

Barbara Barnes & Christine Quinan: Teaching with Social Media Lecturer Teaching Fellows 2013-14

I. Project Purpose and Rationale

Our proposed project was motivated by a persistent pedagogical challenge we face as lecturers in GWS: finding ways to address the needs of students who have varying levels of familiarity with the field. This challenge is undoubtedly faced by lecturers across campus, but we may experience it especially acutely because, being a small department, we open all upper-division classes to students without prerequisites. While this practice has the positive effect of bringing students to the major and creating disciplinarily diverse classrooms, it also requires that we find ways to introduce new students to basic vocabulary and concepts without boring those already familiar. Even more urgently, however, due to the often controversial subject matter of our classes, we find that we must devise ways to encourage discussion on emotionally and politically charged topics among students with varying perspectives and degrees of familiarity with the issues. Based on our preliminary uses, we feel that social media shows promise for addressing such pedagogical challenges.

After trying out various experiments with new social media in different courses, our pedagogical interest in further utilizing online tools has been sparked. Additionally, we have received invaluable feedback from students on changes and adjustments that could be made in the future to better address teaching and learning objectives. This experiment has only touched the surface of the deep potential that social media holds for creating an online classroom community. We ultimately hope to produce tools for facilitating the creation of learning environments in which students can productively agree or disagree, and become actively and collaboratively involved in their own learning.

We envision the possibility of there existing on the CTL site a page where faculty could access suggestions for the use of social media in the classroom. Hopefully, it would also be possible to have a “comments” section or a wiki or forum in which faculty who visit the site could share their approaches.

II. Project Justification

1. Social media is part of daily life and is already shaping how information is communicated and learned. Our institutions, including universities, will benefit from finding effective ways to retool in order to make good use of these tools (Davidson, 2011).
2. That said, social media should serve a pedagogical purpose, rather than being added to syllabi just because it exists.

3. Since the use of social media in the classroom is such a new practice, there is little research on its efficacy. There is, however, a lot of anecdotal evidence of its use, along with many suggestions for practices online and otherwise.

III. Guiding Questions

- How might we create an online/electronic community that addresses varied levels of expertise and different learning styles?
- How might we leverage new media to support student learning?
- Can social networking be exploited, so to speak, and if so, how might we go about this task?

IV. What is Social Media Good For and Why is it Important?

- Facilitates the constant challenge we face of teaching to multiple levels, a particularly salient concern in large, lecture-based courses where students have few opportunities to meaningfully engage with peers and instructors
- Allows students to explore new ideas, exchange knowledge, and actively participate in discussion both inside and outside the classroom
- Offers a space where students can productively agree or disagree and can become actively and collaboratively involved in their own learning
- Provides another space for quieter or more introverted students to engage with both class material and fellow classmates
- Holds potential for:
 - “double-loop” learning/bidirectional learning (Hume, 2012)
 - community building
 - critical thinking skills
 - creative engagement with materials
 - collaborative/group projects

V. Possible Assignments that Integrate Social Media

- Unique student blogs: “Create a blog using a free hosting site (e.g., blogger, wordpress, tumblr). You will keep weekly entries related to class content and will follow other classmates’ class blogs. In your responses, you may (1) briefly summarize the main ideas and/or common themes of the assigned texts, (2) provide your opinion or analysis of the readings, (3) respond to comments, questions, or debates brought up during class discussions, or (4) comment on a classmate’s blog entry. You should aim for blog entries of 250+ words (approximately two paragraphs). Responses will be graded on a check-plus, check, check-minus scale.”

- Periodic Online Forums: “This assignment asks you to find and share examples of the ideas and concepts being introduced in the class. The point is to generate lively discussion, engaged thinking, and community. I am also hoping these posts will enrich our in-class discussions by enabling all of us to share cultural products that we’re each familiar with, that interests us, and/or that we find disturbing. We will be using a social networking site called *Piazza* for the posts. Each of you should have received an email asking you to enroll in the class on Piazza. Regardless, our Piazza page can be found at: <_____> and our access code is: _____. It is a good idea to get started on this assignment right away – don’t wait until late in the semester (I will not extend the May 1 deadline under *any* circumstances). If you are shy and wish to post anonymously to the class, you are able to do this (however, I will be able to see who you are). Three posts due sometime in between February 1 and May 1.”
- Single Class Blog: “Throughout the course, you will make contributions to a class blog (**gws111masculinities.wordpress.com**). In your responses, you may (1) briefly summarize the main ideas and/or common themes of the assigned texts, (2) provide your opinion or analysis of the readings, (3) respond to comments, questions, or debates brought up during class discussion, or (4) comment on a classmate’s blog entry. You should aim for blog entries of 200+ words (approximately two paragraphs). Your postings should be coherent, structured, and critical.”

