Literacy and Pedagogy in an Age of Misinformation and Disinformation
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The Multiple Lives of News Stories: Civic Literacies and Rhetorical Transformations

Eric Leake

The news was sensational. An electrical worker in Ohio had stumbled upon a dozen boxes of completed ballots sitting in the back of a truck before election day, each ballot registering a vote for Hillary Clinton and the rest of the Democrat ticket. The seemingly authentic story was published on the now-defunct *Christian Times Newspaper* website under the headline "BREAKING: 'Tens of Thousands' of Fraudulent Clinton Votes Found in Ohio Warehouse." Two images published with the story added credibility. One is of a man, identified as Randall Prince, standing in the back of a moving truck beside stacks of large black plastic boxes marked "BALLOT BOX." The second is of an "Official General Election Ballot" with the bubbles filled in next to the Democrat candidates. The ballot is clearly a sample, as a large "SAMPLE" is stamped diagonally across it. The image is introduced with the disclaimer, "Christian Times Newspaper has not yet been able to obtain a photocopy of one of the ballots found inside the box, but an affiliate in Ohio passed along a replica of what was found" (C. Harris). In case the implication of the story is not sufficiently clear, it concludes: "With this find, however, it now appears that Clinton and the Democrat Party planned on stealing the state on Election Day, making any campaigning there now a waste of time" (C. Harris).

The Ohio ballots story ricocheted across social media and the wider Internet. *The New York Times*, which months later identified and interviewed the author of the story, Cameron Harris, cites web tracking site CrowdTangle in crediting the story as having been shared with more than six million people. The *Times* calls it "a fake news masterpiece" (Shane). Stories such as this highlight challenges in literacy education with serious civic implications. In this chapter, I argue that composition should reengage its democratic purposes in promoting civic literacies, which are fundamentally tied to academic literacies and news literacies. I begin by reviewing the civic purposes of literacy instruction and its relation to academic writing. I then outline a series of assignments designed to help students develop critical media literacy skills suited to an age of misinformation and disinformation. The assignments prompt students to trace rhetorical transformations in the multiple lives of news stories, such as the Ohio ballots story, as they are rewritten for different occasions, sites, audiences, and

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purposes. These assignments illustrate pedagogical strategies to promote critical media literacies based upon rhetorical education. In teaching the multiple lives of news stories, the emphasis is on following the transformations, circulations, and identifications of a story as it travels from site to site. This approach combines resources from fact-checking instruction with a greater rhetorical understanding of the ways and significance of how stories travel. To advance literacy instruction in the ways detailed here not only helps students recognize and respond to online news stories but also strengthens their rhetorical awareness and underscores the ethical and civic commitments that are necessarily involved in writing.

The Need for Civic Literacies

Although civic literacies have a deep history in composition instruction, their importance is not always foregrounded in considerations of the aims and means of teaching writing. Echoing the ancient Greeks, Alan France identifies the traditional role of rhetoric as "enabling participatory democracy" (595). He is dismayed at the increasing corporatization and commodification of rhetoric. "It is the flight from politics—the privatization of rhetoric—that I find most distressing in the discursive practices of composition studies in general," France writes in a critique that is more than two decades old but remains relevant (595). He faults a lack of concern for public discourse and the public good, once the primary concerns of rhetorical study, for this flight from politics. While strong interest in civic literacies is evident in service-learning and community literacy approaches, an emphasis on careerism remains prevalent, as when the corporate demand for writing skills is used as an argument for the teaching of writing. We also see profiteering demonstrated in the rhetorical abilities of Macedonian teenagers and their AdSense work, as detailed in Jacob W. Craig's article in the *Literacy, Democracy, and Fake News* special issue of *Literacy in Composition Studies*. A return to the importance of civic literacies offers a purpose for writing instruction that extends beyond the individual while simultaneously cultivating individual skills.

