

Facebook as a learning platform education essay



Students are heavily involved in Web 2.0 technologies- blogs, twitter, podcasts, wikis, social network sites, virtual worlds, video sharing and photo sharing. The internet is playing an increasingly important role in not only students social life, but also academic. Educators are now turning to Web 2.0 tools, drawing upon their ability to assist in creating, collaborating on and sharing content. At present, little empirical research has been conducted on the value of Web 2.0 in education [1].

Social network sites are quickly becoming ubiquitous online [2]. In the digitalized era new kinds of social, work, and learning practices emerge where information is mixed with entertainment. This research will explore to what extent Facebook, could be used as a education platform. As the social construction of understanding plays an important role in student learning process, Facebook could create potentially powerful social space enhancing students' learning experience. While technological differences abound, social network sites are " web-based services that allow individuals to:

Construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system,

Articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and,

View and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" [3].

Facebook, specifically, has been found to be used to reinforce current offline relationships. As previous communication technologies (e. g. email, chat rooms, bulletin boards, etc.) have been integrated into the way we teach and administer our courses, social network sites may also have a place in our

classroom. To date, the reactions of using social network sites for educational purposes are mixed. Concerns related to privacy and anxiety in interacting with professors in this environment [4], a belief that it does not serve an academic purpose [5], and the opinion that faculty should simply avoid “ educationally appropriating” these “ backstage” social spaces [6], have been expressed. Yet, other studies have supported that notion of using social network sites in education. For example, two-thirds of students surveyed in one study were “ comfortable” with faculty on Facebook [4], and another study found that 39% of college students surveyed wanted regular on-line discussions with faculty [7].

Advantages of social network sites

The main advantages of using facebook like e-learning platform are:

It's free (Ad-supported),

Cross-platform (& mobile),

Discussion Forums,

Wiki,

Embed audio/video,

Expandable with Apps,

Integrates with any website/web page,

500 million users,

More visitors than Google. com in 2010,

Students already visit this site each day.

Facebook has quickly become the social network site of choice by college students and an integral part of the “ behind the scenes” college experience [6]. Since its 2004 inception, virtually a lot of school have designated education networks within the site. The adoption rates of Facebook in universities and colleges are remarkable; 85% of college students that have a college network within Facebook have adopted it [8]. Furthermore, Facebook also has a growing audience in perspective teachers high school and middle school students. To illustrate, registration for individuals age 12-17 grew by 179% between 2009 and 2010, and a 2010, Pew Internet and American Life Project study found that 75% of 12-17 were using social networking sites [9]. Not only are many teens registered on social networking sites, but they are also very active users. The 2010 Pew Internet and American Life study found that “ 68% of teens visit social networking websites daily or more often; 36% visit once a day, and 32% visit several times a day” [9].

In addition to the incredible usage rate among students, there are a number of unique features that make it amenable to educational pursuits. For example, Facebook is equipped with bulletin boards, instant messaging, email, and the ability to post videos and pictures. Most notably, anyone can post information and collaborate within the system. Recently, Facebook has opened up development of downloadable applications, which can further supplement the educational functions of Facebook. While many of these

technological tools mirror those found in currently employed courseware programs (e. g. blackboard, moodle, etc.), the ability and ease with which an individual (instructor or student) can upload photo and videos, the frequent and seamless updates and maintenance, and the compatibility with a wide variety of web browsers are superior to some courseware options.

Beyond high usage rates and some technological advantages, social networks, such as Facebook, can provide numerous other pedagogical advantages to both teachers and students. Facebook is a network that connects students with other students, indirectly creating a learning community - a vital component of student education [10]. Facebook provides instructors opportunities and structures by which students can help and support one another by building their courses atop the community already established by the students themselves. Hamann and Wilson [11], found that students who participated in a web-enhanced class outperformed those students in a traditional lecture format. This suggests that Internet based learning modules actively engage students in a manner unique from the traditional class lecture.

Facebook also increases both teacher-student and student-student interaction in the form of web-based communication. Facebook helps instructors connect with their students about assignments, upcoming events, useful links, and samples of work outside of the classroom. Students can use Facebook to contact classmates about questions regarding class assignments or examinations as well as collaborate on assignments and group projects in an online environment. Building on the face-to-face, teacher-student relationship, social networks allow students to glimpse

instructor profiles containing personal information, interests, background, and “ friends,” which can enhance student motivation, affective learning, and classroom climate [12]. Other scholars, however, find that instructor presence on Facebook has neither a positive nor a negative effect on student ratings (i. e., likeability and respect) of professors [4].

