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IN THIS AGE OF "TRUTHINESS," "fake news," and "alternative facts" comes more disturbing news from Stanford University: in a report released this past November, Stanford researchers find that both high school and college undergraduates have difficulty judging the credibility of online information.

The report, Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Online Civic Reasoning, released by the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG), shows a dismaying inability by students to reason about information they see on the Internet, the authors said. Students, for example, had a hard time distinguishing advertisements from news articles or identifying where information came from.

"Many people assume that because young people are fluent in social media they are equally perceptive about what they find there," said Professor Sam Wineburg, the lead author of the report and founder of SHEG. "Our work shows the opposite to be true."

The study, begun in January 2015, covered news literacy, as well as students’ ability to judge Facebook and Twitter feeds, comments left in readers’ forums on news sites, blog posts, photographs, and other digital messages that shape public opinion.

"The kinds of duties that used to be the responsibility of editors, of librarians now fall on the shoulders of anyone who uses a screen to become informed about the world," Wineburg told NPR. "And so the response is not to take away these rights but to teach them how to thoughtfully engage in information seeking and evaluating in a cacophonous democracy."

An executive summary of the Stanford study is available at: https://sheg.stanford.edu/upload/V3Les

Library Construction Update

The fifth floor of the Hitt Library will be closed during spring semester for the construction of a new quiet study space. Library administrative offices and Special Collections and University Archives on that floor will remain open, accessible by the south staircase and the bank of three elevators. The fourth floor will remain in use as a quiet study floor.

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