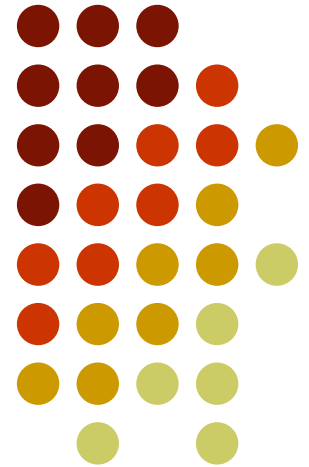# Teaching Government Information

Using Government Information to Teach Evaluation of Sources

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Audience

- Enrolled in freshman rhetoric course
- Facing first college research paper
- Knowledge base:
  - Online catalog
  - General article indexes (i.e. Ebsco, Infotrac)
  - General search engines

Rhetoric 105

- "Study of the methods of exposition, the problems of argument, the use of evidence, and style; practice in expository writing."
  - Narrowing a topic
  - Evaluation of sources
  - Critical thinking

Information Literacy Compentency Standards for Higher Education

Association of College and Research Libraries

- http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm

Instructional Goals

- Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education: Standard 3

  - The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.

Instructional Goals, continued

- **Performance Indicator 2**: The information literate student articulates and applies initial criteria for evaluating both the information and its sources.

Instructional Goals, continued

- **Outcomes**
  - Examines and compares information from various sources in order to evaluate reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, and point of view or bias.

  - Recognizes the cultural, physical, or other context within which the information was created and understands the impact of context on interpreting the information.

Point of View and Context of Information

- Democratic vs. Republican administrations
  - Global warming
  - Social Security

- Executive vs. legislative branch
  - Military appropriations
  - Space exploration

Reliability, Validity and Accuracy

- Trustworthiness of sources themselves
  - Primary sources
  - Influence of point of view

- Trustworthiness of secondary sources that cite government information

Models of Source Evaluation

- Legislative Process

  - Bill as hypothesis or proposed solution

  - Hearing as gathering of sources

  - Report as conclusions and evaluation of arguments

Models of Source Evaluation, continued

- Legislative process, cont.
  - Floor debate as persuasion

- Agencies that analyze and evaluate
  - 9-11 Commission
  - Congressional Research Service
  - Etc…

Results

- Instructors have an example to teach students to interact with sources

- Students know how to evaluate the information their government provides and can apply these skills to other sources

- Librarians have started students on the road to participating in democracy