Bridging Gaps:
AI Civic Literacy Against Political Misinformation

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1. Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the Xin Sheng Project, a 100% volunteer-run counter-disinformation platform for and by the Chinese diaspora, which I co-led for four years before its sunset in 2025. It was through Xin Sheng that I began confronting the lack of intersectionality and culturally grounded insights in my current information literacy work as a faculty librarian.

I am also deeply grateful to my community and family—especially my husband, an engineer executive who was initially apathetic to politics but generously offered his perspective and technical insights throughout this project. His willingness to test AI applications and provide honest feedback helped me refine my work. It is our differing professional backgrounds and nuanced political leanings—as well as our diverse media habits and approaches to information—that reminded me that counter-disinformation work can and must be pluralist and bridge-building, rather than finger-pointing or moral absolutism.

I would like to thank the entire UC National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement team (particularly Michelle Deutchman, Melanie Ziment, Brenda Pitcher) for their outstanding support in the implementation of this project. Their intellectual guidance, administrative care, and more importantly, the irreplaceable environment and collective space of inspiration and collaboration they created, especially during the political challenges of this past year, are instrumental. The thought-provoking and uplifting conversations I had with 2024-25 fellows and Center staff deeply shaped the direction of my project and strengthened my momentum to carry this work forward.

Next, I am grateful to my colleagues at California State University Northridge. Jamie Johnson collaborated with me on the design and assessment of our inaugural Generative AI and Research module, which laid the foundation for the format and structure of the instructional module developed in this project. Invaluable feedback from student assistants and the AI Working Group at the University Library further informed my design principles and helped refine the content.

Special thanks go to Kiley Larkin, Communications Director of BruinsVote, and Philip Goodrich, Manager of Campus Life Initiatives, both at UCLA, for organizing the amazing Democracy Series workshops, which provided me with meaningful, real-world opportunities to pilot and refine my lesson plans based on live student engagement and feedback from civic educators and practitioners on the ground. I would also like to thank Dr. Misha Kouzeh from the USC Annenberg School of Communication, who co-developed and co-delivered our keynote session at the Higher Education Track of the annual Corporate Learning Conference titled “Addressing the AI Skills Gap: Preparing Students for an AI-Driven Workforce”. Our exchange of perspectives on AI literacy with higher education and learning and development professionals across the country reinforced both the urgency and the long-term significance of this work, and the tremendous work that lies ahead of us.

2. Background and Purpose

Political misinformation has long threatened democracy, with its impact particularly devastating for marginalized communities.[1] The 2020 election highlighted the increasing sophistication of misinformation campaigns targeting communities of color, as seen in tailored disinformation specifically for Latino and Asian American voters leveraging language barriers, mistrust in voting systems, and preexisting fears rooted in experiences from authoritarian regimes.[2] The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has magnified these threats to free expression and civic engagement. For example, generative AI tools, capable of creating photorealistic images and mimicking voice audio, escalate the capacity for generating political disinformation.[3] The disparity in AI literacy further underscores the urgent need for research and interventions on college campuses.[4] The exacerbation of misinformation manipulation deepens inequities in democratic processes, necessitating the incorporation of AI knowledge and tools into accessible information literacy education to uphold democracy.

UNESCO has long advocated for the vital role information literacy education should play in advancing civic engagement and democracy.[5] In the United States, scholars and practitioners have particularly emphasized the criticality of libraries in fighting against book bans, safeguarding free speech, and strengthening American civic life.[6] Academic librarians, equipped with their expertise in information science, are uniquely positioned to support democratic learning on campus, particularly by identifying and removing barriers for students of color to effectively engage in democracy increasingly dominated by AI.

However, the vision of academic libraries as civic agents has yet to be extensively implemented in higher education. There is already a scarcity of information literacy research and interventions about communities of color, let alone students of color. Current educational materials on mis/disinformation like information literacy modules either overlook the specific needs of students of color, as demonstrated in the Civic Online Reasoning curriculum by Stanford University Digital Inquiry Group,[7] or fail to focus on political misinformation, as evidenced in the critical information literacy praxis in academic librarianship.[8] Crucially, both types do not address the growing influence of AI in political misinformation.