The public benefits of education in the development of a well-informed citizenry are a foundational rationale for public education, as often cited in the mission statements of universities. Teresa Grettano cites Cary Nelson, with references to Thomas Jefferson and John Dewey, in arguing that "[h]umanities education is the foundation of a critical democratic citizenry … and that our job as educators—and in English in particular—is to help students critically look at public language and discourse" (71). Donald Lazere likewise argues that the humanities and particularly English are ideally suited for the development of critical citizenship because of their attention to "basic reading and research skills (including an introduction to locating and evaluating sources of information on public affairs, in periodicals, books, and reports), the critical insights of literature and literary theory, the analytic tools of logic, argumentative rhetoric, and general semantics" (*Reading* 12). To the skills identified by Lazere, we might add locating and evaluating posts on Internet forums and social media, particularly those fashioned as news, with an awareness of who these posts target and how they circulate. Although we cannot expect students to become critical media and news consumers through one semester in a course, we can help them develop the literacy and rhetorical habits that

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would lead to such civic engagement. Melissa R. Sande and Christine M. Battista further argue in this collection that information literacy should extend across the curriculum and must be taught "*as a writing process* and not a singular skill." Part of the key would be in making connections for students, so that critical academic literacy skills translate to critical media literacy skills and the reverse. In emphasizing civic literacies, I look to foundations of the discipline as applied to contemporary discourse environments.

Civic literacies are not only civic. They overlap significantly with mainstream academic literacies, allowing each to support the other. Amy J. Wan shows that teaching literacy practices for good citizenship has historically included many other educational aims, such as teaching people to be good producers, good employees, and good union members, all under the umbrella of good citizenship. We need then to be specific in what we are teaching when we teach civic literacies, particularly in the university. Civic literacy, as defined by Lazere, involves "mainly the application of more or less traditional elements of academic discourse toward the development of critical citizenship" (*Reading* xii). Lazere views the rhetorical skills of academic discourse as nonexclusive to academic discourse and shared with critical citizenship. A civic orientation of writing courses evades concerns about composition serving merely as service courses to other disciplines or as individual training in professional writing for careers that students have not yet identified. The cultivation of civic literacies lends academic discourse purpose through the development of critical citizenship as a process of inquiry. Academic discourse and education more broadly, then, are put in the service of citizenship and greater democratic participation in the form of critical news consumption.

Citizenship long has been is a primary rationale for public education and particularly for literacy instruction, as Wan observes. She details how "literacy training is a form of citizen-making" (13). The meaning of "citizenship" exceeds its legal basis as recognition or membership in a government to include cultural citizenship and the residents, workers, undocumented immigrants, international students and others who "also make up the fabric of the nation" (Wan 2). Wan notes that as a capacious term, "citizenship" allows for many different formations of what citizenship means and what makes a good citizen depending upon who is teaching, who is learning, and the educational context. While citizenship may be evoked as an unquestioned positive goal, Wan demonstrates that literacy instruction in the name of citizenship has been tied more to economic motivations than critical public participation (19). Furthermore, the promise of equal standing aligned with participatory citizenship often is not accessible for all students. As Wan writes, "Enhancing participation does not necessarily mean enhancing equality, yet literacy skills and associated participation skills often perpetuate the illusion of equality" (26). Wan urges us to consider the terms of literate participation in citizenship: What counts as participation? What is effective? How does it uphold a particular idea of citizenship? Who gets to participate and who is denied access to what types of citizenship? (26) Shereen Inayatulla and Michael T. MacDonald likewise call in this collection for interrogating "citizenship" for its reliance on documentation and colonizer logics. One thing educators can do is be more specific in what they are teaching in the name of citizenship, and how and why they are doing so, in order to "think about the habits of citizenship being cultivated through our practices" (Wan 15). The habits I advocate for here are the critical consumption and response to news sites and stories

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as encountered in digital spaces so that students may be better informed and prepared to participate in discussions of public issues.

News sites and stories are well suited to investigation in composition courses, as they tend to be written for familiar audiences and to speak to civic issues. Contemporary concerns about fake news and the decline of journalism further suggest the media as a site of investigation. Fears of the degradation of news media are longstanding; as Drew Virtue establishes in this collection, "the distribution of fake news for political purposes is not new." Writing during the dominance of network news, Lazere laments that mass media induces "predominantly conservative attitudes, not in the sense of a reasoned conservative ideology but in the sense of an uncritical conformity that reinforces the social status quo and precludes oppositional consciousness" ("Literacy" 237). The concern now is social media, which Bruce McComiskey faults for "exponentially increase[ing] the problems of misinformation and narrow-mindedness" (19). McComiskey continues, "For an ever-growing number of people who get their information online, social media platforms both feed content that viewers already agree with and encourage ideological social grouping, limiting encounters with different ideas that may challenge settled beliefs" (19). In recent political movements, particularly those fomented online, we have witnessed not the cultivation of reasoned ideology but a more basic mobilization of division and group identifications as news is consumed in filter bubbles.

