



CENTER FOR AN INFORMED PUBLIC
UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

LESSONS FROM FINLAND

A REPORT ON THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
CENTER FOR AN INFORMED PUBLIC'S WORK FUNDED
BY THE STATE OF WASHINGTON THROUGH THE 2022
SUPPLEMENTAL STATE BUDGET

SUBMITTED TO THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE

JUNE 2023

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In November 2021, Washington State officials [signed](#)¹ a [Memorandum of Understanding](#)² with the government of Finland to [support stronger economic ties](#)³ with our state. “Deepening the long-standing relationship between Finns and Washingtonians better prepares both our peoples for the task of overcoming the global challenges of the 21st century we will face together,” Washington Lieutenant Governor Denny Heck [said](#) at the time⁴.



Last year, the Center for an Informed Public (CIP) at the University of Washington received \$167,000 in funding from the 2022 Washington state supplemental budget to build deeper ties with researchers, educators and librarians in Finland working in the areas of misinformation, disinformation, and media literacy. This work, covering a term of one year, falls within the fifth area of the state’s MOU — new technologies changing ways how societies interact. Finland has faced disinformation campaigns throughout its history and as the newest member of NATO, these issues will be even more pertinent in the years to come.

The State of Washington’s budget proviso has supported virtual and in-person educational exchange — in Helsinki, Finland in September 2022 and May 2023 and at the University of Washington in Seattle in June 2023 — CIP faculty, researchers and staff led by UW Information School associate professor Jevin West have supported work with Finnish educational peers to share research methods, teaching programs, and ideas for addressing these challenges.

There’s much that we can learn from Finland, which is a world leader in education. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Program for International Student Assessment assess reading, writing and math skills across the world. [Finland regularly rises to the top](#)⁵. But it is not just standard skills where they succeed, they also rank at the top of 41 European countries in their resilience to misinformation, according to the [Open Society Institute](#)⁶.

We’re grateful for the State of Washington’s support for the CIP to pursue this important work to learn from and support engagement with our Finnish peers. In this report, we’ll highlight results from our efforts and key findings that can help inform our own educational outreach efforts in Washington and lay the foundation for continued work in this space.

RESULTS FROM THIS WORK

At the University of Washington's Center for an Informed Public, we're pleased to share highlights from work supported over the previous year by the State of Washington's 2022 supplemental budget.

- In September 2022, CIP co-founder [Jevin West](#) traveled to Finland, where he joined Governor Jay Inslee and State Senator Marko Liias, who were traveling in Scandinavia as part of a state delegation, for a meeting at the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki. During that trip, West met with researchers and educators at the [University of Helsinki](#), within the Finnish government, and at the [Centres of European Excellence](#) focused on threats to national security such as mis- and disinformation.



- The CIP is actively adapting and localizing the [Loki's Loop](#)⁷ misinformation escape room game we've previously developed for use in Finland. As part of the project, the CIP hired an undergraduate student from the UW Department of Scandinavian Studies to assist with the translation of the existing escape room game content from English to Finnish, reflecting Finnish culture appropriately. To benchmark the adaptation, [Mikko Salo](#), founder of Finnish factchecking and digital information literacy service [Faktabaari](#), and [Hiski Huovila](#), a student from the [Aalto University](#) in Finland, will test and evaluate the translated and adapted game content. In May 2023, the CIP's principal investigators supporting our gaming development work, Chris Coward and Jin Ha Lee, traveled to Finland for a meeting with Huovila, Salo, and other potential local partners who are interested in hosting the Finnish version of the game.
- On June 7-12, 2023, the CIP hosted Salo during a visit to Washington state. During his visit, Salo met with CIP-affiliated faculty, research scientists, postdoctoral fellows, staff, and students to exchange ideas around media literacy. Salo also delivered two professional development workshops for teachers and librarians at Teaching for Resilience: FinnishED Workshop described below.
- On June 9-10, 2023, the CIP and a group of educators from across Washington, Teachers for an Informed Public, co-hosted [Teaching for Resilience: FinnishED Workshop](#)⁸, a two-day professional development event at the University of Washington in Seattle for teachers and librarians working in the K-12 and adult education spaces. This workshop was designed to provide dedicated space and time for teachers and librarians to explore how to incorporate media literacy into our education and deep-dive into the landscape of Finnish media literacy education and various pedagogical models

and resources. In ongoing follow-up work, participants are thinking through ways they could adapt and implement them into the U.S. context. Workshop sessions included:

