Abstract
How can we encourage young researchers to exercise critical thinking about the concepts of “authority” and “reliability” in the new information universe? As wonderful as the internet is, the democratic and heterogeneous nature of the online world has clouded the ability of today’s students to quickly and clearly determine a given resource’s trustworthiness. This academic panel talk will demonstrate a visual, interactive and scalable classroom-based method of evaluating a myriad of resources and concepts in order to provoke thought and discussion in small settings, and poll-based participation in large ones.
The Spectrum of Reliability

Critical Evaluation of Sources in the New Information Universe

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Summer 2010

...early stages
2012 Fall Quarter Introductory Course: Environmental Design (EDES) 101

400 Students from Five Majors:
• Architectural Engineering
• Architecture
• Construction Management
• City & Regional Planning
• Landscape Architecture

Extravagant Luxuries: Instructor Cooperation
Two Class Visits
FROM A NEUTRAL SOURCE

EXTENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

AUTHOR'S EXPERTISE IS VERIFIABLE

POOR GRAMMAR OR MULTIPLE TYPOS

SELF PUBLISHED

FIRM OR COMPANY WEBSITE

LIBRARY-SPONSORED RESOURCE

CASUAL USE OF LANGUAGE OR IMAGES

PHOTOS ARE UNCREDITED

WRITTEN IN LANGUAGE SPECIFIC TO PROFESSION

TRUSTED PUBLISHER

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5
Mean = 2.87
Standard Deviation = 0.83

FROM A NEUTRAL SOURCE

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5

Votes

11 45 90 33 5
Mean = 1.93
Standard Deviation = 0.84
Mean = 3.98
Standard Deviation = 0.64
Mean = 4.01
Standard Deviation = 0.70

AUTHOR’S EXPERTISE IS VERIFIABLE

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5

Votes:
5  9  32  98  45
Mean = 1.24
Standard Deviation = 0.63

POOR GRAMMAR OR MULTIPLE TYPOS

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5

Votes

157
15
6
4
4
Mean = 2.02
Standard Deviation = 0.64
Mean = 3.25
Standard Deviation = 0.74

FIRM OR COMPANY WEBSITE

1 LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5

Votes: 8, 33, 75, 62, 16
STUDENT RATINGS

1. FROM A NEUTRAL SOURCE
2. Wikipedia
3. EXTENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY
4. AUTHOR’S EXPERTISE IS VERIFIABLE
5. POOR GRAMMAR OR MULTIPLE TYPOS
6. SELF PUBLISHED
7. FIRM OR COMPANY WEBSITE

LESS 2 RELIABLE 3 MORE 4 RELIABLE 5
Accuracy and reliability are related, but not synonymous.

Is neutrality *always* preferable to bias?

There are few easy answers…

Still to be gathered:

1. Anecdotal evidence from students in the form of reflections.
2. Quantified assessment data, potentially including:
   • Pre-discussion vs. post-discussion.
   • Pre-assignment vs. post-completion.
   • Start of school year vs. end of school year.
3. Pedagogical precedents.