United States Senate:
Legislative Session on Information Literacy

CLARKMUN XIV

Clark University Model United Nations

Empower Minds, Navigate Truth

ClarkMUN
XIV

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Chair Letter

Dear Delegates,

I trust this message finds you well. As we delve into the essential and ever-changing landscape of information literacy, I wanted to share some insights about my interests and the committee with you.

My journey with MUN began in middle school, and the Massachusetts circuit. The transformative experience of participating in ClarkMUN X as a high schooler prompted my decision to transfer to Clark during my sophomore year of university. Over the past two and a half years, I have had the privilege of competing in both General Assembly and Crisis on the East Coast collegiate circuit. My roles representing everyone from a midcentury Las Vegas dancer to Bulgaria in the United Nations Environmental Programme.

This committee holds a special place in my life, having been a dream of mine for the past five years. The scope of governance and topic has evolved alongside my experiences in information advocacy, librarianship and MUN. Researching this committee marked my introduction to the intricacies of United States civics. I am confident that your engagement in this committee will be both enriching and fulfilling, whether this will be your first committee or the final committee of your career. My hope is that you take the approaches to information you learn and implement in your legislation and apply them wherever your journey leads.

Now, I am a senior pursuing a major in philosophy with a minor in economics. My academic endeavors are complemented by a dual role within two of Clark's four libraries. I plan to pursue my "library degree" after I graduate this spring. I am deeply passionate about the library and its role in fostering knowledge and community engagement. I am a member of the American Library Association (ALA), the largest and longest library nonprofit

organization in the world, with a focus on professional ethics. Beyond my professional sphere, my studies extend to writing philosophical investigations, delving into themes encompassing the internet, memes, and technology ethics. Outside of school and work, I enjoy traveling to new places, looking at pictures of cats, and sticker collecting.

Please reach out to me with any questions, concerns regarding how the committee will run or comments on anything I have included in the background guide. The best way to contact me is via email at tclark@clarku.edu

Best regards,

Tetrah Clark

Introduction

Although this is the political body of the United States Senate, it will be functioning with committee procedure mechanics of both a Senate meeting and a General Assembly committee. The procedure rules will be explained further in a later section, but if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at tclark@clarku.edu.

Education and academic freedom are issues impacting every citizen of the United States. To create lifelong learning, many advocates suggest that the ability to navigate the onslaught of information available to us is to critically evaluate how and where people get their information. The name for this navigation is called information literacy. Although there are many definitions offered by organizations who specialize in the sharing or collection of information, the National Forum on Information Literacy (NFIL) defines information literacy as "to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information for the issue or problem at hand." (NFIL). Ever polarizing, information literacy can often be seen as an educational task and not one that demands political attention outside a local schoolboard meeting. Despite this, a joint report by the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), National Forum on Information Literacy (NFIL) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) states, "It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion of all nations." (The Alexandria Proclamation, 2005). Oftentimes we look at education as a solution to problems, whether it be gender equality or economic development, yet we do not look at wholistic or self-sustaining ways to educate populations nationally and internationally. Giving people the tools to educate themselves and their communities is vital to repairing inequalities within the world. As delegates, we are responsible for examining what we think we know, challenge our assumptions, and pursue knowledge.

Role of Committee and Committee Expectations

As Senators, you will be asked to conduct your own research as preparation for this committee and come together with your colleagues to write, debate and vote on a bill to improve implementation of information literacy.

This committee will be a unique blend of traditional General Assembly mechanisms and US Senate mechanisms. The committee will still be upholding Parliamentary Procedure. If a rule is not specified to be in alignment with the Senate, please use General Assembly procedures.

Speakers list and motions will be the same as traditional GA. So will points and caucuses. Resolutions will also be formatted in GA clause style. This also means filibusters will not be used. The divergence comes from voting and solutions that will be permitted in the papers. In alignment with ArtI.S7.C1.1 Origination Clause and Revenue Bills of the United States constitution, "All Bills for raising Revenue shall originate in the House of Representatives; but the Senate may propose or concur with Amendments as on other Bills."(United States Constitution) meaning resolutions written and passed by Delegates will not be allowed to increase taxes. The Senate will be able to appoint individuals to positions in the US cabinet, create new forums and appropriate pre-existing funds. In voting, a simple majority (50% of the committee plus 1) will be needed to pass any motion or resolution presented in debate. Roll call and voice vote will also be done on every resolution. Additionally, there will be a closed session and injunction of secrecy in alignment with the Standing Senate Rules.

