Finding truth when bombarded with ‘fake news’

Autumn Walter | Cigar Amanda Izenstark, associate professor of University Libraries, explains the "C.R.A.A.P." test to help individuals determine which information is legitimate.

Thursday, March 30, 2017

By Olivia Perreault
Managing Editor

With the internet cluttered with more information than ever before, it can sometimes be difficult to differentiate between what information is real and what is not.

Professors from the University of Rhode Island formed a panel to discuss “Finding Reliable Information in a ‘Post-Fact’ World” in Chaffee Hall last Thursday.

“Facts are important but increasingly hard to find,” Karen Stein, English professor and affiliated professor of gender and women’s studies, said. She started off the panel with a slideshow, and displayed the website entitled: MartinLutherKing.org. Although it would seem that the site is about Martin Luther King Jr., it is actually a hate site run by white nationalists. Stein explained how not everything is clear-cut online.

Amanda Izenstark, associate professor of University Libraries, talked about how it’s imperative to evaluate everything and use critical thinking when determining whether a site is truthful or not. She explained the “C.R.A.A.P.” test, which says to evaluate currency, relevance, accuracy, authority and purpose of a site. Andree Rathemacher, professor of University Libraries, discussed “fake results” in economic research and said that often, certain journals are biased to publish positive results.

Journalism Department Chair John Pantalone delved into the difference between false and fake news found online. He explained that fake news is a deliberate effort to mislead readers, while false news is incorrect information presented by accident. He encouraged people to know what they are watching or reading and choose trusted, recognizable sources. In order to avoid viewing fake news, Pantalone suggested to watch out for public bloggers and sites that don’t tell you who they are upfront. He said he is optimistic because people are becoming more aware of fakery and the public is more concerned about the news they’re viewing after the most recent presidential election.

In terms of the election, Political Science Department Chair Brian Kruegur talked about “why we got the 2016 election polls wrong.” He said people were overconfident in poll aggregation and prediction models, although these aggregator models failed to account for added uncertainty. Information was out there to prove the current outcome, yet he believes people didn’t look hard enough. Sociology and Anthropology professor Christine Zozula also touched upon this in her presentation, claiming that maybe she “lived in a bubble during the election.”

After Donald Trump won the presidency, Zozula decided to see where Trump supporters were receiving their news, just to see what the “other side” was viewing. After turning to Reddit, she did not find positive results, but instead, found false news.

“I went in[to the research] earnestly, and didn’t come out with a whole lot of hope,” Zozula said.

Stein said that she originally started the panel, but more people became eager to participate. She believes it’s important for people to be aware of fake news online because there’s a lot of misinformation about certain issues within the country, and you “have to know what the truth is before you start to do something about it.”

She recalled the quote, “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty,” and said, “It seems that’s even more of the case right now.”
There will be similar panels taking place in the fall semester, including one regarding how the government works and possibly one on the environment. For more information regarding news literacy and how to be a responsible information consumer, visit http://uri.libguides.com/c.php?g=629177&p=4392402/.