

News Literacy Lecturer's Background Pack -

Lecture Title: Truth & Verification

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1. Newsweek reports that Quran is flushed down toilet at Guantanamo.

Original Story published in the May 6th, 2007 Issue of Newsweek. 15 deaths are reported in the protests. The uproar started in Pakistan.

Newsweek's story about controversy

"How a Fire Broke Out: The story of a sensitive NEWSWEEK report about alleged abuses at Guantánamo Bay and a surge of deadly unrest in the Islamic world." By Evan Thomas

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7857407/site/newsweek/>

THIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN REMOVED BY NEWSWEEK!!!!!!

2. Michael Shermer

"Dr. Michael Shermer is the Founding Publisher of Skeptic magazine, the Executive Director of the Skeptics Society, a monthly columnist for Scientific American, the host of the Skeptics Distinguished Science Lecture Series at Caltech, and Adjunct Professor at Claremont Graduate University."

<http://www.michaelshermer.com/about-michael/>

3. The rumors of Sen. Giffords' death have been greatly exaggerated.

A decent timeline of the early reporting, who said what when:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/10/media-outlets-apologize-a_n_806603.html

ABC Plays it cool amidst conflicting reports: <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/video/arizona-congresswoman-shot-12571482>

ABC Identifies conflicting reports about whether or not Giffords is alive:

<http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/video/rep-giffords-shot-grocery-store-event-12571810>

<http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/video/arizona-congresswoman-survives-shooting-12572312>

NPR executive editor Dick Meyer apologizes for the previous day's false report of Giffords's death: <http://www.npr.org/2011/01/09/132785205/editors-note-on-nprs-giffords-coverage?ft=1&f=1001>

summary of the coverage and the outlet's mistake by NPR's ombudsman with the quote:

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/ombudsman/2011/01/11/132812196/nprs-giffords-mistake-re-learning-the-lesson-of-checking-sources>

NPR's "On the Media" on "The Rush to Report" & how they got it wrong <http://www.onthemedial.org/transcripts/2011/01/21/07>

Another short but interesting "On the Media" story about bad sourcing

<http://www.onthemedial.org/transcripts/2011/01/21/08>

“Provisional Truth” (with a dash of Transparency) – contributed by J. Anzalone

Arizona Public Media News Director was the first to report from the scene (his wife had been there and alerted him to the shooting). Michaels reports seeing police, ambulances, "at least 5 bodies" on the ground, Congresswoman Gifford "slumped" on the ground with an "apparent" gunshot wound. He saw her placed in the ambulance and taken away. His wife was a witness, and she told him about the rapid firing and the two men who subdued the alleged shooter. At this point, he could not confirm how many were wounded (other than Giffords, whom he himself saw being taken away in an ambulance) or dead. This early in the story, it's very much in development.

NPR later reports that Giffords died from her wound, Fox and CNN echo NPR's report (though Associated Press and MSNBC refrain from reporting the congresswoman's death, which they could not confirm). The Pima County Sheriff, an authoritative source, informs the public that Giffords survived the attack.

The number of victims changes throughout the day: 12:31 Fox News reported at least 12 shot. 12:37 NBC confirms the death of a judge (he is not yet named). 12:56 Pima County Police Dept. reports 18 shot, 6 dead. 12:59 NBC reports that Judge Roll was the victim. 3:30 surgeons report on Giffords, express optimism about her condition. Also give info on 5 victims in critical condition, 4 stable, and a dead girl (who turns out to be Christina Taylor Green). 6:02 CNN reports that Gabe Zimmerman was among those killed.

Info about the suspect also trickles out throughout the day: 12:43 MCNBC reports the alleged shooter was in custody (no name given). A few minutes later, 12:49, Jared Lee Loughner identified as the suspect.

