Enhancing Awareness of Racial Bias in Search Engines through First-Year Information Literacy Instruction

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COLL 101: College Strategies
At Cascadia College

Information literacy curriculum for COLL 101 includes:

*Traditional content*
- Library basics & searching basics

*New content*
- Critical internet searching
- Biases in search engines
Why did we decide to add new critical content?

Librarian/faculty feedback informed our process to create new material to help students to critically engage in the search process.

The Curriculum redesign included

- Broadening the discussion beyond the typical database searching good/internet searching bad dichotomy.
- Expanding information about Google search.
- Adding Dr. Safiya Umoja Noble’s research on how algorithms reinforce oppression(s) promoted deeper critical thinking and reflection.
- Designing an Information Spectrum (instead of an information timeline) to frame the module.
Information Spectrum Chart

Information found on the **Internet**
- What's happening now.
- Current daily info.
- What's happening up to the minute.
- Local info.
- Popular events.
- General opinion.
- Crowdsourced info.

Information found in **print and electronic formats**
- Original research focused on a topic.
- In-depth look at topics.
- Data or statistics.
- Historical info.

**If you need ...**
- Moment to moment.
- Production Time
- Months to years.

**Try this source type...**
- Social media
  - Twitter
  - Facebook
  - Blogs
- Online news
  - General websites
  - Wikipedia
  - Broadcast media
  - Online Magazines
  - Blogs
- Scholarly journals
  - Books
  - Raw Data / Statistics
  - Historical newspapers
  - Magazines & Trade journals
  - General websites

Credits:
Information Spectrum Chart by Myra Waddell and Caitlan Maxwell. Licensed under [CC BY-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)
Critical Internet Searching Module

Why are black women so
why are black women so angry
why are black women so loud
why are black women so mean
why are black women so attractive
why are black women so lazy
why are black women so annoying
why are black women so confident
why are black women so sassy
why are black women so insecure

Algorithms of Oppression

How Search Engines Reinforce Racism

Safiya Umoja Noble
Critical Internet Searching Module

Excerpt from Canvas Module

Search Engines, Algorithms, and Bias

Many people around the world use Google or a similar search engine every day to find information on the left side of the timeline • news, blogs, social media, Wikipedia • but rarely do we think critically about how Google works, how it decides what information to give us, and what information might be left out.

Excerpt from Canvas Module

Google is Sorry its Sentiment Analyzer is Biased

The company’s Cloud Natural Language API rated being a Jew or homosexual as negative.

Google Translate’s algorithm has a gender bias

Commentary: If Google’s workplace is biased, what about its algorithms?
Critical Internet Searching Module

What Students Are Asked to Do

- Did anything about Professor Safiya Umoja Noble’s research surprise you? Why or why not?
- Why are researchers studying the way we get information from companies like Google?
- Do you find yourself using the same information sources again and again? Why or why not?
“Google may have its own agenda and shows us information that it wants us to see, and it may suppress information that it would rather not have us see.”
“I have the habit of searching something up on Google and simply clicking the first link that comes up. This video enabled me to see that following this habit can be unhealthy in shaping my worldview; in the future, I will take care to see what kind of representation is provided on search engines whenever I choose to search something up.”
Where do we want to go from here?
Thank you!

Questions? Please contact us!

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Learn more about the IL Curriculum for COLL 101: College Success at https://guides.lib.uw.edu/bothell/college101