1 Lee, Angela Y., Ryan C. Moore, and Jeffrey T. Hancock. "Designing Misinformation Interventions for All: Perspectives from AAPI, Black, Latino, and Native American Community Leaders on Misinformation Educational Efforts."
2 AP News. "Election Disinformation Campaigns Targeted Voters of Color in 2020. Experts Expect 2024 to Be Worse"; Center for Democracy and Technology. "Election Disinformation in Different Languages Is a Big Problem in the U.S."; Nguyễn, Sarah, Rachel Kuo, Madhavi Reddi, Lan Li, and Rachel E. Moran; "Studying Mis- and Disinformation in Asian Diasporic Communities: The Need for Critical Transnational Research beyond Anglocentrism."
3 "How ChatGPT Maker OpenAI Plans to Deter Election Misinformation in 2024 | AP News"; "How Generative AI Is Boosting the Spread of Disinformation and Propaganda"; Simon, Altay, and Mercier, "Misinformation Reloaded?"; Robins-Early, "Disinformation Reimagined."
4 Yu, Peter K. "The Algorithmic Divide and Equality in the Age of Artificial Intelligence."
5 "Media and Information Literacy | UNESCO."
6 Willingham, Taylor L. "Libraries as Civic Agents."
7 "Home | Civic Online Reasoning."
8 Pagowsky, Nicole, and Kelly McElroy. *Critical Library Pedagogy Handbook: Lesson Plans.*

This project bridges these gaps by developing an open-access toolkit with lesson plans, slide decks, and interactive modules for academic librarians and faculty across disciplines, especially those in writing, communication, and the social sciences, who often collaborate with or rely on academic librarians for information literacy instruction to support the democratic participation of students of color through civic information literacy education in the age of AI.

3. Project Method

This project used the ADDIE instructional design model—Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate—with a strong emphasis on interdisciplinary theory and practice to integrate civic engagement, equity, and media literacy in the age of AI. This method was iterative and combined academic, community-based, and practitioner-driven strategies. Below is a documentation of the process.

1. Analyze (July through September 2024)
    - Identified conceptual frameworks and learning objectives from literature and real-world case studies on navigating intersectional biases in AI-driven political misinformation, such as algorithms targeted at women of color candidates, who were twice as likely as other kinds of candidates to be targeted with mis- and disinformation in 2020[9]
    - Analyzed student-generated civic media projects, such as Xin Sheng, that combat disinformation from immigrant and youth-of-color perspectives
    - Synthesized AI-driven misinformation case studies from the 2024 election
    - Defined learning goals informed by fellow teaching at Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs)
    - Collected needs and insights from classroom experience and student feedback
2. Design and Develop (September through November 2024)
    - Curated and tested a list of AI and misinformation detection tools
    - Compiled educational content from academic librarianship and national racial justice media literacy networks like the Disinformation Defense League
    - Created a pilot Canvas module introducing Generative AI concepts in academic research that collected feedback from early users including instructors and students
3. Develop and Evaluate (January through March 2025)
    - Designed lesson plans and media assignment prompts that reflect the lived experiences and disinformation challenges of students of color
    - Tested the pilot Canvas module on targeted student audiences and gathered feedback from faculty colleagues teaching students of color and involved in the AI Working Group
4. Implement and Evaluate (April through June 2025)
    - Implemented lesson plans at workshops and presented project findings and outcomes at academic and professional conferences to gather input for ongoing refinement
    - Assessment of the workshops and modules is still in progress to support the iteration of content and instructional design

9 Center for Democracy and Technology. "An Unrepresentative Democracy: How Disinformation and Online Abuse Hinder Women of Color Political Candidates in the United States."

4. Political and Institutional Landscape

The Analyze phase of the project yielded several key observations that reaffirm the importance of this project as well as relevant case studies for instructional design. Specifically, the surge in AI-generated political misinformation during the 2024 U.S. election cycle and into early 2025 reveals that while general misinformation has been widely acknowledged, the racialized dimensions of such content—and its targeted impact on young voters of color—remain underexplored and underaddressed. Through the process of this project, several emerging threats and racialized narratives were identified and incorporated into the design of the teaching and learning materials.

