This Site is Fake Dot Com: A novel resource and community model for teaching information literacy.

Introduction: The University of Washington (UW) iSchool (PI: Mike Caulfield) requests $249,517 from the National Leadership Grants for Libraries program for an Implementation Project grant (Goal 1, Objective 1.1). The overall need is to ***provide library staff with resources and a replicable model to support teaching information literacy.*** The intended impact is to co-design a sustainable resource that provides an authentic environment for information literacy instruction, while addressing instructional pitfalls of using "live" examples on social media. To do this, we will develop a website, associated professional development, and a model using youth engagement to provide a sustainable means for keeping the site updated with curated material of relevance to our partners. The project will partner with geographically diverse public libraries that represent rural, urban, small, and large systems, to ensure broad impact.

Project Justification: *Information literacy in the United States is both increasingly important and increasingly difficult to teach*. Problematic forms of information have the potential to undermine everything from public health and trust in science to the functioning of democratic processes. At the same time, it has become more difficult to teach information literacy - information ecosystems have become increasingly complex, social media platforms have been designed to exploit emotions and psychological biases in ways that short circuit critical thinking skills, and technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) add new issues to address. Public library staff once again find themselves at the frontlines of literacy instruction in the US, whether through one-on-one support of patrons or provision of relevant public programming. This team has had extensive experience developing information literacy resources for public libraries, to support librarians in this important work. PI Caulfield is the creator of a fact-checking methodology broadly taught by academic libraries (SIFT), and recent work with the Google SuperSearchers project has recently brought that work to hundreds of public libraries as well. Co-PIs Young and Wedlake and Sr. Personnel Jowaisas are currently leading work, funded by a US National Science Foundation grant, to develop new approaches for delivering information literacy instruction at rural public libraries. While these combined efforts have produced important resources for library staff, they have also revealed an ongoing need - *librarians need easy access to relevant examples of good and bad forms of information, and training to help them integrate and use those examples within their instructional activities*.

Successful digital literacy instruction must be authentic and active, involving real world examples and activities that allow participants to try fact-checking techniques on the live web. However, a number of difficulties, some growing in scale, work against the use of authentic examples. State, local, and institutional bans on accessing websites such as TikTok prevent using examples from such sites. In other cases, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram restrict what non-logged in users can see, making use of those examples in workshops potentially require all participants to have accounts on the sites, an impossible requirement in a library instruction context. Additionally, while examples of random people getting items wrong on the web is useful, spotlighting individual failures of smaller accounts of non-public persons can be ethically problematic. ***Our project will support the NLG program goal by providing a replicable model and tool to support information literacy to library staff (Goal 1, Objective 1.1)***. In order to ensure community involvement in the development of the tool as well as design a sustainable process, the tool will be partially built and maintained through the involvement of library youth programs, in a model which engages youth to help identify relevant online examples.

Project Work Plan: We propose a three-year project that will *support librarians in using relevant and useful examples within information literacy instruction*, by (1) building a mock social media site, (2) designing and implementing youth programming that enables library patrons to contribute new examples to the website, and (3) providing professional development to support library staff in using the site effectively. This work will be divided into three phases.

In Phase 1 (Aug 2024 - May 2025), the team will ***build a mock social media site that is designed to support library staff in running fact-checking exercises*** within information literacy instruction. This site will contain a range of fabricated social media posts, which will provide users with a mixture of true content, false content, and everything in between. The site will also provide users with additional context about each of the posts, to support library staff in using the posts within their instruction. The site will also provide suggested information literacy curricular materials, into which librarians can place the social media posts that they find on the site. The research team will spend the first three months of this phase to design and build the site. They will draw on existing WordPress templates to provide the look and feel of an actual social media site, although the site will also be clearly marked to indicate that all content is fabricated. The researchers, for example, are considering the use of the URL thissiteisfake.com to ensure that users do not mistake the content for real information. This site building stage will be followed by an additional three months of drafting an initial set of fabricated posts. The research team will draw on their extensive experience in information literacy research to carefully design examples to appeal to a wide range of audiences. The final four months of this phase will be used to perform user testing. The research team will ask library staff - both through their personal networks and at library

conferences - to use the site, and provide feedback. This will shape further iterations of site design and the construction of additional social media posts.

