checkology®

How to know what to believe.

OVERVIEW OF THE *CHECKOLOGY®* VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

The **checkology® virtual classroom**, from the News Literacy Project (NLP), is a cutting-edge e-learning platform with engaging, real-world lessons that encourage students to think critically about what they're watching, reading and hearing.

This first-rate resource incorporates many of the best practices in e-learning, including self-pacing, blended and experiential learning, personalization, rich formative assessment, remediation, student challenges, points and digital badges as incentives and rewards for engagement and the application of new skills, and a class discussion area where students share and comment on work, reflect on key questions and initiate their own conversations about the news and information they encounter in their daily lives.

Leading journalists from The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, NBC News, Bloomberg and the Chicago Sun-Times are joined by experts on the First Amendment and digital media as virtual teachers and video-based guides throughout the core lessons. The virtual classroom is aligned to 21st-century state standards.

The core unit includes 12 lessons and four interactive modules that incorporate NLP's four pillars, or enduring understandings:

- The ability to filter information is an essential skill for journalists and consumers.
- The First Amendment is vital to American democracy.
- Today's news and information ecosystem presents great challenges and enormous opportunities.
- Knowing the standards of quality journalism empowers students as consumers and as participants in civic life.

The e-learning experiences in these four modules emphasize social and other digital media and include such topics as the role of algorithms in personalizing news and information and ways to identify and evaluate viral rumors.

Students with access to a high-speed internet connection can complete the current core collection of lessons in 15 to 20 hours. Teachers can draw from several models of implementation — including one-to-one in the classroom, select independent assignments (for example, as homework) and flipping — to structure the use of the virtual classroom in the way that best fits their students' abilities, resources and schedules. The core lessons culminate in the Check Tool, a digital resource that guides students as they synthesize and apply the unit's concepts and skills to evaluate a piece of information they have selected from an online source.

NLP makes the virtual classroom available on a "freemium" basis. There is no cost for Basic access to the platform, which enables educators to deliver the lessons in a one-to-many format (such as on an LCD projector to a group of students). Premium access (which we will begin selling in August 2018 with a fee of between $3 and $5 per student, depending on the number of seats purchased) provides subscribers with individual student logins to unlock the full virtual classroom experience, including one-to-one delivery, self-pacing, saved progress, individual assessments, points and badges, and student discussion. Teachers with Premium access are able to track student progress, view quantitative formative assessment data and offer personalized feedback on qualitative assessments, including short-answer responses, discussion posts and student-created mini-projects (memes, digital trading cards, public service advertisements, etc.). Starting in the 2018-19 school year, teachers with Premium access will also be able to invite NLP journalist fellows to deliver lessons in person or virtually in their classrooms.

Checkology® 2.0, an expanded and more engaging update to the platform, will be released in August 2018, in time for the 2018-19 school year. It will feature new lessons — including one on international press freedoms and one focusing on arguments and evidence — along with additional animation and motion graphics, greater customization options for teachers and students, higher-quality video production, fact-checking and other skills challenges for students, and pre- and post-unit assessments that will be native to the platform.

From the start, we have made assessment a key component of our programs and culture. Our data have consistently demonstrated that our curriculum and programs produce both strong gains in student knowledge and improvements in positive, responsible attitudes and behavior related to news and information. This trend continued in both the 2016-17 academic year (the first full year for the virtual classroom) and the first semester of the 2017-18 school year.

In a summary of our work for the 2016-17 school year, our evaluation consultant, Anita Baker, Ed.D., reported that students who used the virtual classroom and participated in our pre- and post-platform assessments "achieved outcomes similar to those verified for NLP classroom program participants." The results, she said, were "clearly positive." Preliminary results of assessments conducted in the first semester of the 2017-18 school year were equally favorable. They showed, for example, a substantial increase (from 34 percent before exposure to the virtual classroom to 67 percent after) in the number of students who could identify the five freedoms protected by the First Amendment. There was a similar increase (from 17 percent to 50 percent) in the number of students who could explain why something was newsworthy.