

FIGHTING FOR OUR RIGHTS

AUGUSTANA JOURNALISTS PURSE TRUTH IN THE ERA OF “FAKE NEWS”

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Following the 2016 presidential election, the world of journalism was under siege. There were, as there always have been, journalists who were writing unbiased, accurate news stories that presented a wide range of sources who examined issues from different perspectives to ensure objectivity.

“Journalists offer to the public a diversity of voices and sources so that people are pushed to comprehend points of view other than their own,” director of journalism, Janet Blank-Libra, said. “We shouldn’t get to live in bubbles, and the journalist’s job is to ensure that we don’t.”

But with the election and inauguration of President Donald Trump—who accused the mainstream media of creating “fake news” and “alternative facts”—reporters went on the defensive, often times writing stories to combat the actual fake news generated by political operatives whose sole purpose was deliberately misinforming the public.

“Journalism today is in a dangerous situation because people can’t distinguish opinion and commentary from actual news stories,” Jacob Knutson ’19, the editor-in-chief of the Mirror said.

The citizenry’s inability to distinguish between real and fake news led to distrust between the public and the press. Readers often lacked the motivation or resources to research the legitimacy of articles, which often resulted in the dismissal of truthful accounts.

“You have to be careful when you dismiss something as fake news,” Alana Sesow ’20, journalism major, said. “If you find something factual but it doesn’t support [your] previously held beliefs, it’s not ethical to dismiss it.”

Fake news, while originally a term that referred to the misleading clickbait hoaxes that appeared easily on social media feeds quickly became a term some used for news stories that contradicted their personal beliefs.

Augustana journalists encouraged readers to remain skeptical but open to expanding their opinions. “Journalists can’t do much more than be as truthful as possible,” Stephanie Sanchez ’19 said. “It depends a lot on the readers. There’s a difference between considering different viewpoints and disregarding evidence.”

In addition, they urged readers to support respected journalism so that organizations like The New York Times and Washington Post could continue to inform the public on important topics.

“Our democracy depends on strong journalism,” Knutson said. “Words have power and it is important that the free press survives to ensure that fake news isn’t the only news.”