

To: Professor Mann

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Subject: First Amendment Questions and the Digital World

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1. Consider your own circumstances as a citizen (presume you are a citizen even if you are not) protected by First Amendment freedoms. What primary sources and means do you use to access, gather, and share/communicate information, ideas and opinions? Be honest and specific and be sure to include any online sources. Do you believe you are well-informed about current events and issues? Why or why not? Identify some sources you trust, and don't trust. (Please note that *I don't care* where you lie in the political spectrum, but I do care about well-informed, clear writing.)

- When it comes to accessing information about current events, I typically use my computer to search through popular search engines such as Yahoo, Google, and MSN. Additionally, I rely on independent news organization channels available on platforms like YouTube. I find these sources to be a reliable center for finding information related to current events, including political news. One thing I appreciate is that these sources often provide the news source citation at the bottom of each article or video, allowing for easy verification. In terms of communicating information, ideas, and opinions, I personally prefer not to express myself online. Instead, I engage in casual conversations with people I work with and interact with daily. I tend to take a neutral stance in these discussions as I find myself agreeing with both left-leaning and right-leaning political views. However, I do consider myself well-informed as I spend a significant amount of time scrolling through my social media feeds during my downtime throughout the day. As for the sources I trust, I find the BBC, Wall Street Journal, and NewsNation to be reliable and informative. However, I like to ensure a comprehensive understanding of news articles by reading from multiple sources that cover the same topic. This allows me to gain a broader context and perspectives on the news.

2. What roles *can and should* governments and government institutions in the U.S. play in the removal or restriction of content involving misleading, hateful speech/information, especially in the digital world? Give specific examples and cite sources in the body of the memo.

- Roles that governments and government institutions in the US can and should play in the removal or restriction of content involving misleading, hateful speech/information has been an ongoing debate and rather sensitive topic of conversation given the differing perspectives when considering government intervention. While the biggest issue with government intervention being the potential impact on free speech there are some key roles that the government can consider:
 - Legislations - Government can enact laws regarding the spread misinformation and hate speech by clearly defining the law itself by establishing clear definition

and providing guidelines for what constitutes misinformation, harmful speech and provide legal frameworks to take action against violators.

- Enforcement – Government institutions can enforce existing laws and regulations related to misleading or hateful speech by monitoring online platforms and investigating complaints and make appropriate actions to prevent propagation.
- Collaboration with tech industry – Governments can work together with tech companies by ensuring that they are keeping track with all the trends within their platforms and proving clear terms of services and ensuring accountability in dealing with harmful content.

These are only a few of the roles that the governments and government institutions can play, but they must take great caution to respect the fundamental principles of free speech in order to avoid trampling on freedom.

Sources:

<https://www.govtech.com/security/how-state-local-government-can-fight-disinformation>

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/how-to-combat-fake-news-and-disinformation/>

3. What roles *can and should* the private sector, especially social media platforms such as Facebook, play in the removal or restriction of content involving misleading, hateful information in their platform? Give specific examples and cite sources.

The commercial sector, especially social media sites like Facebook, may play a crucial role in the removal or limitation of content featuring inaccurate or harmful information on their platforms. They can and ought to play the following roles:

- Implementing content moderation systems: Social media platforms should make investments in effective content moderation tools that can quickly identify and delete offensive or misleading content. In order to recognize and address problematic content, this may involve a collaboration between human moderators, machine learning algorithms, and artificial intelligence. The use of AI technologies by platforms like Facebook has increased the efficiency of the detection and removal of harmful content.
- Developing and enforcing community norms: Social media sites should set explicit community guidelines that prevent the spread of inaccurate or hateful information. To keep a responsible and safe online community, these rules should be consistently followed. Examples of forbidden content including hate speech, harassment, and disinformation are included in Facebook's Community Standards.
- Collaboration with external fact-checkers: Platforms can work with independent fact-checking groups to examine the accuracy of material and identify or limit the distribution of false content. Through its Third-Party Fact-Checking Program, Facebook has worked

with fact-checking groups across the world to detect and reduce the spread of incorrect material.

Sources:

<https://transparency.fb.com/policies/community-standards/?source=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fcommunitystandards%2F>

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2019/04/09/how-should-social-media-platforms-combat-misinformation-and-hate-speech/>

4. There are many examples of university students who have shouted down university-invited guest speakers with whom they disagree. Find a published example and summarize what happened (cite your source). Do you believe this was an appropriate response? Why or why not? Consider pros, cons, and potential First Amendment concerns.

- A handful of students objected to a conservative speaker invited by a student club to promote free speech at the State University of New York. Protesters packed the conference room, screamed insulting insults, and demanded that the speaker be removed. Despite efforts to get the speaker out, the event was finally relocated to a different room, where a reduced address was delivered. Although the University of Albany had more employees and police officers on hand, several guests, including journalists from the university newspaper, were denied entry. Two pupils were detained as they attempted to access a restricted area. The institution underlined the value of free speech and healthy discourse, while also acknowledging student organizations' ability to hold events without hindrance. I find this response to be inappropriate because it violates the very foundation of free speech and shows hypocrisy of those who oppose the speaker's view. Although they do not agree with the speaker, the best response they could have been performed by providing a counter argument rather than showing instinctive inflammatory reactions which made the event toxic in the first place.

Sources:

<https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/ualbany-students-shut-turning-point-usa-ian-17882744.php>

5. Overall, do you believe the internet and technological developments described in the background section (and perhaps within your own answers to these questions) strengthen or weaken public discourse and democratic processes? Provide some justification.

- I believe that the internet and technological developments described in the background section both strengthen and weaken the public discourse and democratic processes. It strengthens public discourse by providing diverse voices, allowing the public to see each other's perspectives without the problem of distance. It also allows for the quick

dissemination of information resulting in higher informed civilians, fostering discussions and debates globally, resulting in effective mobilization of social movements to hold those in power accountable. However, the internet and technology present challenges. The abundance of information mixed with misinformation and echo chambers can hinder meaningful conversations and contribute to polarization. There are also issues in privacy, security and influence of digital platforms that raise concerns relating to the integrity of democratic processes. Ultimately, effects of internet and technological developments depend highly on how they are used and it will be up to the users to determine information that can be trusted and not. Education must be done to help the public distinguish between truth and falsehood.