

ACRL Delaware Valley Chapter, Fall 2017 Program
**Fact, False, or Just Flawed:
Critically Examining News in the Age of Truthiness**

**Session Report
Expert Panel**

By Penny Lochner, Head of Collection Resources Management, Muhlenberg College

Moderator Tom Ipri queried a panel of four professionals who come at news literacy from different occupational perspectives: a librarian, a media & communication professor, a reporter, and a science writer. The session included time for audience questions. The following represents some of the key points discussed.

Hartman-Caverly, a reference and instruction librarian, shared her approach to teaching students to critically think about credibility. Because each community will stake a claim on the truth, she asks students to consider different versions of the truth and its connection to the type of community. Are there objective measures that will shed light on the true state of the world? She pushes students to confront uncomfortable ideas and guides them through a process of consideration and formation of their own judgements.

Sullivan, a media and communication professor, explained that students do read plenty of news. Most are not discerning and need to learn about the differences in news sources. Sullivan's approach is to teach students how to control the news they see rather than relying on what is pushed to them. He advises students to avoid the Facebook trap and instead teaches them how to use RSS feeds to craft a personal news channel. This approach, which he calls "owning your algorithm" allows a person to choose diverse news sources and know who is providing them with news. Sullivan's concern about Facebook and Google as news sources extends to the reality that neither is held to the same standards of traditional news outlets nor do they espouse the values of those outlets. Issues in the news recently include manipulation of news feeds based on the reader, whether news aggregators should be filtering out false news, and transparent identification of advertisers. Sullivan also warned that people will more easily believe news that has been shared by a friend and social media is all about sharing.

Dent, a reporter for a mobile news outlet, says mobile news can more easily experimentation with delivery options and react more quickly to developing news. As with traditional news outlets, his employer gives top priority to being factually correct and finding an angle to catch the reader. That said, the mobile news business is driven by reporting on topics that will be read as measured by clicks. When asked about a news paywall, Dent revealed that last year's election stimulated people's willingness to pay for news but that willingness is fading. Although Twitter is not a major news delivery mechanism, Dent noted that the briefer format of Twitter and Facebook is impacting other news outlets and how they formulate stories. However, he

reiterated that even a short message should be held to a standard of being factually correct. Building a factually correct story requires time and investigation. He expects social media will continue to be used for news and the level of responsibility Facebook and Google assume may continue to develop.

Shipani, a science writer, cautioned reliance on news reports that draw conclusions by focusing only on findings in a newly released science article. Evaluation of new findings should be put into the context of prevailing science. Look for evidence that the reporter has consulted experts in the field and is not relying on a press release. In Schipani's work, developing an accurate picture in a science article is not accomplished through a short, simple checklist. The best fact checkers maintain a healthy skepticism toward anything they read and consult multiple sources. Being accurate is less likely with a quick tweet or short deadline. For example, *The New York Times* posts corrections to articles after publication more often than in the past.

Panel Participants

Tom Ipri (Moderator), Associate Director for Public Services & Programming, St. Joseph's University

Mark Dent, Reporter, Billy Penn and Politifact: Pennsylvania Edition

Sarah Hartman-Caverly, Assistant Professor and Reference Librarian, Delaware County Community College

Vanessa Schipani, Annenberg Public Policy Center and Science Writer, FactCheck.org

John L. Sullivan, Associate Professor of Media & Communication, Muhlenberg College