VI. Resources:

1. Peer-reviewed articles and books:

- Hume, M. (2012). Adopting organisation learning theory in the classroom: Advancing learning through the use of blogging and self-reflection. *International Journal of Learning and Change*, 6 (1/2), 49–65.
- Davidson, C. N. (2011). *Now you see it: How the brain science of attention will transform the way we live, work, and learn*. NY: Viking.
- Davidson, C. N. & Goldberg, D. T. (2009). *The future of thinking: Learning institutions in a digital age*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Powell, D.A. & C.J. Jacob & B.J. Chapman. (2012). Using Blogs and New Media in Academic Practice: Potential Roles in Research, Teaching, Learning, and Extension. *Innov High Educ*, 37, 271–282.
- Sjoberg, L. (2013). Feminist IR 101: Teaching through Blogs. *International Studies Perspectives*, 14, 383–393.
- Churchill, D. (2009). Educational applications of Web 2.0: Using blogs to support teaching and learning. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 40 (1), 179–183.

- Kerawalla, L., S. Minocha, G. Kirkup and G. Conole. (2009). An empirically grounded framework to guide blogging in higher education. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 25 (1), 31-42.

2. Websites/Organizations:

- Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC): hastac.org

3. *Chronicle of Higher Education* articles:

- Pannapacker, W. (Nov 18, 2013). No more digitally challenged Liberal Arts majors: http://chronicle.com/article/No-More-Digitally-Challenged/143079/?cid=wc&utm_source=wc&utm_medium=en
- Meloni, J. (August 13, 2009). Integrating, evaluating, and managing blogging in the classroom: <http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/integrating-evaluatingmanaging-blogging-in-the-classroom/22626>

4. Blogs/Blog posts:

- Profhacker: Teaching, tech, and productivity at *Chronicle of Higher Ed*: <http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/>
- Sample Reality by Mark Sample: <http://www.samplereality.com>
 - “Reflections on a technology-driven syllabus”: <http://www.samplereality.com/2009/09/30/reflections-on-a-technology-driven-syllabus/>
 - “Pedagogy and the class blog”: <http://www.samplereality.com/2009/08/14/pedagogy-and-the-class-blog/>

5. Other online resources:

- edutopia: “Social media for teachers: Guides, resources, and ideas”: <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/social-media-resources-educators-matt-davis>
- Common Craft on Blogs: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6l7yv0ZXmU>

VII. Wiki/Forum/Comments

Song of Myself collaborative interpretation

Hi Michael -- I was a TA for an American Lit. class a couple of semesters ago, and the professor and I implemented the use of some digital tools for literary interpretation. You mentioned that your class read "Song of Myself" this semester, so I thought I'd share with you a project that we did on "Song of Myself" in the class I TAed for -- we decided to experiment with a collaborative interpretation of the poem, and used a wiki and the blog to accomplish this. It turned out to be quite a fascinating experiment/project -- we had about 60 students (I know, crazy!), so the poem exploded into something else and took on a life of its own. We posted a portion of "Song of Myself" on a wiki, asked the students to choose a word/phrase in the text, insert an image to interpret that word/phrase (visual interpretation), and link both word/phrase and image to their individual blogs, where they wrote about 1-2 paragraphs explaining their word/phrase choice and the rationale behind their reading and interpretation of the poem. It was really quite fascinating to see so many student voices and interpretations come together as they read and dissected the poem. This is a different use the wiki, but thought I'd share! I'm excited to hear about the great work that you and Bridget are both implementing and thinking about in your literature classes, as I'm really interested in how we can use new media in literary studies (at my institution, colleagues and professors have started to go beyond the CMS to using the blog, wiki, and social networking sites in their literature classes, though they're still very much in the minority), so I really appreciate the conversations here!

