Good afternoon and thanks for joining us; I am Judy Simpson. In the digital age there's no shortage of information, anything and everything is just a click away. The tough task of sorting through the online junk to actually find credible and reliable information. For over a year the e-Vermont Community Broadband Project has helped people all across the state make better use of online tools. One of e-Vermont’s many partners is the Community College of Vermont. CCV, among other things, has offered workshops on Internet basics. CCV has also helped place internet interns at public libraries. A librarian with Community College of Vermont is our guest this afternoon. She's going to discuss and demonstrate how to find reliable information online. It's a pleasure to welcome Larraby Fellows. Larraby is a native of Bennington and she is now based at the CCV academic center in Montpelier. Welcome to you. Tell me a little bit about being an employee at CCV and a librarian. You're probably seeing a different landscape when it comes to how people find information these days.

Larraby.: That is certainly true. It's certainly an exciting time for everybody particularly those in school because we as people have access to more information than we've ever have access to before. One of the downsides of that in a way is that it requires a lot more critical thinking. And the day when printed matter and books were our only source of information it made things a little bit more clear-cut. Material had gone to the process of being printed and published it would've been reviewed by editors and researchers potentially peer reviewed and gone through more of a rigorous process before it had been released to the public. With the information revolution the fact that information is instantly available online with more access to information. That means from a consumer or student standpoint we have to be a lot more critical about how we judge what information is accurate and credible vs. what information is opinion or has potential bias.

Judy.: In other words just because it's on the Internet doesn't mean it's true.

Larraby.: Of course and I think most of us know that at this point but especially for people who are coming to the Internet for the first time and were seeing a huge adoption rate of Internet in terms of Vermont there's a 60 to 80% adoption rate of high speed Internet which is very exciting. So as more and more people come to the Internet and have the same experience for school and
learning about how to evaluate information sources that's one of the exciting things that the e-Vermont Community Broadband Project is trying to do is help bridge the digital literacy gap.

Judy.: You used the analogy of driving a car.

Larraby.: Yes we talk about the information superhighway and a great analogy is that we often assume that younger people have access to information they've grown up with it. There's this whole myth of the digital native. A very similar analogy to driving a car. Just because you're very quick that something and just because you seemingly can speed around click and zoom around doesn't necessarily mean that they are better at it. The same way that a young person that's just got a driver's license, you may be speeding around and looks like you are very fast diver but that doesn't necessarily mean you're necessarily a good driver. Of the things the librarians are doing now is striving to give people road maps. That's really what we strive to do in terms of teaching people how to navigate which roads to take which routes to take how do you evaluate the different avenues of information. So that's a very important part of the equation.

Judy.: One of the tools that you created is a series of brief how-to videos. Let's take a look at one of those now.

Thinking about the words we use to search online will save you time and give you better search results. It's easy to type a question into a search engine and it can often look like your results are relevant because all of your search terms will appear in your search results. However just because a website or block contains your search terms doesn't mean that it will have what you want or be a good source of information. You may also have to read through a lot of search results before you find what you need. Remember that search engines are not an information repository themselves but rather tools you use to retrieve information from the web. A search engine is merely retrieving web pages blogs and posts that contain the words you've entered into the search box. So how do you improve your research results? Here are a few simple tricks you can use the basic web search. First if you're looking for specific item or searching for a common phrase you can put your search terms in quotation marks. Also you don't need to use articles words like 'the' and 'there' are. Search engines actually ignore these words anyway so you don't have to include them. There's also no need to capitalize or include punctuation marks. But searching for an exact phrase we've already narrowed down the search results significantly. Another trick is to add words that help guide the search engine towards the type of information you want. These could include words like research data diagnosis treatment statistics results review over to reading report policy law news or update. By using the exact phrase is terminology that gathers specific types of information and a 14 on essential search words we've been able to hone our search and get better results. That's still a lot of websites to review so you may want to explore more advanced search options to get even better results.

Judy.: Tips?

Larraby.: It's interesting watching the video. I created the video only about a year ago and things have already changed. Web search engines are constantly evolving and that's something that is kind of exciting to keep us up to date in terms of the field. Another reason why people are turning to public libraries and their college libraries for help because these navigation tools constantly
change. So the road signs of a go back to the analogy the road signs are constantly being updated and changed to make sure that people have the best tools. Sometimes it's just a matter of turning to the expert on how to navigate.

Judy.: Can you give us some examples I know you brought your computer?

Larraby.: Sure. One of the things there's basically two ways that we usually teach people that are relatively new to the Internet to use a web search engine. One of which is use it as you would use a phone book. You can use it as an index or as a way of looking up a particular institution organization that are already familiar with. An example if we continue the search for health information would be if we wanted to look for a specific hospital or health center. In this case I am going to use a Google search to basically find the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center information. This means that instead of typing health information looking for a particular disorder or disease we are going to actually use the web to look up a medical center.

Judy.: A very specific one.

