



UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
2023 BATEMAN CASE STUDY COMPETITION ENTRY



Get
The **FACTS**
Before
You **ACT**

PREPARED BY:

Courtney Baer, William Bullen, Adriana Dos Santos, Tammy Nguyen and Hannah Schoff

FACULTY ADVISER: Christine Bucan

PROFESSIONAL ADVISER: Tina Elmowitz

PREPARED FOR:





Courtney Baer



William Bullen



Adriana Dos Santos



Tammy Nguyen



Hannah Schoff

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Misinformation is spreading faster and farther than ever before in history, affecting every aspect of life, from healthcare to education to voting. The Gainesville community is not immune to its impact, with 70% of surveyed residents revealing personal experiences of being impacted by misinformation (see appendix p. A7). As a college town with the University of Florida (UF) and Santa Fe College (SFC) at its core, Gainesville is home to more than 130,000 people from diverse backgrounds. The city's culture is rooted in its Latino, Black and rural communities, which are direct targets for misinformation. The CommuniGATORS partnered with the News Literacy Project (NLP) and created a campaign called "**Get The Facts Before You Act**" to raise awareness of the dangers of misinformation, inform local residents of the available resources to help them develop news literacy skills and motivate the local community to act to drive meaningful change against the spread of misinformation.

The CommuniGATORS successfully built a movement that exceeded all campaign objectives and inspired a new generation of news-literate individuals in Gainesville. Through intentional strategies grounded in creating meaningful moments, fostering key partnerships and empowering young adults to be better informed, the "**Get The Facts Before You Act**" campaign approach focused on active community listening and built a movement that went beyond political lines to unite supporters around the common goal of news literacy.

Campaign Highlights:

- Gainesville Mayor Harvey Ward proclaimed March 3 **News Literacy Day**.
- The team secured **17 media placements** across seven local TV, radio and digital channels in English and Spanish.
- The "**Get The Facts Before You Act**" PSA aired **more than 400 times** on local NPR radio and PBS TV affiliates.
- The team created a pledge on Change.org prompting more than 1,000 people to **commit to practicing news literacy daily**.
- The team partnered with **63 local educators, leaders and community organizations** to host "**Misinfo on the Go**" educational workshops and share NLP resources.
- The team recruited eight ambassadors to host **12 on-campus activations** that reached more than **2,500 UF students**.
- Interactive social content, like the "**Spot the Fake**" series and Informable app trivia, led to **high engagement and awareness for NLP resources**.

FACTS YOU CAN TRUST

63

Partnerships

17

Media Hits

400+

PSA Placements

34,556

Gainesville Residents Reached

30

Workshops

810

Workshop Attendees

1,111

Pledge Signatures

27,024

Social Media Impressions

CAMPAIGN DIRECTIVES

The CommuniGATORS were tasked by the NLP to stop the spread of misinformation among Gen Z and millennial audiences, which make up nearly 43% of the Gainesville population, and build a movement of news-literate individuals in the community. The NLP specifically pointed to three key objectives for the CommuniGATORS to address in their campaign:

- Build greater awareness about the NLP and its mission.
- Drive people to learn skills that will help them become news literate.
- Realize that they have the power to take action to help stop the spread of misinformation.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Despite the strides made by the NLP to combat misinformation, there are continued threats to consider for this campaign. News literacy can be perceived as elitist by people who feel judged on their beliefs and news habits. Additionally, there is often a lack of urgency when it comes to addressing misinformation and recognizing the dangers it poses. With a vision for a news-literate Gainesville, the CommuniGATORS leveraged key research findings to raise awareness, equip target audiences with tools to combat misinformation and, most importantly, empower Black, Latino and rural communities to join a movement of people committed to news literacy.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

The secondary research revealed powerful takeaways around news habits and internet usage to inform the campaign. Black and Latino Americans use social media as a daily news source more than white Americans. Coupled with data showing Gainesville residents' internet activity is higher than the national average, the team prioritized social media as a conduit to reach the target audiences. Gainesville residents also are 23% more likely than the general population to receive their information through word of mouth and personal contacts and 27% more likely to report they are too busy to take care of themselves as they believe they should. This translates to a campaign presented in a convenient, accessible way with a simple call to action that is easy to remember and repeat. Finally, a majority of the Latino population is bilingual and increasingly prefers to get their news from widely accessible English-language sources, which the team also prioritized to make the strongest impact. Key findings follow below:

More than **43%** of Black respondents and **45%** of Latino respondents reported **using social media as a daily source of news** at a higher rate than white Americans (**35%**).