The day after, details become more concrete. NPR reports in the morning that 6 were dead, 13 wounded. We learn about the individual victims, the alleged shooter, and the men and women who would be called heroes for subduing the suspect and coming to the aid of the victims. On the day after, but particularly in the ensuing days and weeks, the story shifts to political and legislative implications (Sarah Palin chimes in, gun laws discussed, incendiary political rhetoric debated).

Following the story over time thus yields: more information on the people involved, the suspect (who is he? why would he commit such an act? what's his history? does he have mental issues? was he politically motivated? did he know the congresswoman?); victims (who were they? what were they doing at the Safeway that day?), and heroes (who were they? what did they do during the shooting?); a significant correction regarding the survival of Congresswoman Giffords as well as updates from authoritative sources on her condition; a shift in coverage from the incident itself to its larger political and legislative implications.

8. Winston Churchill. 30 November 1874 – 24 January 1965

He was educated at Harrow and the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, and was sent to India with a cavalry commission in 1895. He won early fame as a war correspondent, covering the Cuban revolt against Spain (1895), and British campaigns in the Northwest Frontier of India (1897), the Sudan (1898) and South Africa during the Boer War (1899). Churchill had authored five books by the age of 26. His daring escape from a Boer prison camp in 1899 made him a national hero and ushered him into the House of Commons, where his career spanned 60 years. He led the British nation on two separate occasions as prime minister, the first time during the Second World War.

<http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/biography/biography>

9. Mark Twain November 30, 1835 – April 21, 1910

Twain began to gain fame when his story, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" appeared in the New York Saturday Press on November 18, 1865. Twain's first book, "The Innocents Abroad," was published in 1869, "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" in 1876, and "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" in 1885. He wrote 28 books and numerous short stories, letters and sketches.

<http://www.cmgww.com/historic/twain/>

10. Lewis Carroll 27 January 1832 – 14 January 1898

Many of Lewis Carroll's philosophies were based on games. His interest in logic came purely from the playful nature of its principle rather than its uses as a tool. He primarily wrote comic fantasies and humorous verse that was often very childlike. Carroll published his novel Alice's Adventures in Wonderland in 1865, followed by Through the Looking Glass in 1872. Alice's story began as a piece of extemporaneous whimsy meant to entertain three little girls on a boating trip in 1862. Both of these works were considered children's novels that were satirical in nature and in exemplification of Carroll's wit. Also famous is Carroll's poem "Jabberwocky," in which he created nonsensical words from word combinations

<http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/78>

11. Truthiness: When did Stephen Colbert first air the episode with this new "word?"

"Truthiness is a "truth" that a person claims to know intuitively "from the gut" without regard to evidence, logic, intellectual examination, or facts.

American television comedian Stephen Colbert revealed this definition as the subject of a segment called "The Wørd" during the pilot episode of his political satire program The Colbert Report on October 17, 2005."

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truthiness>

"The Truth Of Truthiness" By Sean Alfano and Dick Meyer, CBS News Opinion

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/12/12/opinion/meyer/main2250923.shtml>

"Webster's has now sanctioned truthiness with two definitions: "truth that comes from the gut, not books" and "the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts of facts known to be true." At the end of his truthiness skit, Colbert says, "I know some of you may not trust your gut, yet. But, with my help, you will. The truthiness is, anyone can read the news to you. I promise to feel the news 'at' you."

Colbert actually performed this routine on his very first show in October 2005, proof, if any is needed, that this guy is a zeitgeist vessel in a big way. He has earned deconstruction."

12. Newsday coverage of Hofstra Rape: Newsday behind firewall. Stories were not found by google.

“4 Held in rape of Hofstra student” Sept. 15, 2009

“Fear and Anger on Campus” Sept. 16, 2009

“DA: She Made It Up” Sept. 17, 2009

“Why Her Story Changed” Sept. 18, 2009

13. Change in BP Oil Spill Estimates

“White House relied too much on BP, blocked spill info” By Tom Doggett, Reuters (10/6/10)

<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6953Q720101006>

“The Obama administration was over-optimistic about BP's ability to handle the oil spill after the company's Gulf well exploded in April and blocked government spill estimates that might have prompted quicker action, an investigative panel said on Wednesday.”

