



the news literacy project
how to know what to believe

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THE NEWS LITERACY PROJECT LAUNCHES WEBSITE AND PLANS PILOT PROJECTS FOR EARLY 2009

An innovative national program that will mobilize professional journalists to help secondary school students sort fact from fiction in the digital age plans to launch its initial pilot projects in early 2009. **The News Literacy Project** unveiled its website, www.thenewsliteracyproject.org, today.

“This program will systematically address a significant gap in the educational community,” said **Diana Mitsu Klos**, senior project director for the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), one of several major journalism groups to endorse the News Literacy Project. It has the “potential to strengthen the ranks of the next generation of Americans who can recognize and demand quality journalism.”

The project is spearheaded by **Alan C. Miller**, a former reporter at the Los Angeles Times and winner of the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting. It was initiated in early 2008 with a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and recently received a two-year grant from the Ford Foundation. More than 30 prominent journalists have already volunteered to serve as fellows, and the project plans to recruit hundreds of additional journalists nationwide.

Even as young people increasingly participate in the national discussion through such media as text messages and blogs, news literacy is not widely taught in America’s public schools. In a world of the 24-hour news cycle and the explosion of information continuously available online, today’s students have access to unprecedented amounts of information. Yet they are also confronted with the daunting task of determining the reliability of myriad sources of “news.” And surveys show young people are increasingly uninterested in information with a civic purpose.

The primary aim of the News Literacy Project is to give middle and high school students the tools to be smarter and more frequent consumers and creators of credible information across all media and platforms. Students will be taught how to distinguish verified information from raw messages, spin, gossip and opinion and encouraged to seek information that will make them well-informed citizens and voters.

The project will create partnerships between active and retired journalists and English, social studies and history teachers, along with after-school media clubs. The journalists and teachers will devise units focusing on why news matters to young people, what the First Amendment and a free media mean in a democracy and how students can determine the veracity of what they read, see and hear.



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Material will be presented through games, hands-on exercises and the journalists' own compelling stories. The curriculum will also address new media tools, such as Google and Wikipedia.

“Ultimately, this project aims to equip the next generation of news consumers with the ability to judge for themselves what is credible and what is not, increasing their awareness of the value of free press and their demand for news in the public interest,” said **Eric Newton**, vice president of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

“Without the critical capacity to distinguish between what’s journalistic, what’s partisan, what’s entertainment and what’s fabrication, people are bound to make uninformed choices in a digital age of limitless information,” said **Calvin Sims**, Ford Foundation Program Officer for News Media. “The Ford Foundation is proud to support efforts like the News Literacy Project, which seeks to equip young people with the skills needed to be informed consumers of news.”

The first pilots are expected to be started in early 2009 in schools in New York City and Montgomery County, Md. Additional sites will be added in the next year.

The board is chaired by **Vivian Schiller**, senior vice president and general manager of NYTimes.com. **John Carroll**, former editor of the Los Angeles Times, The Baltimore Sun and the Lexington Herald-Leader, is vice chairman. Also participating as board members are **Soledad O’Brien**, CNN anchor and special correspondent for the network’s Special Investigations Unit, and **Chuck Lewis**, a distinguished journalist-in-residence at American University and founder of the Center for Public Integrity.

Its other members are **Neil Budde**, a national pioneer in online news media and the president and chief product officer of DailyMe.com; **Mary M. Chambers**, a management, public affairs and strategic communications consultant with a strong background in education and non-profit work; **John S. Gomperts**, a leader in promoting civic engagement as president of Civic Ventures and CEO of Experience Corps; **Paul S. Mason**, a senior vice president at ABC News, and **Howard Schneider**, a former editor of Newsday who is the founding dean of the School of Journalism at Stony Brook University and executive director of the Center for News Literacy. The project is an activity of the Tides Center.

The News Literacy Project has been endorsed by the National Association of Black Journalists and the Asian American Journalists Association as well as ASNE and has the support of Investigative Reporters and Editors. The initial diverse and distinguished group of journalist fellows includes Pulitzer Prize winners, book authors, newspaper foreign bureau chiefs and network television correspondents. Both active and retired journalists are encouraged to participate and can sign on to do so through a form on the website.

The website features a directory of participating journalists, each with his or her biography, photo and resume. Participating teachers will be able to request assistance from journalists in their regions whose expertise fits their curriculum. A social studies teacher might seek a political reporter for a government class; a colleague focusing on Latin America might request a Mexico City correspondent. Journalists will address classes through videoconferencing as well as in person and will be trained by the project.



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The idea for the project arose from Alan Miller's experience talking about his work as a reporter and the importance of journalism to 175 sixth graders at his daughter's middle school in Bethesda, Md. He left the Los Angeles Times in March 2008 after 21 years, the last 14 as an investigative reporter in the Washington bureau, to commit himself to this new mission. His decision prompted this statement by the media blog FishbowLA (www.mediabistro.com/fishbowLA): "It's a rare reporter who leaves daily news to try to make journalism a better institution."

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