AEJMC: Social Media in the Classroom

Social Media is changing everything. Nowhere is this more evident than on our college and university campuses. Yet there are unique challenges in incorporating social media into an established and tested curriculum.

AEJMC asked teachers to share some of their best practices for incorporating social media into the classroom, including suggested articles, exercises, tools and more. The following is a collection their best ideas and experiences.

Why create another blog on social media?   Resources   Handouts

Social Media in the Classroom

By Brad King, Ball State University

(Journalism) Media Ethics: Building Data Streams

The use of social media within my Media Ethics class allows the students to aggregate a great deal of information, oftentimes from diverse sources, within a very short amount of time. Since ethics is, by its nature, interactive, emerging technology tools enable me to create a "living conversation" that extends beyond the classroom.

I break my class (approximately 25-30 students) into groups of 4-5 using very basic criteria: gender, major/minor, year in school and race to create as much diversity of experience, insomuch as physical attributes and school history can do that, within each group. Extrapolating the idea of the Wisdom of Crowds, the idea is to create as much independent thought as possible within an organization.

The students receive very basic training on how wiki software works, and then each group is given a space on the class wiki for their group. The space is ungraded (per research on high-context learners) and left to the group's collective devices to organize and aggregate information for their assignments.

Ten times throughout the semester, the groups are assigned case studies on Tuesdays and must generate both teaching materials for the class and a 10-15 minute presentation by the next Thursday (less than 48 hours). The wiki becomes a place where the groups can, in an asynchronous way, aggregate their external sources (e.g., normative studies) and their internal work (e.g., summaries, decisions).

The class also has a group hashtag (#bsuME) for questions that need immediate help and as a place where I can send out links (and aggregate link-thinking through Twitter Search and an RSS Reader) for use in class. I can also answer individual questions in a public forum, allowing other students the opportunity to learn from those discussions.

Each new semester, students are given lessons from previous student work as well, creating a classroom that extends both directions in the time stream, creating an opportunity to discuss changes in thinking on a student level.

The students make several hundred changes and built scores of pages on the wiki throughout the semester in these ungraded environments.

(Journalism) Introduction to Magazine Writing: Taking Tests and Building Databases

I use social media in the introductory magazine class to help students both understand the inherent weakness of one person trying to do work that a group can do better and to build a better database of information for future classes.

Instead of using memorization quizzes to gauge the retention of knowledge in the Introduction to Magazine Writing class, a class wiki with a series of questions was created. Answering the questions required information from readings, lectures and outside sources. The wiki was broken up into two parts: individual responses and group responses. Sixty percent of the grade came from students pulling answers from outside sources (e.g., find an example of a narrative introductory lead, post it with a link and explain how the author used it to set up the story theme) and 40 percent came from collaborative answers (e.g., create a database of websites that track political spending nationally and state-wide). Twenty students took the first wiki test, creating a 15-page document with 128 substantive changes.

(Digital Media Minor) Introduction to Social Media: Aggregating Information

I use social media in a variety of ways in this class – students build their own website and social network around a single story idea using nothing but software tools (e.g., no technical coding skill necessary). The students are required to participate in a variety of online communities, building their Twitter follower lists, creating Facebook Fan/Group pages and creating some type of user-generated community activity within their sites (e.g., Google maps made from submitted content).

Add your expertise!

Send your best practices for incorporating social media into the classroom to AEJMCpr@aol.com.

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However, I've found one of the best uses of social media within the classroom is for the teacher to both aggregate information (e.g., links I find, links others find) and to engage with the authors of the texts we use (e.g., the cluetrain manifesto) to extend the conversation beyond the classroom using a Twitter hashtag (#bsuSM).

Throughout the week, I tweet supplementary links that extend the ideas we'll be discussing in class, I require students to send links out (e.g., one lesson asks students to find and tweet examples of participatory culture) and then I use an RSS Reader to aggregate the information. This becomes the basis for discussion in our class, a crowd-sourced lesson that extends the classroom beyond the 75 minutes we have twice per week.

Students also work on a class wiki, which amongst other things, is a storehouse of widgets (the uses and functionalities) for WordPress. This allows each new set of students to help crowd-source widgets across a variety of functions, which serves as a jumping off point for extending blogs and websites through basic software.

The first year I taught this class, I logged 734 Twitter interactions between students – across semesters – as they tried to work out issues related to building websites using software tools.

(Communication Studies) Fundamentals of Public Communication: Organizing Lessons

One of the most interesting experiments has been using a collective wiki to normalize the in-class instruction for the public speaking course at Ball State University, which serves 1,500 students. Dr. Kathy Denker oversees the program and the 32 graduate assistants assigned to 71 courses of 25 students each. With that many students and teachers, it's difficult to organize lessons and share information.

We set up a wiki, where Denker created a week-by-week syllabus. Then, the G.A.s were invited to upload lessons and other projects they created within their classes, allowing the teachers the ability to pool their resources and for Denker to highlight projects that fit in the overall organization and structure of the course. With the collective wiki, the teachers were better able to see what was and wasn't working within classrooms and share lessons with each other.

Books

Lawrence Lessing
Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace
The Future of Ideas
Remix

Web as Conversation
the cluetrain manifesto
Small Pieces, Loosely Joined

Henry Jenkins
Convergence Culture
Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers
Textual Poachers
Life on the Screen

Technology History
Crypto
Hackers
Being Digital

Howard Rheingold
Smart Mobs
The Virtual Community

Virtual World
Dungeons and Dreamers
The Making of Second Life
Masters of Doom

Start-ups, Business and Social Media
The New, New Thing
Groundswell
Once You're Lucky, Twice You're Good
The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

Internet Culture
Geeks
The Hacker Crackdown
The Well
Where Wizards Stay Up Late

Media + Technology

We the Media
The Wisdom of Crowds

Papers/Articles

JCR Licklider, head of ARPANet project
Man-Computer Symbiosis (1960)
The Computer as a Communication Device (1968)
http://memex.org/licklider.pdf

Vannevar Bush, NSF Founder
As We May Think, The Atlantic (1945)
http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1969/12/as-we-may-think/3881/

Larry Press
Before The Altair: The History of Personal Computing, Communications of the ACM (1993)
http://bpastudio.csudh.edu/fac/lpress/articles/hist.htm

Richard Bartle, Multi-User Dungeon (MUD)
Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spaces: Players Who Suit MUDs (1996)
http://www.mud.co.uk/richard/hcds.htm

Andrew Sullivan
Why I Blog, The Atlantic (2009)
http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/11/why-i-blog/7060/

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