Larraby.: A very specific medical center. This is something of a lot of people don't think to necessarily do because they often use global to type in a question or they want a search engine to answer their question but we forget that a search engine can help us back to sources that we are already familiar with. We already know that a medical center is going to have credible information. So if you go to a medical center's website you will see that there's actually health information. There's a link on their page here where you can navigate here how it says health information. Already we've gone to a credible resource by identifying that it's a hospital or health center.

Judy.: You've probably eliminated hundreds of thousands.

Larraby.: Right and you've gone directly if we use the metaphor driven right to the hospital because you know exactly where you want to go then you can look around the health website that Dartmouth Hitchcock website to find health information that takes one of the guesswork out of where this information is coming from who or what is this institution. You already know the answer to the so that's one way you can use search engine to basically seek out and find resources that are already familiar with. The other option that most people the way that most people search is a typing in a disease disorder if they're looking for health information or a question. In this case we could do a search for seasonal affective disorder. This is what I was talking about in terms of the reading the search results as most of us are aware of the first couple of search results are often ads. Global does a really great job of putting the ads right up front and center. And they're usually labeled. In this particular search you don't see any ads at the very top. Let's see if we can do another search. Sometimes really depends on the key words that you use. In this case we added the word diagnosis and we do see an ad read the very top and along the sides. Depending on the search words that you use pending and how using the search engine Google will pick up on whether or not you're looking for a product or service to purchase. Sometimes Google can be very savvy search engines can be savvy about feeding you certain ads but if you're new to using the Internet you often can't identify.
Judy.: Or you just ignore that.

Larraby.: You see that it comes up in your search results and you click on it and pretty soon you're on a pharmaceutical website and you don't know where you are. One of the things that we teach both our students and the general public when you're searching on the web the first thing to look at is who is this information who is the author of this information where is this information coming from why should I use this information? It can be incredibly tempting to look at our cert results here. To be incredibly tempting to see results list like this and see that's my search. All of those are going to be relevant and I can look through all those. But if you do a little bit of digging you'll see they are coming from different types of web sites. One very common health website is WebMD and it's a “dot com.” That means that it's a commercial website essentially selling a service and it also means that there's a lot of sponsored events and links. What does that mean for the general public? It means that you're going to encounter banner ads and they're probably going to try to make them related to your inquiry. Meaning that a search for seasonal affective disorder in a commercial website like WebMD is going to find ads that are specifically about treating that coming from pharmaceutical companies. A great example if you look at the screen at the banner ad right at the top is an advertisement for a pharmaceutical product about treating major depressive disorders and adults. That's just something to keep in mind. This isn't a bad source of information.

Judy.: Well it is easy to just get detoured.

Larraby.: If you're not familiar with using the web you can accidentally click on links or ads that bring you to a completely different resource. It's like flipping through a magazine thinking you're reading an article and you find out it's an advertisement.

Judy.: A full page ad for something else.

Larraby.: Exactly it takes a little bit of savvy to know what type of resource you are looking at. Like I said WebMD is a common resource but it is a “dot com” which means it has a lot of sponsored ads and links. If we go back to our search results one resource that I highly recommend and it does come up in our search results is Medline Plus. If you look at the URL. A URL is basically the web address. You will see this is actually coming from a “dot gov” web address and that means that it's a federally mandated web-based resource. It's not a company providing any services or selling you anything as a dot com would be. It does not come up first in our search results but if you know about it and you know what dot gov means that it’s much more regulated and much more of a credible resource. Medline Plus is actually a service from the National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health. It's a much more credible web based resource and receive right away even though the interface the way the website looks is similar to WebMD you will see that there are no ads no sponsored links. There are fewer pitfalls for someone who's new to the web in terms of accidentally clicking on something. You will see just knowing about the difference between a dot com and dot gov can really help you navigate different types of information resource online.

Judy.: Are there other things that the Community College of Vermont is doing to help prepare people?
Larraby.: Certainly. We've obviously adapted our curriculum over the last several years and many classes incorporate basic information literacy digital literacy skills within the course. In terms of the workforce there's a wonderful Governor's Certificate. There are career readiness certificates which CCV has developed which is a 10-week program paired with the Department of Labor and people who are working with the Department of Labor and looking to change careers or go back to work and need these basic literacy skills communication skills math and reading skills can take this free 10-week course at CCV and it's great in terms of bridging the gap and getting people up speed.

Judy.: There's also an upcoming conference?

Larraby.: There is; there's a May 8 conference. That's the Vermont Digital Future Conference. I highly recommend anybody who's interested in how Vermont is going to embrace our digital future. It's a great conference and all the information about it is on the e-Vermont website.

Judy.: Let's talk about that.

Larraby.: Sure.

Judy.: It's e4vt.org.

Larraby.: Yes and also we've been over the last two years we've been pulling together all sorts of information resources toolkits to help people bridge that gap witness said in terms of basic Internet schools and basic digital literacy. If you can visit the e-Vermont website we have more videos toolkits resources links all sorts of great resources for helping people get up speed.

Judy.: Larraby thanks a lot.

Larraby.: Thanks so much

Judy.: That's our program for today. I'm Judy Simpson we'll see you again next time on Across the Fence.

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