Evaluating Websites

Goals: Evaluating information and its sources is an essential part of the research process. This becomes even more necessary when searching for information that is found on the web. Students will be given a set of 4 criteria that they will use to critically evaluate several websites, determining whether that information is appropriate for a research paper. Students will work individually on a hands-on activity that explores several websites and documents the evaluation process.

Outcomes:
- Students will answer 9 questions about a website's accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage in order to decide whether the website is an appropriate source for a research project.

Materials: Instruction room in the library with computers, handout with website evaluation criteria.

Time Required: 35 minutes with in-class activity (or presentation can be shortened to 15 minutes with the activity given as a homework assignment).

Lesson:
- Hook (2 min.) – display New Yorker cartoon image, "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog." Librarian will emphasize the point that anyone can publish information on the web. It is easy, cheap or free, and unregulated. The burden is on the reader to evaluate the information that is on the web.
- Lesson (5 min) – Distribute handout and introduce the 4 criteria that students will use when exploring the information that is found on a website. (Accuracy, Authority, Objectivity, Currency).
- Action (8 min.): Librarian will display 2 websites and use criteria to evaluate the information. Elicit evaluative comments from students for each site about the author, the author's qualifications, the publisher, the purpose of the site, and its currency. Write answers on board.
- Action (15 min.): Librarian will hand out the worksheets along with a specific website to evaluate. Allow 15 min. to complete this activity. Librarian will circulate and provide guidance as needed.
- Discussion (5 min.): Librarian will review main points, answer any additional questions and collect worksheet for assessment purposes. Worksheets will be returned to students by the next class session.

Assignment:
- Students will work individually on the website evaluation worksheet that will be completed by the end of session. (If the assignment is to completed outside of class, each student should have to evaluate a different site.)
- Librarian will review and summarize main points and collect worksheets for assessment purposes.

Assessment:
- On the assignment handout, students will list any points from the lesson that are still unclear.
- The students will also record what they have learned from the lesson.

Criteria for Evaluating Websites

1.) Accuracy : Can you tell who wrote the page and can you contact the author? Is this person qualified to write this document?

2.) Authority: Can you tell which institution publishes and maintains this website? Is the publisher making a profit off this site? Is there a history of the organization/company, or a mission statement?

3.) Objectivity: Are the goals of this page stated and are they met? Is there a statement of purpose? Can you determine why this page was written and for whom? Is the site trying to inform, or to entertain and persuade?

4.) Currency: Can you find when the site was produced and when it was last updated? Are there any links that are broken or do not work?