At issue now is not so much an unwillingness to question authority but a readiness to flatten all authority, to make no distinctions among claims to authority, so that news from *The New York Times* appears to be as legitimate, or even less so, as news from the *Christian Times Newspaper*. Operating here is a kind of ideological conformity, as readers are less willing to question anything that supports their view, their political affiliations, or their opinion community. McComiskey identifies this as part of the triumph of ethos and pathos at the expense logos, a key feature of "post-truth rhetoric" (20). The need now is not only for readers to question authority, and to distinguish among claims to authority, but also to question authoritarianism. That is easy enough to advocate but challenging to put into practice in a writing classroom, which is where pedagogical strategies of implementation and assignment design enter.

Teaching Rhetorical Transformations, Circulations, and Identifications

Many organizations are trying to get a handle on fake news and are offering means of intervention. Facebook, for example, partnered with fact-checkers at the Poynter Institute to develop a feature that allows users to flag "disputed" news (Guynn). Fact-checking sites such as Snopes have circulated guides on how to spot fake news. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) advises readers to "consider the source," "consult the experts," and "check to see if anyone else is reporting the same thing." The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) similarly advises readers to check the supporting sources for an article, research the author, read beyond the headline, consider how the reader's own beliefs and biases might affect their judgement, and consult a librarian or a fact-checking site. As Jacob Craig demonstrates, many of these guides are built upon

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literacy practices associated with print. They do not fully prepare students for encountering sources online, but they can be useful as primers instructing students on the ways of researching sources. Checking facts and investigating sources should be part of how we teach reading and research in contemporary writing courses. To that end, Mike Caulfield offers an excellent resource in his open-source textbook, *Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers*. Despite the applicability of these guides, however, the problem of how to address misinformation effectively through literacy instruction remains. The pedagogical approach presented here adds rhetorical considerations to existing fact-checking guides so that fact-checking becomes a rhetorical exercise that understands stories as purposefully targeting particular audiences, and it asks students to write in response to these stories. The prevalence of disinformation and misinformation presents an opportunity to reconsider our writing pedagogies and their purposes as they are practiced in the classroom.

Rationale for Analyzing the Circulation of Stories

One promising existing means of intervention, as advocated by John Trimbur, is through attention to delivery and circulation. Although Trimbur's article "Composition and the Circulation of Writing" predates contemporary concerns about fake news, I update and make extensive use of it here, since the underlying rhetorical and pedagogical concerns remain relevant. Trimbur wants to "redefine delivery—and to understand the circulation of writing—in terms of the unfinished work of democratic revolutions to expand public forums and popular participation in civic life" (191). The Internet was supposed to deliver on the part of expanding participation, and it has in some ways, as many people now enjoy greater access to information. It has not lived up to democratic ideals, however, as forums are dominated by clickbait, bots (see Laquintano and Vee), and false information. In summing up his argument, Trimbur writes,

> To my mind, delivery can no longer be thought of simply as a technical aspect of public discourse. It must be seen also as ethical and political—a democratic aspiration to devise delivery systems that circulate ideas, information, opinions, and knowledge and thereby expand the public forums in which people can deliberate on the issues of the day. (190)

These references to delivery systems for writing and public forums for deliberation recall the earlier promises of the Internet. The suggestion of investigating those systems remains helpful. Trimbur describes an assignment sequence he developed in which students tracked the circulation and "rhetorical transformations" of writings about a scientific discovery as a "passage of forms," first in a science report, then as mainstream news, as advice columns, and finally as patent and legal writings (213). He states that his goal in the assignment "is to show students how the rhetorical transformations that take place between the various specimens of writing make up a total system of production" (213). Likewise, the fake news that circulates across social media is part of a "total system of production" that seeks rewards through political power and through clicks and advertising revenues. Sometimes the stories start as legitimate news that is transformed and rewritten for different audiences and purposes, and sometimes they start simply as fake news, composed out of available materials to resonate with available audiences, as in the Ohio ballots story. Trimbur's focus on systems of production is reflected in current emphasis on networked literacies (Craig;

