

How people reason about complex, real-world problems often involves assumptions about the nature of knowledge, how (or whether) opinions are justified and the role of expert opinion about such issues are often important considerations. For college students, assumptions about the nature of knowledge and learning about real-world problems plays a role in students' study behaviors or perceptions of the value of college coursework. More generally, these assumptions may also play a role in other behaviors, such as how individuals use search engines to locate information on the internet. This study examines the relationships between these three topics.

Specifically, this study examines use of an instrument, the Reasoning about Current Issues Test (RCI) a measure designed to assess how individuals justify their opinions about four real-world problems. Items are designed to reflect levels of sophistication as summarized by the Reflective Judgment model (King & Kitchener, 1994). A second instrument consists of a selected items of the Epistemological Beliefs Inventory (EBI, Wood & Kardash, 2002) and assesses students' assumptions about whether learning is all-or-none and the assumptions about truth and uncertainty in college coursework. A third instrument, the Internet Search Strategies Assessment (ISSA) asks participants how they use internet search engines to gain information particularly when the information available is contradictory.

Procedure: Participants were 300 college students who received course credit in an introductory psychology course at a large Midwestern university. The RCI solicited individuals' opinions about how they justified their opinions on the topics of: immigration policy, safety of genetically modified foods, possible biological basis of homosexuality and whether alcoholism has genetic determinants. Participants also completed a short form of the EBI which assessed assumptions about the nature of knowledge and student success.