Lastly, utilizing Facebook effectively in teacher education courses will help facilitate perspective teachers to model what they have learned in their own classrooms. Teacher education students will not only benefit by the classroom advantages of using Facebook, but also by learning professional Facebook etiquette (discussed in the best practices section). Previous teacher education research [11], and a number of popular press articles provide evidence that some perspective and current teachers have much to learn in regards to privacy and professional/personal boundaries on Facebook [13].

How to Use Facebook in Teacher Education

Facebook does offer several advantages as a learning or educational tool. Among many student populations it has a large user base, it costs virtually nothing to implement, offers a range of tools for information sharing and production, and is quick to deploy with reduced community management. Instruction in using Facebook should be an integral part of teacher education programs, particularly with so many different types of social networks emerging. As Voithofer [1], notes, instructing teacher education students on social networks encourages them to consider

The technical and pedagogical characteristics of educational technology,

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The social aspects of educational technology, and

How to think about emerging technologies in relation to teaching.

It is important for teacher educators to introduce students to social networks.

As an optional assignment, teacher can have students create their own Facebook account and “ become friends” with at least one other member of class. Then, have students post appropriate, class-related images, messages about course assignments and events, and course applications, such as “ Courses 2. 0” or “ Courses Connection,” on Facebook – persuade students to experiment with different features (See Best Practice Policies below).

Teachers who engage with a technological medium are more likely to value that technological tool in their teaching [14]. Teacher educators should have students implement Facebook in a currently taught course, focusing on integrating course content and objectives. When implementing Facebook, pre-service teachers must consider a pedagogical rationale for using Facebook as well as suggested course applications. To further identify real and potential issues when using Facebook, teacher educators can assign articles about the educational uses of Facebook. Then, drawing from their personal experience with Facebook and the readings, pre-service students can reflect about Facebook as an educational tool in the classroom or an a course blog.

Levels of Course Integration

There is a lot of different ways how facebook can be integrated into a course.

1) Creating Profile Page: An instructor can chose to create a profile page for him/herself. The profile page can be used to communicate with students via Facebook email, IM, or posting on the wall. In addition, relevant videos, images and websites can also be included. Students could also be exposed to relevant and educational Facebook groups.

2) Creating a Group Page for a Class: A separate page can be created specifically for a course. Students can virtually find other classmates through this page, learn about their classmates, communicate with their classmates and professor, and post/discuss relevant class information. Professors can send an announcement to the entire group, set up and remind students about events.

3) Replacing/Duplicating webcourse functions on Facebook: Discussions that traditionally have taken place on webcourse boards can also occur on Facebook discussion boards. Instant messaging functions are also available online. Instructors can post information and websites on their profile and group page for students to download and use for class.

4) Integration of Facebook Applications: There are a number of useful applications that will expand the functionality of Facebook for class.

The most used e-learning apps on facebook

Many students, instructors and administrators are using a number of facebook applications for a wide variety of academic purposes.

Books iRead: Share the books you're reading, and see what others think of books with this application.

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Flashcards: With this application, you can create flash cards to help you study on Facebook.

SkoolPool: Get the lowdown on schools, online and otherwise, with this neat application.

Rate My Professors: Find out what other students think of professors before you register for their class.

BookTag: This app offers a great way to share and loan books out to students, plus create helpful quizzes for studying.

DoResearch4me: This app makes it easy to gather information using your thesis statement, instructions, and more.

Mathematical Formulas: Distribute formulas, solutions, and more with this application.

SlideShare: Create presentations to send to students with this slideshow application.

Calendar: This calendar app from 30 Boxes lets you organize your days, set reminders and share your calendar with others.

To-Do List: Stay on top of your tasks with this Facebook to-do application.

Zoho Online Office: You can keep all of your documents online, and even share them with classmates, students, and colleagues.

UdutuTeach: UdutuTeach allows you to import courses from myUdutu (a course authoring tool) manage which people can take your courses, and track the learners' progress.

UdutuLearn: UdutuLearn lets you view courses that you have been given access to and shows your progress.

Files: Powered by Box. net, this application makes it easy to store and retrieve documents in Facebook, so you can access them anywhere you have a connection.

