

# FAKE NEWS

## Journalism education combats distorted truths

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There are not too many things the entire country sees eye-to-eye on when it comes to our new president. We don't necessarily agree on his cabinet choices, we don't necessarily agree on his governing style, and we don't necessarily agree on his policies or ideologies. But the one thing that we can all agree on, President Donald Trump has managed to bring the entire country together in recognizing the concept of "fake news."

This trendy theory of fake news is also known as post-truth, alt-truth, alternative news, alternative facts, and out-right, to name a few. The concept has been used so widely that the Oxford Dictionaries declared "post-truth" the 2016 word of the year.

Fake news is not a new notion, though — but social media, online blogs and amateur e-publications (built with online programs that help create and host professional looking websites) have enabled its quick circulation.

An early December Pew Research Center survey revealed that approximately two-in-three adults in the U.S. believe that made-up news is having an impact in our society and that it creates confusion about current events. The same survey found that one-in-four Americans has shared a fake news story — either intentionally or not.

People fabricate fake news in order to gain followers by distorting the truth while creating an environment of distrust with baseless facts — it is, in one word, propaganda.

And while we know fake news is exactly that, fake and propaganda, and that it is misrepresenting reality, we are still fascinated by it and we continue to click, even on that link with the most ludicrous headline. So if we know the news story is absurd, why do we keep on clicking?

We click because these stories amuse us. And when it comes to politics, we read and watch political satire as entertainment.

"Satire is arguably the most prevalent variety of fake news and arguably the best studied. The mental processing of satire is unique compared to other types of information, because it requires audience par-

ticipation," communications psychologist Dannagal Young said in a PBS interview last December.

But fake news can be dangerous and is not always meant to entertain. According to Young's research at the University of Delaware, these fake images stay embedded in our brains. "When you have exposure to fake news or satire, or any content at all, as soon as those constructs have been accessed and brought into working memory, they are there. You can't un-think them."

The amount of stories on how to teach our students to discern between factual and fake news are crowding educational journals and newspapers. Stories that talk about the different types of fake news, and how to identify them, are delivered weekly into our inboxes. Information literacy classes are being established at many schools and universities. And in January, the California Legislature introduced a bill that required the state to introduce a new course on Civic Online Reasoning, geared to teach 7th to 12th graders to distinguish between real and fake news.

And here is where journalism teachers, now more than ever, should feel good about the teaching we have been doing — we teach our students how to find relevant and credible information, conduct interviews, and write factual and unbiased news stories. So, this begs the question: Are journalism students better prepared than their non-journalism peers to discern between factual and fictional news?

If we have been doing our jobs correctly, and our students have been practicing what we have been preaching all along, our high school journalists know that being inquisitive and doing the proper investigation to get to the facts is the only way to get to the bare essence of a story.

I recently sat with my advanced journalism class to get their perspective on whether or not they felt they had an advantage over non-journalism students when it comes to recognizing fake news. They all nodded in unison. They didn't even think twice about their synchronized nod.

So how can they feel so certain about this? Because they read stories the same

way that they write them — with an analytical perspective.

"As news writers we are always trying to find the counter argument, the other side," my editor-in-chief said during our conversation, "and that helps me broaden my perspective in understanding other people's perspectives that don't necessarily align with mine."

My copy editor chimed in, "As journalists we are being trained to view people from different perspectives because there is usually more to a story than you might see on the surface."

In other words, they are getting their news by reading multiple news sources, evaluating the information and making an educated analysis before they arrive to any conclusions — this is really nothing new to them — this is how they prepare when they write their own news stories, this is the way they have been taught to search for the facts.

"It is important to get information from multiple sources," my copy editor said. "I try to search other stories that would corroborate the facts to ensure that I am getting accurate news. And if it seems that it could possibly be not legitimate, I read it with a grain of salt in mind and know this could just be one side of the story, or an incomplete one."

Since I was on the subject of fake news and high school journalism with my students, I asked them how, if at all, their news writing has changed since President Trump took office.

My managing editor, who is a gifted writer, said, "I am seeing stories more from the reader's perspective now. Having the spotlight on journalists has really helped me develop myself as a writer because I am focusing a lot more on getting every single perspective — I'm [more conscientious of] getting all sides to the story."

Regardless of the state of the media, the entire country will probably never come to an agreement when it comes to President Trump. But the amount of learning our student journalists are acquiring due to this phenomenon is something we all can agree on.