In Phase 2 (Feb 2025 - Feb 2027) the team will work closely with library partners to *develop youth programming related to the website*. Library partners will be selected from the networks of the team and from early testers and adopters of the site. We will ensure that the partners represent a wide variety of libraries, including small and large systems from rural, urban, and suburban communities. Programming will be designed to teach youth basic fact-checking skills, so that they can identify true and false content. During the second half of the program, the youth will then use these skills to identify interesting content - both true and false - from their own social media feeds. Youth will then be able to submit screenshots of this content to the project team, via the project website, so that project staff can use it as inspiration for producing new content for the site. This process will provide a sustainable way to generate new example posts that are grounded in content that library patrons find relevant to their everyday lives.

Phase 3 (Feb 2025 - July 2027) will begin concurrently with Phase 2, and will *launch professional development on how to use examples from the website within information literacy instruction*. Professional development will initially occur through webinars and presentations at library conferences. Feedback will be collected at the end of each training event, to help the team iteratively improve training materials. At the end of this phase, training materials will be formalized to provide a 'toolkit' that libraries can use for staff training.

The project staff consists of PI Mike Caulfield, who will direct the project, oversee website and materials creation, and assist with professional development, Co-PIs Jason Young, Stacey Wedlake, and Senior Personnel Chris Jowaisas who will facilitate the professional development and the running of the youth program in conjunction with partners. All researchers work with the UW's Center for an Informed Public (CIP), a nationally recognized leader in problematic information research and have extensive experience working on information and digital literacy projects. PI Caulfield, created the research-backed SIFT, an online information evaluation approach. An undergraduate will be on staff at 20/hrs a week throughout the project and will assist with the management of the site, the production of materials and various community outreach activities. The team will hold bi-weekly meetings to track progress and identify next steps.

Diversity Plan: Diversity is a core element of the success of this program. Research has shown that digital literacy interventions are most effective when patrons can easily see the connection to their everyday lives. This requires that those interventions be able to draw from examples that resonate with patrons. In response to this, the project will *design and implement the youth programming components of the project so that they generate content that reflects diverse experiences across the US*, making it more accessible, impactful, and equitable. The project will select diverse library partners representing small, large, urban, and rural systems. This will ensure not only that examples are representative of the information consumption of diverse populations, but also that the programming model created by the project can be implemented by diverse library systems. Our team has experience working with all library types from across the United States. We will use our own networks to recruit our library partners.

Project Results: At the conclusion of our project we will have produced both a website and a comprehensive set of curricular and training materials to support the broad scaling of enhanced information literacy programming across US public libraries. First, the project will produce *a mock social media website*, tentatively titled "This Site Is Fake". It will contain a mixture of compelling true and fake posts, context about each post to support teaching, and information literacy curricular materials into which the fake posts can be integrated. This site will be administered by UW. Second, the project will produce *a community-engaged model for maintaining the site* using library partners. Specifically, it will produce a youth program that enables youth to contribute locally contextualized examples for inclusion within the site. Finally, the project will produce a *range of educational and training materials to support the broad scaling of this youth program*. It will produce a set of educational materials that librarians can use to run the youth program in their own library. This will include presentation materials, activity templates, and more. It will also produce a set of professional development training materials to support library staff in running the youth program. This will include training in information literacy instruction, selecting examples, and best practices for implementing the youth program.

Budget Summary: The proposed three-year budget is for $249,517, inclusive of UW's 37.0% indirect cost rate. The total anticipated costs include $144,321 for personnel (salaries + fringe benefits for UW research staff); $17,808 for student support (salary + fringe benefits); $2,900 in travel; and $2,100 in supplies and materials. $15,000 is requested for other costs, all of which will go to library stipends. $67,388 is requested for indirect costs. No cost share is requested.