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Laquintano and Vee). The trick is to look beyond the individual rhetorical event and more deeply into the recurring rhetorical dynamics, contexts, and systems. Students need to learn not only how to think of a single particular piece of fake news, not only how to debunk one bogus story, but to better understand the systems that produce bogus stories, how those stories are taken up and circulate, and how they speak to their audiences. Attending to the circulation of stories can help students recognize systems of production and circulation, especially when their discoveries about the stories are shared with classmates for the potential of discovering larger patterns. Students can apply this improved awareness upon their next initial encounter with fake news. These are important rhetorical skills for the practice of civic literacies.

I had in mind Trimbur's ideas of "rhetorical transformations" and the "total system of production" in developing a series of assignments on the multiple lives of news stories. The sequence I describe here is only one possible way of working toward goals of civic literacies. Such goals require a progression of assignments that allow students to acquire tools in tracking the permutations of stories so that they might develop a greater understanding of how a story and stories circulate. I have used these assignments in teaching first-year writing at Texas State University, a large public institution between Austin and San Antonio in a blue-leaning area of a red state. The university's student population is majority-minority with more than half identifying as non-white ("University Demographics"). It is federally designated a Hispanic-Serving Institution with thirty-seven percent of the student population identifying as Hispanic during the fall 2018 semester ("University Demographics"). Additionally, the university has been targeted by white supremacist groups that have posted fliers and racist propaganda on campus, especially following the 2016 election. I mention this because the political issues that capture public attention, most notably those concerning immigration, are quite personal for many of my students. Although they seem to want to talk about public issues, many students are understandably wary of sharing their own positions, concerns, and experiences. There also are many students who come from rural parts of the state and have much more politically conservative backgrounds and views. I have understood my role as instructor as creating a space where students feel supported in asking questions and sharing their views and experiences, to the degree that they want to do so. Like many institutions, Texas State's mission statement cites values such as respect, compassion, civility, diversity, and the public good, values I refer to in class. As an assistant professor, I felt supported institutionally in engaging political issues in the classroom so long as those engagements were based in critical literacy, rhetoric, and writing. My main institutional constraint has been in finding ways to adapt news and media literacies curricula within the programmatic requirements of first-year writing courses. I teach habits of civic and media literacy informed by my experiences as a former journalist, which I acknowledge in class. In doing so I employ my personal experiences pedagogically to normalize journalists and to speak about the production of news stories. (For a fuller account of instructor identity in the classroom, see Lava Asaad's chapter in this collection.) I try to use my cultural and institutional authority to create a space for voices and perspectives that may be silenced in other areas of public discourse. I always am working to support the classroom community and students who may feel vulnerable or marginalized, which is something the university is working on as well. My pedagogical approach is far from perfect, and

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I could go on about its advantages and limitations. I do think, however, that when done effectively, teaching toward media and news literacies can help create a positive classroom community where students feel empowered to critically engage public issues.

Following Moves and Images

I begin by asking students to track an individual move in the circulation of a story. We use Joseph Harris's *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts* for how it describes what writers do with texts. The moves detailed there are helpful for all kinds of writing in various networks, academic and elsewhere. One of the moves Harris identifies, for example, is "forwarding," and so I ask students to find and link to an example of where they see a news story being forwarded in another post on another site. They are asked to comment upon what is lost, gained, or altered, or what remains the same, in that forwarding. They do the same with "countering." Students generally can locate earlier or later iterations of a story through references in the story itself or a Google search. Library access to Lexis-Nexis to search media publications also has been useful. As it is forwarded, the story tends to be recast, repositioned, re-contextualized, or otherwise rewritten in a way that somewhat changes its meaning. As should be clear here, the idea of a story that we work with is not simply a discrete text but a short narrative or bit of information—such as the fake Ohio ballots story—that remains essentially the same as the details of the story change. This tracking the moves of a story is similar to the process Caulfield describes: to "go upstream" to look for the original source in fact-checking. Many of the techniques Caulfield describes, such as using Google search filters and checking other fact-checking sties, would be equally helpful here. As students begin to track the moves of a story and how the story is changed in each permutation, even if only in publication time and context, they should begin to better understand how stories circulate.