"Standing Senate Rules XXI, XXIX, and XXXI cover secret sessions for legislative and executive business (nominations and treaties). Rule XXI calls for the Senate to close its doors once a motion is made and seconded. The motion is not debatable, and its disposition is made behind closed doors. Rule XXIX calls for Senate consideration of treaties to be conducted in secret unless a majority votes to lift the "injunction of secrecy," which it usually does. Rule XXXI mandates that all nominations be considered in open session unless the Senate votes to do so in secret." (Amer, CRS-2).

Normally, closed sessions are reserved for impeachments, voting on treaties or matters pertaining to national security. We will hold a closed session following a presidential update. Failure to uphold secrecy will result in a temporary censure in the committee.

The committee will feature both Democratic and Republican representation, yet bipartisan agreement must be reached to pass a proposed bill. Delegates will have to cross the political aisle and come to a resolution on the United States' approach to information literacy with the opposing party to be successful in the committee. Teamwork and collective effort are crucial to this committee's workings. Thoughtful debate on the issues raised in this background guide and fellow delegates are essential. In this committee, we embrace diversity and insist on treating fellow delegates and their ideas with respect.

Historical Background

The United States Senate

The US Senate was established in 1787 by the Constitution in Article I. Their most significant role is to gather information to create comprehensive and representative bills. Bills come up for debate after research is conducted on the issue at hand. Their legislative powers include impeachment, ratification of treaties, confirmation of executive officers, approving the federal budget and power distribution about legislature between the House of Representatives as stated in the US Constitution. This is called the interbranch check. The Senate, also referred to as the Upper House differs from the House of Representatives as it theoretically is Insulated from public opinion. The Senate has two representatives from each

state while the House is based on population of the state's districts. The Senate relies on

representative trusteeship, that is the Senator makes choices based on what they believe is

best for their constituents, not what the constituents voice directly.

Information Literacy

Information literacy came as a response to the advent of the digital age,

"William Demo followed a similar line of thought in 1986 by considering the technological innovations that were available to process, store, retrieve and transmit vast amounts of information. He listed examples of new technologies such as microcomputers, cable TV, electronic publishing, fiber optics, satellite communications, videotext, online database searching, high-density CD-ROM storage, and robotics. His point was that in order to master these technologies a new intellectual skill was needed. This new skill he regarded as information literacy. Although Demo did not suggest a working definition of information literacy, he pointed out that only people who possessed the necessary skills would be able to benefit fully from the information age. It is apparent that by the middle of the 1980s the advancing information technology (IT) had begun to affect the information handling requirements for information literacy. Demo noted that, along with traditional literacy skills, information literacy forms the common prerequisite for lifelong learning." (Behrens 312)

Since the 1980s technology and communication has changed even more, necessitating the requisite for formalized technology and information competencies along with traditional learning.

On January 10, 1989, a division of the American Library Association, the Association

of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), released the "Presidential Committee on

Information Literacy: Final Report" released recommendations on how to maximize the

information revolution and to also look to future issues that could be emerging. Information

literacy standards address the following:

- Determine the extent of information needed

- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently

- Evaluate information and its sources critically

- Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base

- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose

- Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally (ALA)[1]

The ALA also considers the following in critical evaluation of information:

- Consider the source. Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.

- Read past the headline. Headlines can be outrageous in effort to get clicks. Go beyond headlines.

- Assess the credibility of the author. Do a quick Google search on the author. What is their expertise? What organization do they represent?

- Look at the links and sources supporting the article. Click those links. Determine if the subsequent information supports the story. Consider the reliability of the sources.

- Check the date.

- Consider that the item might be satire. If it seems too outlandish, it might be satire. Do some quick research on the site and author to find out.

- Consider that it might be promotional. Is the purpose of the site to sell a product?

- Check your biases.

