Café Salon #3

The sociological and humanistic problem of “fake news” as it applies to all subjects, including scientific research and theories in the public sphere

Facilitators: Andrée Rathemacher, Amanda Izenstark

Ballroom front tables

Questions to consider in your discussions:

- What would it look like for URI to take leadership in this area?
- How does work in this topic open up research/scholarly activity across disciplines? Who is already working on this topic?
- What is the right breadth of areas to be covered?
- What are the University’s strengths that would build out this topic well?
- What areas of the topic would be a main focus for URI?

Goals of the conversation:

- To come from various perspectives and disciplines to collaborate to address the session topic
- Build on existing research and scholarly strengths, propose how the topic could be addressed; what we would have to offer to it?
- Come to consensus on the areas of focus for this topic to continue exploring together in the future

We’ll leave enough time to come to consensus on the main areas of focus to continue proposing and exploring together in the future, probably 20-30 minutes to start attempting consensus.

First, let’s get to know each other. Please share your name and your department.
The charge of “fake news” is a political weapon to delegitimize the position / point of view of a particular group.

While charges of “fake news” are a tool of authoritarians, the idea gains traction from a broader distrust of established sources of information such as the media, universities, and government.

This distrust is the result of:

- overwhelming levels of access to information online
- the removal of traditional filters for information
- Widespread awareness of malfeasance, conflicts of interest, compromised professional practices
- lack of information literacy and ability to critically evaluate information

As a research topic for URI, we could look at “fake news” from a variety of angles.

There is information and media literacy -- how to train students and others in critical thinking and evaluation of information and claims made in media. => Harrington School of Communication and Media, with GSLIS and Communication Studies and Journalism.

There is the sociological phenomenon of charges of fake news, which could be of interest to Political Science and Sociology/Anthropology.

From a scientific perspective, we have the Metcalf Institute for Marine & Environmental Reporting which conducts science training for journalists and communication training for scientists, to for more accuracy in communication of science to the public.

And there is also a link to the reproducibility crisis, characterized in 2005 by John Ioannidis with the statement that “most claimed research findings are false.” Given that the reproducibility crisis is the result of bad incentives within the academy and closed systems of research communication, is there a role for URI to play here, as well?

With that, open up to discussion...
Questions to get things started: [Amanda]

What’s going on in your discipline regarding fake news?

What’s going on in your discipline regarding reproducibility?

**What would it look like for URI to take leadership in this area?**

- How does work in this topic open up research/scholarly activity across disciplines? Who is already working on this topic?
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Finally

1. Building on existing research and scholarly strengths, propose how the topic could be addressed; what we would have to offer to it?

2. What could URI do to research the topic of fake news?
   a. What could your school/college/department bring to this topic?