WorldCat: Use WorldCat to do research, catalog your library's collection, and share information with students.

HeyMath!: These mini-movies explain difficult math concepts, so these are great to share with students or use on your own.

Study Groups: Get everyone together on your group project by collaborating with this application.

StudentsMeetTutors help to link students and local tutors. The tutoring is done face-to-face; however, the introductions are all done via Facebook.

CourseFeed: Take advantage of CourseFeed's class sharing, announcements, file storage, notifications, and more on Facebook.

Webinaria Screencast Recorder: Record a video for students, and share it with this application.

BookTag: This app offers a great way to share and loan books out to students, plus create helpful quizzes for studying.

Hotseat - Students at Purdue University are experimenting with a new application developed at the school called Hotseat that integrates Facebook and text messaging to help students “backchannel” during class. At Purdue, Hotseat is used to allow students to comment on the class as it proceeds, with everyone in the class including the professor able to see the messaging as it happens. The Hotseat software allows students to use either Facebook to post messages during classes, or they can simply log in to the web site to post to and view the ongoing backchannel. Right now it’s only being pilot tested in two courses, but has already become a fast favorite for both teachers and students.

Best Practice Policies

As instructors create their profile and course functions in Facebook, what are some best practices for using it effectively as a teaching tool? And how can teacher educators teach Facebook professional etiquette? First, an instructor should create an additional Facebook profile for professional use only. This profile should be entirely separate to their social/personal profile, where privacy settings need to be implemented. The professional profile should contain contact information, specifically an email address, office address, and phone number. The profile allows students to learn about the instructor on a personal level, so it is important to include a few photos, post items or web links, or list favorite quotes. While these tidbits of personal information can lead to positive teacher-student interactions, it is important to maintain

a level of professionalism that does not cross the boundary of the teaching-student relationship.

Considering the latter, for instance, instructors should carefully screen personal photos and items they post to their profile. In addition, instructors should refrain from talking about their students, other teachers, administrators, and their institution on Facebook regardless of whether they are professionally or socially using Facebook. Second, to connect with students, instructors must inform students that they have a Facebook profile. It is not recommended that instructors invite students as their friends on Facebook, as students may perceive this as an invasion of privacy as well as intimidating. Instead, keep your profile “open” to the public rather than “private.” This allows students to comfortably peruse an instructor’s profile without asking the instructor to be their friend. Then, instructors can simply list the web link to their Facebook profile in their course syllabus, email signatures or other course management software. In addition, instructors can simply display their Facebook profile during class, inviting students to look at their profile.

It is also recommended that instructors mention that they will not be viewing their students profiles and encourage students to designate them on their “limited profile” list (i. e. instructors will not be exposed to all of the student’s Facebook activities). Instructors should demonstrate how to use Facebook privacy settings. Third, to get students started on Facebook, instructors should create an icebreaker activity on Facebook, such as a posting a topic to solicit student discussion or inserting a video accompanied with study questions, to help develop a classroom community and establish positive

relationships. Fourth, when integrating Facebook into their courses, instructors should designate student involvement on Facebook as an option, as not all students are registered users, and provide students other alternatives. Lastly, if using the site as a course tool, it is suggested that instructors post podcasts, websites, and videos on Facebook, and, using Google Documents, link students to study guides, powerpoints, assignments, and tutorials. Instructors can contact students via Facebook by sending messages, posting comments on “ the wall” or chatting with students during virtual office hours. By increasing student involvement through communication and community, instructors can tailor their courses towards a variety of learning styles.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that there is some potential in using Facebook in education. The positive aspects of using Facebook in education related to easy access, promoting friendly environment, useful features like video links web links and other applications. It is our conjecture that the benefits of Facebook’s networking and social communication capabilities can benefit both the instructor and the student by tapping into a greater number of learning styles, providing an alternative to the traditional lecture format, creating an online classroom community, and increasing teacher-student and student-student interaction. Efforts should be made by instructors to expand their pedagogical portfolio, promote active learning through a learning community, and to test the effectiveness of on-line learning communities through social networks such as Facebook. Scholars should continue their investigations into these alternative teaching tools to determine if the

benefit of creating cyber learning communities to complement the traditional classroom experience is worth the cost of retooling and restructuring.

Furthermore, teacher preparation can be enhanced by creating opportunities for teachers in training to see, experience, and effectively model lessons learned on Facebook in their future classrooms.