Images are also part of stories as they circulate. Students are asked to write a short analysis of a picture, graphic, chart, or other visual in relation to a news story or opinion piece. They are told to consider how the visual affects their reading of the story and how their reading of the story affects their interpretation of the visual. I have used selections from Errol Morris's *Believing is Seeing (Observations on the Mysteries of Photography)*, which was developed from a series of columns in *The New York Times*, to help students interrogate how truth claims are attributed to photographs. Students might also search the history of an image using Google image search, as described by Caulfield. If they were to search the image associated with the Ohio ballots story, they might find links to sites debunking the story or possibly the original source of the associated image, a 2015 election news photograph from Birmingham, England.

Analyzing Language and Audiences

As students follow the circulation and transformation of a news story, they also are instructed to attend to the importance of language in how the story is rewritten and how it offers sites of identification for readers. Thomas P. Miller and Adele Leon suggest that rhetoric and composition might apply lessons from social psychology in understanding authoritarian appeals. To give an example of such an application, studies show that the inclusion of moral-emotional language helps

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Twitter messages spread (Brady et al.). Students could be briefed on this research so that they might use it in their analysis of the moral-emotional appeal of stories. As Joanna Geary suggests in this collection, students could be asked to attend to their own emotional reactions, because, "Normally, if something is untrue, it's untrue because it is attempting to stimulate someone's emotional responses in some way." Likewise, in *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think,* George Lakoff provides useful materials to help students understand important language differences in how issues are framed in terms of values and metaphors. In an age of disinformation, critical participants in online forums need also to be aware of how "dog whistles" and other forms of coded language work to signal affiliations. Propaganda, as defined by Jason Stanley, is characterized in part through the ways that it uses the language of democracy to undercut democracies, as is clear on some forums. Stanley writes that "masking the undemocratic nature of a state with democratic vocabulary is an existential threat to a democratic regime" (11). He suggests, however, that language and discourse also are part of the corrective to this problem, crediting civic rhetoric with the ability to "repair flawed ideologies, potentially restoring the possibility of self-knowledge and democratic deliberation" (5). Students are taught to scrutinize the purposeful use of language and its implications.

Students also should consider the audience of a particular permutation of a story. This mode of analysis builds upon a closer reading of the language, visuals, and individual iterations and general lifespan of a story. When talking with *The New York Times*, for example, the author of the Ohio ballots story says he knew the story would take off, that it would confirm all of the suspicions of voters who did not trust Clinton or the media and the election system. "'I had a theory when I sat down to write it,'" Cameron Harris says (C. Harris qtd. in Shane). "'Given the severe distrust of the media among Trump supporters, anything that parroted Trump's talking points people would click. Trump was saying 'rigged election, rigged election.' People were predisposed to believe Hillary Clinton could not win except by cheating'" (C. Harris qtd. in Shane). There is a definite rhetorical savvy on Cameron Harris's part. He is practicing persuasion in the modes of identifications, such as that articulated by Kenneth Burke when he describes "a general *body of identifications* that owe their convincingness much more to trivial repetition and dull daily reënforcement than to exceptional rhetorical skill" (26). These identifications are prime rhetorical concerns and can be conspicuous in online forums. They work through repetition. Students might look for those repetitions as the stories speak to the habits and values of particular audiences. One of the possible assignments Trimbur endorses is a microethnography in which students are enmeshed in a discourse community and report out on how texts within that community are received, commented upon, and circulated, all of which requires close attention to the language, beliefs, and values of a particular audience. Digital domains make such analysis even easier as they are widely accessible and textually mediated. Work in identifying audiences in detailed ways may also help students pop their own filter bubbles as they encounter other perspectives and appreciate how stories affect other readers.