- *What we can learn from Finland* with Jevin West (CIP co-founder; UW Information School associate professor)
 - *Diving into Finnish Pedagogy and Curriculum* with [Kari Kivinen](#) (EUIPO educational outreach expert; former secretary-general, European School System)
 - *Landscape of Finnish Education and Policy Implementation* with Mikko Salo (Founder of Faktabaari; former member of the European Commission)
 - *Digital Voter Literacy & 2024 Elections* with Mikko Salo
 - *ChatGPT in Education* with Jevin West (CIP co-founder; UW Information School associate professor)
 - *Investigating Truth and Trust in Curriculum Building* designed by [Mike Caulfield](#) (CIP research scientist) and facilitated by Liz Crouse (CIP MisinfoDay program coordinator; Teachers for an Informed Public co-founder)
 - *Hands-on Curriculum Building* with Heejae Chung (CIP assistant director for education and engagement) and Liz Crouse
- Through this work, CIP co-founder Jevin West has been interacting with Andrew Nestingen, University of Washington Department of Scandinavian Studies professor and department chair. We will be sharing notes, programs and ideas for furthering this collaboration with our peers in Finland.
 - The CIP has been working extensively with Steven Livingston, a professor at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and a Fulbright Scholar in Finland. Livingston has helped the CIP make academic and governmental connections in Finland throughout the year.
 - CIP co-founder Jevin West gave an invited talk to [The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats](#) based in Helsinki. West met with researchers there on his initial visit in the Fall 2022. The talk was on “Rapid-Response Frameworks for Mitigating Online Disinformation” and organized by Iida Karjalainen, the Centre’s international relations coordinator.
 - West is planning to visit Scandinavia again in July and is scheduled to give the keynote address at the [IC2S2 Conference](#) in Copenhagen, Denmark. He then plans to visit Helsinki and connect with Finnish educational peers.
 - The CIP wrote two blog posts, in [September 2022](#)⁹ and [March 2023](#)¹⁰, providing updates from work funded through the State of Washington’s 2022 supplemental budget.

WHAT WASHINGTON CAN LEARN FROM FINLAND

In March 2023, The Associated Press [featured](#)¹¹ the “growing movement of educators and misinformation researchers working to offset an explosion of online misinformation about everything from presidential politics to pandemics. So far, the U.S. lags many other democracies in waging this battle, and the consequences of inaction are clear,” the AP observed, [highlighting efforts in Washington State](#)¹², including the annual [MisinfoDay educational program](#)¹³ co-presented through a statewide partnership between the University of Washington’s Center for an Informed Public and Washington State University’s Edward R. Murrow College of Communication, [including in-person events in March 2023](#)¹⁴ at UW Seattle, WSU Pullman, and WSU Vancouver.

In an interview, Petri Honkonen, Finland’s minister of science and culture said:

“Media literacy was one of our priorities before the time of the internet. The point is critical thinking, and that is a skill that everybody needs more and more. We have to somehow protect people. We also must protect democracy.”

Honkonen’s comments echo insights from the CIP’s work in media literacy and educational exchange with Finnish peers supported by the State of Washington.

As Jevin West observed in [a March 2023 Q&A](#), Finland’s long-standing excellence around media and information literacy skills “is likely a reflection of their unique approach to education where critical thinking is prioritized above standardized tests, but the success is also likely due to the early development of media literacy skills starting in pre-school and the integration of these skills across all subjects — from math to the social sciences. Finland shows us that media literacy shouldn’t be taught in isolation. In the U.S., schools are lucky to have a class or special seminar with older students where media literacy and digital civics is the focus. We need to change that and integrate media literacy skills earlier and across our national curriculum.”

As CIP faculty, researchers, students, and staff have learned from our research and educational efforts, teaching and improving media literacy and information skills are indeed important, the challenges of mis- and disinformation present whole-of-society challenges.

In the Q&A, West explained how Finland approaches these challenges in different ways compared to the United States: “Finland doesn’t wait until high school to talk about ‘fake news.’ They talk about it in pre-school and upwards. They talk about it in health classes; they talk about it in writing classes, etc. In Finland, teachers are highly respected and are given a lot of latitude in how they teach students. There is less focus on standardized tests and teacher evaluation. This allows teachers to customize their learning environment to the students they are teaching. They can have an open discussion about a news headline in the papers that day. They can then follow its sources and critically assess its validity as a group. This kind of activity is difficult to standardize and assess, which makes it harder to incorporate into our course planning. It doesn’t mean that we don’t see this in our classrooms; it is just harder to incorporate into an already full, sometimes rigid curriculum.”