More than **24%** of Latino respondents and **30%** of white Americans believed that mainstream news outlets report information that could be considered **"fake news."**

Between **22% to 24%** of Black, Latino and white people surveyed reported listening to **podcasts as news sources.**

Gainesville residents spread health information through **word of mouth** at a **23%** higher rate than the national average.

See appendix pp. A1-A3.

PRIMARY RESEARCH

In-Depth Interviews

The CommuniGATORS conducted interviews with seven experts in news literacy, misinformation and public interest communications, including Dr. Sharon Austin, Janet Coats, Dr. Rachel Grant, Becky Raulerson, Ann Searight Christiano, Matt Sheehan and Dr. Chuck Wallington (see appendix p. A4). The interviews revealed the following key insights:

- **"What issue moves you?"** To ensure the campaign resonates, the team needs to tap into the issues and topics people already care about.
- **Start with shared values.** What unbiased topics can the campaign emphasize that are of priority to people across populations?
- **Give the audience a voice.** The audiences should feel they have a voice and are visible.

Focus Groups

The CommuniGATORS conducted three focus groups totaling nine participants representing Black, Latino and rural demographics, which revealed the following:

Participants felt they exist in echo chambers.

Participants were unlikely to call out people sharing misinformation.

Bilingual and multilingual participants typically read news articles in English.

Survey

The CommuniGATORS' survey of 338 Gainesville residents found that:

- **92%** of respondents agreed that misinformation is an issue in society.
- **51%** agreed they will do less research on a news source if it aligns with their beliefs.
- **70%** have been impacted or know someone who has been impacted by misinformation.

Newspapers were the least consumed form of media (**15.7%**) yet deemed the most trustworthy by consumers.

Social media was the most consumed form of news media (**80%**) yet deemed the least trustworthy by consumers.

See appendix pp. A4-A8.

PLANNING

Target Audiences

Research showed that UF and SFC students are predominantly white, and their largest minority groups are Latino students, followed by Black students. The demographic breakdown of Gainesville is similar, as the city is predominantly white with a large representation from Black and Latino residents. Rural residents were the least represented in Gainesville, as the city was described as "urban" during the 2020 census.

Based on this, the CommuniGATORS identified their primary target audience as:

- UF and SFC students ages 18 to 22, primarily those who identify as Latino.
- Young adults living in Gainesville ages 23 to 34, primarily those who identify as Black.

The secondary audiences were rural residents and the general Gainesville population.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenge

More than 81% of people believe the media — rather than themselves — is responsible for regulating misinformation.

Newspapers were the least consumed form of media, yet they were deemed the most trustworthy.

Social media is the most consumed form of media, yet it was deemed the least trustworthy.

Opportunity

Create a campaign that calls people to verify the information they see before sharing it with others.

Host an event where journalists and researchers can connect with the target audience and share their thoughts about news literacy.

Plan an interactive yet educational social media campaign that includes infographics about news literacy and misinformation.

Campaign Taglines

Primary: "Get The Facts Before You Act"

Primary research showed to stop the spread of misinformation, people should fact-check information and ensure its veracity before sharing it with others. This tagline was created to inspire the target audience to take action toward news literacy by applying the NLP's five factors — source, context, authenticity, reasoning and evidence — and using resources like RumorGuard.

Secondary: Why Do You Care About the Truth?

People who have a strong emotional connection to a campaign's cause are more likely to notice, remember and share messages about it. This tagline tapped into the issues that the target audience already cared about and used them to build an emotional connection to news literacy and the NLP.

Key Messages

#1 - What It Is: The NLP is increasing awareness of news literacy and empowering people to stop the spread of misinformation. Join the movement now, and be part of the solution.

#2 - Why It's Important: Misinformation affects everybody and social media is not always a trustworthy news source. Check with multiple credible sources to determine the validity of the information you see online.

#3 - How You Can Help: Sign the "**Get The Facts Before You Act**" news literacy pledge and visit RumorGuard.org to take action against misinformation.

See appendix pp. A9-A12.

CAMPAIGN OUTLINE

Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Tactics

CAMPAIGN GOAL

To create a movement of individuals across Alachua County and Gainesville, Florida, who recognize the threat of misinformation and work to combat it through NLP tools and resources.

