- Ed Aboufadel, **Mathematics**
- Kin Ma, **Geography**
- Haiying Kong, **Health Communications**
- David Zwart, **History**
- Steven Peters, **Visual & Media Arts**
- Shaily Menon, (formerly) **Biology**

Eight faculty members signed up for our table, from disciplines ranging from the arts to the social sciences and natural sciences. I myself believe deeply in the value of liberal education, and have thrived working within and among the array of disciplinary cultures at a liberal arts-based institution. For a stimulating 2-hour lunch-and-discuss moment, our group was able to share among us our various experiences of students and critical evaluation of information, both specific to their subjects and as a core life skill.
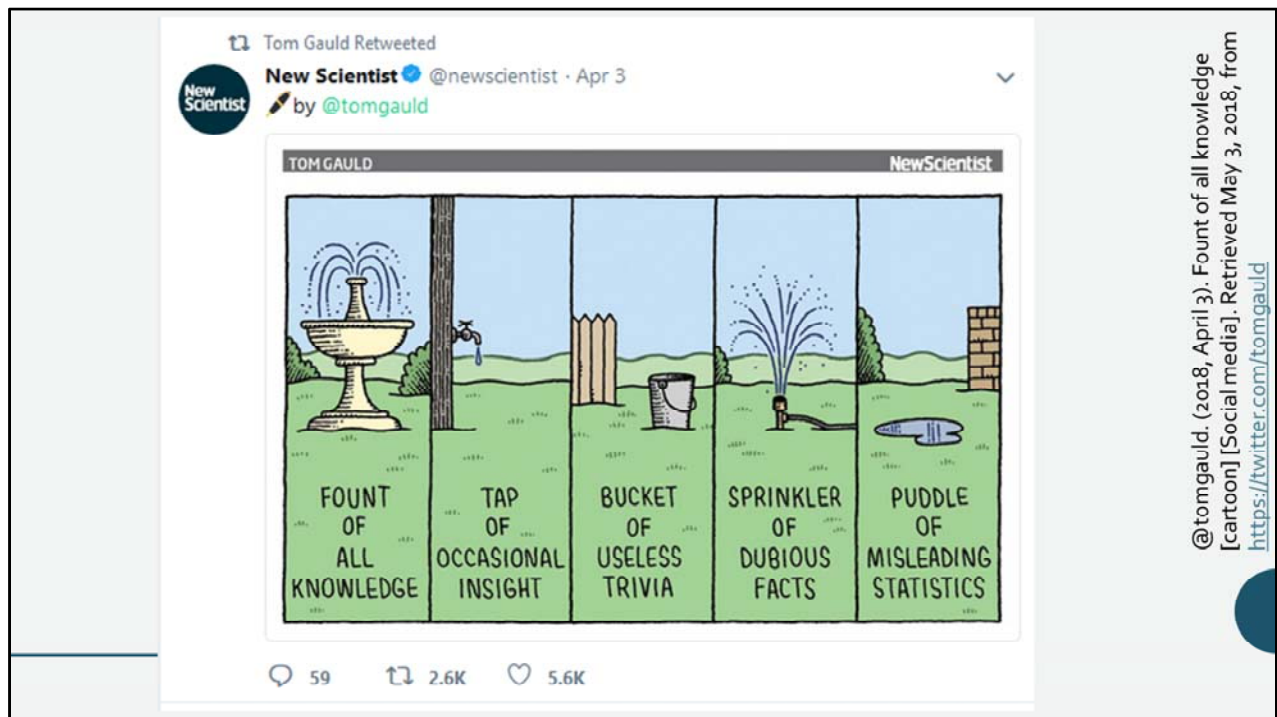
At this point I will conclude my remarks with this cartoon. Somehow it relates to information literacy and our "fake news" world. How might you use it in your information literacy teaching and outreach? Please discuss.

Questions/
Discussion?

Thank you!
Debbie Morrow
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Abstract

In a "post-truth" society how do we sustain an informed citizenry, the underpinning of our democracy? What news is "fake" and which facts are "alternative"? Crucially, how do we educate students to evaluate the information they encounter in a variety of contexts and disciplines? How can librarians take the lead in teaching that "authority is constructed and contextual"? This session offers some ideas culled from outreach and contact opportunities around campus during the last year.