

## SCI 3101 - ADDRESSING BIAS IN SCIENCE

### AFTER-CLASS ACTIVITY: EVALUATING YOUR MEDIA DIET

**OBJECTIVE:** In this exercise, you will become more cognizant of the news sources you consume and reflect on their reliability and impact on your life. It is important to note that the *volume* of news you consume is not being evaluated; instead, the goal of this activity is to help you to develop a deeper understanding of the *type* of media you choose to follow and *why*.

#### PROCEDURE:

**Step 1:** Over a 48-hour period, complete a news audit to evaluate your current media consumption habits. Closely track the information you receive and the sources you use over this time. A sample chart for your data collection and observations is attached, but feel free to modify/customize it as you see fit. Be sure to list *all* sources of information and how you're consuming them, including TV, social media, newspapers, radio, online videos, websites, apps, *and* the specific people who tell, text or email you news, however you're defining it.

**Step 2:** Now that you've spent 48 hours noticing what news you already follow, think about what would make it better for you. What would you like to add, subtract or change? Why? How can you come up with a mix that will improve your life? This step invites you to follow the news *intentionally* and construct a diet to match those intentions. Here are some questions to guide you:

- **What kinds of news or sources should I have in my daily diet?** What is missing from my list? What do I have too much of, and what might I not have enough of? What new topics do I want to learn more about? What new sources could I explore? How reliable is the news I'm getting now? Is there bias? How representative of a variety of points of view and experiences? How useful for my everyday life? Look at the mix of sources in your news audit and experiment with adding new ones that address any bias you notice. For example, you might have discovered that the majority of the news you get is skewed to either the political left or right, and, in a desire to get out of your "bubble" maybe you'd like an ideological mix. Or, maybe you've decided that you'd like to get a global view via more international news – or, conversely, maybe you'd like to focus more locally, on Ottawa or the campus itself. Assess your list to see if it helps you achieve the goals you set out to achieve.
- **You can also consider how you get your news.** Maybe you want to exclusively use your smartphone, or maybe you want to use a computer. You might like to read the paper or magazines in print because your family subscribes. If you're on your phone, you might decide to use several different news apps – or that you want one app that will aggregate a lot of sources. Or, do you want to read the news through your email instead of an app, via a newsletter? Maybe you just want to watch videos or listen to radio. Or, perhaps you want more news on platforms you already use for social purposes, like Snapchat or Instagram. What should you add? See what feels right.

You might need to go through this analysis a few times before you get it right. Maybe you got enthusiastic and added too much news at the beginning of this step. Or, you could be getting news at the wrong time of day or on the wrong platform. Experiment until your system and sources work for you. Try to find a mix that feels useful, enjoyable, interesting or important, then live with it for a while and see how it affects you. After all, even though you're doing this for an assignment, the goal of this exercise is to apply it to your real life.

**Step 3:** Live with your new media diet for at least 48 more hours, and notice what happens. Reflect on your experiences before and after you experimented with your news diet, and think about how you see the role of news in your life now.

TO BE SUBMITTED:

Your News Diet Chart, and a ~500-word essay about your experience. Try to be as honest as possible – again, the goal is to get you to think deeply and critically about your relationship with the news. Try to answer these questions in your self-reflection essay:

- Where did you start? What did your news audit reveal about your habits and sources and the role of news in your life at the beginning of exercise?
- What happened when you experimented with your media diet? How did it impact your daily life? What stood out from the experience?
- What *didn't* work for you? What mistakes did you make? What was difficult?
- Will you continue to experiment with your news diet? What may be the right mix for you? Why?
- What notable reactions to individual news items or topics did you have along the way?
- What does this exercise leave you noticing, wondering or thinking about the role of media in your life in general, and any bias it may cause? Is the right mix of news making your life better somehow?
- What was most notable, useful or interesting about this experience?



