Exploring perceptions of faculty members’ use of social media in higher education

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Abstract

Social media or Web 2.0 tools have become central to people’s everyday activity and have been impacting the way people learn and interact with each other. These tools are being used informally by faculty members at universities to support formal classroom learning. The widespread use of social media by faculty and students has led to a need to explore the types of learning activities that are implemented through social media and faculty’s perceptions about the roles that social media plays in their students’ learning as a step to inform the design of sound instructional strategies through social media. Five faculty members at a higher education institution in Northern Virginia were interviewed to explore their use of social media in their courses. Results from the interviews suggest that faculty members use social media to introduce students to new tools that they will be using in the workplace and to help them connect with their peers, their professor, and people in their field. Moreover, the findings suggest that faculty perceive quality in students’ learning and an opportunity for the students to be mindful of the topic as a result of using social media in their courses.

*Keywords:* social media, higher education, learning activities, connectivism, students’ learning

**Exploring perceptions of faculty members’ use of social media in higher education**

The spread of social media has impacted the way people learn and interact with each other. This phenomenon has brought to surface inquisitions on how people benefit from this interaction and how it might impact their knowledge and education. Social media is old, and rooted back to the invention of the telephone when people used this technology to communicate with each other, but today’s use of social media is much more sophisticated than a one-on-one conversation, and it entails a network of people communicating through the web. Many research studies have described the different use of social media in education, and some studies have suggested the positive impact of social media on students’ learning, however, none of the studies has looked at how faculty members are using social media across the curriculum and how they perceive the role of social media in their students’ learning. Understanding this role and the learning activities that are assigned through social media can inform faculty members in implementing social media in their courses.

Initially, my interest in this topic started through my own teaching practices in which I use social media tools informally to facilitate communication with the students and among themselves in addition to sharing class activities and assignments. I have been using these tools to encourage students’ interactions and to help them improve their English language skills, but I have not been able to identify how the use of blogs, wikis, sharing tools, and Facebook have influenced their learning. My beliefs and experience using social media drove my curiosity further to look at how other faculty members use social media to support their formal instruction. I got more interested in learning about the instructional strategies that enhance student learning if any learning is observed from the professors’ perspectives. Social learning theory supports the fact that learners learn and grow through social interaction, however, due to some of my students’ mixed feelings about the use of social media in my course, I am approaching my research in an exploratory strategy in order to understand sound practices for using social media in higher education when used in a course. Moreover, I would like to understand the rationale behind faculty’s choice of specific social media tools and how their experiences compare to courses in which they did not use social media.

**Conceptual framework and experiential knowledge**

Social media, otherwise known as social software or Web 2.0 tools, refers to a group of technology tools that promotes a personal repertoire of information or could promote interactivity and communication of individuals with each other through an online, internet-based application (Anderson, 2004; Dabbagh & Reo, 2011; Cistek-Chandler, 2012; Chen and Bryer, 2012). Mason and Rennie (2010) emphasize the idea of collective intelligence that is harnessed by social media networking through the collaborative efforts of the users while Bates (2011) presents the term “E-learning 2.0” as suggested by Downes (2005) to refer to social media’s pedagogical use in education. Bates elaborates on Web 2.0 affordances and states “that they empower the end user to access, create, disseminate and share information easily in a user-friendly open environment” (p. 25). In sum, based on the common definitions presented by researchers, social media/Web 2.0 tools afford the following:

* Communicating
* Interacting
* Accessing
* Creating
* Sharing

For the purpose of this study, I refer to social media tools that as described by McLoughlin and Lee (2011), “foster and encourage informal conversation, dialogue, collaborative content generation, and the sharing of information” (p. 45) and that serve as means to facilitate and enhance students’ learning.

**Types of social media tools**

Social media tools are used for different purposes although they share a common process and outcome by affording interactivity, communication, and sometimes creativity between the end users. While some of these tools promote collaboration between users to produce some kind of a collaborative created work (Wikis, DropBox, Google Docs), others allow for connecting and socializing with friends around the world (Facebook, Friendster, Google +). Other social media tools support media sharing (YouTube, Flickr) while some of them allow bookmarking (Delicious, Diigo) (Dabbagh & Reo, 2011; McLoughlin and Lee, 2011; Bates, 2011). The most current social media tools are listed below:

* Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, etc.)
* Blogs (e.g. Wordpress, Blogger, etc.)
* Microblogs (e.g.Twitter)
* Wikis (e.g. PbWorks)
* Podcasts (e.g. Podomatic)
* Bookmarking (e.g. Delicious, Diigo)
* Social studying sites (e.g. Cramster, CourseHero)
* Sharing tools (e.g. Dropbox, Google documents)
* Media Sharing tools (e.g. YouTube, Flickr.)
* Presentation tools (e.g. Slideshare)
* Virtual worlds (e.g. Second Life, Farmville)

**Learning theories that support social media**

Social media stems from natural interaction and collaboration between individuals to create communities, and it stems from the social learning theory that is rooted in Vygotsky (1978) in which he argued that humans develop cognitively and learn through social interaction with other humans using language, cultural history, and social context. Vygotsky started the concept of student-teacher relationship as more of reciprocal benefit rather than a one-way benefit. He advocated the role of the teacher as a facilitator rather than the only provider of knowledge which is evident in today’s e-learning pedagogy. Vygotsky did not study this theory in the light of the technologies and the social media tools that exist today, but he discussed the natural, non-linear phenomenon of humans’ learning which Siemens (2005) refers to as informal learning and that could be translated into what we are witnessing today in the dynamic, collaborative world of social media. Dabbagh and Ritland-Bannan explain that knowledge from the social constructivist perspective is distributed and moves from the individual to become collective as suggested by the situated cognition pedagogy. Hence social media is rooted in both social constructivist theory and situated cognition pedagogy (Dabbagh and Reo, 2011).

Siemens (2005) proposes a new learning theory, connectivism, in which he addresses more than the process of learning that the social learning theory, behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism suggest. In connectivism, he emphasizes the value of what is being learned, and he defines it as follows:

Connectivism is the integration of principles explored by chaos, network, and complexity and self-organization theories. Learning is a process that occurs within nebulous environments of shifting core elements – not entirely under the control of the individual. Learning (defined as actionable knowledge) can reside outside of ourselves (within an organization or a database), is focused on connecting specialized information sets, and the connections that enable us to learn more are more important than our current state of knowing. (para. 23)

In other words, Siemens explains that learning happens informally when individuals make sense of information circulating around them unlike the formal learning strategies that are linear. He also emphasizes the fluidity and the growth of learning in a cyclical manner as a result of connections between ideas that keep changing across place and time due to networks and interactions. Siemens offers a more up-to-date learning theory which embraces an information age that offers accessible data for all individuals resulting in learner-centered personalized learning (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012), otherwise referred to as personal learning environments that are supported by Web 2.0.

Hence, social media pedagogy is not a new phenomenon, it is rather deeply rooted in existing pedagogy, but the constant development of the Web 2.0 tools and their varied affordances has shaped the way researchers look at existing theories. Dabbagh and Reo cite Brill and Park (2008), and Weigel, James and Gardner (2009) to emphasize the idea that Web 2.0 tools have many affordances that hold promises in education if they were “developed into discipline-specific pedagogical practices and competencies” (Dabbagh and Reo, 2011a, p. 179).

**The use of social media in higher education: Pedagogy 2.0**

Not only did social media lead to a paradigm shift in how people learn, it has also added a new suffix to education: 2.0. Researchers question whether social media will have positive or negative effects on higher education due to the affordances that it suggests to the 2.0 generation.

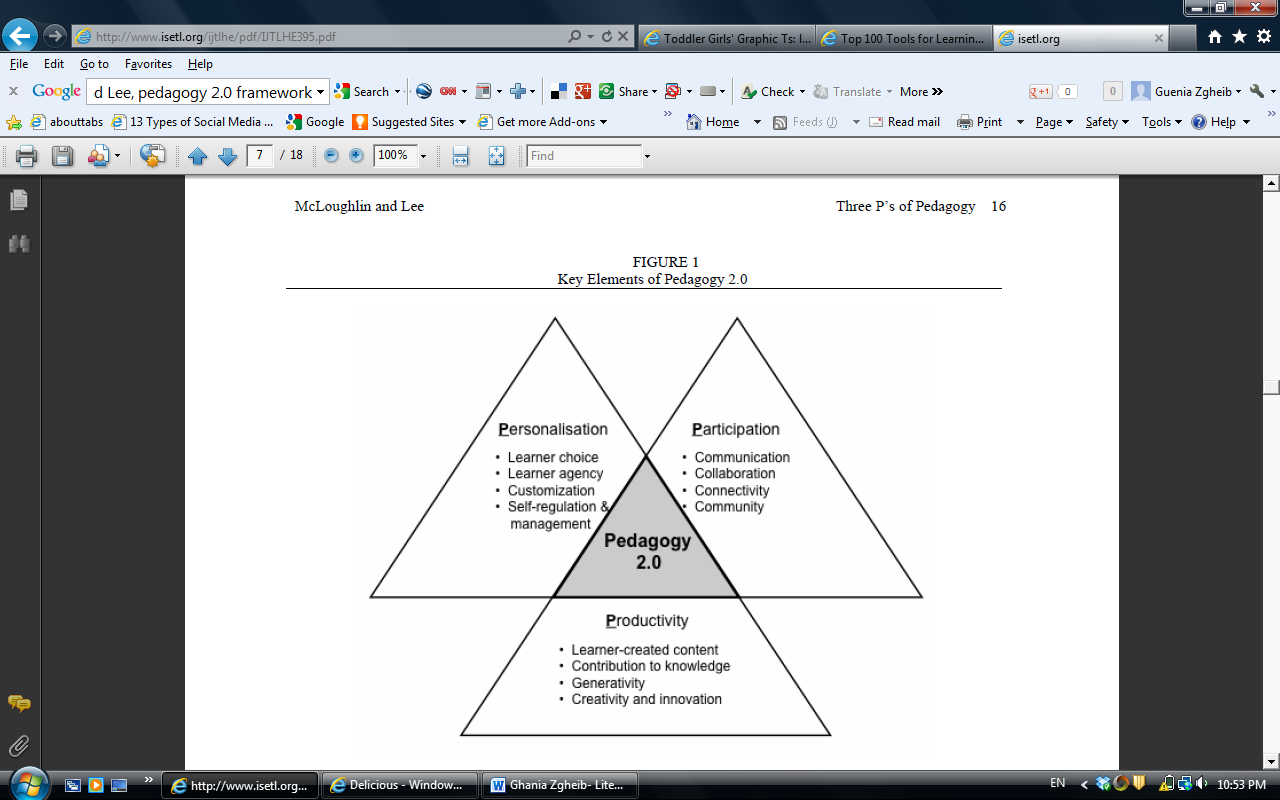
Dabbagh and Reo (2011a) discuss the impact of Web 2.0 on all aspects of higher education including faculty, students, classrooms and pedagogy as discussed in the previous sections. To describe their current and potential roles in higher education, Dabbagh and Reo, refer to them as Faculty 2.0, Students 2.0, Classroom 2.0 and Pedagogy 2.0. Faculty in the 2.0 era no longer can represent the only source of information (Siemens, 2005), but are more of co-learners and co-designers who are surrounded by a 2.0 generation who has access to information anywhere and anytime and can make sense of it. To elaborate on this idea, Dabbagh and Reo (2011a) also cite Sample (2009) who advocates openness in education where open content sharing is part of teaching and research. Similarly Students 2.0, who use social media as part of their daily activities have different expectations from their professors than previous generations, and they come into 2.0 classrooms that are equipped with interactive technology and bring in with them their mobile technologies including laptops, smart phones and tablets. Hence all of these new demands which are part of the student’s everyday life bring a significant fast-paced change into higher education that faculty, curricula, and even the classroom setting has to adapt to (ECAR, 2012; McLoughlin & Lee, 2011).

The abundance of social media tools and their use in education has led researchers to consider a 2.0 pedagogy and a 2.0 lifelong learner characteristics. Cigognini, Pettenati, and Edirisingha (2011) present the 2.0 Lifelong learner’s personal knowledge management (PKM) skills as situated in a Web 2.0 era which in turn inform their learning design model that supports these skills. Cigognini et al. present provide four online learning phases, activation, demonstration, application, and integration to represent their learning design model (Figure 1). McLoughlin and Lee (2011) also present a 2.0 pedagogy framework that emphasizes personalization, participation, and productivity (Figure 2). Similarly, Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012) present a framework for faculty and instructors to support students’ self-regulation in developing their personal learning environments through the different affordances that social media tools propose (Figure 3). The pedagogical framework is divided into three different levels: personal information management, social interaction and collaboration, and information aggregation and management.

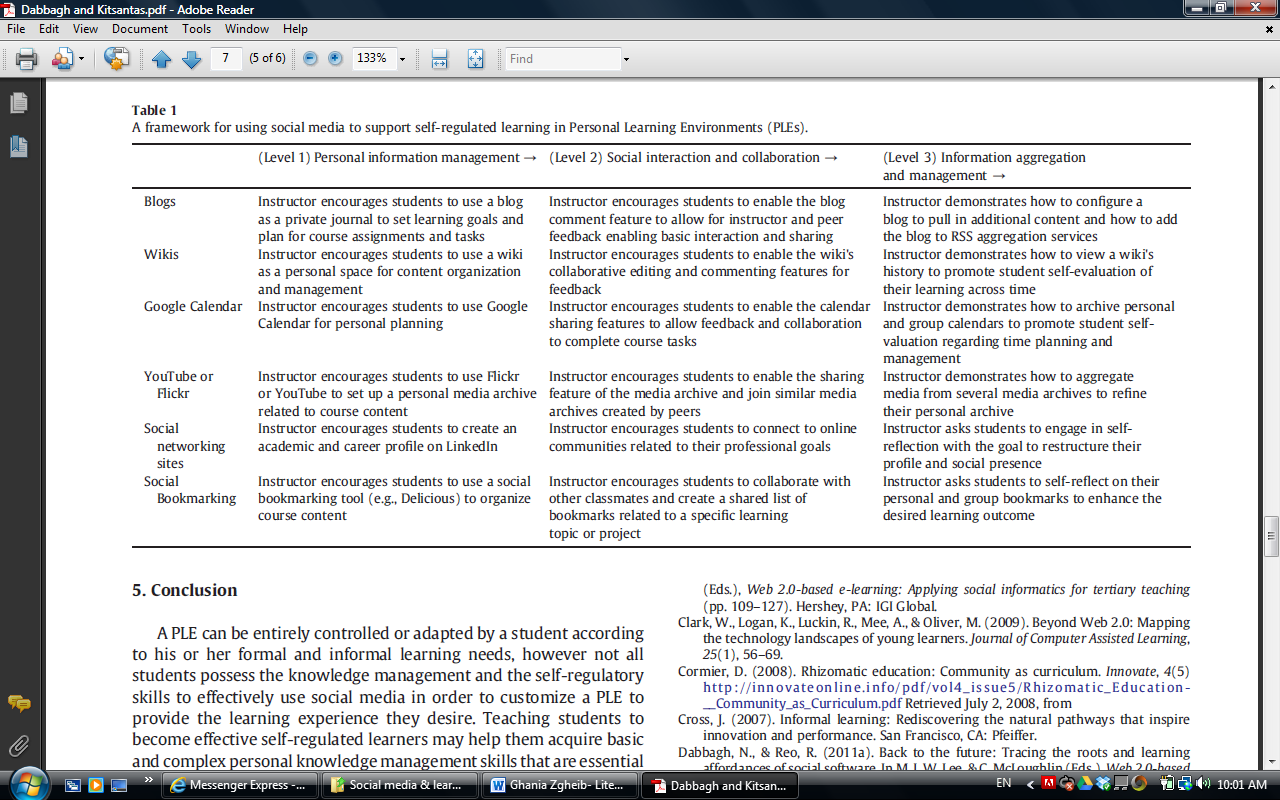
*Figure 1.* Instructional design principles and online learning phases.



*Figure 2.* Key elements of pedagogy 2.0



*Figure 3.* A framework for using social media to support self-regulated learning in Personal Learning Environments (PLEs).



While Cigognini et al. and Dabbagh and Kitsantas present a hierarchical framework that faculty could use to help students become lifelong learners and make sense of the profuse knowledge that social media offers, McLoughlin and Lee present a non-linear framework that supports education in the Web 2.0 era. All three frameworks or diagrams highlight the affordances of social media that reflect the learning strategies that could be applied to an educational setting. As a guide for my study, I present a shared diagram that highlights the common strands among the three diagrams and that includes the different cognitive affordances that could be developed through social media. “Activate” represents the lower order learning activities that social media affords and “personalize” represents the higher order learning activities (Figure 4).

*Figure 4.* A summary of key elements of figure 1, 2 & 3

Cigognini et al., Dabbagh and Kitsantas, and McLoughlin and Lee all define the terms in the frameworks. Drawing key terms and description from their work, I define each of the terms presented in the pyramid above to be used as a guideline for analyzing social media learning activities.

**Activate**

At this stage, learners get introduced to the different tools and “become accustomed to handling information and knowledge abundance” (Cigognini et al., p. 118, 2011). McLoughlin and Lee (2011) also mention that introducing these tools is important to help learners engage with their peers.

**Connect**

McLoughlin and Lee state that Web 2.0 tools “increase the level of socialization and collaboration with peer groups, experts and community, and by fostering connections that go beyond the walls of the classroom or the institution” (p. 52). Hence, at this stage learners connect with others to form a personal network of resources. Dabbagh and Kitsantas suggest that at this stage, learners can connect with people in their professional field through social networking sites.

