



Evidence Summary

Librarians and Faculty Are Concerned About Misinformation, But Differ in How to Implement News Literacy in the Classroom

A Review of:

Saunders, L. (2023). Librarian perspectives on misinformation: A follow-up and comparative study. *College & Research Libraries*, 84(4), 478-494. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.84.4.478>

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Abstract

Objective – To explore academic librarians' perspectives on misinformation, including how they teach it in the classroom and their perceptions of undergraduate students' news literacy competence. A secondary objective is to compare academic librarians' and faculty's misinformation perspectives using data from the author's previous study (Saunders, 2022).

Design – A Qualtrics-hosted online survey modified from the previous study.

Setting – Two electronic mailing lists from the American Library Association (ALA).

Subjects – There were 189 respondents. The target population was librarians employed in a college or university with at least some library instruction responsibilities.

Methods – The electronic survey was distributed in March 2021. The quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics and chi-squared tests to identify any statistically significant differences in responses between librarians liaising with different departments and between librarians and faculty.

Main Results – Academic librarians agree that mis- and disinformation is a major concern. The survey defined misinformation as “inaccurate information shared by accident,” and disinformation as “inaccurate information shared on purpose to mislead/deceive.” In the article, misinformation was used to encompass both terms. The majority of librarians address news literacy during classroom instruction using a variety of methods, including active learning and, less often, using assignments with news literacy outcomes. Librarians who do not teach news literacy report that faculty members do not request this type of instruction, and that they do not have time to teach it. Faculty and librarians agree that misinformation is a concern, and that news literacy instruction is important for combatting misinformation. However, faculty members were more likely to report that misinformation was not relevant to their discipline, and that news literacy instruction should occur elsewhere in the curriculum. Faculty also tended to rate students’ proficiencies in identifying misinformation as higher than librarians.

Conclusion – The majority of academic librarians and faculty are concerned about misinformation and agree that news literacy instruction is an important method to address it. It is unclear how librarians are teaching students how to identify misinformation and if they are using evidence based methods to do so. Many faculty members do not include librarians in this instruction or do not believe it should be addressed in their discipline. Based on these results, librarians could provide outreach to faculty members about how librarians can address misinformation within their disciplinary curriculums. They could also provide training workshops to faculty members to enable them to teach these skills on their own.

Commentary

This study contributes to the growing library and information science (LIS) literature on librarians’ role in addressing misinformation and teaching news literacy. A strength of this study is the direct comparison of librarians’ and faculty members’ perceptions of misinformation and perceived needs for relevant instruction using the data from the author’s previous study on faculty (Saunders, 2022). This offers valuable insight into how these groups may view misinformation and news literacy instruction differently.

This study was assessed using the Center for Evidence Based Management’s (2014) critical appraisal checklist for cross-sectional studies. The study addressed a clearly focused research question with a closed-ended survey. The use of two American Library Association (ALA) electronic mailing lists may have introduced some selection bias in that most members are from the United States, and respondents would have needed to be members of ALA. When sampling from electronic mailing lists, it is difficult to assess how representative the subjects are or what the response rate is. Librarians interested in combatting misinformation may have been more likely to respond to the survey, which may have overestimated the number of librarians who teach news literacy skills in the classroom. The author acknowledges that the sampling method limits the generalizability of the results. While the original faculty survey is available, the adapted version for librarians was not included with the publication, which limits readers’ ability to see how the survey was modified. Despite some issues with the sample, this study provides meaningful insights for librarians teaching how to identify misinformation and their relationships with faculty.

One of the most important insights is the disconnect between faculty and librarians’ opinions on whether and when to teach misinformation identification and news literacy skills. Librarians feel hampered in their ability to address misinformation since they rely on faculty members to see the need for this instruction and request it for their classes. As the author acknowledges, it is unclear from this study what strategies librarians use to teach news literacy skills and if the selection of those strategies may be limited due to time and faculty interest. Recently published qualitative research has already begun to build on this work by examining the tension between librarians’ role in teaching how to

identify misinformation and the constraints of traditional information literacy instruction (Willenborg & Detmering, 2025). Librarians and library administrators should consider alternatives to the one-shot model for teaching news and information literacy and engaging faculty in this work.

References

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