“The revelations from the National Oil Spill Commission, whose members were appointed by President Barack Obama, could be embarrassing as Obama's Democratic Party struggles to retain control of the U.S. Congress in the elections on November 2.”

“The commission also criticized the White House for blocking early worst case estimates of the oil spill, which it said may have affected how fast resources were assembled to fight it.”

“The panel said the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) wanted to release some of its worst-case spill models on the accident in late April or early May. But the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) blocked the move to make the information public.”

14. “Mozart may have died of strep throat complications” by Shahreen Abedin (8/17/09)

http://articles.cnn.com/2009-08-17/health/mozart.strep.throat_1_strep-throat-scarlet-fever-strep-infection?_s=PM:HEALTH

Why this new theory? What new information is it based upon?

The theory draws upon new information from Vienna's death registry, which had not yet been analyzed for clues surrounding Mozart's death. The registry provided context; by looking at the pattern of deaths at the time and combining it with information about Mozart's symptoms, researchers could get a clearer picture of the causes of death than they could have by looking at the symptoms alone. Researchers found that in 1791, there was a spike in edema-related deaths among younger men, possibly because of an epidemic of strep throat. The evidence is not conclusive, however, as there is no evidence to show that Mozart suffered with strep throat during the last weeks of his life. Nor were there any signs of the edema-causing condition APSGN, which itself is caused by strep throat.

15. “Study Concludes Beethoven Died From Lead Poisoning” by Rick Weiss (12/6/05)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/05/AR2005120501937.html>

How does study come to this conclusion?

In this study, researchers focused an extremely powerful X-ray beam on six of Ludwig van Beethoven's hairs and a few pieces of his skull. The X-ray, which can detect the specific signatures of different atoms, revealed a high level of lead atoms in both sample types. The hair samples showed 60 parts of lead atoms per million, which was about 100 times higher than normal. While the bone fragments also showed a large amount of lead atoms, the researchers weren't able to get a precise number.

16. CNN projects Al Gore winner

CNN's review of what went wrong

“Television's Performance on Election Night 2000: A Report for CNN”

By Joan Konner, James Risser, and Ben Wattenberg

January 29, 2001

<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/ALLPOLITICS/stories/02/02/cnn.report/cnn.pdf>

The 2000 presidential election, involving candidates G.W. Bush and A. Gore, was one of the closest in American history. The closeness of the race, leading many to regard the results as contentious, was exacerbated by the way the election results were covered. The election was held on Nov. 7, 2000, and on the night of the 7th, CNN, ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox News, and the Associated press called the state of Florida for Mr. Gore. Florida was a key state in the election and had this call been correct, would have been a significant boon to Mr. Gore's prospect for the presidency. This report was retracted later that night (personal note: after many voters had gone to bed, which resulted in a rude awakening the next morning). The five television networks (but not the AP) later called Florida for Mr. Bush, which tipped the electoral college tally in Bush's favor, and, again, if this report was true, meant Bush had won the presidency. This report, also, would later be retracted (with an official decision eventually being made by election officials in Bush's favor 36 days later). Before the report was retracted, however, Mr. Gore called Mr. Bush to concede.

While the errors made by these news organizations were within the realm of what is legally permissible, the fact that their reporting (specifically their errors in reporting) influenced the events they were reporting on; namely, the election results. The authors of this report identify a destructive environment of competition to report the story first (or at least not be left behind and report last), which functioned as a more powerful motivator than reporting the story accurately.

17. “Pluto Is Demoted to ‘Dwarf Planet’” by Dennis Overbye (8/24/06)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/24/science/space/25pluto.html>

“In the new solar system, there are eight planets, at least three dwarf planets and tens of thousands of so-called “smaller solar system bodies,” like comets and asteroids.”