**Contribute**

At this stage, the learner contributes to the network of peers or professionals, and as Cigognini et al. call him, he becomes a “visible node.” McLoughlin and Lee emphasize productivity and knowledge creation in the 2.0 pedagogy as the “new genre of dynamic, self-published content” (p. 54).

**Personalize**

Although different researchers have placed personalization in different positions in their diagrams, however, my definition of this construct is related to Dabbagh and Kitsantas as well as Cigognini et al.’s description on personal learning environments. At this level, students are aware of their learning by selecting appropriate resources, and they possess self-evaluation and metacognitive skills that makes the learner knowledgeable in the subject area as suggested by Cigognini et al.

**Examples on the use of social media use in higher education**

Social media tools are being widely used in higher education. These tools are being used for different purposes and using varied learning strategies which could be categorized by the frameworks used above.

In a study that investigates the use of Twitter in a pre-health professional seminar, Junco, Heibergert, and Loken (2011) present the results of a semester long study on students’ use of Twitter for academic and co-curricular discussions. Students were divided into control and experimental groups. The experimental group participated in the following educational activities that promote connectivity : continuing class discussions, asking questions in a low-stress environment, engaging in a book discussion, receiving class and campus event reminders, receiving academic and personal support, connecting with peers and with the instructors, organizing service learning projects and study groups, and completing optional and required assignments that require the students to reflect on readings, videos, or sayings and post their tweets and then comment on two of their friends’ tweets. The researchers suggest that the experimental group’s (the group who was using Twitter to communicate with the professor or other students) GPAs were higher than the control group’s (students who did not use Twitter). This study also shows that the experimental group showed more engagement with the content than the experimental group. Furthermore the faculty member in this experiment represents the faculty 2.0 characteristics that Dabbagh and Reo (2011) described earlier.

Kelm (2011) describes his experience using blogs with a group of students who are part of China Global Connections program that provides students with international business communication experience abroad through an MBA program. As part of this experience students are required to post comments (75-100 words) about the daily activities that are scheduled. The students’ comments were to have focused on their takeaways about Chinese culture and their awareness of aspects related to the American culture. In this same course the instructor asked students to post seven photographs and videos on LESCANTE’s photo-sharing tool and YouTube channel, a University of Texas at Austin database that allows students to post media and comment on it in a blog format. These social media-based activities encouraged students to engage in discussions, reflections, and collaboration to decide on videos to share, and since the program’s purpose was to enrich students’ experience in business communication, exposure to the language and the culture and communicating about them is what enriched the students’ experiences as suggested by Kelm.

Blogs can be used interactively as illustrated by Kelm (2011) as well as personal reflection tools. Yang and Chang (2012) present a study in which they describe a learning activity using blogs that requires the experimental group to post a blog contribution after each lecture in which they write about course content-related material (Information technology). Students in this group were also asked to read and comment on three of their peers’ blog contributions. Students in the experimental group who were using blogs in an interactive way were compared to another group of students using blogs for personal reflections in an isolated way. As a result, Yang and Chang show that blogs, when used in an interactive manner can enhance peer interaction, improve critical reflection on each other’s comments, as well as it increases students’ positive attitude towards academic achievement.

Cain and Policastri (2011) present a mixed-methods study on the use of Facebook as a learning activity in a pharmacy management and leadership course. They created a Facebook group and invited students optionally to join the group. As a result, of the 128 students enrolled in this course (80%) of the students joined the group. The purpose of the Facebook group page was to invite guest speakers to submit posts on contemporary management, pharmacy, and leadership issues not covered in the course. The students’ participation in the posts was optional with no requirements so that the researchers ensure the informality of the nature of the Facebook activity. Data from the student survey, exam responses, and student focus groups revealed that students appreciated the informality of the activity and the opportunity to connect with professionals in the field and be exposed to “real world” experience.

Churchill (2009) describes a study on the effectiveness of the use of blogs in a postgraduate course “in which students were accessing course material, posting reflections, featuring artefacts created through the learning tasks, commenting on each other’s contributions and otherwise participating on a regular basis throughout the semester” (p. 179). Data was collected through observations of the blog, faculty reflections, student interviews and surveys the results of the study suggested a positive learning impact of blogs on student learning. Interesting findings from the study suggest students’ perceptions that they learned more in that course compared to other courses and that blogging facilitated and contributed to their learning. Hence, social media played an important role in this course through the interaction that was taking place among students enrolled in one course and the reflection tasks that they had to conduct.

Oskoz and Elola (2011) present the findings of a study in which they explored the use of a Wiki and chatting to complete a writing assignment in a Spanish foreign language face to face course which consisted of 10 students. The researchers looked at students’ essay, wiki drafts, chat discussions and a questionnaire that was administered with the students. Findings suggested that students learned more about foreign language writing through the collaborative nature of the wiki and the chatting that took place among the group members. Students also reported that the combination of a collaborative site with a chatting tool was very helpful. However, the study also suggested that some students did not take full advantage of the affordances that wikis provide and they preferred to meet on campus. Again social media tools prove to be useful in collaborative activities that might pose a challenge on students to meet physically and complete a project.

Despite the fact that undergraduate students prefer to use social media for academic purposes rather than personal interaction with their instructors as reported by ECAR (2012), however, they showed an interest in connecting and interacting with other students through social media. This report also suggests that social media tools such as open educational resources (e.g. the OpenCourseWare Consortium and the Khan Academy), social studying sites (e.g. Cramster, CourseHero), simulations or game-based learning, e-portfolios, learning management systems, online chatting tools, web-citation libraries, and ebooks all contribute positively to the students’ learning and academic success. This report provided 10,000 undergraduate students’ perceptions about technology tools that help them in academic success. ECAR report does not define what academic success stands for but it could be interpreted as passing a course, learning the content, or getting prepared for the work place.

**Research Questions**

Despite the fact that some studies have presented learning activities in higher education with a measurement of how efficient they are, none of the studies analyzed and categorized these activities based on the diagrams presented in figures 1, 2, 3 and 4. Some studies showed examples of how social media can be used but actual examples were not categorized. It is worth analyzing these activities and understand the faculty’s perceptions about the impact of these tasks on their students’ learning. Hence, this study aims at addressing the following research question:

*How are faculty members using social media in higher education, and how do faculty members perceive the role of social media in their students’ learning?*

The research question was further divided into several questions:

* In what ways are faculty members using social media in higher education?
* What are the most common learning activities that faculty assign for students to complete through social media?
* What role do faculty members think that social media activities play in their students’ learning?

**Method**

Several quantitative studies have been conducted to investigate the impact of social media on learning by comparing experimental and control students’ GPAs, however, few qualitative studies have been conducted to explore the process of implementing social media and its impact on students. Hence, I chose to conduct a qualitative study because it answers how and why things happen (Maxwell, 2013). I am much more interested in the process of how social media is used in higher education and how it affects students’ learning rather that understanding relationships and variances. Moreover, qualitative research gives me the flexibility to explore the topic from different facets due to its narrative nature which gives rise to unexpected themes and elaborates on others.

**Research setting and participants**

This study was conducted in a higher education institution in Northern Virginia where I currently teach. The institution is known for its innovation and has been selected as number one up and coming national universities in 2012. Five faculty members were interviewed on campus in a face to face format. The first faculty member was my pilot interviewee, but due to the richness of the data collected from that interview, I decided to include it in the data analysis. Based on the pilot interview, I was able to modify the interview to cut back on some questions if the faculty member agreed to share her syllabus. Moreover, other questions were added to the interview protocol. One of the interviews was not recorded because the digital recorder gave me a false signal, so I had to come back to my office and type in all the notes that I could remember from the interview. These notes were used in the data analysis although direct quotes were not included.

Participants in this study were purposefully selected “to provide information that is particularly relevant to your [my] research questions and goals, and that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). For this study, I contacted the manager of the Wiki platform at that institution and asked for names of faculty members who are using social media in their teaching. He was very supportive and gave me names beyond the number that I was looking for. I tried to contact faculty from different disciplines to establish heterogeneity as Maxwell proposes, and to explore how social media is used across disciplines. However, the responses were few and three of the participants ended up being faculty members in the same college; two of which were co-teaching a course and using almost the same social media learning strategies, but each was also teaching another course individually. For confidentiality purposes, I am using pseudonyms in this paper although I am mentioning, with their approval, the college name in which these faculty members teach and their course assignments. Although the participants and I teach at the same institution, however, we teach in different departments and we never met before the interviews took place. The participants are described below.

*Katie* holds a PhD in Spanish Linguistics and General Linguistics andteaches Spanish in the department of Modern and Classical Languages in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. She has been teaching at that institution since 1996 where she has developed interactive web-based material for courses she taught. She has authored and co-authored handbooks and textbooks on the instructional use of Web 2.0 tools. She is currently teaching a undergraduate online course and a graduate face to face course in which she is integrating social media tools.

*Nelly* holds a PhD in modern history and an MFA in creative writing and she teaches in the New Century College courses related to digital activism in which her research interests lie. She has been teaching at that institution since 1998, and she has received several grants from the Technology across the curriculum program to enhance teaching and learning in higher education. She is currently teaching 200 and 300 level courses in which she uses social media.

*Susan* holds aPhD in Counseling and Personnel Services and teaches in the New Century College courses related to leadership. She has authored and co-authored textbooks and manuals on leadership and is currently teaching 200 and 400 level courses. She is currently using social media in all the courses that she is teaching.

*Allie* holds a PhD in Education with a concentration in Assistive Technologies. She teaches graduate courses related to special education and assistive technology as well as research methods courses. She is using social media in the courses that she is teaching this semester as she has used it in previous courses.

*Haley* has a PhD and is the Director of the Center for leadership and community engagement and is teaching this semester a 200 and a 400 level courses. She co-teaches the 200 level course with Susan. She is also using social media in her 400 level course.

**Data Collection**

The study was submitted for review by the IRB office and it was exempt from review. A copy of the consent form is included in Appendix E. The faculty members were contacted via email through which we agreed on a meeting time and place. All the interviews were conducted in the faculty’s respective offices where they had their own computers to share with me the types of activities or social media activities that they are using. The interviews were conducted between October 4, 2012 and November 15, 2012. The faculty members were asked to sign a consent form before the interview. Interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions that allowed faculty to talk about their experiences using social media in their respective courses. Interviews lasted between 35 – 64 minutes as presented in Appendix B. The interviews asked faculty to describe the tools that they use in their respective courses, the learning activities that their students are required to complete through the social software, their experiences teaching with and without social media, and their evaluation of their students’ learning as a result of using social media Appendix A. The interview asked eleven questions and one of them had three follow up questions.

**Data Analysis**

After I conducted the interviews and transcribed them, I went back to the literature review and focused it around emerging themes. One of the obstacles that I had with data analysis was the lack of a framework that I could base the analysis of the social media learning activities on. So I did some research and found three existing frameworks as presented in figures 1, 2 and 3 that could guide me in my analysis. However, I figured that I should combine all three frameworks in one simplified diagram that could help me in my data analysis, and that’s when I created the diagram presented in figure 4. To begin with the data analysis, I categorized all the learning activities that I collected from faculty interviews and their syllabi (table 1.) to help me organize these activities in terms of the level and the type of engagement that they involve the students in. Moreover, I created a table with the main topics (Appendix C) that were covered in my interviews: course titles, social media tools used, purpose for selecting these tools, description of learning activities, impact of social media on students’ learning, professor’s experience teaching with and without social media, and challenges and included each of the faculty responses to create a matrix that could assist me in comparing the participants’ responses and to look for common themes.

I used a thematic approach for data analysis (Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2013) and looked for common patterns to identify common themes. The major and the subcategories are presented in Appendix D, but the major themes include the use of social media as a tool to activate students’ technology skills, to extend classroom discussion beyond the classroom, to help students create a personal learning environment, and to produce quality learning.

*Table 1.* Categories of learning activities assigned through social media

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Course assignments** | **Activate** | **Connect** | **Contribute** | **Personalize** |
| *Reflecting on my Learning Blog: students reflect on their language errors.* | √ | √ |  |  |
| *Oral Projects through LanguageTwin: students video conference with native speakers of Spanish* | √ | √ |  |  |
| *Blogging: The voice of my story*  *Students blog about any topic related to the Spanish language.* | √ | √ |  |  |
| *Twitter: sharing resources*  *Professor shares resources with students* | √ | √ |  |  |
| *Twitter: Connect with informants- students connect with people in their field and draw lessons from them* | √ | √ |  |  |
| *Twitter activity: Personal transformation experiment- Students tweet about leadership aspects they are developing in themselves.* | √ | √ |  | √ |
| *Wikis: Students have personalized pages to post their assignments; also collaborative class activities are shared there* | √ | √ |  |  |
| *Online Exhibit: Video festival* *of at least ten videos, available to watch online, which will inspire, instruct, animate and/or spur to thought and even action the intended audience.* | √ | √ | √ |  |
| *Online Exhibit: Curating an exhibit which mixes media to instruct, animate…* | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| *Wikipedia edits: Students edit an existing Wikipedia post to participate in collaborative knowledge-building activity* | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| *Collaborative note-taking in wikis: students collaborate to post their weekly reading notes* | √ | √ |  |  |
| *Reading Reflections: 5 wiki posts- personal learning spaces- students post their reflections on the readings* | √ | √ |  | √ |
| *Wikis: students collaborate to review each other’s research proposals and give each other feedback* | √ | √ |  |  |
| *Blogging: Students write five posts through the semester about any topic and they have to comment on each other’s posts.* | √ | √ | √ | √ |

**Results**

The interviews suggested several findings that addressed how faculty members are using social media in their courses and their perceptions about the role of social media in their students’ learning. The themes are organized in the graph below according to figure 4 which shows a range of learning activities from lower order skills to higher order skills.

*Figure 5:* Visual representation of the major themes

**Activating technology skills**

After analyzing and categorizing the different learning tasks that faculty assign through social media (table 1), I noticed that faculty mainly assign activities that encourage students to use a new tool and connect with peers as well as with professionals in the field. Four out of five faculty members reported that students generally lacked technology skills and that was a challenge for them to teach them how to use the tools before implementing them. Faculty reported that many students did not have Twitter accounts before enrolling in their courses, or they did not know how to use blogs. Nelly for instance reported that her students found the Wikipedia editing activity a whole new experience which they were unaware that it even existed. Blogging was also considered another new tool to most of the students as faculty described except for one participant who reported that five of her students were already blogging before being enrolled in her course. Hence, working with students on learning new social media tools and activating their skills is a big challenge in the participants’ classes before they move to more advanced activities.

Several activities that involved blogging, tweeting or using Wikis were basically used by the participants to prepare their students for the workplace. Two of the faculty members consider social media very essential to their students’ professional development since these are tools they will be using in their future jobs. Faculty believe that it is necessary to activate the students’ social media skills because when they graduate they won’t be using Blackboard in their jobs but rather social media tools.

So social media for me is you know a little scale on the classes so students can get to know each other and get like the technicalities of using Wiki, Blog, Twitter in safe space, but then I want them to move that knowledge to you know to their professional lives. (Katie)

I said, “You know, how many times … You're not gonna graduate and go to a job that uses Blackboard, but you are gonna go to a job that use Wikis and Twitter and LinkedIn.” You know what I mean? So I’m trying to push them towards…The tools they’ll actually be using in the workplace. (Susan)

Similarly, Nelly believes that social media gives the students a sense of what real life looks like and it is “a bridge between the classroom and outside.” Hence preparing graduates for the workplace has taken a different approach and the skills that a student should graduate with are different from what they used to be in the past. Using social media in the classroom helps students learn more than the content, it helps them acquire necessary skills for the job.

**Extending the discussion beyond the classroom**

Faculty believe that social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter encourage students to be mindful and think about the topic every day, “seeing the topic everywhere they go” (Haley). Both Haley and Susan who co-teach a course believed that the Twitter assignment “personal transformation experiment” allowed the students to think about the topic all the time because they had to post 14 Tweets about it.

Moreover, in a Facebook group that Haley’s students created, students post any questions or comments that they have from the course. Although this Facebook group was created by the students and not as part of a course requirement, Haley sees the value of social media in fostering a sense of community. Blog assignments were also popular in extending the course content beyond the classroom. In both Blogging activities listed in the table, students were asked to post anything related to the course content to extend the discussion beyond the classroom. Faculty believe that students should have total freedom to choose what they want to blog about as long as the topics are related to the course. In this sense, the use of social media tools keeps students aware of the courses they are enrolled in and of the content.

In addition to being mindful of the topic, faculty members reported that social media allow students to connect with their professors, their peers, or professionals in the field. All of the learning activities presented in the table have a “Connect” component in them. In some activities such as “Reflecting on my learning” blog, students connect only with their professor rather than with their peers, but this activity allows the students to reflect on their learning growth. In other activities such as “Language Twin,” students have to connect with Spanish native speakers around the world. Similarly, in the Blogging activity “The voice of my story” and the Twitter assignment “Connect with informants,” students connect with people from around the world. Hence, connection which is central to social media can take several forms in the classroom. Such assignments prepare students for the workplace by connecting with people in the field to learn from their expertise and to develop some expectations for their careers.

**Creating personal learning environments**

Several activities that are presented in table 1. demonstrate a certain level of reflection that is facilitated by the social media used. Although the use of Twitter or blogs facilitate reflection, however, only in the Twitter assignment “Personal transformation experiment” and in the Wikipedia edits assignment, the students think about their learning and their transformation. In the personal transformation Twitter assignment, Susan explains that students have to do the following:

… They design their own experiment, and they say, “Here’s where I am with risk taking, for example, now…” And they say, here’s what I’m gonna do for the next few weeks to try to sort of become better at that in my own way,” and they develop accountability partners to sort of check in with them and they sort of, um … and at the end they have to say how much they’ve transformed or not. So part of that assignment is that they have to tweet almost every day.

