SORTING OUT SOURCES: GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING WEB-BASED INFORMATION

There are many resources online for helping students learn how to evaluate information found on the Internet. One of the primary challenges of this material from the scientific standpoint is that very few pages are peer-reviewed or have gone through the traditional methods of receiving feedback from a publisher. Therefore, information found online should be subject to additional scrutiny. Listed below are a few select web sites that address this issue.

Valenza, J. (1999) Evaluating Web Pages: A Web Quest (accessed 7/20/02) http://mciu.org/~spjvweb/evalwebteach.html. This site provides an excellent, easy to use lesson for 9-12 graders. Students break up into groups of four and evaluate a series of web sites with an eye to content, authority/credibility, bias/purpose, and usability/design. They then rank the web pages and record their observations. The whole class discusses results. Sample web sites to use are included.

Kapoun, J. (1998), Five Criteria for Evaluating Web Pages, Cornell University Library (accessed 7/20/02) http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref/webcrit.html This site provides a straightforward checklist that would be easy for students to use. It includes separate columns for 'Evaluation of Web Documents' and 'How to Interpret the Basics' for the following categories: accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage.

November, A. (1998), The Web—Teaching Zack to Think, Educational Renaissance Planners (accessed 7/20/02) http://www.anovember.com/articles/zack.html This article is worth reading just for the true example of a high school student who found a web site written by a Professor at Northwestern University denying the existence of the Holocaust. November discusses how to use multi-search engines such as profusion (http://www.profusion.com) and meta-web information such as a link command in order to evaluate pages.

Alexander, J., and Tate, M. (1999) Evaluating Web Resources, Widener University, Wolfgram Memorial Library (accessed 7/20/02) http://www2.widener.edu/Wolfgram-Memorial-Library/webeval.htm. This site contains a teaching module with supporting materials (evaluation checklists, power point presentations, and web page examples). A suggested method for teaching the module is provided.

Kirk, E. (2000) Evaluating Information Found on the Internet, (accessed 7/20/02) http://milton.mse.jhu.edu/research/education/net.html. This page provides a comprehensive discussion of the basic criteria for evaluating all forms of information, including the Internet. It discusses authorship, publishing body, point of view, referral to and/or knowledge of the literature (context), accuracy or verifiability of details, currency, and the importance of understanding how search engines work.

Ormondroyd, J., Engle, M., and Cosgrave, T. (1999) How to Critically Analyze Information Sources, Cornell University Libraries (accessed 7/20/02) http://www.library.cornell.edu/okuref/research/skill26.htm. This resource is similar to the one above. Separates description into initial appraisal (author, date, edition, publisher, title) and content analysis (intended audience, objective reasoning, coverage, writing style, and evaluative reviews).

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