“For now, the dwarf planets include, besides Pluto, Ceres, the largest asteroid, and an object known as UB 313, nicknamed Xena, that is larger than Pluto and, like it, orbits out beyond Neptune in a zone of icy debris known as the Kuiper Belt. But there are dozens more potential dwarf-planets known in that zone, planetary scientists say, and the number in that category could quickly swell.”

18. Baseball Controversy

“Blown call costs Galarraga perfect game in 9th”, By Larry Lage, AP Sports Writer, 6/3/10
<http://sports.yahoo.com/mlb/recap?gid=300602106>

“Umpire Jim Joyce emphatically called Cleveland’s Jason Donald(notes) safe, the Detroit Tigers argued and a chorus of groans and boos echoed in Comerica Park.

Then Joyce emphatically said he was wrong and later, in tears, hugged Galarraga and apologized.

“It was the biggest call of my career, and I kicked the (stuff) out of it,” Joyce said, looking and sounding distraught as he paced in the umpires’ locker room. “I just cost that kid a perfect game.”

“I thought he beat the throw. I was convinced he beat the throw, until I saw the replay,” he said after the Tigers’ 3-0 win.”

“It’s rare for an umpire to acknowledge a mistake and, in one of the few sports that relies heavily on the human eye, it’s certain to prompt a push for Major League Baseball to use increased replays.”

19. “U.S. grenade may have killed British hostage, PM says” by CNN Wire Staff, 10/12/10
<http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/10/11/uk.afghanistan.hostage.death/index.html?hpt=T1>

“NATO and British officials had said earlier she was killed by her captors, who detonated an explosive.

But Cameron said Monday that statements made about Norgrove's death over the weekend were "highly likely to have been incorrect," although they were made "in good faith."

The initial report on the rescue mission by the troops who carried it out did not mention throwing a grenade, but a follow-up report "raised a lot of questions about what killed" Norgrove, U.S. Navy Capt. Gary Kirchner told CNN after Cameron spoke.

The mission commander called Petraeus as soon as he learned a grenade had been thrown, Kirchner said, without naming the commander.”

20. “Hevesi Pleads Guilty in Pension Case” By Danny Hakim and William K. Rashbaum

Published: October 7, 2010

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/08/nyregion/08hevesi.html>

“Former State Comptroller Alan G. Hevesi, once considered a leading voice on corporate governance and ethics, stood before a judge on Thursday and calmly explained how he took part in a sprawling corruption scheme involving New York State’s \$125 billion pension fund while serving as its sole trustee.”

“Mr. Hevesi, 70, said in State Supreme Court in Manhattan that he had approved a \$250 million pension investment in exchange for nearly \$1 million in benefits from a California businessman, Elliott Broidy.”

“Still, it was unclear whether Mr. Hevesi will face any jail time; the count, an “E” felony, does not require it. The judge, Lewis Bart Stone, set sentencing for Dec. 16.”

He could face up to 4 years.

21. Wikileaks Release of Video in Iraq When AP Journalist is Killed

Let's get the latest on that controversy. What did they know? Did WikiLeaks edit the tape honorably...Have they been punished, etc...

There is very little coverage by mainstream media. PFC Bradley Manning is being held in a brig at Quantico Marine Corp base. He is facing up to 52 years of imprisonment. There were rallies in 18 cities across the U.S., Australia and Canada to support Manning the weekend of Sept. 25, 2010. The military has claimed the cockpit video doesn't give the full story because it only shows what is happening in one location. They claim there was insurgent activity on a block close by. The video contains the helicopter gun man joking, pleading for permission to fire, firing at the wounded, firing at unarmed men trying to help the wounded, and in the aftermath finding children inside a van that was fired upon. The soldier in the helicopter mistaken a camera for a gun. But later, there are two men that do appear to have guns. Two Iraqis working for the AP, a photographer and a driver, were killed.