As for the Wikipedia assignment, after the students complete the edits for one of the articles, they have to write 750-1000 words to reflect on their learning experience and “discuss the ways in which you [they] might apply your [their] new knowledge, of the medium and of the field of digital activism, in the future” as Nelly explains in her syllabus. In other tasks that involve blogging such as is “The voice of my story”, students reflect on the content of the course and make connections to topics that they find interesting.

Furthermore, faculty believe that social media’s affordances allow students to archive and organize their work to create a personal repertoire of their work so that they can come back and reflect on their progress; in this respect Nelly reports that the use of Wikis promotes a sense of achievement in students. This is one of the roles that social media plays, and Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2011) illustrate how archiving through social media allows students to reflect on their learning and is a steps toward guiding students to develop their personal learning environments (PLEs). Cigognini et al. (2011) as well discuss meta-reflection and meta-cognition as a strategy to guide students through integrating knowledge that helps the e-learner be more successful in the information age.

But for me it’s more at the graduate level particularly or at the advanced level for students to get connections with the word and to have this personal learning environment where they are not so dependent on what I know as a professor or on the years they are in college, but they build up something that they are going to be using in the future. (Katie)

Nelly also sees the value in social media as tools that teach students to learn on their own and to adapt to any new learning situation “learn to learn”, and it encourages students to be flexible learners. Susan emphasizes the personalizing feature of social media which allows students to create personal learning spaces which in turn foster autonomous learning.

**Producing better quality of students’ work**

Collaboration that is facilitated by social media plays an important role in students’ awareness of each other’s’ work. Several assignments in table 1 suggest collaboration between students to produce an outcome. Haley believes that wikis allow students to share their work and give each other feedback whereas before social media existed her students did not use to collaborate on a project in a real sense. They used to divide parts of the project among each other and then compile them in one document, and the project used to lack coherence. Now with the use of wikis, students collaborate easily and instantaneously and Haley states that “there you can see a definite improvement, in terms of the goals that I wanted for the assignment.” Nelly also emphasizes the public nature of social media which encourages students to write for an audience rather than a professor which improves the quality of the students’ work. Furthermore, Susan and Katie explain that the ease of access to information through social media as well as the immediacy of accessing information as reported by Allie facilitate students’ learning and create better quality of learning through the online nature of these tools which allow students to evaluate their learning based on their classmates’ resources.

Finally, a good take away from this study is what Haley reported in the final interview. She believes that making use of the social media affordances is what produces quality work. The tool by itself does not enhance the learning but rather how the features of a tool are used for a specific assignment is what matters.

I think the design of the assignment needs to take advantage of what social media can do. But if you’re using it in exactly the same way than no, there’s probably not any benefit at all. If my students were just writing five reflection papers and posting them to a blog instead of what I’m asking them to do which is truly a blog, like link around, comment on each other’s stuff – and I can tell them, once the first round of blogs is done, if you want your second blog to be in response to somebody else’s first blog, awesome. Right? So they love that too. And that’s not something that can happen if you just say five reflection papers. Except for post them on a blog instead of typing them. Right?... it’s not just that you’re using social … It’s not just the platform, it’s the design of the … The platform allows you to design the assignment differently, and that is what I think enhances student learning. (Haley)

**Limitations and validity issues**

The study poses a few limitations that could be addressed in future studies. The interviews measured the faculty perspectives of their students’ learning as a result of their use of social media. Further research needs to investigate the students’ takes on their learning and needs to compare them with the faculty’s perspectives. Moreover, five faculty members using social media tools are not representative of all faculty who use social media tools at one institution or in higher education in general. More faculty using social media need to be interviewed in order to identify a common pattern of instructional strategies that enhance learning. The study investigates the types of instructional strategies that faculty implement through social media as well as their perceptions of their students’ learning as a result of using social media. As a result, it was hard for most of the participants to compare their students’ learning to students they taught without social media. They rather suggested possible benefits and opportunities that social media tools provide learners with.

Several validity threats are presented in this study. First, validity threats could be a result of faculty’s perceptions that social media tools should enhance student learning due to their initial beliefs that this is true and that is what drove them to include social media in their courses, and so their description of their students’ learning was all positive except for the challenges they faced with students adopting some new tools. This leads to a validity threat related to myself as a researcher and an instructor using social media in my courses. My knowledge of the topic and my current teaching practices might have influenced the interviewees and data analysis and provided positive analysis of the findings because of my belief that social media does have a positive impact on students’ learning. I noticed that in the interview I praised the faculty for their proficient use of social media and that might have influenced their answers and drove them to talk about the positives. Another validity threat is reactivity. The participants work at the same institution in which I teach, and so they might have conveyed the most desirable responses rather than their true experiences. Another validity threat is the sample size that was interviewed. To minimize this threat, more interviews will be conducted in the future and will be added to existing data. Finally data was collected for a short term, during one semester, which might not be enough to understand the participants’ experiences across semesters. Besides the participants are using social media in all their courses, and it would be worth observing a course in which they are not using social media.

**Discussion**

The study initially investigated two research questions; the first is related to the types of instructional strategies that faculty members are using through social media and the second question is related to how faculty members perceive their students’ learning as a result of social media. Previous studies have looked at the use of a social media activity in one course and compared experimental to control groups. This study added a layer to these individual studies by showing how social media is used across the curriculum and faculty’s perceptions about their students’ learning as a result of social media learning activities. It was interesting to look at the different learning activities across disciplines and see the level of cognition that social media tools afford in each of these activities. It was also interesting to understand the motives behind faculty’s selection of the different social media tools and the activities, and how they perceived implementation in their courses. Although other studies have suggested a positive influence on students’ learning as a result of social media, this study shed the light on the “HOW” can social media influence students’ learning based on the faculty’s perceptions.

As mentioned in the previous section, it would be worth asking the students about their experiences in the respective courses and ask them to evaluate their learning as a result of social media learning activities. It would be also worth asking them to rate their learning on the specific social media learning activities which could help us identify what level of cognitive affordances (figure 4) promotes learning the most.

**Reflection**

This study was an eye opening exercise for me. Before I started conducting the interviews, I was confident about my research questions and about what I want to learn from the study. After I started reading more about the literature and listening to the participants in the interviews, I became shaky about what I already knew and what I wanted to know from this study. I noticed that my research study was looking at two different things, but I was halfway in the process, and I decided to keep going in the study and learn as much as I can so that it will be my pilot for future research.

The interview data brought up several new topics about social media that I thought were not very important in implementing social media in the classroom. But it turned out that there are several factors involved in implementing social media in the classroom including the students’ readiness to adopt new technology tools, to use social media as educational tools, and faculty’s technology skills. All of these factors replace the initial classroom time, and despite the positive feedback that the participants had about social media tools, it is worth looking studying the impact of social media from the students’ lenses to evaluate its use in the classroom. Hence if I were to do this study again, I would focus on one component or research question, and I would conduct student focus groups to listen to their perceptions about the topic to really understand how students perceive the usefulness of social media use in the classroom.

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**Appendix A**

**Interview Questions**

1. What courses are you teaching this semester?
2. What social media tools are you using in the courses that you are teaching this semester?
3. Is the use of social media optional for students or is it a course requirement?
4. Why did you choose this specific tool(s)?
5. What type of activities are students required to carry through the social media tools?
   1. Explain a task or two that they are supposed to do
   2. Describe a learning activity that you think (or students have reported) has enhanced students’ learning.
   3. Are these tasks mentioned in the syllabus?
6. Think about a course that you have taught but without using social media. How was your experience different/

similar to a course in which you used social media?

1. What impact do you think social media has on your students’ learning of the content? On the class environment in general?
2. Do you consider social media as an essential component in your course? Please explain.
3. How accepting of social media tools for educational purposes do you think students are? What is their response when you tell them that you be using a social media tool in your course?
4. What is the level of serious commitment that students show when they use social media for educational purposes?
5. As a second step in my research I am planning to investigate students’ perceptions of social media activities in their coursework. Would you be willing to share an anonymous online survey with your students to learn more about their social media learning experiences in your course?

**Appendix B**

**Table of Interviews**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Participants** | **Date of the Interview** | **Length of the interview** |
| **Katie** | October 4, 2012 | 64 minutes |
| **Nelly** | October 18, 2012 | 41 minutes |
| **Susan** | November 1, 2012 | 35 minutes |
| **Allie** | November 12, 2012 | 50 minutes (but the interview could not be recorded) |
| **Haley** | November 15, 2012 | 50 minutes |

**Appendix C**

**Table of Codes**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Professors’ names** | **(Katie)** | **(Nelly)** | **(Susan)** | **(Allie)** | **(Haley)** |
| **Course Titles** | Undergrad: Spanish 115 (online)  Grad: Spanish 505: Advanced Spanish stylistics (f2f) | NCLC 348: Digital activism  NCLC 245: Visual culture and society | NCLC 204: Leadership theory and practice  NCLC 435: Leading Change | EDIT 590: Introduction to research methods (hybrid)  EDRS: Advanced research methods course (f2f) | NCLC 435-001: Leadership in Changing Environment  NCLC 295-002: Leadership & Community Engagement |
| **Social media tools used** | Span 115: **Language Twin**(R) and the **Blog (R)** feature in Blackboard  SPAN 505: **Wikis, Twitter (optional), Blogs** | 200 level: **Wiki** (not a requirement)  NCLC 348: **YouTube (shared with the course group), Twitter (course hashtag and twitter assignment)** | NCLC 435:  **Wikis (individual wikis)**  **Twitter**  NCLC 204**: Wikis** | EDIT 590: **Wikis** in blackboard (mandatory)  **Twitter** (optional) | NCLC 435:  **Wikis (individual wikis)**  **Twitter**  NCLC 295: **Class blog** |
| **Purpose for selecting these tools** | -Twitter helps students connect with people in the field (p.3), use Spanish in a real world and learn from their mistakes, connect with the world and create their Personal learning environments, and learn about a tool that they will use beyond the classroom.  -social media helps students transfer skills to the workplace in the future  -faster exchange of information  -Develops students’ autonomy | -Wikis help students “learn and author collaboratively; it helps them to learn to compose multimedia presentations”, “ease of access and use”, “trains students to collaborate and organize information online”,  -Twitter helps “students communicate their knowledge and their learning with the public audience and become part of a public conversation”  -Youtube encourages students to use what they are already using (creating videos) for educational purposes  -Professor encourages students to choose the social media tool that matches their goals.  -social media teaches students to learn on their own and to adapt to any new learning situation “learn to learn”; encourages students to be flexible learners | -“Technology mediates leadership in good and bad ways” and that is why she chose to model it for the students.  -Uses social media in the graduate class because she thinks that students cannot learn to change organizations until they figure out how they can change themselves  -prepare students for the workplace  -Wikis are personal working spaces and they allow students to personalize them unlike blackboard.  -Twitter helps students articulate their thoughts briefly. | -wikis create an order for files and students can use it as a repertoire of their artifacts and they can visit it any time to reflect on their growth.  -The professor also chose twitter (but students disagreed to use it) because of its immediacy. She could get instant updates from students especially when the class number is large.  - social media communication is more immediate and informal and it creates a relationship between students and the teacher which might be absent in an online course. | - the blog was created to extend the discussion beyond the classroom.  -The first one, like in terms of thinking about trying to use social media in any class in general, for me I’m always just interested in having students have this on the brain. Have the content, like the topic of this class, I want them to have it on the brain more than just like I said the hour that I get them inside the classroom, or the time that they are writing a paper or reading, like I want them to be … Maybe it’s because of the topics that I teach.  - we want them to start seeing interactions with other people and seeing interactions in groups with a leadership lens. We want it to be on the brain.  - seeing the topic everywhere they go |
| **Description of activities** | SPAN 115:  *Reflecting on my Learning Blog*  Every two weeks, students will write a 100-word log reflecting on the errors they made in the discussions and in the compositions, when applicable. Students will explain why they made the errors and how they corrected. Other reflections about the learning process are welcome.  *Oral Projects*  Students will submit regularly oral samples through Centro and through LanguageTwin space at http://www.languagetwin.com. Students are required to videochat EIGHT TIMES with students located all over the Spanish-speaking world.  Span 505:  *Blogging: The voice of my story*  Students have to write five entries throughout the year about Spanish language, writing or literature, and they have to comment on each other’s posts. This activity encourages students to write in Spanish.  *Twitter:*  A hashtag is created for the course and professors shares announcements and extra resources through the hashtag.  *Wikis:*  It’s the main course site where files are shared between teacher-student and student-student. Every student has his individual space to upload his work. Also the wiki is used so that students post their in-class collaborative work (p.2). | NCLC 348  *Online Exhibits*  In this assignment, you need to focus on a specific issue where you would like to be, or already are, digitally active. You should choose a specific audience for your exhibit (elementary school students, college students, fellow activists, political representatives whose views you wish to influence, etc.), and tailor your exhibit precisely to that audience. Your exhibit could range from the instructional to the inspirational, and you must create it online.  •***Online Exhibit #1***  You are creating an online video festival of at least ten videos, available to watch online, which will inspire, instruct, animate and/or spur to thought and even action your intended audience. As you filter your films and videos, you will need to investigate their producers (your festival needs to be credible and should not peddle misinformation) and their sources.  • **Online Exhibit #2**  For this exhibit, you are curating an exhibit which mixes media to inspire, instruct, animate and/or spur to thought and even action your intended audience. You may want to include any or all of the following: academic articles, government reports, newspaper or reputable magazine or journal articles, photographs, graphics and charts, video clips, audio clips, music, etc. You need to include at least ten items in at least 5 – 6 different forms.  *Twitter*  Expert Twitter users not only post the fruits of their own reading, viewing, and knowledge building. They also curate a collection (sometimes large, sometimes small) of well-qualified “informants” whose contributions to public digital forums substantially enhance their own practice and knowledge.  In these Twitter assignments, you face three challenges. First, you need to research and start to follow your key digital informants. Second, you need to explore the ideas and information to which they link you. Third, you need to summarize the key content you are acquiring in 140 characters.  *Wikipedia*  As active citizens, we need to engage with as many aspects of our information ecologies as we can. And Wikipedia certainly dominates at least the initial quests for information for billions of people. Some scholars and teachers try to ban Wikipedia. A more responsible attitude might instead be to improve Wikipedia for everyone by participating as scholar, teacher and citizen in this experiment in collaborative knowledge-building.  At the end of your Wikipedia assignment, you will compose a 750-1000 word reflection on what and how you learned during the assignment, and discuss the ways in which you might apply your new knowledge, of the medium and of the field of digital activism, in the future. You should include with your analysis screenshots of your edits to Wikipedia, and notes from the history page of the article(s) on which you have collaborated.  *Participatory Reaction video.* Students create a video about their experiences in doing the project. | NCLC 204:  *Collaborative note-taking*  For this assignment, you will work in small groups to create notes on the assigned readings from the Northouse text. At the courses conclusion, each student will have a comprehensive set of notes on the most central scholarly leadership theories. The notes will be collected and stored online using a wiki. You will need a (free) account with PBWorks. Notes will address:  o Origin story (how the theory evolved)  o Summary of the theory  o Strengths and criticisms of the theory  o Application of the theory (how would someone apply this to inform a leadership experience or their own leadership practice?)  o How can you learn more about this way of thinking about leadership? (including links)  In this activity students work collaboratively to collect notes on the reading and to organize them.  NCLC 435:  *Reading Reflections:* 5 wiki posts- personal learning spaces where students post their individual work in an individual workspace. Professors also use the wiki to post files.  *Twitter activity: (Personal transformation experiment)* minimum 14 Tweets; students set up a unique twitter account for the class.  In this assignment, “they have to pick one of the aspects of social entrepreneurs and social innovators. Their sort of research of this is they have these sort of six aspects to develop in themselves, and there are things like risk taking, resilience, gratitude, um, something about transformative communication. So they pick and say … They design their own experiment, and they say, “Here’s where I am with risk taking, for example, now…”  And they say, “Here’s what I’m gonna do for the next few weeks to try to sort of become better at that in my own way,” and they develop accountability partners to sort of check in with them and they sort of, um … and at the end they have to say how much they’ve transformed or not. So part of that assignment is that they have to tweet almost every day.”  In this manner, Twitter encourages students to be mindful and think about the topic every day.  “So they use a fake email, they get the Twitter account and they're … they use, like, 435 is the name, the number of the course plus their last name. And then they use hashtags for which element they're working on, so they all, um, use the class hashtag, and then they use a hashtag if they're in the risk taking group or if they're in the gratitude group or if they're in the communication group or the innovation group or whatever, and they have to tweet … And what I tell them, we talk about creative, like what creative tweets look like.” Professor encourages students to share resources in their tweets. | EDIT 590:  *Wikis*  Professor is mainly using it so that 5 of the 6 students collaborate to review each other’s research proposals and give each other feedback. Also the wiki is used as a communication tool with the professor who in turn gives them feedback on their research proposals.  *Twitter*  The professor also tried to use Twitter in this course but the students seemed to be resistant to use this tool. | *Blogging:*  They do five posts through the semester, every other week and I put them into teams so that one week team A is posting and team B is responding, and the next week team B posts and team A responds. So they have to comment on at least three of their classmate’s posts, and I had some, you know, I had this discussion about what a comment is. They have the freedom to post about any topic.  “…so this is going to be really short, and you can use … You know, put in cartoons, put in a photo, put in a drawing, you know”  It’s a public blog |
| **Impact of social media on students’ learning** | -In order for students to actually learn through social media they have to be active participants. Opening a Twitter account and not follow someone or interact with others does not impact the students’ learning.  -not sure about the source of the impact on the students’ learning; is it adding more opportunities for students to practice the language? Or is it the quality of the tools? (quality vs quantity)  -Professor is not sure about the quality of the students’ learning because she does not have quantifiable data  -educating better citizens and better professionals. | -Students see the value in using the Wikis as a tool to organize and archive their work in one place.  -Students are choosing the online exhibit assignment over the others (professor thinks they’re porpular)  -Creating work for an audience rather than for a teacher  -Teaching using social media produces a better quality of students’ work.  - Students have a sense of achievement.  -Gives the students a sense of what the real life looks like (Wikipedia assignment p.8); “a bridge between the classroom and outside”  -Some students transfer social media skills to the workplace after they graduate  - | - Twitter encourages students to be mindful and think about the topic every day.  -social media helps students who have different learning styles to express themselves differently. (p.13)  -ease of access to material which facilitates learning  -Twitter allows the professor to check on the students’ inner reflections  -Hyperlinking in wikis can create students’ metacognition  - hyperlinking makes students think visually  -students see the value of learning social media later and not on the spot  “I hated it while I was doing it, but now I get it”  “I was with you and I was lost and I didn’t know why we would do that and then I… Now I’m a believer.” | -The professor does not see a difference between classes in which social media as opposed to classes in which social media is not used. The reason is because she teaches face 2 face and blended courses so the experience does not compare in types of course delivery. But the professor thinks that the students learn more in an online course and they learn more when they collaborate through blackboard wiki. The professor think that wikis can help students learn more because they can come back and look at their progress and give each other feedback. | -wikis allow students to work collaboratively and be aware of each others’ work. By posting on the wiki page findings: “They probably still don’t meet in person, but they are all touching on each of those issues. The very same class, but instead, the class created each small group had a wiki. So instead of sections in a binder, there was a page for each of those, right. So here’s our page on volunteer management with links, and here’s our page where we found ten organizations that also address this issue, links to all of them.  So yeah, I came up with three, you came up with three, you came up with three – oops, we came up with the same one, we’ll have to find a different one. And since it’s in a wiki I can go onto the page history and I can see every single one of them posted pieces, and I know that they didn’t just hand off different sections to different people – this was a collaborative effort on each of the topics, like I wanted it to be. Um, so yeah. There you can see a definite improvement, in terms of the goals that I wanted for the assignment and the wiki helps me with that.”  -Professor thinks that social media helps students learn if designed well and if faculty take benefit of what social media can do. (p. 13) It’s the design of the assignment through social media that helps students learn and not the tool itself. “it’s not just that you’re using social … It’s not just the platform, it’s the design of the … The platform allows you to design the assignment differently, and that is what I think enhances student learning.”  -social media allows all students to participate |
| **Professor’s experience teaching with and without social media** | -Students have access to more resources  -facilitates learning |  | -With presence of social media, classtime is used more efficiently, students work on collaborative activities virtually  -before social media everything was note-based and professor could not monitor who is doing what.  -students have access to each other’s work which makes them evaluate how well they’re doing in a course  -students share resources in a social media environment |  | -Engages all students in the assignment |
| **Challenges** | -Students’ lack of technology skills.  -Students’ resistance to use social networking sites (Twitter, Facebook) for educational purposes. | -Students consider Twitter frivolous and resist using it (p. 2)  -Fewer students choose social media assignments (Twitter, editing wikipedia, and blogging)  -Some skills do not transfer through the next semester  -Facebook is private for students and the professor doesn’t like to use it in class  -Students have to be persuaded to use social media as educational tools(p.9) | - age; some older students are overwhelmed by the use of new technology or several tech tools at the same time.  -students are not good at teaching themselves new tools or finding solutions to problems and they are even resistant to that.  -students’ lack of technology skills.  -students are intimidated when it comes to asking a question about a technology they’re using because they think that others have gotten it. | -students’ older age is the first barrier and the second is barrier is  -Students are special education teachers and they don’t want their students’ parents to follow them on Twitter and know about their personal lives. | -some students were already using Twitter and blogging |