AI tools have significantly lowered the barrier to producing persuasive disinformation, enabling new forms of manipulation that specifically affect historically marginalized communities. These include deepfakes and doctored images targeting Black voters and other minority groups,[10] fake celebrity endorsements and manipulated disaster responses to stir distrust,[11] AI-generated memes and voice messages used for voter suppression and ideological propaganda,[12] and false associations, such as linking DEI policies to natural disasters. Noteworthy incidents—like right-wing influencers blaming California wildfires on diversity programs,[13] the fake robocall of Biden that mislead voters about when and why to vote,[14] or malicious voter suppression texts targeting Wisconsin youth[15]—demonstrate how AI-driven content is deployed to distort public discourse and suppress political participation. These cases weaponized deepfakes to erode trust that disproportionately targeted marginalized voters.

Meanwhile, experts agree that AI-generated misinformation did not cause mass disruption in the 2024 U.S. election.[16] Scenarios like viral deepfakes or last-minute panic at polling places largely didn't happen. Public awareness was significantly higher than in past years, and voters approached online content with more skepticism, which suggested that increased civic education and media coverage about AI manipulation appear to have played a proactive role in building civic resilience. Moreover, over 20 U.S. states have passed laws targeting AI in political communications—though many face

10 Spring, Marianna. "Trump Supporters Target Black Voters with Faked AI Images." *BBC*, March 4, 2024. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-68440150.

11 Merica, Dan, and Ali Swenson. "Trump's Post of Fake Taylor Swift Endorsement Is His Latest Embrace of AI-Generated Images." AP News, August 20, 2024. https://apnews.com/article/trump-taylor-swift-fake-endorsement-ai-fec99c412d960932839e3eab8d49fd5f.

12 Bond, Shannon. "How AI-Generated Memes Are Changing the 2024 Election." *NPR*, August 30, 2024, sec. Untangling Disinformation. https://www.npr.org/2024/08/30/nx-s1-5087913/donald-trump-artificial-intelligence-memes-deepfakes-taylor-swift.

13 AP News. "A Parody Ad Shared by Elon Musk Clones Kamala Harris' Voice, Raising Concerns about AI in Politics," July 28, 2024. https://apnews.com/article/parody-ad-ai-harris-musk-x-misleading-3a5df582f911a808d34f68b766aa3b8e; Hagen, Lisa. "Why Right-Wing Influencers Are Blaming the California Wildfires on Diversity Efforts." *NPR*, January 10, 2025, sec. The Picture Show. https://www.npr.org/2025/01/10/nx-s1-5252757/california-wildfires-dei-diversity-influencers-firefighters.

14 Shepardson, David. "Consultant Fined $6 Million for Using AI to Fake Biden's Voice in Robocalls." *Reuters*, September 26, 2024, sec. United States. https://www.reuters.com/world/us/fcc-finalizes-6-million-fine-over-ai-generated-biden-robocalls-2024-09-26/.

15 Herman, Alice. "'Malicious' Texts Sent to Wisconsin Youths to Discourage Them from Voting." *The Guardian*, October 16, 2024, sec. US news. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/oct/16/election-wisconsin-voter-texts.

16 R Street Institute. *How Did Misinformation and AI Deepfakes Impact the 2024 Election?* YouTube video, 59:35. Posted May 12, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXJWlUwkEA4.

First Amendment hurdles. Most effective laws may be those that focus narrowly on voter suppression content (e.g., false voting times) and require disclosure when AI is used in political ads. Courts will continue to play a critical role in balancing free speech protections with the need for truth in political communication.

Within the California State University (CSU) system, which serves a majority of students of color, AI deployment presents both opportunity and risk. Faculty have expressed deep concerns about academic freedom under privatized AI rollouts, budget constraints and lack of transparency in procurement, and the need for safeguards against algorithmic bias and toxicity. The California Faculty Association (CFA) has responded by passing a Fall 2024 resolution on AI and including AI governance in its upcoming 2025 contract negotiations.[17] These developments introduced an essential layer of shared governance and ethical considerations of AI literacy education that will shape the future iterations of this project.

