

## Academic libraries and the 45th President

This volume of *Reference Services Review* is focused on challenges and opportunities brought about since President Donald J. Trump took office in 2016. The numerous changes to American life under the Trump administration have been well-documented by newspapers, news magazines, and television journalists. As a people, we are polarized. Our political views may lead us not only to disagree with another person's views but also to mistrust or even hate that person. The President's Twitter feed supplies a seemingly endless stream of attacks on individuals as well as on American institutions, none more so than journalists and the media[1].

A recent study from the Stanford History Education Group stated that "Reliable information is to civic health what proper sanitation and potable water are to public health. A polluted information supply imperils our nation's civic health." Over the course of one year, researchers administered an assessment to over 3,000 students across the country to determine their skill at evaluating digital resources on the open internet. The reported results are dismaying: "Nearly all students floundered. Ninety per cent received no credit on four of six tasks."

In addition to the challenges raised by the cries of "fake news" and the lack of digital information literacy, college and university campus climates are changing. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, hate crimes on college campuses rose by 17 per cent in 2017 compared with that in the previous year. The Anti-Defamation League reported that "white supremacist groups continued to escalate their propaganda campaign targeting US college campuses, with incidents increasing by 77 per cent during the 2017-2018 academic year"[2]. One can debate whether this increase in hate crimes can be tied to the current presidential administration but the facts themselves are indisputable.

One of my primary concerns is that younger college students have no frame of reference for the current political climate. For students coming of age in the Trump era, it might be difficult to understand that American institutions were once held in high regard. Political norms that many of us grew up with cannot provide context to students who predate them. So, how can we as librarians guide students as they attempt to navigate the internet as novice researchers? How do we help them investigate controversial topics? How do we build inclusive collections? What role does the academic library have in supporting students' mental health? How do we build archival collections that document the current campus climate? How do we now teach students to use government resources? Can they trust them? How will they know? Can academic libraries achieve neutrality? Should we?

The articles in this issue strive to answer those and other questions as well. Addy suggests that an information literacy curriculum based on fact checking practices, such as lateral reading, may be best practice in our current political environment. Albert, Emery and Hyde tackle students' increasing mistrust of government information and propose using the Information Creation as Process frame to align instruction with the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education. Many librarians are now faced with students who wish to research highly divisive topics. Brunvand opines that librarians should be a part of students' civic education and describes relevant librarian competencies for helping students investigate controversial subjects. Gohr and Nova seek to increase awareness of equity and justice and argue for institutional



change. Fiedler, Mitola and Cheng describe the campus climate at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, before and after the 2016 election and discuss the library's renewed focus on equity, diversity and inclusion. Kingsland and Hanz offer an interesting case study in which they develop a model workshop to address the topic of fake news. Incorporating the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education, the authors created an instructional template that can be adapted to multiple audience types. Krutowski, Taylor-Harman and Gupta explore biased media coverage and disinformation about trans individuals and create a staff development training program to encourage equity, diversity and inclusion. Kubas investigates students' perception of government information since the 2016 election and whether or not librarians have changed their behaviors in response to that perception. Lynch and Hunter offer a new approach to information literacy instruction in the post-truth era that focuses on student self-reflection. Wagner and Crowley apply critical discourse analysis to examine exclusionary practices in academic libraries with respect to trans and gender-nonconforming individuals. Wiles considers the implications of the "Trump effect" on academic archives and reviews Trump administration higher education policy.

The response to the original February 2019 call for papers was so overwhelming that we plan to publish additional articles on these topics in the second issue of *Reference Services Review* in 2020. Given the changes in our national discourse since the original call, one can only speculate where we will be when this second round of articles is published. It is my hope that all these articles may lead to productive conversation on these topics and perhaps spark ideas that you may use at your own college or university. As James Madison wrote many years ago: "Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."

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## Notes

1. The *New York Times* reports that President Trump has now tweeted the phrase "fake news" more than 600 times. They write: "When an American president attacks the independent press, despots rush to imitate his example. Dozens of officials around the world – including leaders of other democracies – have used the term since Mr Trump legitimized it." As of this writing, the *Times* reports that "40 foreign governments have invoked the specter of 'fake news' to discredit journalists."
2. From the same report: "From Sept. 1, 2017 to May 31, 2018, ADL's Center on Extremism documented 292 cases of white supremacist propaganda on college campuses – including fliers, stickers, banners, and posters – compared to 165 during the 2016-17 academic year. Since Sept. 1, 2016, ADL has recorded 478 propaganda incidents, targeting 287 college campuses in 47 states and the District of Columbia."

## Further reading

Anti-Defamation League Center on Extremism (2018), White Supremacist Propaganda Nearly Doubles on Campus in 2017-18 Academic Year, available at: [www.adl.org/resources/reports/white-supremacist-propaganda-nearly-doubles-on-campus-in-2017-18-academic-year](http://www.adl.org/resources/reports/white-supremacist-propaganda-nearly-doubles-on-campus-in-2017-18-academic-year) (accessed 5 December 2019).

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Barry, W.T. and Madison, J. (1822), "James Madison to W.T. Barry, August 4", 4 August, [Manuscript/ Mixed Material], available at: [www.loc.gov/item/mjm018999/](http://www.loc.gov/item/mjm018999/) (accessed 2 December 2019).

Bauman, D. (2018), "Hate crimes on campuses are rising, new FBI data show the chronicle of higher education", 14 November, available at: [www.chronicle.com/article/Hate-Crimes-on-Campuses-Are/245093](http://www.chronicle.com/article/Hate-Crimes-on-Campuses-Are/245093) (accessed 5 December 2019).

The Editorial Board (2019), "Who will tell the truth about the free press?", *The New York Times*, 30 November, available at: [www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/30/opinion/editorials/fake-news.html?searchResultPosition=2](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/30/opinion/editorials/fake-news.html?searchResultPosition=2) (accessed 30 November 2019).

Stanford History Education Group (2019), Students' Civic Online Reasoning: A National Portrait, available at: <https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/gf151tb4868/Civic%20Online%20Reasoning%20National%20Portrait.pdf> (accessed 4 December 2019).