Objective 1: By March 6, the team will reach 10% of Gainesville residents (approximately 13,000 people) to raise awareness of the perils of misinformation and how it can be identified.

Strategy 1: Create moments in high-traffic areas that build NLP awareness, educate audiences about news literacy and generate momentum for a national news literacy movement.

Rationale: *Meeting the target audience in the places they frequent can increase reach.*

- **Kickoff Event:** Launch the campaign at a high-traffic UF area where attendees can learn about news literacy and share how misinformation affects them.
- **Sustained Activation:** Set up information booths to share facts about misinformation, NLP resources and host interactive activities at least twice a week throughout the campaign.
- **Why Do You Care About the Truth? Interactive Display:** Build an 8-foot-by-4-foot board for people to write why they care about the truth and how it affects issues they care about.
- **Ambassador Program:** Appoint eight ambassadors to spread the campaign's key messages.

Strategy 2: Garner earned media coverage across local media outlets, prioritizing broadcast and online channels.

Rationale: *Newspapers are the least consumed media by the target audience, so the message will have a stronger reach across a mix of TV, radio and online outlets.*

- **PSAs:**
 - **TV:** Create a :30 PSA to inspire people to join the NLP's news literacy movement.
 - **Radio:** Produce audio version of the PSA.
- **Media Relations:** Write press releases and customized pitches to a targeted media list.
- **Media Coverage** (see appendix p. A21):
 - **WCJB TV20 (ABC):** The story aired three times on the evening news and was shared on its website, Twitter and Facebook.
 - **Guide to Greater Gainesville:** Published an online story that shared campaign details.
 - **Tech Tuesday WCJB TV20 (ABC):** Aired two segments (English and Spanish) about misinformation in the AI industry and published on its YouTube channel.
 - **WUFT(PBS) First at Five:** Aired a story about the campaign during the 5 p.m. news and published on its YouTube channel.
 - **WUFT Radio (NPR):** Aired a segment about the News Literacy Day proclamation.
 - **Noticias WUFT (PBS):** Published a live segment and an online article about the campaign.
 - **Podcast:** Appeared on "Talking Biotech," a podcast with 30,000 monthly listeners.

Strategy 3: Leverage owned media content to humanize media literacy and portray it as approachable and relatable.

Rationale: *Interviews showed that news literacy is often viewed as intangible and unattainable.*

- **"Get The Facts Before You Act" Website:** Develop a website as a hub for NLP resources and tools, a blog and a pledge for news literacy.
- **"Matter of Fact" Blog:** Produce personable blog posts that share key findings from primary research and highlight events hosted by the team.

Strategy 4: Develop shared digital media to provide information about news literacy, NLP resources and the **"Get The Facts Before You Act"** campaign.

Rationale: *Research shows that members of the target audience are avid social media users.*

- **Channels:** Create a **"Get The Facts Before You Act"** account on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and TikTok.
- **Content:** Produce posts, stories and infographics to educate the audience about misinformation, promote events and tap into the latest trends and current events.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with UF departments, student clubs and professional chapters to share campaign content on their platforms, which have high reach and engagement.
- **Influencers:** Recruit influential figures — like the dean of the UF College of Journalism and Communications (CJC) and the Gainesville Mayor — as well as micro-influencers within the target audiences to raise campaign interest.

Objective 2: By March 6, the team will educate at least 750 people on the effects of misinformation and the news literacy resources available to them.

Strategy 1: Foster strategic partnerships and relationships with organizations and local leaders that are trusted and respected by the target audience.

Rationale: *People are more open to information that comes from organizations they are involved in. This also allows the team to tap into existing audiences.*

- **"Misinfo on the Go" Workshops:** Present workshops about misinformation to student organizations and local professional chapters within the target audience.
- **Third-Party Endorsement from Community Leaders:** Ask community leaders, such as the Florida Chancellor of Higher Education, to share campaign messages to their audience.
- **News Literacy Day:** Present at a Gainesville City Commission meeting and secure a mayoral proclamation for News Literacy Day.

Strategy 2: Connect the target audience with media professionals and journalists they trust and who can share their thoughts on news literacy.

Rationale: *Research showed that print media sources were the most trusted. By connecting our audience with these journalists, it is possible to reach those who do not consume print media.*

- **"The Power of News Literacy" Panel:** Plan, promote and host a panel where three media professionals and researchers discuss misinformation.

Objective 3: By March 6, the team will inspire at least 1,000 people to take action or change their individual behavior regarding misinformation.

