Chapter 11
Using Social Media to Enhance Information Literacy:
The VCU Libraries #VetYourSources Campaign

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ABSTRACT

Academic librarians have long been committed to developing their students' abilities to assess the quality and credibility of various types of information. A combination of increasing public discourse about evaluating every day information and librarians' commitment to empowering students to be responsible consumers of information led Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) librarians to develop the #VetYourSources campaign, focused on enhancing undergraduate students' skills for evaluating information in academic and day-to-day contexts through social media. This chapter details the design, planning, and execution of the campaign, as well as future directions.

INTRODUCTION

Librarians in higher education devote notable time and energy to developing their students' abilities to assess the quality and credibility of various types of information. The importance of evaluating sources as a learning outcome was clearly articulated in the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL's) *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000), and continues to be prominently featured in the new *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2017). In the wake of the 2016 United States presidential campaign and election, the American public has been more attuned to accuracy, misinformation, and bias in news media outlets than at any time in recent history. As a result, librarians have been well positioned over the

past several years to use their expertise to educate students and members of the general public on how to evaluate news and other types of information. A search of the academic library literature quickly reveals librarians' efforts to enhance students' skills in evaluating information through instruction, outreach, events, and online learning (Batchelor, 2017; Burkhardt, 2017; Johnson, 2019; Musgrove, Powers, Rebar, & Musgrove, 2018; Wade & Hornick, 2018).

At the same time, academic libraries continue to explore meaningful ways to engage social media to connect with library users. Most libraries use social media to create posts intended to help library users by increasing their awareness of library initiatives, alerting people to learning opportunities, and inviting the academic community to library-sponsored events (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014; Wan, 2011). However, the literature does not reveal examples of libraries using social media to enhance users' information literacy skills, or to connect them to a robust suite of resources that might help them do so. It was the combined interest in leveraging social media for educational initiatives plus evidence of the increased need to assess the quality of sources that led Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) librarians to develop the #VetYourSources campaign, focused on connecting undergraduate students to ideas and materials that will help them enhance their skills for evaluating information in academic and day-to-day contexts.

For the past several years, VCU Libraries (VCUL) has had a robust social media presence and an active information literacy program focused on undergraduate students. However, VCUL had not used social media as a vehicle to enhance information literacy in the past. Like most academic libraries, VCUL's social media presence has been and still is often focused on publishing about services, resources, collections, and events (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, Wan, 2011). The idea of using VCUL social media platforms in order to enhance information literacy -- specifically by addressing "fake news" and related concepts -- arose in a brainstorming conversation with members of the VCUL public relations (PR) team and several librarians. As a result, librarians and the PR team initiated the #VetYourSources campaign, which began in February of 2017 and is still ongoing.

The overall purpose of the campaign is to point VCU Libraries social media followers, and especially undergraduates, toward high-quality resources that help them improve their skills in evaluating information. The initial campaign took place in spring 2017 and was reprised with less frequent posting in spring 2018. It is planned to continue as an ongoing theme of social media postings during the 2018-19 academic year. In this highly practical chapter, readers will become familiar with:

- The need for the campaign
- The social media environment and information literacy objectives at VCU Libraries
- The process for designing the campaign conceptually
- The planning and execution of the campaign, including the process of developing content for Facebook and Twitter, and assessing success through engagements and impressions
- The in person events offered to complement the social media campaign
- Methods used to enhance social media accessibility
- Future directions for the campaign

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