**Appendix D**

**Themes by Categories**

1. Activating students’ technology skills.

* Learning a new technology
* Preparing students for the workplace

1. Extending the discussion beyond the classroom

* Be mindful of the topic
* Connecting with the professor, peers, and professionals in the students’ field of study

1. Creating personal learning environments

* Metacognition
* Developing students’ autonomy

1. Producing quality learning

* Collaboration
* Ease of access
* Immediacy
* Evaluation
* Taking advantage of what the tools offer

**Appendix E**

**Faculty Consent Form**

***Social Media Use in Higher Education***

**FACULTY INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**RESEARCH PROCEDURES**  
This research study explores the use of social media (Twitter, Facebook, blogs, YouTube, wikis, Flickr, etc.) by faculty members at GMU. Mainly the study investigates the instructional strategies that faculty implement through social media and examines the faculty perspective on the effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing student learning. In addition the study explores students' perceptions on the use of social media in their courses and their perspectives on how it impacts their learning. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute audio-taped interview.

**RISKS**  
There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

**BENEFITS**  
There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in how faculty are using social media effectively.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**  
The data in this study will be confidential. No names will be included in the study and only the researchers will have access to the study data. Audio recordings will be transcribed on the researcher's personal computer and stored under a password protected folder. Recordings will be deleted after the transcriptions are conducted. Data from the student online survey can only be accessed with the researcher's username and password. Therefore, they will be stored confidentially

**PARTICIPATION**  
Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

**CONTACT**  
This research is being conducted by Dr. Nada Dabbagh, Professor, Instructional Technology, College of Education & Human Development at George Mason University, and by Ghania Zgheib, Doctoral student, CEHD at GMU. Dr. Dabbagh may be reached at (703) 993-4439 and Ghania may be reached at (703)993-5352for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity & Assurance at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.  
  
This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

**CONSENT**  
I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
Name  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Signature

**Appendix F**

**Interview Transcripts**

**Interview 1: Katie**

Ghania: All right. So thanks for giving me this opportunity. Um, uh so you go by Dr.

XXX…?

Interviewee: XXX.

G: XXX

I: You know, in Spain we have two last names and I put a hyphen so people would call me XXX and don’t forget my XXX which is my dad’s name.

G: That’s fine…

I: But you can say XXX.

G: I agree. I prefer to keep my last name too and my husband’s last name. I like that. So Dr. XXX, uh, what courses are you teaching this semester?

I: This semester I’m teaching one class online which is um, uh, a review of Spanish. It’s completely online. We only have one, one face-to-face meeting, and at the end of the semester for the final exam, it’s called Spanish 115. It’s for people who had Spanish before and they are prepared not to take the first ones, the sixth grade courses. We have the 110 meant for all the languages. So I’m teaching that, um through Blackboard.

And then I’m teaching a graduate class uh which is called Applied Writing … Applied Written Spanish or Advanced Applied Written Spanish, but it’s a written, a writing course for, for, for the graduate students. It used to be mandatory for everybody, but we changed the requirements, but now we’ve realized it’s really helpful for them because it prepares them for other, you know, the other classes and many students, you know, need a little bit more of the language. So it’s, it’s a writing, a very advanced writing class. That’s what I’m teaching.

G: Interesting. And what social media tools are you using in the courses that you are teaching?

I: In this, but then these ones I’m not teaching, I mean, I’m using for students they have at the graduate level, they have, I’m using Wiki. I can give you access to it if, if you want. Uh, instead of using PBworks, which is the one that we can get through, through the university. I use that for other projects, but now uh, for my classes I use Wiki on most basis.

So um, in Blackboard I only put like folders for students to submit the assignments every week, but here I have almost everything. It’s like uh, it’s like where I put my, the information, what they have to do every week, then what I’m going to do with them every day of class with all the materials. Then every student has his space within the space where they can put their, you know, portfolio and things like that. So it’s only close for the students because of privacy issues and I wanted to have a space to write where everybody can see each other’s writing, but not people outside the, you know our community.

So sometimes if we do, like yesterday we had… it’s very easy to set up like an activity there because I gave them like a couple of topics and then I put them in groups and then I create this, I created this in just seconds. And then they do some research and they put the results of their research here. So by doing this, what I’m trying for them to see is that they can…there are other sources of information even within their peers, which is like the basis to to go outside and see and look for knowledge beyond the professor. Because still I see every time I try to do things like that, students prefer for the professor to be the source of information. You have to have all the answers, blah, blah, blah.

But you know, little by little, many of the students had classes before with me. Three of them were in a class about social media and research that I taught one year ago. So they know that if they get their class with me, there’s going to be a lot of you know working with tools and, and they’re getting better with the passwords, with the settings and sometimes I think it’s more of my problem…not my problem, but for me everything is so clear that you have different identities and different also passwords and things you do in different spaces that I don’t explain that well to them. And they don’t know why I’m using Blackboard only for a few things and why I’m using other things, you know other tools for other goals. But little by little I think I’m better in explaining to them why I’m doing that and why they should at least try different media. So that’s in the in the graduate class…

G: Can you tell me, I’m sorry, can you tell me why you are doing that? Like what do you tell the students, why do you use different tools?

I: Um, for me that’s why I had also in presentation that I gave to my colleagues because they know I’m doing that much and I don’t think they know why. And then they ask me to…for the orientation we have at the beginning of the semester for new teachers and um, Julie asked me to do, you know, to talk about something. So instead of talking about how you correct mistakes or whatever, which is you know something very difficult for different professors in different languages, then I say, “Okay, I’m going to tell them why I’m using social media, what I think you know, we as a department, as teachers we should have presence there and at the same time what benefits could we get from them, so from being there and from communicating uh to students through social media.”

So there are like three things that I explain to my students. I don’t make them…I’ll show you right now the blog we have and what we do on Twitter, but I don’t force them to do that usually you know because I know some students are more private. And even some students yesterday were blogging about not being on Facebook anymore, they don’t like it anymore. So every time I, I take them out of that space outside, I’m very cautious. But still I think there is, first for them in the professional world, they, they have to know what social media is, just you know, in different areas they’re going to be working as translators, as you know people in governmental organizations, international organizations, as teachers.

And always with technology I think my idea is that you don’t know what it is, then somebody can come to the department or to your office and tell you, “You know, you can do all these great things with this, so you’re more subject to be fooled by the glamour of technology. While if you know where first, what is technology and now social media and who you can contact to get information, then it might be more difficult for people who may have an agenda in technology or you know, schools trying to sell, I don’t know, software or to sell you some great ideas about change in education. Then you are prepared to have an answer and to look for other people who can give you an answer.”

And that’s why I’m a big supporter of Twitter, but more, more than for students to do activities for the language development. I’m very happy, I mean I’m very um… how do you say that? That I usually don’t teach at the at the beginners level, so if I teach a content class, it’s very easy to integrate social media for the content and not for the language per se, to improve the language. So if I did a class on I don’t know, like culture of Spain or like the writing class, it’s more about them getting outside and, and use the language for purposes, for specific purposes.

So in case I tell them with Twitter, I know there are people using Twitter to get you know, students to write and, and to and they’re checking mistakes, usage of grammar. But for me it’s more at the graduate level particularly or at the advanced level for students to get connections with the word and to have this personal learning environment where they are not so dependent on what I know as a professor or on the years they are in college, but they build up something that they are going to be using in the future.

So and I have few students who now they have… they’re good on Twitter. They have followers, they know how to um… I’m not very you know, I’m serious with my tweets but I, I mix them you know, personal with professional, but they know I tell them, “You know, if you want to get a job, you know, you have to be very careful about what you post online.” It’s not the same as my case that I already have my fulltime position. And of course they can have trouble if I say something wrong, but um, I can take… I can say things about politics and about policies and things because, you know, I feel like I have to say that. But all the people who are maybe coming up from tenure or for you know, profession, then they might want to be a little more cautious.

So social media for me is you know a little scale on the classes so students can get to know each other and get like the technicalities of using Wiki, Blog, Twitter in safe space, but then I want them to move that knowledge to you know to their professional lives. And I think also to get information from, from other sources, from us, when you’re a teacher what your students are saying about institution, your work, the administration, how other institutions are doing or solving problems that you may have and you may think it’s just here and then you realize no, all universities or all schools are having the same problem. So it’s a very way, a very good way not to feel isolated. And many teachers feel like that.

Um, I have a project with a graduate student and she, we’re doing like a mentorship um, studying with a self-studying methodology. And we have been using also blogging and other things to see how our relationship changes throughout the, the month she was working on her thesis. And it’s very it’s very interested because then you have all the data. And when we meet and when, when the mentor and team meet, then you don’t have, unless you record and then transcribe and everything, you don’t know you have a feeling all this relationship changed like this. But now we have data and that we’re analyzing about how the mentorship relationship reverses. So now I’m learning also from her and you can see how, how it has changed.

So it’s many things. It’s just in some cases you … you do things more efficiently because it’s quicker. You get more data that you can use for you research then and for students or professionals you get people um, you get information from people, but at the same time you give out… you, you publish things or you distribute your knowledge quicker than if you wait until you have the paper.

And if I know something and I’m on Twitter and somebody asks, then because it’s been… I want them to, to be more involved in that sharing spirit of, of social media that is everywhere on the literature but I don’t see it very well focused yet in students, you know. And if then sometimes is on the wrong side by they take things and copy without giving credit. So I think the society is asking for people to be more open about knowledge but we don’t know how to do it.

So I think in college they can learn to do that and then see if they want to apply it or not. That’s their choice, but if we don’t give them models, if we don’t integrate those, those tools in, in our communication with them, then they, they won’t have any models. So when they go to a class and when they teach and when they become professionals, they’re going to be different but not as much different as they could if we begin to change those ones. So that’s my, my, my view of technology.

G: Very interesting, uh you’ve quite a lot.

I: I know I’m sorry.

G: No, don’t worry. I, I would like to hear everything you have. I think I asked you the next question whether it’s optional so student’s participation is optional or it’s a course requirement like in all those tools that you are using?

I: We have um like for instance in… like in Twitter, this time it’s optional and if you can see. And we’re using the hashtag and every time I do and I do the same for, for the undergraduate class with the little ones, I call them, every time I look, I mean I see something that might be interesting for the class or also when I post an announcement on Blackboard, many students told me they don’t check Blackboard, they don’t receive the alerts and everything.

So, one student from 115 told me, “Why don’t you do… you know, you’re always on Twitter, why don’t you put like a little reminder there? Because there are some students who, who know that.” So I mean and some are following me, but most I think don’t… many may not be on Twitter. But then they, they know that if they go to Twitter page and then they search for the hashtag for this class or for the other one, they may find the information that… then I’m archiving all these things as when to have another project when I’m looking into if this changes.

So if the hashtag, the use of hashtags in my classes, on my research, at the beginning it’s only me, but then more people realized that they can communicate by using these things; so it’s just… and in this case I don’t force them to do that.

In 115 we’re going to begin to use like uh a social platform that is being piloted right now. It’s an outside project from, from a company. It’s called Language Twin. I don’t know, they they’re having a lot of trouble, but it’s a tandem thing where students from all over the world sign up with the professors and then… it’s like Mocha Live or something but it’s more… it’s really they video tape, I mean you video chat with the, with other students the minutes you’re… I mean you can video chat as much as you want. But then your teacher assigns how many minutes are going to be graded, but they communicate with somebody who’s a native speaker. So they do like 10, 10 minutes, 15 minutes every week or as much as you want and in one language. And then in return you have them with English or whatever language.

So we’ll be launching that for the, for the online class because of course the language’s component of it, it was really weak. We tried language videos. I’m always telling them, “You can contact me through Skype,” but it’s only one student who did in three semesters I’ve been teaching online right now. So and we are very worried about the oral part because you know, in the regular classes they may not talk that much, but at least they, they listen to the language and we don’t have a tool for them to do that. So now if this works then, but still we’re having… it was supposed to begin on Monday, they delayed for yesterday and I’m not sure if it’s working. But and that one is mandatory. It’s like for eight weeks they have to go online and talk to somebody from Spain or from other countries in Spanish.

G: Have you tried it this semester?

I: Yeah that’s the first time we’re…

G: Okay, what’s the tool?

I: Language Twin, Twin.

G: Twin?

I: Yeah. They, they invited me, I mean, like a twin. So they are like twins and like it’s like a tandem and I don’t know how to check, but that one is mandatory. The other two people who are teaching online are using other things that are like Collaborate within Blackboard and the third professor is using VoiceThread, which is also a tool that, but it’s not it’s not really you know, synchronous. So and we’re going to compare the results and what we can really expect from students. The Wiki is mandatory, the blog they have to do um…

G: Wiki is mandatory.

I: Yeah, I mean it’s like, it’s like the platform where everything so they have to go there to… but you know, for this and they have this assignment at the end of the semester where they would reflect about the writing, how it had changed and they have to like a little activity, I mean like a project and it will be posted there. But right now they don’t have anything here.

I told them to put all the essays that they’re writing, but I don’t think they’re, they’re doing so. Like they have like uh, you know, everything they did for the class in just one place. Because I love the idea of a portfolio and the learning environment, but still I’m working on students to see how important is to keep track of what you do, how you learn. And with a tool like this, you can you can have all that information handy for later. But then we have um…

G: You mentioned the blog.

I: The blog and it’s the voice of my story. And they have to write here five entries throughout the year and then they comment. And you know, some students had trouble with… that’s more, you know, I told them and this is open to everybody and, and I told them they can…

G: It’s online?