- Search other news outlets to see if the news is widely reported. (ALA)[2]

Efforts to create citizens who understand information and technology is also seen outside of the United States. Countries like Cuba have already responded to the 2003 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) call for an information literate society. In Cuba, information literacy is coupled with traditional literacy. Journalism and information studies were the primary disciplines who received information literacy instruction and Library and Information Science professionals spearheaded an effort

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[1] (The Association of College and Research Libraries and American Library Association 2000)
[2] (American Library Association n.d.)

to record the information literacy competencies first-year students came into university with.[3]

Topic of Committee

Fake news is in the minds of many politicians. Currently the United States is battling misinformation and disinformation. "Misinformation is false or inaccurate information—getting the facts wrong. [while] [d]isinformation is false information which is deliberately intended to mislead—intentionally misstating the facts." (American Psychological Association n.d.).

Social media is a part of most people's media diets. In 2020 the President at the time created an Executive Order to ban the application TikTok.[4] Once again in 2023 the President of the United States and Congress attempted to ban TikTok. [5] The main catalyst for this ban is the potential for foreign actors to use the app to spread misinformation.[6] Facebook, owned by Meta has also been faulted for hosting misinformation and its role in the January 6th insurrection[7] and election misinformation in 2016[8].

Traditional news media like broadcast and print are not immune to spreading misinformation and disinformation, however[9]. Traditional media sews distrust with the American public. Reuters Institute Digital News Report from 2021 stated 29% of Americans trust the news[10].

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[3] (Ponjuan 2010)
[4] ("Executive Order on Addressing the Threat Posed by TikTok – The White House" August 6, 2020.)
[5] (BORDELON 2023)
[6] (Maheshwari and Holpuch 2023)
[7] (Merrill 2022)
[8] (Giwa 2022)
[9] (Moschella 2022)
[10] ("United States | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism" 2021)

Generative AI like that of that ChatGPT also threaten to upend democracy by influencing policy through fabricated lobbying and automating fake news production. The data sets used to train these types of artificial intelligence also utilize black box algorithms, that is an algorithm so smart it cannot tell you the source of its generated outcomes[11]. Black box algorithms seem antithetical to a transparent American democracy.

Wherever it comes from, misinformation and disinformation undermine American democracy and progress. This distrust and regression in public trust is the essential reason for the information literacy policy to be passed by the Senate. The implementation of these actions may be the safeguard for democracy needed. Public policy, professional ethics, technology companies, and educational institutions play roles in combatting misinformation and disinformation.

The key purpose of this meeting of the Senate is to create a policy that addresses these issues through comprehensive information literacy.

Overview of the Problem and Current Situation

This committee will meet during the second week of January when the Senate calendar for 2024 starts. This will be the 118th Congress, 2nd Session.

Fake news and disinformation have influenced the citizens and politics in the United States. The US Department of State says that misinformation is one of the biggest threats to America at home and abroad[12]. After the events of the past years, the Senate understands the urgent need to reach out to the American population and embrace information literacy, lest the fabric of American democracy falter under fake news.

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[11] (Sanders and Schneier 2023)
[12] (US Department of State October 20,2023)

Recent attempts to ban problematic social media platforms on a state-by-state basis have been ruled unconstitutional and a violation of First Amendment rights.[13] With policy being unable to ban or restrict offenders of misinformation and disinformation, Senators must coalesce and created a civic body resilient to fake news and is able to find reliable and trustworthy information for themselves.

Each party holds different values in considering legislative goals within the committee. Republican Senators hold state-by-state standards for information literacy while the Democratic Senators want sweeping federal regulations and standards on the instruction of literacy skills. Problems arise with both as Republican backed efforts may fail while a Democratic one size fits most policy may not target a states' needs.

Character List

For the sake of cross-party collaboration and the advancement of discussion these are not real people or representatives. An important fact to note however is the party affiliation is accurate to the state's representative as of December 2023. Please remember that compromise and collaboration are the committee's secondary goals. What makes MUN great is the ability to do better than the actual states and bodies we represent.

