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Media Literacy Skills Study Published

A study in teaching media literacy skills by the Instruction Coordinator at the New Mexico State University Library was recently published. Kate Manuel's article "How First-year College Students Read Popular Science: An Experiment in Teaching Media Literacy Skills" appeared in *SIMILE: Studies in Media & Information Literacy Education*, volume 2, May 2002. *SIMILE*, an electronic journal, is located at <http://www.utpjournals.com/simile/>.

Media literacy has been defined as the ability to understand, evaluate and respond thoughtfully to the media we consume. In Manuel's study, over the course of three consecutive quarters during the 2000-2001 academic year, sixty-three students enrolled in an information literacy course at a western university were required to conduct a close reading of an article from *Popular Science* after preliminary instruction in key information and media literacy concepts. Manuel found that even after basic instruction, many students had difficulty in identifying problems with information resources such as bias, authors' lack of credentials and lack of sources because of the ways that the students misread texts and made mistaken inferences from them.

Faculty members in the higher education community presume that students understand what they read. It has also been suggested that students' exposure to the Internet would make students more critical in evaluating sources of information. However, Manuel questions the accuracy of these suggestions. She notes that for students to be able to interpret and evaluate information correctly, they must be given the opportunity to practice intensively the art of close reading. They must be presented with models of ways to read a text in order to evaluate it as an information source. They must also have constant feedback and analysis of their efforts. Manuel concludes that much work remains to be done by both students and teachers to prepare students to read critically the types of texts with which they will interact throughout their adult lives.

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