On the instructional level, CSU students and faculty are seeking guidance on using GenAI ethically in research and writing, including my institution CSU Northridge. While basic AI literacy learning materials (e.g.: the pilot Canvas module I designed and tested in November-January) on AI are in demand, more advanced topics such as AI-driven political misinformation, are overlooked or deemed too sophisticated for undergraduate students. This gap demonstrates the urgency of developing inclusive, accessible educational tools like this project that center the needs of students of color and frontline educators.

A final insight from the political and institutional landscape scan is the misappropriation/weaponization of free speech through misinformation (i.e. proliferation of misleading information about higher education in the name of defending free speech and diversity).[18] Political misinformation doesn't just distort facts—it reframes the very meaning of free speech to serve power and control. In doing so, it undermines the democratic institutions—like public universities. In a climate marked by intense political polarization and attacks on DEI initiatives, recognizing and countering such misinformation is essential to preserving the integrity of free speech and upholding democracy.

17 California Faculty Association. *Resolution for a New CBA Article Governing the Use of AI*. Adopted October 2024. https://www.calfac.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Resolution-for-a-New-CBA-Article-Governing-the-Use-of-AI-with-Friendly-Amendments-10.2024.pdf.

18 Sachs, Jeffrey Adam. *Campus Misinformation: The Real Threat to Free Speech in American Higher Education*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2024.

5. Learning Objectives Identified

1. Category 1: Generative AI basics
    a. Identify characteristics of generative AI and ethical implications of AI technologies
    b. Articulate benefits and risks of generative AI in research
    c. Write basic AI prompts to support academic work
    d. Evaluate AI output
    e. Cite AI-generated work
2. Category 2: Generative AI and political misinformation
    a. Understand the role of AI in political misinformation—how deepfakes, AI-generated propaganda, and algorithmic bias influence civic participation and democracy
    b. Develop hands-on GenAI skills and tools to analyze, detect, and counteract misinformation and
    c. Identify strategies to leverage GenAI in civic engagement and foster pluralist dialogue to bridge ideological divides

Learning Objective 2c was created informed by the critical pedagogical framework[19] which situates students not as passive recipients of information but as co-creators of knowledge capable of resisting epistemic injustice. To foster trust in civic engagement and pluralist dialogue to bridge ideological divide, this objective extends beyond the original scope of the project and is addressed in Lesson Plan 3 and Workshop 3 with a case study on the famous "Habermas Machine" that leveraged AI to facilitate democratic deliberation.[20]

19 Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970; hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

20 Hong, Lu, Jonathan S. Jiang, Jeffrey T. Hancock, and David M. J. Lazer. "AI Can Help Humans Find Common Ground in Democratic Deliberation." *Science* 383, no. 6670 (2024): 396–400. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adq2852.

6. Topics Covered

1. Definitions, risks, and ethical use of Gen AI
2. Case studies on navigating intersectional racial biases in AI-driven political misinformation, such as algorithms targeted at women of color candidates, who were twice as likely as other kinds of candidates to be targeted with mis- and disinformation in 2020;[21]
3. AI tools and applications that can detect patterns indicative of misinformation, such as Factmata, NewsGuard, and AdVerifAI, emphasizing the critical analysis of political information platforms like encrypted messaging apps, especially those heavily used by communities of color like WhatsApp and WeChat;[22]
4. Media assignment prompts that reflect civic experiences of students of color, such as xenophobia fueled by immigration misinformation, fostering a critical understanding and application of responsible and ethical AI to mitigate misinformation impacts on democracy.