I: Yes, just on blogger. And they can… you know, some students I told them you know, “If you don’t want anybody to know your name, then change your name and use some pseudonym.” And all the students didn’t mind so they’re beginning to talk to each other, I mean to write to each other. We don’t have any you know, any comment from the outside. And then this is more for them to, to think about writing first on a blog, but also when you write and you don’t know who is going to eh read what you are writing. Which is different as when you write within the Wiki where you’re not the only people, you know you’re, they’re really writing for, for an audience. And here you, you, you have to think about one reader or two you want to talk with, but, but still you don’t know who at the end is going to be reading that.

So, yesterday, I don’t know one of the students was saying no, she should block her family-in-law from Facebook because they were very conservative. I said, “Oh, they can read your, your, your blog. This is open. “Oh, they don’t speak Spanish.” Anyway, they don’t know what to write. I don’t give them… I’ve seen my colleague uses blogs maybe more than, probably more and she gives assignments and then everybody has to write the same assignment. I don’t do that. It’s just you know, imagine this is like um, like a showcase of our class and the class is about writing, so anything that has a little bit to do with writing. If you go to you know to Fall for the book and you want to write a little you know any review...

G: Topics, they can blog about any topics?

I: But related to writing, literature or, or the language. It’s not, it’s more like how they feel about writing in another language, but I don’t tell them for this week you have to write a summary of this lecture we went altogether or a summary of a movie, because we do that in the, in class. This is more for them so they don’t have when…

For students I’ve seen that writing online creates in a language that is not theirs, although I have a lot of heritage speakers, but it creates a lot of anxiety. So if you increase the anxiety by giving them topics that are very fixed, then some students may prefer that because then they, they don’t have to think about being creative. But in my view, I think it’s also good that they know that there is some freedom. And then when you… if you think about having a blog, sometimes your problem, I have my own blog and then some… it could be one month without writing because I don’t have an idea that I like to share. I have the idea but I don’t I don’t have the thought. I think by… that’s my, my, my, my perspective in this in this thing.

All the times I’ve used blogs for students to reflect on, on what they learn every week. And I use that with 115 but I’m using the blog in tool within Blackboard because it’s you know, it’s easy. I don’t see them so if they have problems, technical problems, it’s a lot of trouble. So then I say, “Okay, you’re going to write on, on the blog.” And there they have to write every two weeks about what mistakes they made, why they feel they made those mistakes and what they can do in order to, to, to improve that. And so and then at the end of the year, they can see all the entries have the same mistakes. I want them to see in their own, by themselves that they didn’t improve much or they did, you know.

So, but that idea of self-reflecting about your learning is still very difficult for students. And, but you can only that if you have a journal. Before you know, you had journal, but it was more difficult for you to go back and read it again, but here you can always do like a search and say okay like this verb, ‘to like’ or with the pronouns and see how many times you, you, you blogged about that problem and if it goes up or down.

I know most students won’t do that, but for me it’s a nice way to introduce them to that thing that they can also be their own…they can control their learning much more than what they think. What we… in college I don’t think many professors do that that is because I can give it to them, but then you see after that there can be, you know, some work for the students waiting on classes for me it’s lot of work teaching online.

So they you know, they study through Blackboard and I, I put my comments on it and then I scan their compositions. And I don’t want these things to get you know, to waste or, so they have to open them and say, “Okay I did these mistakes,” and I usually I correct them. But then they have to explain me why? You know, if it was because they didn’t know the work, if it was because they, they were in a hurry, just one of the many cases that they give. And because they were trying to say something for which they don’t have a structure yet and they were trying to be a little bit you know, a little more creative with their Spanish. So there’s like a list of, of different reasons they might and they can choose those. Or just some students they just say you know, “I put this and I should have put that. I put this and should have…” and that’s not what I want.

No, but I mean because they know that. They get my correction, but “Oh, no, it’s not this, this is dump.” And so then they… yeah, but why? It was a mistake because you weren’t paying attention, because or like many comments you know, they put something and they didn’t check the, the gender, they didn’t check the, the meaning of the word. So when they… because then if you have a lot of mistakes in you know, in one category, then if you’re not aware why you’re making a mistake, then you’re not going to be able to, to go further. You’re going to… so I don’t know.

I’ve been doing that in the summer and now I’m happy because the student, the ones who want to learn the language, they, they realized that that is very, a very good way to, to, to learn.

G: Right.

I: Especially online because I don’t have a way… I don’t teach the class, you know how… they go to the book, they check, they do the exercises, they, they write on the discussion forum, they have the compositions, they have this language them, but I’m not giving a lecture. Because you know, I put videos that already explain what they need to know. But then in a language every person is at, at a different level. So I’m giving them feedback once I get from them their input. And then they have to do something with the input I’m giving them back with their feedback because…

G: That’s true.

I: Yeah, so that’s, that’s the thing with online. I’m always working on that class because it’s a lot; it’s almost like one by one.

G: Is that graduate’s course?

I: No, the, the online class is undergrad, the Spanish, yeah because it’s very…

G: That’s why they’re face-to-faces?

I: Yes, but once a week.

G: So and then the blogs are mandatory and the Wiki is mandatory but Twitter is optional?

I: Exactly.

G: Okay. Is there any other tool that you’re using?

I: Not for the graduate class.

G: For the online class you mentioned Language Twin.

I: Yeah, the Language Twin, the blogs but within Blackboard, we have um Skype for communication with me. Then I have my online office hours through Collaborate, which is within Blackboard. And I also have a hashtag for Twitter, but in that case I, I… they know I’m using that but I’m not asking them to provide with extra you know, information about the class. It’s just information in the graduate class. If they want they can contribute with resources if they want to but um, this semester is not one of the highest. I’ve been doing many things in the past… [Laughter]

G: I think you’re doing many things, yeah. So, you explained to me about an activity that they have to carry through the blogs like writing. Do you know normally mention this in the syllabus as course requirements?

I: Oh, yeah.

G: Yeah? Do you mention all the online activities on your syllabi?

I: Yes. In some cases I write more information online like with Language Twin because, you know, I wasn’t sure what it was what it was going to be. So, but I, I, I have to. I mean, I think I have to particularly because of the… they’re not so many technical requirements, but a little bit. And for some students it might be in the past even if I announced the activities and some students were complaining because they failed.

We have a lot of nontraditional students at the graduate level and they thought they were at a disadvantage because they think younger people are a little bit, you know, they use technology easy… more easily than they do. So and I know I have to say that in advance.

And then if the class meets face-to-face, I try to do like when, when they were creating their their uh, accounts for the blog, we did that in, in the class. And the same with Wiki spaces, I can make sure that everybody is online and they know how to get into the materials. Even so then sometimes they call me like two weeks later and say mm, and I don’t have access to their passwords. That’s the problem with social media outside of the university, I cannot help them.

If they have to create a new account if they want, but if, yeah unless they give me their password and their log in and then I keep it for them, which is you know … like you should do that. And that’s also one skill they have to learn you know, if they want to participate and want, they need to remember. I’m the first one who loses passwords. I forget some of my password, but um, yeah with… if I do a lot of technology that is not the one they… because with Blackboard I think more students know how to go in right now. So then I prefer to have a session or to… not the whole class, but to, to teach in a class where you have computers so then a lab where…

G: You walk them through?

I: Yeah, yeah. And with the online class, it’s a little bit more difficult. We have on the settings, I mean on the things they need to, but of course then they, I know some students struggle with in a way. That’s why I use a little bit less. Only that thing because… the Language Twin, because I think it’s going to help them with the oral part but not…

G: Yeah, interesting. Very interesting. Um, I think you’re answering my questions ahead. So I was going to ask you about specific activities that you do, but since you’re you are mentioning them on your syllabi, is it possible for you to share your syllabi with me?

I: Yeah, it’s on the Scribd I put on syllabi and if you go to my…

G: On what?

I: Scribd is this thing where you can share documents.

G: Okay.

I: So I have here and if you could read Spanish, I have a very nice activity that I explained. I won an award in Spain with that. It was a video, I mean I did a video and then I was using with students photo sharing I think a couple of years ago. They’re somewhere here, but the two last syllabi are here.

And then if you go to our… this is just a page in you know, what we have in the college. So then here you see all the, the ones that have um, an underline and you can get the syllabus.

G: All right.

I: This one is the… I have to put this one in here … that was a couple of years ago. Anyway or you can go here and then if you go here to, this is my, my other blog, the one the professional blog. I can give you the address and then you have all the syllabi and then go to scribd and you can copy that.

G: Okay and they’re all updated, this semester’s syllabus?

I: Yeah, because it’s on you know, you see this fall, that’s previous and in the summary you can see the one, this one I didn’t put the name too, but, but if you see something you want to see, I mean you need, just to let me know because it’s been; we have a few ones … and the one on social media is also, is also online.

G: Okay. Are there any other activities uh, social media activities that you do not mention in your syllabi or everything is clear right from the beginning?

I: I think, I think, no, yeah you know, you’re right because the thing with the, the ones… they had like the Language Twin is here, uh, then what they need. That’s one of the online class um and everything is like set up here.

For the graduate class, which is the this other one … Advanced Spanish Statistics, in this one I didn’t mention the… I mean the other one I didn’t mention the hashtag because it occurred to me later when students were telling me, “Okay Blackboard is not working fine, why don’t you do that?” But here, yes I have the technology and also the evaluations, the Wiki is here and then the, the other thing is somewhere here, the blog and also I am trying to see what is here…

G: Oh, so this is all in Spanish?

I: The graduate class is in Spanish.

G: Okay, all right. Yeah, it will be hard for me to understand what you have in there. But, can you tell me, for the uh, undergraduate class the students are supposed to write uh, blog entries, five blog entries and to comment on each others’…?

I: No, they don’t comment on each other. The undergrad, the undergraduate is eight blog entries. That’s the one on the Blackboard.

G: That’s eight?

I: I think so

G: Okay.

I: The undergrad is five and the grad is five and actually you can see in the syllabus you have here compositions and learning blog. So they have one, two, three, four, this one per chapter, five, six, not six. Then they have eight compositions that’s regular one and then the discussion forums are 10, discussion forums.

And discussion forums they have to comment on each other’s postings. And they have uh… but, you know, I don’t consider those social media because they are within Blackboard. I don’t know why but for me Blackboard even, you know, it’s a blog but the fact that only students can comment, I mean can see it, that is a very… it’s not something they’re going to transfer. I mean they cannot open a blog on Blackboard once they graduate. This is just for institutional uses, so that’s the way I view it. But you know, in terms of writing and being on an online community also you could consider it social media. I don’t know, but this is the forums, the blogs and the, and the other activities.

G: Language.

I: Yeah. So this is the um… those are required but students can see each other’s, but they don’t comment. And I feel because they’re talking about their mistakes and even if I tell them that they shouldn’t use the word mistake, but challenged with the language, they may feel bad if other people would comment on. So I think for them it’s not to just to, to write in public about what they did wrong, so I don’t ask them to. And they don’t have that much knowledge of the language.

In the other one, the graduate class, which is the voice of my story, that one, that one they comment and it’s getting better. So I always remind them you have to write on the blog blah, blah, blah. So it’s just that they see how, how the structure of the blog is, how you comment and why. It’s, it’s, it’s that more than anything and they’re using the language that’s all.

G: Okay. And for the undergraduate class do you mention what they are… you mentioned they have to write about their mistakes on the blog?

I: Yeah. And it’s like in 100 words. I mean, yeah I put the number of words. In this one I don’t require any number of words. And in the discussion forums in, in, in Blackboard for the other class, I didn’t say at the beginning how many words and it was not on the syllabus so then I realized they weren’t writing enough, just… so then now I changed that. And for a couple of weeks they would be writing in 75 words and at the end 100 words. Which is much more… they write much more than what they do in the class; in a regular class they’re always writing, but it’s getting better.

I mean they… I don’t know. I don’t know if they, they have to comment, but I’m not sure. I have to see how the thread go which is for that, the discussion forums are nice because then you can see if a student just is always commenting on the same person or just gets the first one they see and say, “Oh, I’m going to say something.” So I don’t think they’re reading all of them, but I can get, I can get some statistics from Blackboard which is good. In that respect Blackboard gives you more information about what is going on online, than, than the Wiki, you can see the changes, but that’s, that’s it.

G: Okay.

I: I’m not, in another writing class within the class I’ve found this that they, I check how they change their writing because you can see that every easily on the Wiki, but in this one, um, they do everything on Word. And they prefer to do it on Word, so. And I wasn’t using that data for anything. You know, I always think, oh I have all these things about my students and I never have time to do.

But they, at least they, they know, you know, if they go to Wikipedia that that works like our Wiki so they can see who changed what. So it’s a good knowledge, I mean it’s some knowledge that they may not have before going to the class that they get extra just because they were using a tool that is used outside.

The Blackboard, it doesn’t give you any extra knowledge about any… I would think you know Blackboard is… using Blackboard is just… and particularly most of us use Blackboard just to put like information there, like in the shared folders and…

G: But you said you also use the Wiki. In what ways do you use the Wiki? Uh, what type of activities are the students supposed to carry through the Wiki?

I: In this one, not very much. It’s just more like um, you know, if… I told them they can… you know, if they see some resources they, they want to share, they should contribute to that, but it’s, it’s, it’s just suggesting. So they are not… and then for me when I want them to do an activity in class and they want… I mean, they’re working in groups or individually, um, like in the first day we did like personalization and everything so then here I could see if they saved this. They don’t have um, they don’t have some with us. I could see the story but I don’t think... this one does not have. I think she just wrote and then she didn’t make any changes but I could, they could see that.

Um, in this particular class, I’m not doing much of you know, write what you, what you think and then see you know, and change that with feedback from other students. In the one, in the one in social media, that one they had to use it a lot, a lot. This is another one but this one might be closed. Before you had to pay for the for the … and this one everybody had um, individual spaces so they were writing all the activities here and integrating you know, pictures and, and videos and, and changing things in groups.

They were like working on this one. They were working like in campaigns or environmental campaigns. And then it’s always… it was always in class, get together, do something and then posted it and then other students can comment or can change things. So it’s that idea of um, when you work on something, it might be finished, but if you put in on an environment where other people can see it and can collaborate, then you can enhance that or do more with that. While if you put it on, on a Word document in Blackboard, then probably nobody will check that. And then even if, if you change it, it’s very difficult for the other person to see that you changed that. While online, on a Wiki, if you’re just providing the information you know, what you did and somebody else can come and work on that. So it’s that, that’s social media spirit or whatever.

So that, that type of activities where it could be anywhere; It could be you know, let’s look for, for some links and, and, and share that, but the idea behind I think the basic one now that I think more about it is, it’s just you know, of knowledge is always being constructive. And you can… if you share that in an environment that is easier for people to construct on, and then they probably will go further. Of course there are many Wikis where you could put things and then let them contribute.

And people are very shy that I’ve seen that in students where they have to write something. We did for Wikipedia in one of the classes. We… there was no entry for judgments anywhere in Spanish. So I divided the entry of in English all these that they were working in each of the chapter and the section. Then I told them, “Okay, now we have to see you know, if we can change things.” But they didn’t want to change what other students have done because they respect all the people’s work and all.

And they’re not… I think it has to do more with the language. It’s not their language so they don’t know if, if they change something then if then if the other knows less, then they, you know, here’s a person who thinks you know. And then the other way around if you don’t a lot of language, you don’t feel empowered or entitled to change somebody who you think you know, is a heritage speaker and they probably know everything.

And that’s, that’s one of the things with social media and heritage speakers and non-heritage speakers. It works a lot, I mean it works very well because then students see that everybody has something to contribute and also something to learn from the others. And a regular class it’s so short a semester that at the end they may feel like that, but at the beginning we have a lot of you know not issues, but people… you know, heritage speakers think that they don’t know enough because they don’t know grammar or they never learned the grammar. They feel you know, that they don’t know as much as the other ones and non-heritage speakers think, oh these people they speak so well and…

And with these activities I always put like one heritage and non-heritage and I mix them up and then they see that, that it’s not always… and they communicate, they create a relationship quicker that helps them bring down on this stereotypes and breach this. So, that’s, that’s also another… there are so many things you can do. I think the problem is I don’t know if the students get that, you know. The ideas that I have that are… but probably a little bit they say. I don’t know, that’s my hope, but if... I don’t know that.

G: Speaking of students now that you um, that we’re talking about students, do you think… how do you think social media impacts their learning of the content in general or of the language?

I: It, it, it depends on the engagement with them. Social media is like a book. It doesn’t impact you unless you read it, you know. So it’s there and it brings so many opportunities and if you have not only a teacher but other students who agree to that, it may help you see those opportunities. But if you close your eyes to that information or to that opportunity, it’s not going to help you.

It’s like okay then with communication we have our own platform now Language Twin or Twitter, but if… and I made my students in many classes, I mean some classes open a Twitter account. But if you don’t follow people, if you don’t engage in the, in the interaction, then it may help you but not as much.

So it’s like in the social media and the social activists in class. They have to, to follow social activists in topic like the three marked people or you know, ecology or women violence, or people gets women violence. And, and then they had to do an interview to one of these people on Twitter. Some students didn’t follow up. So it’s something that may be very potentially very helpful for them in the future if they want to become activists or if they want to have connections outside the university. You really need to put some you know, some work on that.

And all things that are make an addition to the class or I cannot put so much weight on these activities because it’s risky for them and for my evaluation as well. And then they don’t see that as so essential as reading a book or doing, you know, essays. So I may expect too much from students and I’m not giving them so much grade for what they do, but because I’m afraid that it’s like a class I was telling you about where they had to… that was a super big project and it didn’t work out because some students were taking pictures with copyrights and then they realized that it was, it was a calendar with pictures and they have to write about Spain based on the picture they chose every weekend.

And then some students were taking these pictures and then they saw that and they erased all the pictures and students were like, “Oh, but this picture...” I don’t know, it was big, big thing. So I stopped using it’s called Shadow Call.

