

Social Media and Society - Using social media for student learning about social media at Durham College

Opportunity

At Durham College in Oshawa, the growing use of social media for online communication and collaboration in industry, business, government, politics, and personal life and student interest in learning how to use social media for learning and in their careers have been recognized. In response, a General Education course on social media was developed to be offered entirely online as an elective in a wide variety of programs.

Innovation

Social Media and Society looks at the impact of social media on business, government, education, and the economy in a 14-week asynchronous online course that highlights the flexibility and applications of social media. Students are engaged in exploring, analyzing, and creating materials for social media – learning by being immersed in the world of social media.



The course was developed by Jordanne Christie who is the Learning Technologies Specialist in the Centre for Academic and Faculty Enrichment (C.A.F.E.) and she continues to teach one of the sections of the popular elective. The course site is linked to YouTube and Jordanne creates a video for each module to highlight the content, activities, and assignments for the week. Each module requires about three hours of

reading, watching, and activity, plus additional time for assignments. The media covered in the course include:

- Social networks, such as Facebook
- Social bookmarking, sharing links to web pages, often enhanced with descriptions of content
- Photo sharing applications
- Video sharing applications
- Podcasting
- Blogs
- Microblogging, such as Twitter
- Wikis, collectively developed and edited online information on specific topics
- RSS, web feeds that publish frequently updated information and send it directly to subscribers' browsers
- Virtual worlds, including simulations and 3D images

The weekly modules have examples of social media applications such as during the debates in the last Ontario election, online readings, examples, videos, quizzes, reflection questions, and assignments. The variety of possible assignments best demonstrates the use of social media for student learning about social media.

Creation of a Wiki: Students are put in groups of five or six and assigned a Wiki page headed by the name of a particular social media. They build the content including definitions, advantages, disadvantages, applications, and examples of usage. These are posted and the students work as individuals to significantly edit at least two of the entries by adding pictures, revising content, updating references, etc. Each student then writes a reflection on the Wiki work.

Audit: Each student audits the social media of an organization, analyzing its scope, messages, gaps, and usefulness, and makes recommendations on how it can be improved.

Blog: A blog is created for the course, built around questions posed by the instructor. Students are expected to contribute to the blog and make comments on the posts of other students on a regular basis.

Microblogging: Each student follows a politician on Twitter and comments on how he/she uses the media to communicate.

Social Bookmarking: Each student creates a topic-specific list of relevant resource links.

Educational Plan: Each student describes how social media could be used in one of their other courses and how the media relate to the course content.

Personal Learning Environment: Each student demonstrates learning by commenting on a topic of choice, such as citizen journalism or web privacy, using video, a Wiki, blog, or text report online.

The instructor is available online and by telephone to offer additional support.

Outcomes and Benefits

Student learning is active and effective as they learn about the theory and practice by following, manipulating, analyzing, and creating social media tools and applying them to their own situations, as well as the broader social context.

Students are enthusiastic about the course and what they are learning, and enjoy many of the assignments, such as following politicians on Twitter and looking at social media sites of organizations.

The course is increasingly popular as interest in the topic is growing.

Challenges and Enhancements

Despite students' enthusiasm for, experience with, and learning about social media, they persist in submitting text-based assignments. When given the choice, the majority do not take advantage of the opportunity to use the social media for their assignments. In future courses, instead of having the option of submitting written reports, students will build social media portfolios.

Students express concern about their technology skills when they realize how much technology is embedded in the course. Documentation on using each is provided, and the hesitation decreased after the first couple of modules. However, the choice of text-based submissions indicates how difficult the shift is for them.

Some of the students have concern about creating personal accounts on social media, particularly those studying Law and Security. They were also concerned about missing parts of the course if they did not have these accounts. The issue has been resolved with all students using Google accounts, which are private.

For the instructor, the ongoing challenge is staying current with examples, tools, and technology. Course materials require revision each time it is offered.

Potential

Social Media and Society was developed so that the structure is flexible enough to be used in courses in post-secondary education in Ontario that want to integrate learning

about and through social media. It can also be tailored to complement program offerings by emphasizing content specific to their needs.

For example, in the School of Business, IT, and Management at Durham, Social Media and Society is being re-designed as a mandatory course for the certificate, diploma, and advanced diploma programs in Business. Introduced in January 2012, it is a hybrid course, with one hour of online activity to be completed before each weekly two-hour class. In-class small group activities, with emphasis on examining and creating social media tools, are built around what students have learned in the online preparation.

Jordanne Christie is willing to discuss the structure of Social Media and Society, its pedagogical basis, and the experience of designing, revising, and teaching the course, as well as adapting it for use in the School of Business. She is also interested in exploring the idea of “massively open courses” in which anyone in the world can participate but only some students register, pay tuition, and earn credit.

For Further Information

Jordanne Christie
Learning Technologies Specialist
Centre for Academic and Faculty Enrichment (C.A.F.E.)
Durham College, Oshawa
jordanne.christie@durhamcollege.ca