“US intelligence analyst arrested over security leaks” 7 June 2010

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10254072>

“The video from Iraq shows a US helicopter strike in July 2007 in which about 12 people died. On the transmission, US soldiers on the ground can be heard establishing that there are two child casualties and agreeing to take them to hospital.

The Pentagon has not disputed the authenticity of the video but has been working to trace the source.

At the time, the US military said the helicopters were engaged in combat operations against a hostile force.”

In the article below, Manning claimed his motive was to help people make informed decisions and stir up public debate. Daniel Ellsberg voices support for Manning.

“Alleged Army Whistleblower Felt ‘Isolated’: Bradley Manning Said To Have Leaked Sensitive Information Because He Wanted People To ‘See the Truth’” AP
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/07/07/national/main6653736.shtml>

“Wikileaks in April posted a video clips shot from a cockpit in 2007, of excited, laughing U.S. troops gunning down a group of men that included a Reuters news photographer and his driver. An internal military investigation concluded the troops acted appropriately, despite having mistaken camera equipment for weapons.

The case has drawn comparisons to Daniel Ellsberg's leak 40 years ago of the Pentagon Papers, a top-secret history of the Vietnam War. And it has bolstered perceptions that the Obama administration, despite a stated policy of open government, is as determined as its predecessors with keeping secrets.”

“His motive, according to the chat logs: "I want people to see the truth ... because without information, you cannot make informed decisions as a public." Manning wrote that he hoped to provoke worldwide discussion, debates and reform, according to the chat logs.”

“Ellsberg said he considers Manning and Assange heroes for publicizing information the government wanted suppressed. He said Manning's alleged leak was possibly more significant than his own, which exposed the secret expansion of the Vietnam War.

"He is the first person in 39 years to do something comparable to what I did - and really better than what I did, because it's current," Ellsberg said.

Both Ellsberg and Gabriel Schoenfeld, an author who supports cracking down on leakers, said that the Obama administration has gone further than the Bush White House in pursuing alleged whistleblowers.”

“WikiLeaks posts video of 'US military killings' in Iraq”
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8603938.stm>

“The video shows a street in Baghdad and a group of about eight people, whom the helicopter pilots identify as armed insurgents.

The transmissions says of one of the individuals: "He's got an RPG [rocket-propelled grenade]. I'm going to fire."

After a voice on the transmission urges the pilot to "light 'em all up", the individuals on the street are shot by the gunship's cannon.

A few minutes later a van drives to the scene, and its occupants appear to start picking up a wounded person.

It, too, is fired upon. Altogether, around 12 people die.

'Hostile force'

The transmission continues: "Looks like we've got some slight movement from the van that was engaged. Looks like a kid."

US soldiers on the ground establish there are two child casualties and agree to take them to a hospital, according to the transmission.

"Well it's their fault for bringing their kids into a battle," says a voice.

Two journalists working for Reuters were killed on the day the incident took place in July 2007."

From a blog on the Guardian

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/greenslade/2010/sep/20/wikileaks-usa>

Posted by Roy Greenslade Monday 20 September 2010

"Rallies will be staged in 21 US cities this week calling for the release of Bradley Manning, the soldier accused of leaking military secrets to the public.

Manning allegedly passed on the video known as "collateral murder" that showed American troops shooting civilians from a helicopter in Iraq in July 2007. The dead included two employees of the Reuters news agency.

Though the actions depicted in the video amount to violations of the Geneva Conventions (aka war crimes), none of the soldiers have been prosecuted.

Manning, who faces 52 years in prison, is also being investigated for allegedly leaking the "Afghan war diary" documents that were posted on Wikileaks and reported by The Guardian, the New York Times and Der Spiegel.

Marjorie Cohn, a professor at the Thomas Jefferson School of Law, argues that if Manning did what he is accused of doing, he should be honoured as a hero for exposing war crimes."