It was a good way for students to, to, to talk about in their language and to use a picture for that that they chose, but of course again, you know, and that was so risky and for them because they lost work they have done. It was a learning experience because now they know and I know, you know I have to be… I told them but of course they, some didn’t follow the instructions. So it’s always… [Knock] yeah just as second. So I think you know, it depends on how much they, they, they do.

It’s more exposure to the language if you use so even with that, but in technology it’s always the case. You don’t know about if the impact is just because you’re adding more opportunities for them to use the language. Then because that that, that particular tool is better than the other one, but because they need to be aware of those you know, ways of communication, I think just per se, just because it’s another skill they have to do.

I’m happy that I’m asking them to use things outside the traditional media, traditional you know, materials, but it depends on… and I think in a way I think these tools are… the benefit is more long term because you get outside you, you, you may have good friends or connections, professional connections and then you use the language more and you see that the language is not only something that is in a textbook, but it’s something that people use and that changes. So you see the language in use while maybe you know, I don’t know

G: Yeah, no, it’s interesting. But I’m wondering, if you compare your current classes to the classes you’re teaching using social media, so classes you taught in the past without social media when social media wasn’t there. Do you notice difference in the students’ learning in both groups, between both groups?

I: When I… I’m happier in many cases because they have access to many more resources. There isn’t not one class that I taught before without social media. Maybe the writing class, because that one I’ve been teaching like five times and every time I use different things. And I always use some type of technology. So I, when I came here, then I was using forums and things on Java Script, but of course now it’s way different. It’s a little bit different.

So what I see is they have access to information like all the dictionaries, all the you know, tools or many of the tools like dictionaries, but they can, they can write quicker, they can check with other um, you know, Google translator which is getting better as well.

In a way, so in a way, I don’t know… like in that case the reference books for them to write. There’re very good synonym books out there. I mean like reference, the dictionaries. Before you know, many students they have monolingual dictionaries, they had just one dictionary and now they can access the best dictionaries in Spanish too. So that helps them write, I mean not to lose that… not to waste time when first getting the tools.

And so in that case I’m happier because I don’t need to, to use that much time in, in, in things that now they can find online. But difference is kind of in … like in the writing, the writing…

G: Do you see any improvement in language with the current groups that they’re working in or with groups that use with them social media compared to groups who does not use or without social media?

I: I think I am… because I’ve been so much in technology and every time something new comes up then people saying that we have to use technology just because they learned better the language and I never done research on that in terms of you know, why. So for me isn’t they learn… if they don’t learn the language worst then I’m happy because I know they’ve learned other skills.

So I don’t see myself as just a language teacher. I’m, I’m a person who is here to educate students on how to get mm, better on what they do. And what they do is not only learning the language, but, but becoming a better self-learner. And that’s why I say you know, the, the benefits are long term where I cannot control them. And I’ve seen research a lot, research done with that…

G: But may be not research just your own perception, your own observations.

I: Yeah, but it’s not, you know, one student may… because you cannot… I mean I don’t… I go back to the research because in this profession it’s very tough you know. You cannot tell; you cannot go to a conference and say I’m a serious member unless you have data you know that I did, you know the pre and the post and then you compare that with the control group or with other type of technology.

So I focus always on other things like motivation, like uh, time that they stay on task, that you know, perception of their own language and with their … the same with losing the prejudices. So more like the social aspect of learning because once you lower that, and then students become more, more… it’s not that they become more fluent, but they become more um… they’re more comfortable with the language, with using the language. Would talk to me about what they can do to get better in the language.

So I don’t think um… there are many things that have changed also with the spell checkers, with many things that I’m not sure if my students write more now because I have better students who have more years in the school, in Spanish because of what I do and with technology. And it varies, so I’m not using social media so they become better writers, but they become better citizens of the world, what they have to write in that media. Where they become better, I don’t know, better citizens in general or that they become better professionals.

And in three months of the semester you don’t really… I mean you see improvements, but it’s not really that much. I mean, it’s very difficult to, to, to know why this person is writing more…

G: Oh, okay, because they’re not getting it…

I: Yeah, I mean they’re getting better. They’re getting better, but it’s also they write so much and I give so much feedback. And of course then you would say why, may be if I used the time that they write on the blog to write more they become better, but then they can do that later.

But they will have this opportunity of being exposed in the same way to new media in other classes. So I feel like I have to present them those things and so they can… because if you only write and correct, then once the class is finished, it’s finished. So I won’t to give them more feedback. So they would be like, “Oh, it was nice to have this class, but what do I do now?” But if instead of from one class here then I use a little bit for them to see how they can use other tools for the future, then they will be… you know, they will have… they learn this much, maybe less than before, but then they have all this world open for them to learn. So that’s what, that’s my expectation. But of course I would love to see them writing or… but I’m not so…

G: There are some studies that measures that. Um, I’ve been reading about so many studies. There isn’t empirical that would be, it would you be interested at the end, not like towards uh, the quarter you know, the, like through the three quarter of the semester, would you be interested in sending your students a survey and know what they think about their learning through social media?

I: Yeah. The problem is I don’t think they... I’m using social media that much, you know because I…

G: Yeah, like Wiki and…

I: Yeah, but it is… I don’t know.

G: No, in your class, like for the purpose of your class.

I: Yeah, but I don’t think it’s so relevant this year. Because I’ve used it so much in the past, for me this is just like the loveliest thing because I’m using the Wiki like to share, the blog, but it’s just you know, for them to write in an open space and the, the, the Twitter. So I don’t think in these particular classes right now.

We could see and Language thing is, is like social media but it’s also close and then they can choose who they want to talk, but they’re not going out to Facebook and say, “Okay, I’m going to find some Spanish speakers and talk to them.”

So for me we could try, but I don’t think in this particular class, I’m not putting that much emphasis. I mean you should see the classes I taught in the past, it was really heavy. And in that place, in that case it would have been nice to see. And I did. I have a lot of… I have some uh, surveys that I did in the social activism, in the social research as well, in almost every, every, every time I knew I was putting in a lot of emphasis like more than 15%, 20% in one activity, then I wanted to see the results. Uh, these ones they’re just very low, low so that’s low key.

G: I don’t think it’s low; like you’re using three to four tools per class.

I: Yeah, but it’s just that…

G: Even if it’s closed and they’re interacting with each other like they’re using it interactively and cooperatively.

I: Yeah, yeah.

G: It’s a thought. It should be interesting to look…

I: The thing is, every time I’ve asked; when the answers are so … I don’t know it’s like when I was reading the blog about what they were doing to learn the language every day. And students were so … like on the blogs and that in that case I could do a follow-up and only a few students were really creative in terms of taking the picture of their notes and explaining and say, “Okay that’s what I do or I listen to this and this song today.” So they didn’t know what to say. They didn’t know what they are doing to learn the language. So I felt like so… I’m thinking they’re not doing anything or something. It’s very sometimes like worrying because it’s… we tend to...

G: And it’s time consuming too for you.

I: Yeah and you tend to like in this case it’s because my use of technology now is maybe their use of technology, you know. It’s just not the use of technology, but they don’t write anything about their learning because they’re not doing anything. So what do you… it’s because of the tool, no it’s because the students use it in many language classes they don’t… and in many other courses, they’re not putting all their senses on their learning.

So I don’t want to blame the tools because it’s probably… that’s what I was saying, if they’re learning as much as they you know, they were learning before I’m happy. And I don’t… I think most of the… a lot of research especially with online education versus distance education, they’re not focusing so much in explaining you know and proving that you learn more or less because it’s proven, it depends on you. So that that, that type of research is just assumed you know, that is going to happen.

So now what you have to do is to, to see how much time students task, what the professor can do to improve that communication, what elements are more important in the distance class that you have and how you can you know, emphasize those and let the other ones for and of course then train students to be good online learners, which is one of the problems. It’s not that the tool might be dry, but you can learn but you have to, to know how to learn on your own. And that’s the main problem, we’re not… we don’t know. And it’s very boring to be on computer. You need a lot of discipline.

So the best thing with social media in general, it puts so much emphasis because the role is on the learner. And if you don’t have that urge to learn, then it’s not happening. But then you cannot change your learners. So, but I know they need to become self-learner and autonomous learners. So that’s, that’s what I’m trying… it’s that that part I seeing myself using social media is because of the language or the skills they have, but the skills as learners in general. And that’s what they can transfer from one class to the other.

And if you teach them history, they may transfer of course many, you know they give context to other disciplines history, but I don’t know because I know the professors are not doing that. I think it’s important. See my students are not very, not focused on what they should be. It’s a nice way for them to think about things that are not the language. Maybe I should be teaching something different that can….

G: You should be teaching social media education [laughter]. Okay thank you very much for your time that was very useful.

I: Yeah and of course…

**Interview 2: Nelly**

G: Thank you for the opportunity. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to interview you.

L: My pleasure.

G: What courses are you teaching this semester?

L: This semester I’m teaching NCLC 348 which is called Digital Futures. Each faculty member who teaches it can frame it around and interest, so we’re working on Digital Activism this semester.

G: Interesting.

L: Then my other learning community is Visual Culture and Society, which is just a 200-Level learning community.

G: Are you using any social media tools in any of the courses?

L: Yes, I usually use Wikis for my learning communities. In the 200-Level class, I don’t require them for students presenting their work, but several students have already set up their own Wikis in order to post their assignments and their work and so on.

In Digital Futures, the final project is going to be a participatory action video that the students present. They’ll also - depending on the permissions that they receive from those with whom they’re working –that would be something that will be shared via social media via YouTube probably depending on … there may be some contacts where the people with whom the students are working feel vulnerable and that may be just that film may just need to be shared to me or to our class and not shared more widely, but at least we’re working with video in a format that potentially could be shared via YouTube.

G: Okay, shared like publicly or with…

L: No, just shared it with a limited group ... yes our learning community and so on and that’s one of the nice things about YouTube, you know that you can post something up unlisted. Anybody with the link can see it, but those who are just randomly searching can’t pull it up. I’ve used that before to create videos to help students understand parts of a learning community where they’ve got a little bit stuck and that sort of thing.

Other things that we’re using, we have a Twitter Hashtag for NCLC 348 that’s the Digital Futures class. I would say primarily I’m the person doing it [laugh], but I’m hoping gradually by the end of the semester that others will pick up and start to use it too.

G: Why do you think students are not using it?

L: I’ll tell you from my conversations with the students that I teach and they may or may not be representative, there is a perception amongst students that Twitter’s terribly frivolous. It’s all about what you had for dinner or over-sharing with other people and that’s there’s too much information.

I was chatting with a colleague the other day, who also teaches in the Digital Media field, and we were saying that we were both enthusiastic about Twitter when it started, because it was a way of networking and getting information and making connections with people and then it kind of got swamped with this and so I did last night and “Hey, wasn’t it cool” or whatever it was. We were both saying that now it seems to be coming back to a much more professionally focused-type of sharing.

One of the things that I’m starting to do now is talk to students about using Twitter as a way to curate a selection of informants about a particular field that they’re interested in, so that they should think about trying to choose four to six informants, specialists, experts in a field that they’re interested in for a learning community for example or in their own private research for their concentration and concentrate on following those people and starting to become themselves an informant on whom others should draw.

I think that’s the way I’ll move in the future. This semester for example, I allowed my students semi-learning communities to choose roughly half their assignments from a longer list. This year I gave an almost equal number of social media-related assignments such as editing Wikipedia, blogging, using Twitter and so on. Very, very few students opted for those.

I think what I may do next time is require the students to split the list of assignments into two and they’ll do one from the more conventional assignments and they have to do one from the social media assignments. What I’m trying to do is to reframe that for them as public scholarship that this is where they communicate their knowledge and their learning with the public audience and become part of a public conversation.

G: That’s true and then so this becomes more like a requirement of the course rather than something … optional?

L: Right something … there’ll be a list. I mean usually I try to give students a fairly big list of things to choose from so that they can really play to their strengths, but there will be a requirement that one will be the public scholarship using these platforms and one will be the more private scholarship that they share with myself or with the rest of our group.

G: Okay, but for this semester you’re already using Twitter and Wikis and YouTube?

L: Yes.

G: Which ones are mandatory and which ones are optional?

L: The Twitter is optional. We’re using a Wiki … I put up pages every week to cover the material we went over in class, so that’s theirs a reference point for students and I have an RSS feed of our Hashtag on there as well. It’s mandatory in the sense that it’s there and if you want to check up on the material, it’s there to do it.

Last fall using Wikis was mandatory in both my classes. It didn’t … it worked well in some ways and not in others. I’m really in the process of rethinking how I will use Wikis because I do want to use Wikis as a mandatory part of the learning community, because it helps students to learn to author collaboratively; it helps them to learn to compose multimedia presentations, and communications, to really design what they’re doing.

I’m still rethinking how I want to do that. so I doubt back a bit on making it compulsory this semester as I am rethinking how I would like to do it. For example, I taught in the summer fully online learning community and one of the most successful uses of the Wiki there which was mandatory was collaborative brainstorming around particular assignments. Students did that very well and built up a real sense of community and conversation there which is what I would really like to design a compulsory Wiki assignment to generate – that sense not just, “Oh we got to go post on the Wiki,” but I’ll look what senses posted on the Wiki I need to respond while still keeping it focused on readings or assignments.

G: That’s true, yeah it’s otherwise they’ll be talking about other different things. Okay.

L: Yes. I think it’s one of these things that’s constantly evolving. In my Digital Futures class there are number of other platforms that I’m introducing to students like Fotki which allows you to create an avatar and so some people have used those for an in-class assignment to do like a public service announcement.

We’ve looked to Glogster. We’ve looked at the Etherpad clones for collaborative composition and so on. What else have we … ? VoiceThreads we’ve looked as well. I’ve had one workshop looking at ... I call this ready-made, tools that are ready made for you to use them for your communication. We’ll probably have another session later in the semester. Then, we’ll have accessional searches simply about basic principles for editing material together.

G: Okay, wow interesting. Why did you choose the specific tools that you talked about like Wikis, Twitter? I think you answered part of my question, did you…?

L: I like Wikis ... I like Wikis because of the ease of access. It’s not difficult to learn how to do it. Some people struggle a little bit but most people manage it. For example, I can put together a little package of instructions in four or five videos and people are up and running. It’s a place that students can create their own materials. There’s also a space where they can collaborate tune and the collaboration is really one of my…

…well there’s two main reasons: One is the collaboration because students are going to be finding themselves ... Undergraduates now may be taking masters programs where a lot of their work is online and where they’re going to have to collaborate with people at distance. The same as through of the working environments that they may going into. I think really becoming skilled at collaborating online, organizing information collaboratively, organizing communication collaboratively – that’s very important.

The other area is, it’s any easy platform to create multimedia compositions of one kind or another. It’s easy to embed images. It’s easy to embed audio. It’s easy to embed video. Students learn some of the principles of composing for a web-based environment and so on. That’s really the reason that I use that.

I also like it from a faculty member’s point of view if I require students, which I do in Digital Literacy classes the 200-Level, a class which I require. It means that I’m not constantly having my nox clogged up with, “Here’s my assignment.” I don’t have to organize it and file it everything. I just know to go to each student’s Wiki to read their work and that simplifies mine.

For me YouTube students are making videos all the time anyway - why not encourage them to make videos in response to assignments. All right, you create videos as a way of communication, as a way of presenting the results of their research and that’s really what the participatory reaction video is in NCLC 348.

G: Do you mention that in the syllabus? Is it like clearly stated like this is how they have to use YouTube, this is the activity that they have to do?

L: Again it depends as is last fall I had a lot of requirements for the students. They didn’t … in some ways they worked that well, some ways they didn’t work that well so I wanted to roll that back. This semester it’s very much voluntary except the video is a requirement, but that was clearly stated that that would be done as a group project in the learning community.

I also like to sort of trying to leave a space for what I call Emergent Behavior. For example, last year I just required students … last fall I just required students to post their formal assignments and last summer I required them to post their formal assignments on Wiki.

What happened was that many people started to post informal assignments and actually just started to build portfolios not because I was a saying, “Do it” but because they were starting to see the value of being able to archive and organize all their work for a specific learning community in a specific place.

G: Two courses that you teach are face-to-face, right or…

L: Yes this semester they’re both face-to-face.

G: Okay. So you mentioned brainstorming as an activity that your students carry on in Wiki?

L: On a wiki, yeah.

G: Are there any other specific activities that they have to do and you mentioned also on YouTube that they can present their work in a video format.

L: Yes, yes.

G: Can you describe may be an assignment or two that you assigned to them specifically through social media?

L: Well, this year is really the focuses on the participatory reaction video…

G: Okay.

L: …that’s ... that’s the main ... that’s the main one.

G: Okay.

L: I mean in the Digital Activism course I’m teaching, one of the things I want to encourage people to do, is to choose the mix of potential social media platforms that suits what they’re trying to do, that suits their activity.

For example, I have one group in my class, their participatory action video is focused on raising students’ awareness. They have chosen for one of their other assignments as a group … normally it would be an individual assignment but they’ve decided to put together their individual assignments and make another video that they want to share with the university community. There is an assignment that a lot of people are choosing this year which is called an online exhibit.

G: Where do you mention all these assignments? Are they like in class or do you have them written somewhere?

L: I give them a list and then I give them a description and then…

G: Okay, do you think you can share with me those lists?

L: Sure, sure, yes.

G: I would like to look at detailed … I’m looking at detailed strategies that faculty used in social media.

L: Right, right.

G: It would be awesome if you can share it with me.

L: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely.

G: Then you don’t have to talk about it.

L: Okay.

G: You don’t have to explain in details.