Strategy 1: Motivate the target audience to join the NLP's national movement on news literacy and commit to stopping the spread of misinformation.

Rationale: *Inspiring the target audience to take action will reinforce their commitment to the cause.*

- **"Get The Facts Before You Act" Pledge:** Create a pledge to sign and commit to fact-checking information before sharing it with others.

Strategy 2: Raise awareness of NLP resources and how the target audience can use them.

Rationale: *Promoting the NLP's resources will show individuals how they can validate information, thus empowering them to take action.*

- **Tools and Examples:** Break down examples of misinformation and refer the target audience to NLP tools during in-person events, workshops and social media campaigns.
- **QR Code:** Distribute flyers with QR codes that lead to NLP resources around Gainesville.
- **Targeted E-Blasts:** Send email blasts to the target audience with links to NLP resources.

See appendix pp. A13-A37.

EVALUATION

Throughout this campaign to unite people around facts, the CommuniGATORS inspired many individuals from diverse communities to take action against the spread of misinformation and monitored the movement's progress daily. To evaluate the campaign's effectiveness, the team frequently analyzed social media insights, traditional media reports and in-person interactions. The **"Get The Facts Before You Act"** campaign employed several strategic partnerships with community organizations to broaden its reach and amplify key messages that resonated with target audiences. The campaign was a resounding success, and the team's efforts inspired a new generation of news-literate individuals in Gainesville.

Objective 1

By March 6, the team will reach 10% of Gainesville residents (approximately 13,000 people) to raise awareness of the perils of misinformation and how it can be identified.

Result: EXCEEDED

The campaign reached more than **34,556 Gainesville residents**. Tactics drove **273 redirected link clicks to NLP's RumorGuard.org** as well as 17 media hits and 400+ PSAs airings with **99.8% key message penetration**. The campaign generated significant awareness about the threat of misinformation, **surpassing the target goal by 266%**.

Objective 2

By March 6, the team will educate at least 750 people on the effects of misinformation and on news literacy resources available to them.

Result: EXCEEDED

The campaign **partnered with 63 educators, local organizations and student or community leaders** to host more than **30 workshops** across the greater Gainesville area. The team **taught 810 people** how to identify misinformation and apply NLP resources, **surpassing its target goal by 8%**.

Objective 3

By March 6, the team will inspire at least 1,000 people to take action or change their individual behavior regarding misinformation.

Result: EXCEEDED

The campaign obtained **1,111 pledge signatures** from individuals who committed to taking daily actions to combat misinformation by verifying news before posting and calling out others who share false information. The campaign **surpassed its initial pledge goal by 11%**.

See appendix pp. A38-A39.

CONCLUSION

The CommuniGATORS' "Get The Facts Before You Act" campaign delivered big results and, more importantly, inspired measurable action. Combining the power of traditional media, social platforms, local events and partnerships, the campaign pioneered a successful movement to expand news literacy and made a strong impact across millennial and Gen Z communities in Gainesville.

Over the course of this campaign, the CommuniGATORS hosted 30 news literacy workshops, empowered 1,111 people to sign a pledge to stop the spread of misinformation, reached 21 counties in North Central Florida via multiple TV and radio stations and received more than 27,000 social media impressions. Informed by the team's research, the "Get The Facts Before You Act" campaign can be replicated in other parts of the country to drive even more action with this personal approach to news literacy.

Client Recommendations

- Create a **customizable workshop** for various target audiences.
- Work with universities and community colleges to implement a **news literacy course**.
- Create an **"NLP-approved"** seal for objective news organizations.
- **Monitor trends** to create relatable content that ties in NLP resources.

See appendix p. A40.

BUDGET

Expenses

Website domain name	\$3.17
Website hosting	\$46.00
8-foot-by 4-foot wooden board	\$13.55
Balloons	\$23.63
T-shirts	\$120.00
Sponsored Instagram posts	\$77.00
Panel snacks	\$12.38

TOTAL: \$295.73

In-Kind Donations

Gift card from HYPPO.....	\$10.00
Gift card from Swamp Boil.....	\$50.00
Gift card from Germain's.....	\$20.00
Screening fee from 352 Printshop.....	\$30.00
Banner from Renaissance Printing.....	\$130.00
Lollipops from UF CJC.....	\$28.00
Printing and supplies from UF CJC.....	\$150.00

TOTAL: \$418.00

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