Creating Engaged Citizens: The Digital Polarization Initiative

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2003: American Democracy Project was established as a nonpartisan initiative of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) in partnership with The New York Times.

2017: "The Digital Polarization Initiative, or “DigiPo”, is ADP's national effort to build student civic, information and web literacy by having students participating in a broad, cross-institutional project to fact-check, annotate, and provide context to the different news stories that show up in our Twitter and Facebook feeds.

DigiPo is being spearheaded by ADP's inaugural Civic Fellow Mike Caulfield of Washington State University Vancouver.

DigiPo will work to advance student civic literacy in our digital and too often polarized age.
The Stanford Experiment
DIGITAL POLARIZATION: A PROJECT TO PROMOTE ONLINE CIVIC INFORMATION LITERACY

- Black Hills State University (S.D.)
- Georgia College
- Indiana University Kokomo
- Metropolitan State University of Denver (Colo.)
- University of North Carolina Charlotte
- Texas A&M International University
- San José State University (Calif.)
- Washington State University Vancouver
As an example, consider a death hoax -- news comes that Jennifer Aniston has died. Is it true?

Critical thinking verification approaches would ask us to think it through -- what is the likelihood that she has died? What is the plausibility of the cause of her death? Traditional "checklist" approaches to verification might ask us to look at the article -- are there typos? Does the layout seem professional?

Our approaches, on the other hand, focus on the web.

In this case we follow the simple assumption: big, breaking stories will be reported by multiple outlets.

We right click our way into a Google News search for "Jennifer Aniston" and "died." If we see multiple sites reporting this story, we'll assume it's true. If not, we'll assume it's false.

This is just one example, of course.

We teach students how to check the organization behind a website, or quickly confirm the expertise of a speaker.
In Digipo we have three goals for our program.

- Students will be able to:
  - Perform basic verification and contextualization tasks. (90 sec. fact checks)
  - Understand the larger social structures behind and social impact of mis- and dis-information.
  - Design personal, civic, and political interventions that improve our shared information environment.

That last part has been key for us from the beginning. So you see a mistake online, or someone being harassed, or learn about the ways in which trolling is used to silence people. What do you do?
The project created a curriculum module that was then tested in different classrooms on different participating campuses.

Disciplines in which the curriculum was piloted included Communication, Elementary Education, English, First Year Experience, History, Journalism, Marketing, Sociology, Political Science, Rhetoric, and University General Education.
Overview

- Two week commitment - but they could do more
- Before week one of Digipo:
  - Pre-Test Assessment Given
- Week One of Digipo
  - Script Provided to Faculty
- Week Two of Digipo
  - Choose own examples
- Weeks Three +
  - Optional, but many faculty ran small reinforcing class activities
- A few weeks after week two Post Test-assessment was given
FOUR MOVES & A HABIT FOR ONLINE INFORMATION LITERACY

First, CHECK YOUR EMOTIONS
Move 1: CHECK FOR PREVIOUS WORK
Move 2: GO UPSTREAM TO THE SOURCE
Move 3: READ LATERALLY
Move 4: CIRCLE BACK
Students can go to the sample page via a link.

Students answer the following:

Is this picture fake or real?

Where does it come from?

Associated text: “WHOA. Obama's been lifting since he got out of office. Looks like that friendship with The Rock is paying off!”
Demo two techniques for this photo:
Search for “Swolebama” which returns an article about the photoshopped image, or
Reverse image search the image

The other approach -- search to see if other trusted sources have written on this and already checked it.

Look for trusted sources
Or, if you found the reddit group, you found the original poster, who says right in the post that it’s photoshopped.
(Find the original)

Associated text: “WHOA. Obama’s been lifting since he got out of office. Looks like that friendship with The Rock is paying off!”
Take a look at the following story:
https://www.consumeraffairs.com/news/american-women-are-50-percent-more-likely-to-die-from-pregnancy-than-their-mothers-were-112018.html

Answer the following questions:

• Can you find a better source for the story?

• Is the headline more or less accurate?

• What other context can you provide to the claim and the story?
Mike’s 4 Moves Blog:
https://fourmoves.blog/about/

Georgia College DigiPo Resources
https://libguides.gcsu.edu/DigiPo

Image Credit: Newspaper Photo by Elijah O'Donnell on Unsplash
Significant Finding: Discriminating Trustworthy from Untrustworthy Prompts
GCSU Overall

% Accurate

A Version

B Version

Pre
Post

Georgia College & State University
Areas for Improvement

- There are three main areas for improvement:
- Faculty training
- Curriculum
- Data collection
What Worked Well

Faculty reported several things that worked well:

Materials:
- The video resources that were made available
- Having a script for the content
- Having access to the Four Moves blog with several examples

Method:
- Revisiting the skills throughout the course. This was accomplished using the first 10-20 minutes of subsequent classes to do an example, often related to the course topic.
- Assigning student groups a prompt from the Four Moves blog, having the fact-check it, and report back to the class.

Student Activities:
- Pairing up students and having them practice the skills
Online with #DigiPo

- Georgia College DigiPo Resources [https://libguides.gcsu.edu/DigiPo](https://libguides.gcsu.edu/DigiPo)

- Webpage: [http://www.aascu.org/AcademicAffairs/ADP/DigiPo/](http://www.aascu.org/AcademicAffairs/ADP/DigiPo/)

- Twitter: @ADPaascu @holden (Mike Caulfield)

- Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/ADPaascu/](https://www.facebook.com/ADPaascu/)

- ADP Blog: [https://adpaascu.wordpress.com/](https://adpaascu.wordpress.com/)

- Mike’s 4 Moves Blog: [https://fourmoves.blog/about/](https://fourmoves.blog/about/)

- Mike’s Hapgood Blog: [https://hapgood.us/](https://hapgood.us/)

- Hashtags: #DigiPo #OnlineCivicLiteracy #ADPaascu
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