L: That was one of the things that I forgot to mention to you that one of the options for students is this idea of curating. I’m going back to curating again…

G: Yeah, yeah.

L: …on an online exhibit. In an area of Digital Activism, it could be curating an exhibit of 10 videos pulled from the web with the contextual materialize as one would find in a museum per se. Then there’s another option to create an online exhibit which involves curating images, videos, text again into a coherent exhibit.

G: This is very interesting.

L: Then the students, they then ... I mean this is what I like about it … they then have to choose what platform are we using from there. Am I going to use a Wiki? Am I going to try and get a free website? How am I going to put this together?

G: It’s interesting.

L: [laughs]

G: Yeah, really I would love to look at the list…

L: Yes, I can send that to you.

G: …that the students can ... have to choose from. Okay and have you ever taught a course where you did not use social media in it?

L: Not recently.

G: Not recently? Okay.

L: Not recently.

G: Can you think of ... before social media existed, can you think of how your experience was different from the current courses that you’re teaching using social media?

L: Yeah, I mean the big difference is that students created work for me and it was not made publicly available. The minute you move to using social media, you create an audience for the work. Even if it’s just the audience as a group, 20 students or 25 students. That’s a big difference from turning something into teacher and everybody in the class looking at it.

I’ve used lots of different kinds of social media over the years. I used like social bookmarking via Delicious and Digg. What I often run into, is the fact that students will do it for the semester, but it doesn’t have any lasting effect and so that’s another thing I’ve been rethinking. What I’m really trying to do now is tap into ... that’s why I’m pushing more of a video and sharing video and curating video and so on. I’m trying to take the literacies that the students use in their everyday lives and transfer them.

I don’t use Facebook and I made a deliberate decision not to do that, because for many students that’s a private space. It’s a space where they socialize with their friends and their family and acquaintances and so on. I just think if they’re happy to friend me that’s fine, but I don’t want to push work into their social space.

G: How long…?

L: I think the real difference is, it’s the shift in the nature of the audience. What gave me that was many, many years ago ... it was in I think about ’97…

G: Wow that’s when you started using social media?

L: No, well, no that’s when I started using the web.

G: Okay.

L: I’m asking students to create web pages so that they had a public audience. I was doing a course on war and literature. One of the students became very fascinated by a French prose poet and memoirist called Charlotte Delbo. He pulled together as his final project a website of articles on her Langston Encyclopedia material that he’d researched in French and English and so on. He was stunned. He got an email from a scholar, a professor in France thanking him for his work. I thought ... that was one of the key moments for me that I need to push students…

G: Wow.

L: …out there more, but you know it also…

G: That’s quite old …

L: Well, I think those of us who were involved in the web fairly early on, got a real sense of the quality of work that students might generate when they have a public audience and that as I said is having looked to what happened with my list of assignments this year and how few people chose the social media. I’m going to make one private scholarship, one public scholarship compulsory.

G: Wow, it’s really interesting. Speaking of students and the projects you’ve done with them over the years, how do you think this has impacted their learning of the content? How do you think it has impacted their learning?

L: I think the main impact has been when they realized that one they can actually contribute. I’ll often do in a class exercise where I ask everybody to edit a Wikipedia article and I’ll teach them the basic principles. What’s astonishing to them is that most of them confined a Wikipedia article somewhere where they contribute.

What’s equally astonishing and why I like doing an in-class Wikipedia editing assignment, is that often students will make changes, go back to the page a week later and find that the changes have been erased, because they haven’t sited a source, they haven’t sited an authoritative source, they haven’t sited the source properly and so. Even something small like that, maybe takes us about an hour, is profound in learning, because it helps them realize that when teachers ask for in-text citations, list of references, this is not a bazaar school thing, this operates in the real world.

I think it’s … what I’ve liked about it is that linkage between what happens in the classroom and how students may act and react outside the classroom, that it’s a bridge. It says, “We’re not just doing this for fun or to torture you in a class so you can get a good grade. We’re doing this because this is one of the driving forces for sharing and building knowledge in the world itself. ”

I think it’s sometimes one of those things that doesn’t always hit immediately. Sometimes there’s students and I meet them in the corridor and they’ll say, “Oh, remember Ehterpad”, but we’ve been using it to something completely unrelated to school but still professional for example.

G: Wow.

L: Working students will sometimes come in and say, “Hey, I shared everybody in my office that thing we tried last week and this is how we’re using it.” I think that it helps to build that bridge to make the classroom not seem a separate place from the world, where our bizarre activities take place and teachers make you jump through hoops but all you get in the end is a grade and it helps to turn it into a place that prepares you and to act in the world. Also for some students lets them be a leader and lets them be a teacher in the world by saying, “Oh, we’ve looked the timeline software” for example and that’s great for building a portfolio, but it’s also great for building the history of an issue or history of legislation on a particular topic or whatever.

A lot of my job is teaching with the students, that it’s easy if you look to find tools that you don’t need programming and then how to use them in many different ways. That’s one of things I’m liking about the Digital Activism course. It’s the first time I’ve taught this themed course and it’s really because there’s two new books have come out very recently that help students to understand this a little bit more.

There are actually good readings I can assign by people with best practical and theoretical experience and that’s what I’m liking about the Digital Activism course, because the students are able to see that direct connection.

G: It’s true, wow.

L: Yeah, and also the other thing that I forgot to tell you is one of the assignments the students can opt for, are take-home midterms and finals and some people … a lot of people actually take the midterm because they want to get like 20 percent of the grade and it’s a good test for them to see how well they’re getting everything, but there are ... for example, one student has made a video for one of her responses to her exam, one of her exam questions.

G: Wow, very interesting. I think you’ve answered this next question, that do you consider a social media an essential component in your course?

L: I think so [laughs].

G: Yeah. I think you’ve explained it earlier. How accepting of social media tools for educational purposes do you think students are? Do you think they accept them as educational tools?

L: No, I think they have to be persuaded...

G: Okay.

L: ...that they are potentially educational and as I said when we talked about Twitter with Twitter, there’s just this perception that Twitter is frivolous and people around Twitter are frivolous people or sometimes there’s that fear, the, “Okay, if I’m letting my teacher follow me because I’m doing a Twitter assignment in class, she’s going to see everything else about me.” We talked about having separate Twitter accounts and so I said, “Hey.” I think there is some need to persuade there, I think…”

G: Even with Wikis and Wikipedia and…

L: Yes. Well, amazingly most students, unless they have been introduced to Wikis in a learning context, don’t encounter them. Every time I do that ... let’s have the Wikipedia in class exercise, even in classes for Wikis are compulsory, it’s like “Really?” I can just go in and edit it. [laughs]

G: Yeah, I know like how do they know if you don’t teach them.

L: I mean I do think that ... it’s not … persuasion may be not the right word, but it’s what once’s got to demonstrate their … here’s the thing, one has to demonstrate to students that these tools, whether it’s Twitter or whether it’s YouTube, are not single use tools. Yes, people put up silly cat and kid videos on them, but you can use YouTube for serious purposes.

Yes, Twitter can be noise and nothing but noise. Mitt Romney and his ladies and binders – here is a classic example, but it can also be really exceptional information, exceptional professional networking and so on. It’s to help students understand that these tools are very flexible, that you can come up with the way using this tool that nobody else has or you can come up with the way of using these tools to precisely meet your purposes.

They’re not uni-functional and I think that sometimes it’s what students get that there’s a unit, there’s a single function for each kind of platform and tool.

G: Yeah, I understand.

L: There is always that tension between, “Oh, I’ve got to do it for grade” and actually freely choosing to use it and so that’s I think quite most of us … put in…

G: Understandable.

L: …do it for a grade, in the hope that in the future that freely choose to use will come by, but as I say one does get emergent behaviors in classes.

G: How serious do you think the students are when it comes to using social media for educational purposes? You see this tension when you have to persuade them, but how serious are they when you ask them to post the video on YouTube and share it with the class or do you feel that they are as serious as doing like an in-class activity or another type of assignment?

L: Yes, they take it very … once they realize that they have to do it, they take it seriously, take it very, very seriously.

G: You mentioned that you have this whole list of activities…

L: Yeah, well I can print them off for you or send them to you. Would you…?

G: Yeah, if you want you can just send them to me...

L: Okay, okay.

G: ...but off this list? If we can just…

L: Yeah, sure let me pull it out.

G: I’m wondering like which activity do you feel that students are more enthusiastic about and have learned better through it?

L: Let me think about that.

[pause]

Let me pull this out because let’s see … [writing down the list] Okay, this is the outlines of each of the self-select date assignments. There’s take-home exam, final portfolios, book review articles and I give them a list, online exhibits and then I explain to them.

G: What are the online exhibits?

L: Yes, one is an online video first of all then the others are mixed media. That’s proven quite popular this semester.

G: Which one?

L: The online video ... the online exhibits.

G: Okay, mixing media…

L: Well both of them ... either curating the video festival or ...Movie analyses are always very … movie analyses are always very popular in any class and often students will do them as videos.

G: What social media will you be using when they analyze the videos or the movies or…?

L: Well, again I don’t force a medium on the students for responding to these assignments.

G: Maybe like one and two ... the first two activities are online exhibits or more social media focused? Okay, Twitter.

L: They have to use ... yes, they have to use social media for that and then here’s the public scholarship section. There’s three Twitter projects there. Then these two Wikipedia projects there. Nobody chose that first Wikipedia project but we’re going to do that as a class. [laughs]

G: Okay.

L: You know, the article actually on Digital Activism is terrible and my students have already done enough reading to be able to do this. This is going to be an in-class project. Then I give them lists of books they might review and movies they might review and so on.

G: Right. Among the learning activities that they have to do to select from, if on top of your head you might not have numbers ... which activity you said like one of the activities is very popular, but which ones do you think help your students learn more?

L: Well you see it depends on the student. That’s the whole point of integrating different kinds of work and letting people self-select. I have a student in this particular class who very severely dislike has had a lot of problems with … I’ve known it since the first year ... a lot of problems with focus and learning communities and classes. He is a superb filmmaker though.

G: I know.

L: I got YouTube videos from him.

G: Wow yeah.

L: He puts them up on YouTube and shares them.

G: It depends, because you have a variety of…

L: Yeah, but that’s the whole point. Social media are just one set of spaces or one set of platforms that we can use. I mean one of the things that ... as faculty members we have to encourage students to do, is understand their strengths, know their weaknesses and learn to play to their strengths and strengthen their weaknesses.

Social media is just part of that makes and really why I’m doing all these is not so students can learn how to use Wikipedia or Twitter or use a Wiki or make Fotkis or create animations or whatever it is. I’m trying to teach them to learn to learn, because when they graduate they can be holding themselves on platforms and social media out there.

G: Yeah.

L: Who had heard really of Wikis 10 years ago?

G: Yeah, that’s true.

L: It’s all part of helping them to learn to learn and I would say to my students, what I want you to do in terms of any kind of information and communication technology when you graduate, you’re not going to be hit by a wave of change and have to react to it. You should be in a position to ride the wave of change and have some control over it.

I use the Information Ecologies metaphor a lot with my students and social media is just part of that. To be honest I kind of change it up each semester so I had really interesting results last fall, had interesting results using social media particularly Wikis and Voki platforms and YouTube, but I need time to process.

Come next fall or actually for some of my classes in the spring, I’ll probably have something different, some different combination and some different usage. That is also the nice thing about social media that it’s constantly evolving and what we do and can do is constantly evolving too.

Students who are coming through are learning communities are evolving too. One of my colleagues with whom I co-teach, her son is 9 and he’s making Stop Action videos on ... with iMovie and a little digital camera. In nine years’ time when he’s in college, who knows what we were using for learning?

G: Hundreds of tools would be.

L: Yes, yes, yes. I mean and that’s … social media is like every other platform, every other possibility, every other space of communication, every other space of research, every other space of building knowledge – it’s just part of the armory to help our students be self-sustaining learners, who understand that there are not at the mercy of technology which a lot of them do feel. They feel just empowered but they actually able to control and understand and shape the way it’s used in their lives.

G: Right, that’s interesting. What you’re doing is interesting.

L: [laughs]

G: It’s really amazing.

L: I get bored easily. so I like to keep changing that.

G: You know…

L: You know I always, I always, always ... before I do anything, I think what are the students going to learn from doing this.

G: Yeah, yeah.

L: That’s why ... you know as I said I was disappointed that so few students opted for the public scholarship and that’s why I’m going to make doing one of those compulsory, definitely next fall when I teach this combo of classes again.

G: Because you see the benefits of that.

L: The benefit is there and they’re going to see … when I’ve made something like Twitter compulsory in the past, I’ve not used it quite as well and framed it quite as well as I think I can now, but when I’ve used in the past, once student starts using it ... They send a tweet to some politician or they send it to someone who’s a good scholar in the field and the next thing they get a tweet back. Wow!

G: Wow, yeah.

L: I share a lot of my own experience. I mean I’ve really come back to using Twitter a lot for professional networking over the last six months or so. I shared with students for example, a two of the pieces of work we used ...one as readings in the class, one a very complex info graphic, and the other a really fine conference presentation by a colleague in the UK. I had my syllabus ready for awhile and I go and check my links just before semester starts and both of those had disappeared, but I contacted each of the authors via Twitter and you know within two weeks they were back up and they … so I was able to show that to students. You know, here’s what happened.

G: Yeah definitely, but you see it more…

L: I think that’s really important because I think that’s what gets students too that they feel they’re being asked to do something that their faculty members themselves are not doing, so I like to show them.

G: Right.

L: This is my learning communication practice.

G: Which motivates them a lot, right.

L: Yeah. This isn’t something that’s just a class assignment. This is something that we use.

G: Yeah, wow. Will you be interested in … because a part of my research is to send an online survey to your students and see what they think about the activities in terms of promoting their learning.

L: Sure.

G: Would you be interested in doing that? It’s optional?

L: Yeah we’re not … at 245 probably not, because it’s not nearly as intensive class, but here yeah.

G: Yeah?

L: I think that would ... yeah that would be fine.

G: It would be interesting to see what they think about social media.

L: Yeah, they probably have an entirely different perspective to me.

G: Yeah and … and…

L: It’s an anonymous survey?

G: Yeah. I don’t need names.

L: Yeah, no that’s fine. I have two or three students in that class whom I’ve known for awhile and they’re a little nervous about putting their names on things.

G: Okay but is it okay if just ... they write the course title, the name ... because we want to know who your students are or other faculties as well. That’s interesting.

L: Yeah, yeah. I think that would be fine.

G: Thank you very much for your time.

L: Yeah especially if you’ve shared with me the results…

G: Yeah.

**Interview 3- Susan**

G: Thank you very much for this opportunity. Let’s just start, straightforward.

I: Okay, great.

G: So, what courses are you teaching this semester?

I: Um, this semester I teach two courses in our leadership studies minor. So students get a minor in leadership studies, and so I teach the intro class, which is really about … it’s a survey course about theoretical conceptions of leadership—

G: Mm-hmm.

I: With a little bit of active learning and skills, those kinds of things, so they get 250 years of theory…

I: So, of leadership theories. And then the other one is the capstone class, so the 400 level course in that one is called, Leading Change…And so it’s really about how do you change organizations, and then also systems. So social change… And how change varies across context. So students learn all different kinds of levers for a change, and then which levers work in political context or in global context or in nonprofit context, and they sort of analyze that way. So the class is sort of more a higher order, and they really do develop their own kinds of projects. They develop a social innovation plan… For how they're gonna make sort of a systems level change, and they do a whole needs analysis and all that kind of stuff. So it’s like intro leadership theories and then like the advanced capstone leading change class.

G: So what types of tools are you using with them, since they're developing their social…

I: Right.

G: Development plan?

I: Well, there is—it’s so weird, ‘cause there’s so many different … There are now emerging theories about virtual leadership too, and how sort of technology mediates leadership in good and bad ways.

And so we just touch on that. I’m not super well knowledgeable about all of that, but I do introduce them to the concept. (laughter) So it’s good to model some of that. So in the intro class, they're using Wikis. I don’t know if you’d count that as … but they do group projects— So they are each assigned sort of a family of theories to do this large, like a full class, an hour and a half-level presentation. Some of them are, you know, freshmen or sophomores, so that’s big for a younger, you know, for the intro course. Um… So they have a Wiki for their groups, and they have to, um, do collaborative note taking.

So instead of just, um, do your own notes, they have to take notes on the whole book as a team and they have to figure out how to organize that and then they have to sort of figure out whose taking notes on what part. And there’s different parts of note taking, so some people are sort of the descriptive people and some people are sort of the critical or reflective people… They sometimes have different roles, and they also use that to sort of plan their presentations and I give them feedback on that, and so…

G: Okay.

I: So they have that. The Wiki is really the main thing they do for social media in that class.

G: Okay. Uh, do you use anything else like Twitter? Uh…

I: Only—that’s all in the other class.

G: Oh.

I: I don’t know, like … I don’t know if you want me to tell you what both…

G: Yes, sure.

I: So that’s the collaborative Wiki. It’s pretty much all they do in that class, in any kind of online environment. The other class, the advanced class, the Leading Change class, they have a, um, have a philosophy that you can’t learn how to change organizations and systems until you sort of figure out, can you even change yourself? So they do this sort of three-week experiment that I call the personal transformation experiment…

G: Wow.

I: And they have to pick one of the aspects of social entrepreneurs and social innovators. Their sort of research of this is they have these sort of six aspects to develop in themselves, and there are things like risk taking, resilience, gratitude, um, something about transformative communication. So they pick and say … They design their own experiment, and they say, “Here’s where I am with risk taking, for example, now…”

And they say, “Here’s what I’m gonna do for the next few weeks to try to sort of become better at that in my own way,” and they develop accountability partners to sort of check in with them and they sort of, um … and at the end they have to say how much they’ve transformed or not. So part of that assignment is that they have to tweet almost every day.