Another important finding from this work has been the collaborative ways Finnish educational leaders work with government partners to address mis- and disinformation, which creates opportunities and allows flexibility for educators to design curriculum better suited to meet the challenge and supports the type of mutual trust that leads to innovation and quick adaptation.

“The U.S. is much larger than Finland, and the education system is different, but given the importance of training our citizenry to be resilient to the increasing onslaught of misinformation, we should work to become more collaborative across agencies and institutions on this topic of media literacy, as they seem to be in Finland,” West observed in the March Q&A.

The 2022 state supplemental budget provision supporting this work has laid a strong foundation for additional educational exchange between our multidisciplinary research center in Seattle, where we aim to translate our research into educational tools and programs. At the CIP, we hope to build upon Finland’s time-tested programs and incorporate many of them into our own educational work here in Washington.

CITATIONS

[1] Scruggs, G. (2021, November 4). “Washington state and Finland sign tech-focused MOU, plan to establish smart port in Tacoma.” GeekWire.

<https://www.geekwire.com/2021/washington-state-finland-sign-mou-establish-smart-port-tacoma>

[2] Finland in the United States. (2021, November 4). “Memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Finland and the State of Washington concerning cooperation on high technologies and green transformation.” Finland Abroad.

<https://finlandabroad.fi/documents/384951/0/Finland+Washington+MoU.pdf/6afb878e-e9e5-6b8b-43c9-9fd6cc18c434?t=1636140501398>

[3] Finland in the United States. (2021, November 5). “Finland and Washington state to partner on transport and technology.” Finland Abroad. https://finlandabroad.fi/web/usa/current-affairs/-/asset_publisher/h5w4iTUJhNne/content/finland-and-washington-state-to-partner-on-transport-and-technology/384951

https://finlandabroad.fi/web/usa/current-affairs/-/asset_publisher/h5w4iTUJhNne/content/finland-and-washington-state-to-partner-on-transport-and-technology/384951

[4] Office of Washington Lt. Gov. Denny Heck. (2021, November 4). “Lieutenant Governor Denny Heck welcomes delegation from Finland for signing of transport MOU.” Twitter via @LtGovDennyHeck.

<https://twitter.com/LtGovDennyHeck/status/1456448271031812098?s=20>

[5] Colagrossi, M. (2018, September 10). “10 reasons why Finland’s education system is the best in the world.” Big Think via World Economic Forum.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/09/10-reasons-why-finlands-education-system-is-the-best-in-the-world>

[6] Lessenski, M. (2022, October). “How it started, how it is going: Media literacy index 2022.” Open Society Institute Sofia.

https://osis.bg/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/HowItStarted_MediaLiteracyIndex2022_ENG_.pdf

[7] <https://www.lokisloop.org/about/>

[8] <https://www.cip.uw.edu/events/finnishedworkshop/>

[9] UW Center for an Informed Public. (2022, September 24). "CIP's Jevin West working to build research and educational ties in Finland around media literacy, mis- and disinformation."
<https://www.cip.uw.edu/2022/09/24/cip-jevin-west-finland-education-media-literacy/>

[10] UW Center for an Informed Public. (2023, March 1). "What we can learn from Finland."
<https://www.cip.uw.edu/2023/03/01/finland-media-literacy/>

[11] Klepper, D. and Valdes, M. (2023, March 20). "Digital literacy: Can the republic 'survive an algorithm'?" The Associated Press.
<https://apnews.com/article/misinformation-education-election-vaccine-canada-finland-e7d6eed63f3db289bf887605c99ab5c5>

[12] Valdes, M. (2023, March 20). "Teachers push for misinformation education." The Associated Press.
<https://apnews.com/video/education-misinformation-teaching-texas-australia-d1ebca7fba3240a4af275ca3a039b403>

[13] Grass, M. (2023, March 28). "At MisinfoDay 2023 events across Washington, high school students and educators learn valuable skills." UW Center for an Informed Public.
<https://www.cip.uw.edu/2023/03/28/misinfoday-2023-washington-program-lessons/>

PHOTOS

Page 1: Photo of Helsinki, Finland by Ninara via Flickr / CC BY 2.0
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/ninara/48861424791>

Page 2: Photo of the main railway station in Helsinki, Finland by Juha Uitto / Flickr via CC BY-NC 2.0
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/12810816@N08/47656554362>