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## No, There is No Ghost in the Campus Library Stacks

By Meg Scharf  
UCF Forum columnist  
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Toward the end of an old favorite film, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), a newspaper reporter tells Jimmy Stewart's character, "This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."

In that case, the printed legend created a much-admired local hero because the myth was more compelling, exciting and interesting than the truth. Besides, while the legend was simple, the true story had too many details.

Often the same approach is used today with "fake news" and "alternate facts" circulating. Those terms do not yet appear in the Oxford English Dictionary, but they may be added in the not-too-distant future.

Unfortunately, legends have a hard time disappearing on college campuses, as well, because new students hear and repeat the stories. One might think of legends on campuses filled with ivy-covered walls and many years of history, but even with UCF's relative youth the campus has a history of unusual, interesting and legendary personalities and occurrences just since the late 1960s.

I have worked in the university library for more than 30 years, so I receive – and set straight – many of the questions about the earlier history of the university.

For example, every few years I hear the story of the "library jumper." Supposedly, a distraught student jumped from the balcony of the library. The reasons vary: the stress of finals, breakup with a girlfriend/boyfriend, parental disapproval of choice of a major, etc. Students are certain this happened, because their friends told them the story.

Again, fake news.

It is very hard to dissuade them, to convince them that this never happened. So I tell them that this would have appeared in local and campus newspapers, and if they take the time to search the digitized copies of them, there will not be a story about the incident.

Students sometimes seem disappointed when I respond. They want mystery, drama and the discovery of an old, secret tragedy. For some, it is exciting to hold onto this myth and

to be the one who tells new students this secret bit of history. And so every few years, a new group of students will come forward with this story, wanting to know more.

Some fake news is less tragic. My favorite is that nude sunbathing took place on the library balcony back in the wild-and-crazy late 1960s and '70s.

Once again: fake news.

The locked overlook has wide railings that substantially block the sun and would create fairly big tan lines on anyone seated there. And the design of the building prevents the sun from shining on any section of it directly for a long period of time.

And no, there is no ghost in the library stacks. Or in any of the group study rooms.

Yes, we did have a few streakers on campus back in the day when many campuses had them. But no, there was not a big group of streakers that ran through the library.

And as for the eerie Oviedo Lights and UFOs supposedly spotted nearby, no.

Stories, legends and myths take on a life of their own. They are fun. They are more exciting than many of the routine aspects of university life: classes, assignments and tests.

Off campus, in the so-called real world, fact-checking groups such as Snopes.com, Politifact, and FactCheck.org adhere to principles developed by the Poynter Institute for its International Fact Checking Code to report the facts.

I am hopeful that by encouraging reading, critical thinking and lifelong learning, higher education can prepare students to evaluate what they see and hear for themselves, and leave sensational and less-than-factual stories behind.

Everyone knows some local legends they've heard around a campfire, were told on a college campus, or were even repeated yesterday online, but we just need to face those stories with a smile – and then discern what is true.

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