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Salter '03, putting legal analysis skills to use as CEO of the News Literacy Project

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You *can* handle the truth.

Or at least that's what **Chuck Salter** and the News Literacy Project hope. In a world where fake news, disinformation, propaganda, and misinformation are more prevalent than ever, the 2003 Indiana Law alumnus and the nonprofit organization he leads are doing all they can to help citizens determine the credibility of news and other information they're receiving.

"We're based on the idea that information—we live in the most complex information landscape in human history—is also easily manipulated," said Salter. "People are just not equipped to deal with this much information and to detect when they're being bamboozled."

Enter the [News Literacy Project](#). The nonpartisan group has been working for almost 15 years with educators across the country, helping teachers equip the next generation of voters with news literacy skills that are essential to being full participants in our democracy. But now the organization is expanding its efforts with broader



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with a podcast, e-learning opportunities including free webinars, an app, and other tools. That includes a new civic platform launching this fall called



Chuck Salter '03, serves as chief executive officer of the News Literacy Project

RumorGuard, a site that goes beyond traditional fact-checking by not only rounding up debunked rumors, but also teaching users how to apply news literacy skills to other claims so they can resist misinformation and identify credible news for themselves.

As the country prepares for contentious midterm elections in November, Salter believes the mission of the NLP is more important now than ever. The organization is running PSAs and free training sessions for the public so they can learn to identify red flags that often accompany misinformation, and curating information from credible organizations so that people aren't confused about how and where to vote.

Salter credits his legal education at the Maurer School of Law with allowing him to help others and strengthen our democracy in the process.

"We're at the point where we live in different information ecosystems," Salter said. "We work in red states and blue states, but I don't believe in that. You have people in every state who are susceptible to hearing—and spreading—

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here to help them learn how to think about the news they are consuming.”

Salter pointed to several studies that show a range of problems facing Americans when it comes to discerning what is true and what is not—from sharing disinformation to the inability to discern between editorial content, opinion pieces, or advertisements. While much of that misleading content revolves around politics, the NLP intentionally steers away from political issues.

“Take an upcoming election, for example,” Salter said. “Our focus is on helping citizens identify misinformation about the election itself, not fact-checking the candidates or taking sides. We’re focused on the misinformation that someone might get that tells people they can vote on a Wednesday when in fact the election is on Tuesday. Or what kind of identification you might need to vote. We’re leading people to the facts so they can vote and vote responsibly. We want to preserve democracy, not influence it.”

Two decades ago, though, Salter was more interested in becoming an international corporate attorney.

He’d been interested in law and politics from an early age (he majored in international relations and German at Pennsylvania’s Susquehanna University) but earned a spot in the Teach for America program after earning his undergraduate degree. Salter was assigned to a California school for three years, giving him the opportunity to see the power of education in action.

“That experience really did change my life and help me focus on issues of opportunity and equality, things that,

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school, but my focus had completely changed. I'd become really interested in and passionate about things like law and democracy, where people get their rights, where they can speak up."

The Maurer School of Law, with its [Center for Constitutional Democracy](#), was a perfect fit. And even though he'd grown up all over the world in a military family, Salter was considered an Indiana resident once his father left the service and took a job with Eli Lilly.

"It was the best choice I ever made," Salter said. "I loved my time at IU. I spent any time I had in my 2L and 3L years focusing on constitutional law. Professor [David Williams](#) was very much a mentor to me. A few times he even created seminars just for us so we could continue learning more about constitutional democracies around the world."

Salter even spent a semester assisting with research for one of Williams' books.

After earning his JD in 2003, Salter went on to nonprofit management (he spent a year at IUPUI's [O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs](#) as part of the Law School's joint degree program), then served as a superintendent of schools in northwest, Indiana. From there he made it back to Indianapolis before accepting a job with a California nonprofit. From there he joined the NLP, first as its chief operating officer, then president and COO, and finally as its chief executive officer.

While Salter may not be practicing law—he is still a member of the Indiana Bar—he said he uses his legal education every day.



it should have or not, the fact that I had a JD in my bio gave me instant credibility. The most important thing I learned in law school is how to analyze and frame a situation. In all of my work, it's about stakeholders and constituencies and finding consensus. Breaking problems down to their bare issues, and the ability to frame it all came from law school. It taught me a new way to think that I still use to this day.”

Now he's teaching others new ways to think, ways that hopefully allow citizens across the country to better vet the quality of news they're consuming.

“It's a ground game,” Salter said of the NLP's strategy. “It's face-to-face, boots-on-the-ground, one district at a time. We're working with state-level education departments now so they can take it across their curriculums.”

Convincing older Americans creates a bigger challenge, but it's one the NLP isn't backing away from. It may be hard to reach those who have already fallen deep into misinformation and conspiracy theories, but there are many adults who are in the middle – concerned about the quality of information they're consuming but unsure what they can do about it.

“With adults, we're clear-eyed,” Salter said. “We have more work to do to reach older generations than students, so we're adapting a lot of our resources and tools for older adults into shorter, more easily consumed content. We're not going to censor or end disinformation. The only way to deal with it is to educate them about it.”