State:	Party Affiliation:
Alabama	REPUBLICAN
Alaksa	REPUBLICAN
Arizona	DEMOCRAT
Arkansas	REPUBLICAN
California	DEMOCRAT
Colorado	DEMOCRAT

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[13] (Mackey 2023)

Connecticut	DEMOCRAT
Delaware	DEMOCRAT
Florida	REPUBLICAN
Georgia	DEMOCRAT
Hawaii	DEMOCRAT
Idaho	REPUBLICAN
Illinois	DEMOCRAT
Indiana	REPUBLICAN
Iowa	REPUBLICAN
Kansas	REPUBLICAN
Kentucky	REPUBLICAN
Louisiana	REPUBLICAN
Maine	REPUBLICAN
Maryland	DEMOCRAT
Massachusetts	DEMOCRAT
Michigan	DEMOCRAT
Minnesota	DEMOCRAT
Mississippi	REPUBLICAN
Missouri	REPUBLICAN
Montana	DEMOCRAT
Nebraska	REPUBLICAN
Nevada	DEMOCRAT
New Hampshire	DEMOCRAT
New Jersey	DEMOCRAT
New Mexico	DEMOCRAT
New York	DEMOCRAT

State	Party
North Carolina	REPUBLICAN
North Dakota	REPUBLICAN
Ohio	REPUBLICAN
Oklahoma	REPUBLICAN
Oregon	DEMOCRAT
Pennsylvania	DEMOCRAT
Rhode Island	DEMOCRAT
South Carolina	REPUBLICAN
South Dakota	REPUBLICAN
Tennessee	REPUBLICAN
Texas	REPUBLICAN
Utah	REPUBLICAN
Vermont	DEMOCRAT
Virginia	DEMOCRAT
Washington	DEMOCRAT
West Virginia	REPUBLICAN
Wisconsin	DEMOCRAT
Wyoming	REPUBLICAN

Senate Composition by Party

Republican
48%

Democrat
52%
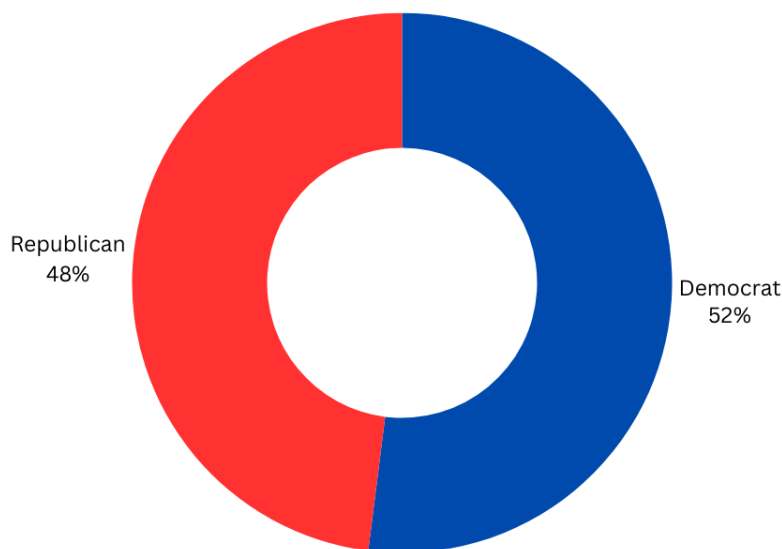
Questions to Consider/Issues to be Addressed

The questions and issues presented below are not rigid directives but rather proposals open to discussion, modification, and adaptation based on the needs of the committee.

1. How should the United States define information literacy?

2. A resolution should address and evaluate the American Library Association's necessary skills of information literacy as outlined in the Historical Background section and implement or adapt them to the needs to the committee.

3. How can the UNESCO Prague Declaration be adopted in the United States?

4. How does ChatGPT and other generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) work for or against the committee's goals?

5. Look at the research you did for this committee which followed the literacy guidelines. What were the challenges of this? What were the benefits? What would you change?

6. What can be done outside of the traditional classroom? What skills would adult learners need? What skills would non-native English speakers need?

7. What solutions have worked well in the past? Why?

8. What solutions have not worked? Why?

9. Is there any research on demographics that should be considered before implementing any policy?

10. How can we implement safeguards online for misinformation? What standards and practices should be present in social media and traditional media?

Suggestions for Further Research

For additional research, look at your state's preexisting standards on information literacy, academic freedom, libraries, and education. It is also recommended that you see how your personal interests or studies can be incorporated into your policy.

References

Please note, I tried my best to use open access or open educational resources for the works I used to research or cite in this paper. If you have any trouble accessing these materials, please reach out to me at tclark@clarku.edu and I can share them with you for your research

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