She has students pick one quote from *every* reading and write a paragraph explicating/responding to it on their class webspace. In her model, the students are encouraged (but not assigned) to interact a bit with each other's quotes and explications. Entries are due at the end of each week, so if a student is a little behind on readings they can post it after class, but they have to write something about everything. She said in her class that makes them stay on top of the material much more closely. She does not grade posts as they are put up; rather, students print out, read through, and write a final response to the entire commonplace book at the end of the semester and then she grades them as final projects.

My friend Mary who first introduced me to the commonplace book uses it in a way that many of us use blogs or Moodle. She has students pick one quote from *every* reading and write a paragraph explicating/responding to it on their class webspace. In her model, the students are encouraged (but not assigned) to interact a bit with each other's quotes and explications. Entries are due at the end of each week, so if a student is a little behind on readings they can post it after class, but they have to write something about everything. She said in her class that makes them stay on top of the material much more closely. She does not grade posts as they are put up; rather, students print out, read through, and write a final response to the entire commonplace book at the end of the semester and then she grades them as final projects.

Initially, I loved the idea of the commonplace book, but I thought having 36 people posting a quote from every reading and trying to talk about them all was going to be too much (in large part it's just a problem because our course sizes are so large!). So, when I tried it I divided my students into 4 groups, and each group was in charge of posting quotes for specific classes -- other students were allowed to post if they were so inspired, and they were all assigned to respond to one another. When I use this assignment again, however, I'm going to do it Mary's way -- she's had success in equally-large courses and I think that making students write something about every reading has intellectual merit. More importantly, I think when students reflect on their entire commonplace book, it will be a much more powerful experience if they wrote about everything instead of just 1/4 of the readings. Mary's students have written in their reflection papers that they noticed trends in their interests and improvement in being able to close read, and I think that their experience looking back on the class is one of the most valuable parts of the assignment. It's a more personal way to reflect on the class as a whole and everything covered than a cumulative exam!

I'm also thinking about tweaking the assignment so that **and the quotes students post and respond to will become the quotes I put on tests or quizzes. I think this will encourage students to read and respond to quotes on their course webspace because it will allow them to self-select the quotes they're most interested in.** (Sorry for the bold, but since we were discussing how to get students more involved in responding I thought I would highlight that strategy as a possibility.) If I go with this method, I would have a clause in the assignment that explains quotes that generate the most debate or conversation on the course blog will be strong candidates for tests and quizzes. In addition to some of the more playful ideas I mentioned earlier, I think that this could be a way to give value to the act of reading and responding without having to say "You Must Respond X Times."

However, since reading all 35 of their peers' quotes is a good deal of extra work, I may hybridize the assignment, so that students have to write an entry for every text, but we rotate so that certain students' entries are flagged for response on a rotating basis (and other responses would be welcome, naturally, if anything stands out); or instead, I might make response groups whose job it is to flag certain entries that they like and encourage other students to look at those entries first if they don't have time to read through every one every week. On the one hand, I want them to be able to gravitate towards the most interesting quotes; but on the other hand I want to make sure everyone has the experience of having something they selected responded to, and I don't want to make the assignment detract from the other work we have to do in the course. Not 100% sure how to mitigate the problem yet. Mary's method of minimizing the requirement for them to respond is one way to do it, but I am still trying to come up with a way that really harnesses the power and fun of responding. I may end up keeping the commonplace book separate from, but overlapping with, a post-and-response assignment.

[Here's a less uncertain synopsis of the practice of commonplace booking.](#) Like any assignment, there are a ton of ways to implement it to deal with the needs of your

specific classroom. If (hopefully) your class sizes are smaller than mine, you may be able to implement this type of assignment without all of the stress of adding too much labor :-).

For now, I'll end with pointing out how much I appreciate what you said about the use of technology for learning and reading texts: "By inviting the students to engage more with class material, digital technology has also noticeably improved the quality of their work. And no matter what you teach, and what you believe about teaching, that's good change that we can all agree on."