A related civic literacy goal in following the multiple lives of news stories is the promotion of ethical discourse practices. Ethical positions are always inherently connected to writing positions, as John Duffy contends. He argues, "To teach writing is by definition to teach ethics; more specifically it is to teach what I will call 'ethical dispositions,' or the communicative practices of honesty,

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accountability, compassion, intellectual courage, and others" (213). Researching and fact-checking stories promote honesty and accountability. To attend to the ways stories affect people in their daily lives and how they affect the larger public is to cultivate a sense of compassion and connection to others. There are responsibilities inherent in partaking in public discourse. A reader who uncritically forwards the Ohio ballots story is complicit in promoting its falsehoods. Duffy notes that negative opinions on the quality of American political discourse prevail, and this predates the 2016 election. He writes with regret that rhetoric and composition has not had greater influence in these areas, despite the values espoused in the discipline: "The principles we teach are largely absent from the public square, and our conceptions of rhetoric as a method of inquiry and community building seem so much folklore, appealing mythologies that have little purchase in the worlds beyond our classrooms" (211). A pedagogy of civic literacies and instruction in attention to the multiple lives of news stories is one way we might work to address this problem.

Widening Perspectives

My assignment sequence culminates in an essay in which students bring together the multiple moves they have analyzed in a story as it has been forwarded; countered; paired with images; and rewritten to appeal to particular audiences, such as through emotional language and metaphors. In the description for that assignment, students are asked to

> [f]ollow the multiple lives of a news story through social media and other sites. Note how the story changes and is rewritten as it passes from site to site, and note the uses and limitations of each iteration. This will require researching and analyzing multiple versions of the story. Your analysis might include the moves discussed by Harris and should attend to rhetorical considerations such as author, audience, purpose, context, and language. You may conclude with your own take on the story or what you think it teaches us about media, writing, and society. (Leake)

The assignment is intended to do many things. I hope to help students see publications as not only discrete events but as moments in the lifespan of a story as it goes from site to site and is shared and reworked for different audiences and purposes. Journalism professor Jeff Jarvis describes news ecosystems and how every publishing event captures a moment in the lifespan of a story. Comparing the traditional news publishing model to contemporary modes of delivery, Jarvis writes, "The notion that news comes in and stories go out—text and photos come in and paper goes out—is an artifact of the means of production and distribution, of course. Now a story never begins and it never ends." Each publication or post is, in Jarvis's words, "merely a blip on the line, a stage in a process, for that process continues after publication." Jarvis is concerned with more official news outlets, but the same continuous view applies elsewhere in circulations. In the case of the Ohio ballots story, a key moment is the publication of the story on the *Christian Times Newspaper* site, although the story could be tracked back further to allegations that Clinton would rig the election. The story is published and picked up and shared across social media. It accumulates authority with shares and is repurposed and re-contextualized each time a comment is added or the story appears in links and alongside other stories. As it travels, the story begins to attract attention from authorities and fact-checkers

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who rebuke it and in doing so become part of the larger story. Finally, *The New York Times* reframes the story, this time in identifying and interviewing the author as part of their coverage of the fake news phenomenon and its political effects. Students following the multiple lives of a story would be looking for those moments of transformation and trying to see how the story itself circulated, was rewritten, worked with other stories, and was delivered. They might then be able to see the rhetorical effects of the story as not the product of any particular publication but as accumulated across rhetorical events, across the moments. This is in line with Carolyn D. Rude's suggestion that rhetorical analysis include "vision beyond the single document" (273). In looking beyond the single moment, students also might be better able to view the news and social media as operating within a larger ecosystem of sites, links, publications, and audiences.

Rhetorical attention to the circulation of news stories cannot be developed through just one assignment; it is a regular emphasis of my first-year writing courses that focus on civic literacies. I require students to check in with and read *The New York Times* and at least one other news site daily. Early in the semester, we discuss what it means to follow the news and how people do so by skimming headlines and reading the opening paragraphs of those stories that interest them, reading some until the end. As they read the news and peruse social media and other sites, students begin to follow stories and notice circulations. Each class session begins with a short discussion of what stories students have been following or have read recently. I ask the students to tell me where they encountered the story, how it was presented, and who the intended audience seemed to be. We give special attention to word choice and images, sometimes pulling the story up on the class projector to analyze it together. One challenge of these discussions, and of this assignment sequence in general, is in focusing not on what the story *is* but *how* it is and *why* and for *whom* it is; focusing not on what the story is *about* but *how* it is about it. With practice in class discussions and writing assignments, students are able to make this shift. Discussing the news to open each class session is also intended to give students practice in talking about the news with people who have views and experiences that might differ from their own. Discussing the news is a valuable rhetorical skill best developed through practice, such as around the dinner table, with friends, or in a college writing classroom.

