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Letters to the Editor

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Letters to the Editor

It may be true, but who said it first?

To the Editor:

In your Spring 2007 issue, Sandra Estenek ended her article quoting an admonition of St. Ignatius: "Pray as if everything depended upon you; and act as if everything depended upon God." Ms. Estenek admits that, at first glance, she always thinks the axiom should be reversed. And, in fact, I've always seen it quoted in the reverse ("...act/work as if everything depends on you."). Which is right? Do you know the source of the quote?

*Jamey Brogan
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Reply: Google quotes the "Pray as if everything depends on God..." version, and attributes the quote to St. Augustine, the Torab, Martin Luther, and St. Ignatius among others. Bartlett's Familiar Quotations includes neither version. A leading American Jesuit historian told me he has never seen the quote in Ignatius' writings.

RAS

In Defense of Internet Research

To the Editor:

As a reference librarian who works with undergraduates on a regular basis, I take strong exception to Fr. Stephen Kuder's recommendation that faculty prohibit students from using "internet sources" due to what he describes as students' "inability to discern legitimate web-sites vs. peer-reviewed publications in the library."

This recommendation does a great disservice to our students. Like it or not, the internet will continue to grow as a vast source of information. Those who were raised with it will continue to turn to it. If we ban its use for academic research, we are moving in a troubling direction.

First, we will have opened a slippery slope of confusion between the "free web" and online, peer-reviewed academic resources. When we disallow internet sources, does that include library-subscribed online e-journals, e-books and other reference materials that are, indeed, accessible via a web browser? What about the growing online presence of peer-reviewed open access publications? (See <http://www.doaj.org/>) Over time, the boundary between internet sources and peer-reviewed academic publications will continue to blur, and by indiscriminately banning internet sources, we run the risk of shutting out a great deal of legitimate material.

Second, by issuing a simple ban, we will not be giving our

students the analytical tools they need to navigate the vast sea of information. Fr. Kuder takes the cynical position that a ban is desirable because students are unable to judge the quality and legitimacy of an information source. This casts the student as a hopeless case, unable to learn. If students are unable to judge information sources, let us view this as an opportunity for educators. Information literacy should be integrated into a student's education, from elementary school right through to graduate school.

During library instruction sessions, I stand in front of first-year students and go over criteria for evaluating a source of information: Is the piece attributed to an author, and if so what are his or her credentials? What institution or organization has published this work? Does the author or institution have an agenda? I explain peer review, and we talk about its importance. An understanding of these issues is critical to evaluating any resource, in print or online.

I tell these first-year students that research in this day and age requires agility. One must understand how to move between the vast online world and the library's traditional domain of print publications. Both are vital, and our students deserve more than an indiscriminate ban. They deserve to learn.

*Kenneth Simon
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