

What is this course about?

We wrote this recitation guide to start, without preamble, an exercise that gets them right into the heart of the course. Hand out a report of your choice (Err on the side of provocative: “Ground Zero Mosque” or the Tucson shooting or a WikiLeaks story.

Then get started.

I. WHY NEWS LITERACY MATTERS: A warm-up (10 minutes)

The News Consumer's dilemma: How do I know what to believe?

Be very firm about not turning this recitation into a discussion of the merits of the Mosque, or Sarah Palin's crosshairs or Julian Assange. Rather, you're just trying to crack open the door on the idea that news consumers need some skills in order to sort out conflicting information, sometimes even in the same story. How does a news consumer decide what to believe?

-Ask students to identify the opposing views. Write the source and the gist of her/his remarks on the board.

-Ask students what viewpoint is missing?

-Ask students to talk about their impressions of the credibility of each source: Credible? Knowledgeable?

-Follow up with questions about how students arrived at those evaluations of the sources. Now switch gears.

-How is the information in this story actionable? Can it be used to make a decision, take an action or make a judgment?

-Ask in what ways will they use the information in their civic life?

Now at this point you say Welcome to News Literacy. These questions are the point of this course: making sure you know how to find the reliable information you need for the civic parts of your life.

II. COURSE OVERVIEW:

This course will help you become a better news consumer by teaching you to:

- distinguish between legitimate news and other kinds of info.
- gauge reliability and credibility of news reports (broadcast, print or internet)
- understand the mission of the press
- understand how news decisions are made
- to not be manipulated and deceived by Internet sources.
- become a responsible news consumer

Students should have brought paper copy of syllabus. Review it together.

(Or, open it from Blackboard and show it on the projector.)

Some sections to emphasize and/or elaborate on:

- ✓ Intended Outcomes – relate back to discussion of attitudes
- ✓ Required texts
- ✓ Attendance policy
- ✓ Assignments – explain how SafeAssign works
- ✓ Plagiarism
- ✓ Grading policies, including curve on assignments

Check for confusion. Emphasize they need to go to Blackboard and get comfortable with it.

Stress importance of doing assignments and attending classes. Some students do well on the tests but not in the course due to missed assignments or too many absences.

Take attendance.

III. BLACKBOARD:

In preparation for this recitation, instructor should log onto Blackboard and find where vital course parts are so that you can explain to freshmen how to find them:

- Readings – explain digital textbook
- Assignments and SafeAssign submissions
- Quizzes
- Gradebook, inc. how to retrieve graded assignments

Stress importance of checking Blackboard frequently for announcements and assignments.

Then, if time permits...

IV. RETURN TO ATTITUDES ON THE PRESS:

ASK: What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear "the News Media"? Write it down.

Ask students to read their reactions. Write them on the board. Probe how and why they came to those conclusions.

- Trace declining confidence
 - cite "Speaking of the Press," quotes for historic context
 - cite PEW studies
- Compare student reactions to overall adult attitude
- ASK: Is the skepticism justified? Why?
- Possible reasons for negative responses:

- kill the messenger
- news “fatigue” (24/7 cycle)
- political polarization (*audience bias*)
- a few bad apples
- press irresponsibility and mistakes
- growing confusion between “media” and “news media”

You’ll make up your own minds by the end of the semester. But...

Starting today, put away your assumptions.

Base your conclusions on evidence and critical thinking.

Support your arguments.

ASK: Any of you ever had an encounter with the press? Tell us about it.

Was it a positive or negative experience? Why?

Prompt discussion of the role of the press and public perceptions.

Segue into student perceptions

ASK: Other than the rare personal encounter with the press, what informs your perceptions?

TV or film depictions of journalists?

Probe the stereotypes.

So how much of student attitude is informed not by fictional images but by actually consuming news?

Either way, lead discussion on what news most interests them, where and how they consume it, and how often they seek it out.

News Matters: Touch on some of the big stories of the summer – Gulf oil spill, floods in Pakistan, etc. – and discuss why a Stony Brook college student should care about those and other stories.

ASK: So what news stories are most important to you? Why?

What news stories seem least important? Why?

V. ASSIGNMENTS:

READING: CPJ readings on the website and the CPJ homework assignment.