Grounded in critical pedagogy, students engage in learning practices that foreground lived experience and foster transformative agency. Learning activities embedded in the Canvas modules and workshop slide decks reflect this orientation:

- Community Case Studies: Students analyze misinformation case studies affecting Latino voters on WhatsApp, targeting Black, and harming AAPI communities on other platforms to identify key disinformation strategies and community impacts.
- AI Testimonial Project: Students share short personal narratives (in text, audio, or video) about experiencing or witnessing political misinformation in their communities. These testimonials become artifacts for reflection and civic dialogue.

21 Center for Democracy and Technology. "An Unrepresentative Democracy: How Disinformation and Online Abuse Hinder Women of Color Political Candidates in the United States."

22 Woolley, Jacob Gursky, Martin J. Riedl, and Samuel. 2021. "The Disinformation Threat to Diaspora Communities in Encrypted Chat Apps."; Zhang, C. 2018. "WeChatting American Politics: Misinformation, Polarization, and Immigrant Chinese Media."

7. Outcomes

For Category 1 Learning Objectives:

7.1 Canvas Module: GenAI and Research

Description: This introductory module equips students with a foundational understanding of the rapidly evolving field of artificial intelligence, with a special focus on generative AI tools such as ChatGPT. In addition to technical concepts, the module emphasizes the need for students to clarify the ethical concerns and different expectations of instructors regarding the use of these generative AI tools. After completing this module, students will be able to:

- Identify characteristics of generative AI and ethical implications of AI technologies
- Articulate benefits and risks of generative AI in research
- Write basic AI prompts to support academic work
- Evaluate AI-generated output for accuracy
- Properly cite AI-generated work

For Category 2 Learning Objectives:

7.2 Canvas Module: Outsmarting AI-driven Political Misinformation

This module prepares students to critically engage with generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in the context of political information and civic life. Students will explore how GenAI content and tools like deepfakes are used to create, amplify, and challenge misinformation, and develop strategies to detect, question, and respond as both a student and an engaged civic participant. After completing this module, students will be able to:

- Define political misinformation and disinformation and its relationship to generative AI tools like deepfakes, manipulated images, and AI-generated memes.
- Recognize the racialized and gendered impacts of AI-generated misinformation on communities of color, women, and marginalized voters.
- Analyze digital media for signs of AI manipulation, using clues from anatomy, physics, context, and culture.
- Use AI detection tools and verification strategies (e.g., metadata analysis, reverse image search, fact-checking databases) to assess the credibility of media.

7.3 Lesson Plan 1: GenAI and Political Misinformation

7.3.1 Slideshow 1: Seeing is Not Believing

This lesson plan and accompanying slideshow constitute the first in a series of three workshops to teach students critical tools to engage with generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in the context of political information and civic life. The workshop begins with real-world political examples (e.g., altered Pelosi and Acosta videos) to understand the difference between misinformation and disinformation, followed up by a case study gallery walk features gender-based deepfakes and the Biden robocall, encouraging students to reflect on tech-facilitated propaganda and how it affects targeted communities. The workshop concludes with a discussion on content farms and nanoinfluencers on TikTok and X, and students write an exit ticket connecting AI political misinformation to democratic risk. After this first workshop, students will be able to identify how AI is used to generate political misinformation and recognize its racialized and gendered impacts.

7.4 Lesson Plan 2: Detecting AI-Generated Misinformation

7.4.1 Slideshow 2: Outsmarting AI Deepfakes

This lesson plan and accompanying slideshow constitute the second in a series of three workshops to teach students critical tools to engage with generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in the context of political information and civic life. Students participate in a hands-on skill-building workshop designed to improve their detection of fake images, videos, and social media content. Instructor will facilitate a "Guess the Fake" challenge (Obama and Pope images), rotating analysis stations, and a browser-based verification tool demo using TinEye and InVID. The workshop ends with student reflections on how these tools can be used in everyday civic life. After this second workshop, students will be able to detect AI-generated images, videos, and online content using visual, contextual, and metadata cues.

