SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

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The Facebook project was really beneficial to my learning. I'm a terrible test taker but the Facebook project was fun and informative. –Student

The Facebook profile project was just genius I learned so much about not just my project's subject but that of the others participating in it. – Student

Educators are increasingly adopting social media tools to encourage student engagement. Whether a blog, micro-blog, or Facebook, social media is becoming a common component of the classroom experience. Syllabi and class materials are posted on Facebook, classes Tweet, text, and connect.

These popular tools have certainly made a difference in the construction of learning with students as active participants. However, most of the approaches to integrating social media in the classroom embrace the tools for their inherent information sharing potential rather than for providing learning-centered academic spaces.

While valuable for the exchange of personal observations and resources, social media can also be visually and linguistically designed around an academic subject to more fully engage students in disciplined, academic inquiry and critical thought.

In this session we will explore the potential of Facebook as a focused academic space designed around course objectives and student learning goals. Specifically, the session will detail a successful student-driven role-play activity where students posed as a prominent psychologist or psychoanalyst and used the Facebook applications to demonstrate a critical understanding of their "character's" theoretical perspective. The friends network, biographical profile, and notes are only a few of the tools students used to research and critically evaluate psychological theory.

The results of this process will be described together with the project development process; the final format and assignment rubric; and the lessons learned. Importantly, the application of this type of instructional design strategy across the curriculum will be also discussed.

Students gained in multiple ways from this assignment. The assignment provided an engaging and focused way to interact with psychological theory from the personal perspective of their chosen theorist. Their work was deeper, richer, and more sophisticated than that of a traditional essay. They also learned to understand the psychologist as a person, which grounded the theoretical process for them. They were able to see how theory emerges from personal experience, that it takes time to evolve, has weaknesses, and that it begins and is developed in a unique cultural and historical context.

Finally, the assignment allowed students to have fun while in character - and this time their late night Facebook exchanges, arguments, witty observations, buttons and bumper stickers were all supporting real learning.

Keywords - Facebook, social media, instructional design, psychology.