This kind of work requires students to develop rhetorical skills that contribute not only to civic literacies but also academic literacies. As McComiskey argues, "Rhetoric and composition have had the tools to combat post-truth rhetoric for years" (38). The assignments detailed here are designed to build upon those tools and, finally, to invite students to offer their own take on the story as they share their work with their classmates or elsewhere. I hope students become more aware of the ways writing circulates, the writing moves made on social media and across the Internet, and the rhetorical possibilities and restraints encountered in the multiple lives of news stories. My experience is that many students are unaware of the news and the public discourses that surround them. They sometimes rely on information by means like osmosis, what Jarvis identifies as an expectation that "if the news is important, it will find me." Unfortunately, the news that finds them is often the news that others push to them. I teach with a concern for civic literacies so that students might be more critically aware of how knowledge is created and circulated through writing for civic purposes and so that they might more actively engage with news. Like Lazere and McComiskey, I do not see these

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issues as avoidable. Students are already implicated in what is happening in civic discourse and the rise of post-truth rhetoric. I hope that in writing about the news and public discourse, students may be more willing and able not only to question authority but to evaluate it, to open up other positions for response, and to question authoritarianism where they encounter it, in resistance to a passive model of media consumption.

Unease with Politically-Engaged Literacies

In a hyper-politicized environment, I understand concerns that civic literacies risk politicizing the classroom. Rhetoric and composition has dealt with these concerns for some time, although they seem a bit different at the moment when a majority of polled Republicans think colleges and universities have a negative effect on the country (Savransky). It is important to acknowledge those concerns. One response traditionally has been to teach the conflicts. Such a strategy, however, risks contributing to a problematic belief of false equivalencies. Lazere argues that the responsibility and need to raise the level of civic discourse is non-partisan because everybody, regardless of political position, has an interest in the health of our democracy. Another response is to advocate clearly for the cultivation of civic literacy habits and positions in the reading and writing practices of our courses. "I believe that citizen building, including enhancing our collective sense of ownership of the public sphere, *is* an appropriate academic goal, one that involves not only the pursuit but also the generation of truth," Elizabeth Ervin argues (411). The value of "citizen building" is articulated in the mission statements of many of our institutions and in many of the foundational philosophies of rhetoric and composition. A curriculum that encourages non-passive relationships to the media is also a curriculum that openly acknowledges the role of politics and ideology in how meaning constructed, circulated, delivered, and to what ends.

There are of course limitations to a pedagogy that advances civic literacy. There are institutional constraints that may hinder such a pedagogy, and civic literacy is not the only purpose for composition. It is a critical one, however, and worth considering as a point of return when scholars and instructors wonder what we might do to help improve the quality of public discourse. Many of the skills promoted in a pedagogy of civic literacies, specifically critical media literacies, align nicely with well-established academic literacy: considering audiences, determining purposes, analyzing language, evaluating sources, researching arguments, including multi-modal awareness, and partaking in larger conversations. We see this, for example, in the moves of *Rewriting*—forwarding, countering, taking an approach—as categories of analysis and as rhetorical instructions (J. Harris). These moves both describe the rewriting of news stories and detail how to make moves in academic writing, further connecting the civic and the academic. By following the multiple lives of news stories, students are empowered to read and critically respond to those stories. Following stories across sites and instances of rewriting makes the cumulative changes in the stories more salient. The writing assignments that support this work may happen in a multitude of fashions and are easily adapted to academic and civic ends. I am curious about what kind of writing classroom Cameron Harris, the author of the Ohio ballots story, experienced. I certainly do not blame his writing instructor

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for any of his ethical transgressions, and he clearly is an adept writer with an understanding of his medium and audience and an eye for opportunities. I like to think, however, that a classroom with greater attention to the significance of civic literacies and an emphasis on ethical commitments of writing might possibly have helped put such rhetorical talent to more positive ends, or at least have empowered more of his audience and peers to see through the disinformation.

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