7.5 Lesson Plan 3: GenAI and Civic Engagement

7.5.1 Slideshow 3: GenAI and Civic Engagement

This lesson plan and accompanying slideshow constitute the third in a series of three workshops to teach students critical tools to engage with generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in the context of political information and civic life. This final session shifts the focus from defensive strategies to civic innovation. Students review AI-powered civic tools (e.g., Peaches Bot, DebunkBot) and brainstorm how GenAI can be ethically used to advance civic participation. In a "Design Jam," student groups develop their own civic AI tools (chatbots, zines, data visuals), present their ideas, and reflect on how GenAI might empower their own communities. After this third workshop, students will be able to articulate how GenAI can support civic engagement and propose ethical AI tools to strengthen democracy.

Note on the lesson plan and slideshow: these workshops are typically delivered by **academic librarians or educators trained in media and information literacy,** who are experienced in adapting content to various instructional contexts and comfort levels. **Speaker notes** also suggested talking points, definitions, quotes, and interactive questions to guide instructors and facilitators from across disciplines through these segments.

8. Significance

The significant impact of this project is multifaceted. By equipping academic librarians and instructors across disciplines with tangible resources to teach students of color about computational propaganda, it aims to level the playing field of civic literacy on college campuses, thereby fostering an equitable environment in and out of the classroom for robust civic discourses. The open-access toolkit, while addressing the specific needs of students of color, is designed with Universal Design for Learning principles in mind, thereby enhancing students from all backgrounds to gain a deeper understanding and acquire skills of harnessing AI's impact on equitable democratic processes.

Furthermore, it connects recent technological and theoretical advances with everyday democratic life, learning, and praxis, catalyzing new strategies to counter political misinformation on college campuses. Innovative, practical, and interdisciplinary interventions, such as machine learning and data analytics, will help both educators and students detect and mitigate the impact of misinformation such as deepfakes.

Ultimately, this project aims to understand and tackle the disproportionate impact of political disinformation targeted at students of color by filling an important gap in higher education practices and information literacy education within the broader community. Despite emerging national interventions aimed at addressing misinformation affecting communities of color, there remains a dearth of research and tools to support students of color in civic education, especially concerning AI. Through an integration of resources and literature at the intersection of critical pedagogy, political misinformation, and AI, this project enriches the national discourse on democratic participation on college campuses with an interdisciplinary, intersectional perspective.

9. Limitations and Future Directions

Originally, I envisioned incorporating downloadable AI applications that can help students detect clickbait, satire, and falsehood.[23] However, the tools identified and tested in the Analyze phase, such as ClaimBuster, did not demonstrate sufficient accuracy or usability and therefore were excluded from the final learning materials. Going forward, I will continue monitoring developments in AI detection tools, especially those that can be integrated into civic education to build student awareness and critical thinking.

While Canvas is a popular Learning Management System (LMS) and was used to pilot and publish the initial modules that are openly available to view, the long-term vision is to host learning content on an open access platform to allow for full engagement and flexible instructor capability. I plan to research and identify platforms like Pressbook, where educators create and share openly accessible, interactive digital learning materials, and migrate existing content from Canvas to such a platform to support improved accessibility, user experience, and visibility across higher education and civic learning spaces.

Future phases of the project will also prioritize ongoing environmental scanning to keep pace with a rapidly evolving political and educational landscape. In particular, I intend to monitor implications of the landmark AI deployment at CSU and explore opportunities to incorporate AI tools and strategies into civic education while taking into consideration the intersection with faculty governance and algorithmic equity. Additionally, Wikipedia's "Artificial Intelligence in the 2024 United States Presidential Election" page [24] lacks substantial information-suggesting a potential opportunity to disseminate results from this project to more public-facing, accessible ways to extend the project's reach beyond the academy and inform public discourse. More importantly, civic literacy education must evolve. Future phases of this project should expand teaching students how to spot AI-driven falsehoods and using AI for social good—it should help students develop the critical consciousness to understand why such falsehoods circulate and the systems behind disinformation.

23 Rubin, Victoria L. *Misinformation and Disinformation: Detecting Fakes with the Eye and AI*.
24 "Artificial Intelligence in the 2024 United States Presidential Election." In *Wikipedia*, April 30, 2025. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Artificial_intelligence_in_the_2024_United_States_presidential_election&oldid=1288058168.

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