And we use Twitter for mindfulness. So the idea is that we want you to think about this every day. (Laughs)

G: Wow.

I: Like, I want you to think about cultivating this.

G: It’s a course requirement?

I: Yes.

G: It’s not optional?

I: Not optional.

G: Okay.

I: And so they all get … We use—I use like a … what’s called a three-minute email…

You know, if they get up there—I don’t want it to be on their regular Twitter accounts—

Because I’m like, “I really, I don’t really care what you did this weekend.”

So I make them make class Twitter, tweet—Twitter accounts.

So they use a fake email, they get the Twitter account and they're … they use, like, 435 is the name, the number of the course plus their last name. And then they use hashtags for which element they're working on, so they all, um, use the class hashtag, and then they use a hashtag if they're in the risk taking group or if they're in the gratitude group or if they're in the communication group or the innovation group or whatever, and they have to tweet … And what I tell them, we talk about creative, like what creative tweets look like.

‘Cause they actually get graded for that part, so I say, like, you know, “I want you to not only write what you did, because some of that’s personal reflection, took a risk today, talked to someone I didn’t know, or told my mom I was grateful that she pays for my tuition,” you know. They… (laughter) so I want them to tweet about what they're doing related to the topic…

G:Yeah.

I: But also to share resources. So with all of these, there are so many online, like, “Here it a quiz I took about resilience.”

And they put the, you know, the tiny URL in there. Or … and so they share resources with each other through Twitter as well. And pictures, you know, here is an inspirational quote that made—you know, or … and then they also react to each other, so they’d say—

So they’d say @Julie, you know, “Keep it up,” or they give each other kind of feedback, so … And we have 36 students in our class (laughs) all tweeting for three weeks every day. And then, you know, I’m a big believer that you need to be responsive to people in an online environment if you want them to continue the—

G: Yeah.

I: So it’s kind of exhausting in the faculty end of, like, monitoring that and encouraging people and … You know, some people misinterpreted their risk taking. One woman’s like, “Oh, I haven’t learned to ride a motorcycle.” I’m like, “No, like maybe not a physical risk. This is about…” (laughter) This is about sort of personal risk taking.

G: Yeah.

I: So it was good to sort of catch her. I was like, “Don’t sue me, because….” (laughs) But it worked, and they were all … And it was shocking how few of them had Twitter accounts. I’d say maybe like five out of 35 were active on Twitter, so it was a first—

G: That’s normal.

I: Is that? Okay. That’s a shock to me. I just didn’t know.

G: Yeah. I think people use Facebook more than they use Twitter.

I: Yeah.

G: Yeah.

I: Especially … And they're—we’re trying to push them into the … sort of more professional tools online.

So we also use Wikis for that class. They have personal Wikis.

G: In addition to Twitter?

I: Yeah.

G: In the 400 level course?

I: Yeah.

G: Okay.

I: So—and they, um … Most of them hadn’t used that either, and we got some pushback like all the readings are on a class Wiki and all the syllabus and all that, and then they have their own Wikis where they turn in all their assignments and they're like, “Why aren’t we using Blackboard?”

G: Ah.

I: I said, “You know, how many times … You're not gonna graduate and go to a job that uses Blackboard, but you are gonna go to a job that use Wikis and Twitter and LinkedIn.” You know what I mean? So I’m trying to push them towards…

G: Yeah.

I: The tools they’ll actually be using in the workplace.

So, um, they use LinkedIn and two … A couple of the people designed … One of the things they could work on was networking, and some of them are counting, like, how much can I expand my LinkedIn accounts…In three weeks, and they went from, like, zero to 300 people…

G: Wow.

I: So you know, there is some really measurable, you know, things that they are, like, started LinkedIn, and so they're using all these different tools for this assignment.

G: And the Wikis they, they're used inter—they're using them interactively or just like one on one with you?

I: Yeah. Those are personal Wikis, so… In the intro class they're collaborative and group Wikis, and then this—for collaborative authoring. And in this class, they're really just for individual use.

G: Okay.

I: And I can show you some of … I don’t know if it’s helpful, but I can show you—

G: Yeah.

I: Some examples.

G: Okay. So which ones are course requirements and which ones are optional?

I: Okay. They're all pretty much course requirements. (Laughs)

So, in the groups—like the intro class, that’s a course requirement. In this class they have to have the personal Wiki and then they had to do the tweeting. The LinkedIn was optional. Some people chose to do that project.

G: Okay.

I: Yeah.

G: All right.

I: I think that’s all the social media they're using. (Laughs)

G: Yeah.

I: Yeah. Oh, and we … that was a different—never mind. I had them write two digital stories in the past, too…

G: Oh.

I: But we decided not to do that. They have the option, but they don’t have to do digital stories. They can do a traditional paper if they want to…

G: All right.

I: For their final, like, exam, um, create something that demonstrates your own personal philosophy of leadership and change.

G: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit more about the digital stories? So you said it’s optional and…

I: Yeah. Yeah, we … In the past, last year when I taught this class, it was required as well.

But, it got … I guess we… It was overwhelming. We have some also, not—like, non-traditional students.

G: Yeah.

I: So I, in my last class, I had several people over 60 and they’d say, “Julie, the Wiki and the tweeting and the digital…” It was too much technology already. (Laughs)

G: Yeah.

I: So they were like, “We are full.” But that created a nice learning, because I mean people who were, um, younger and the sort of, the … Whereas people that had more jobs and more life experience were very much, sort of, giving advice in the class, but when it came time for the assignments, the mentoring switched, right?

G: Hmm.

I: So the 21-year-olds were like, “This is how you do this,” and they were … So it was really nice to create a balance in the aging about who’s got the wisdom.

G: Right.

I: But anyway, so that class, those classes, they were required to do a digital story and they were able to use whatever sort of media tool they wanted. So people used everything…

From the MacBook software, you know, the software on … I—It was called iMovie.

Um, and people used Wix and a couple other … Even some Prezis, you know…

G: Yeah.

I: That were, that ended up being pictures with narration on top, and so…

G: Yeah, and were they shared together, uh, or…?

I: Those were shared. They had to present them to the class.

G: Okay.

I: So they weren’t necessarily linked. Like, they couldn’t go in and just look at someone else’s in some ways.

G: Okay. Oh, okay.

I: I wanted that. I liked that idea that we could archive them…

And then, the next … this year’s class could watch—I just didn’t get there. (Laughs)

G: Okay, yeah. You were doing other things.

I: Yeah.

G: You can’t do everything…

I: Yeah.

G: Sometimes. Okay, and I think you answered part of this question but why did you choose, uh, these specific tools?

I: Yeah. So, um, the Twitter, you know, they can’t do depth of reflection in Twitter very much, right, ‘cause they only have a few characters, although a lot of them figure out how to do the additional space. I can’t remember…

How they do that, but they … Students, I like when they can figure out stuff that I don’t know how to do yet. They're like, “Well, you just put this and you get all the tweeting room that you want.” “Oh, okay.” Um, but they … That was really for mindfulness. It was such a great way to sort of, “Every single day, I want you to think about this project. Like, you don’t have to … The project didn’t have a lot of writing in it. It wasn’t like an intensive, but it’s a personal change course, so I want you to every single day have to think about it. This creates mindfulness. Every day, you need to have a tweet, and it makes you think about your day. What did I do today that inhabited that characteristic?”

So Twitter really matched that assignment. And in the Wikis, like I said, I picked them because I think they’re a workplace tool and I’m shocked at how many students don’t know how to use those either.

Um, and so they sort of have to learn how to upload documents and create links, and it allows more functionality in my mind than Blackboard, for sure. Um… So students can include all different kinds of media. They can make it look and personalize the page, so it looks like their own, um…

So I like that function too, yeah.

G: Um, so you explained about the activities the students are supposed to do through social media. Do you mention that in your syllabus?

I: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

G:It is mentioned?

I: It says really clear. It’s actually under requirements. It says, “You need this book for this class. You need to have a Twitter account.” (Laughs)

G: Okay.

I: Like, “You need a PBworks account.” Like, it’s listed. Um, there’s a fee. We take them to The EDGE, you know, they do the outdoor education. So it’s all listed under what the course requirements are, ‘cause I learned that you have to say…

G: Yeah.

I: You.

G: And, as you mentioned the activities that they have to carry on social media or you don’t? Like, specifically, you have to submit every day. Um…

I: Yeah, it pretty much says that so the, the, the requirements … We have the accounts in the, under the, um, like, required text and stuff, and then when it says what are the assignments, it specifies you will … With you, Twitter… Account, you will do the following. So it’s pretty clear what I’m asking them to do, which I don’t know if that’s good or bad. I’m interested in your pedagogical view.

G: Yeah.

I: It might be too directive, you know.

G: No. It’s a course requirement…

I: Yeah.

G: Do you … Do you mind sharing with me your syllabus?

I: Oh, not at all. I couldn’t remember if I … I’ve been sending it to so many people lately…

For different reasons. I will definitely send you both of them, yeah.

G: Thank you. Because that could be helpful, because I’m…

I: Yeah.

G: Looking at the specific activities that you just described, but seeing them also written helps me as well.

I: Sure. Let me get … Actually, I have a copyright here. Oh, you know what, I didn’t bring it. Sorry. Typical. I didn’t bring that along. I’ll email it to you so you can … You’d rather have it digital?

G: Yeah. Thank you very much.

I: Yeah.

G: Thank you. That would help. So, um, okay. Can you remember a course that you taught without the use of social media in the past, and how your experience was different from your experience now in these courses?

I: Yeah, that’s a good question. Um, yeah. I mean, I think I’ve been teaching leadership studies for 15 years now, so clearly it didn’t start out this way, although what’s been nice is that we've all had a commitment to sort of interactive classroom pedagogy. So we always sit in a circle, right, and we always have, um, some theory and then we’ll demonstrate application and, so, lots of games and lots of, you know, moving around and, like, teamwork and design your model with your group and, so … But all of that had to be sort of done in real time, right?

So, I still… I think I still have that commitment. What this enabled me to do is take that outside of the classroom.

Right? So now they are able to interact with each other and work on shared definitions of leadership and projects that they all do that virtually. So, I don’t have to sit there and use class time for that.

So I think it probably has shifted a little bit that I use my class time a little bit more for sort of delivery of information, knowing that they can do sort of the collaborative pieces in the virtual space, might be one change, yeah.

G: Wow, wow. Okay. Um, and, um … What impact do you think social media has on your students’ learning of the content…

I: Um…

G: And, like, let’s start with the content. Do you think it has enhanced your students’ learning of the content?

I: The collaborative note taking, definitely. There’s something about knowing that I’m … I’m not just letting down myself if I don’t do my reading, that I’m letting down my group. And they can all look on the Wiki and see who didn’t do … You know, we have notes on all this and if you didn’t do that part that you were supposed to and now nobody else had to go back and read that chapter, are you … Yeah, it creates a—not a shaming, that’s not the right word, but there’s a little bit of accountability there.

So it was just like, oh, you have to turn in notes or questions… I guess I used to do that. How did I used to do that? I don’t remember how. (laughs) This is embarrassing. I can’t think of how I used to … But I think I used to give hard copies, or like, “Here are the notes I took on the chapter and my critical questions,” or something.

Or we had people write on a note card, “What questions do you have from today’s reading?”

Um, I think that’s how I used to do it in the old days. Um, it’s so much different online, you know, so they see who hasn’t done what and who has, and they see, “Oh, that person’s doing it better, so I up my game.” So I think they learn the content better because not only are they more accountable with the collaborative note taking, but they also see different models.

So they know where they stand and like, “Ooh, I really did phone it in ‘cause I only did three bullet points and that person did six pages.” (laughs) So, a little bit of that, and they are also able to grab external resources so one of the parts of the note taking is finding web links or, um, you know, it can be any kind of media, but find some media links that demonstrate this theory of leadership, and so they're able to say … And they find—I use that for my own, because I steal it from them, but they find stuff that I would never have thought of. You know, YouTube videos or here’s somebody being transactional or here’s somebody being transformational, and here’s a quiz I found online and here’s this … They really … It makes them troll— Larger body of content, larger than I would ever know, and then…

G: Yeah.

I: They pick stuff that they think demonstrates or enacts the theories.

G: Yeah.

I: So I think that really adds to content knowledge, too.

G: Okay. So, do you think this group of students that you're teaching now…

Using social media, is different from the group of students that you taught without social media? Do you think that the quality of their education is better or the same or slightly … Like, how would you rate it?

I: Yeah, yeah. Here’s my—here’s what I think. Students who were like traditionally successful in school end up using social media in kind of traditional ways. Does that make any sense? So they're more likely to put a perfect paper up with, like, footnotes and it looks … And it’s not sort of demonstrably different than that would have been 10 years ago. But what I’ve see social media help is the students who maybe were not as successful in the classroom for some reason, had different learning styles potentially, right, you know, and then all of a sudden they're given a different way to express themselves…

And those students … So I think it actually helps more boats rise, if that makes sense.

G: Okay, yeah.

I: Those students are able to show they're learning in really unique ways that maybe the old formats didn’t allow, so the traditional students that were great then are still kind of great, um, but they're not as creative and that sometimes shows. And then it’s bringing all these different students to sort of becoming … seeing that they're successful in getting it, and seeing them absorb the content and sort of apply it in creative ways.

G: Yeah.

I: So I think it’s helping more people, um, sort of access the class material, if that makes any sense.

G: Yeah.

I: Yeah. I don’t know if you find that in the research

G: No. What you're saying, I didn’t read it anywhere.

I: Oh, interesting. Okay.

G: I thinks it’s … it’s unique. What you're saying is really unique.

I: And we definitely saw that in portfolios, too. I forgot to tell you that we do … NCC is a portfolio-based curriculum.

G: Wow.

I: So students do … they have paper or digital they can choose… But they … They’re all … Their whole degree program… So before they graduate, they do a senior portfolio. And many of them are e-portfolios now.

G: Yeah.

I: And they have to demonstrate competencies and those same things, like the students who do the paper one, I mean, it’s very traditional, and the students who do some of the e ones, they make movies. They put in digital stories. They're able to, say, access their own learning. Here’s how I learned about citizenship or civic engagement from this class, and it’s very… The links, and it’s integrated, and such a different kind of example of how they learned it than a two-paragraph essay, you know?

G: Yeah.

I: So, yeah. Anyway, I’m a fan.

G: Yeah, you are obviously, which is good because…

I: What is so weird is that I’m not a technical adapter, you know what I mean? I mean, I’m like, I do all this like, “Um, I’m going to learn it from them more than…” I come in and say, “If I can learn it, you can learn it because I don’t have…”

G: You know what technology keeps changing. You can’t keep up with everything.

I:Yes.

G: So I think teaching it is a way for you to get introduced to it.

I: Yes, absolutely. I do learn it through having them teach me.

G:Yeah. Why not? It’s changing, and we have to learn as well As well as students.

I: But then I know, you know, Leslie Smith and Wendy said she’s meeting with you, too, and those two in my mind are sort of … They get excited by the new tools and like, “What can I do with this?” And they're, to me, more the leading edge of that. I’m more like, “Hmm, you know, I could do this assignment in a way that’s more…” Like I feel they were led by the curriculum, instead of…

They sort of have a value commitment to being cutting edge in technology.

G: I know. I think that’s where you start.

I: Yeah.

G: You're way better than beginners.

I: Yeah.

I: Okay, so …Okay, this is a question which is slightly different from the others…

G: Yes.

G: But a bit similar. Do you consider social media as an essential component in your course?

I: Hmm. Yeah. I mean, definitely for the advanced class. I feel like…

G: Okay.

I: I want to say … I have a quote … There was a range of … So we asked them at the end to reflect on their use of—

G: That was last semester?

I: This semester… They’ve already finished their projects…

G: Oh, okay.

I: And like, reflect on, “What did you think of using Twitter for accountability, talk about your…” And there was a huge range. And that’d be something if you wanted access to, we could, you could code, what, what their reactions to were, to using Twitter, ‘cause there was …

People were like, “I always hated it, and I still hate it.” You know, and or who said, you know, “You can’t say anything in this short a time,” but the majority of people said, “I started out really thinking it was dumb and by the end I was sold on it.” Or they said, “You know, I didn’t realize how much it created community, to realize that I was doing this work and other people were too,” and somebody’s idea would trigger, “Oh, I want to try that too,” or “They're risk taking that way. I want to do that, as well,” or “I’m going to take that quiz.” And so they really got it for, like, the community part. Now I forgot your question.

G: Yeah. Do you think it’s essential?

I: Oh, so yes, I do. For that class, I don’t think I could do that a different way. I don’t think I could have the same outcomes and watch them move from … Like, I wouldn’t know how to check in on their personal inner workings in the same way that the Twitter project lets us do.

G:Okay. So, uh, you mean, you're talking basically about the Twitter?

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

G: Okay.

I: And the Wikis, um, as I said, I think Blackboard is a very … you know, there are some … There’s different online environments where I could give them resources and have them have discussion boards and stuff, but I really like the, um … I like that Wiki makes them make their own template, right?

So instead of saying, “Here’s the format and you have to adapt to the Blackboard format,” it’s really a blank page and they can sort of work with their group and decide, you know, “We’re going to arrange it this way or we’re going to add our pages this way. And they get more ownership over that because they are creating the links. I think it affects cognition.

Like how you link stuff. It sort of like shows how it’s linking in your head.

G: Yeah.

I: Like my one friend… You probably don’t know Darren Cambridge, but he’s big in electronic portfolio stuff, but he’s like, “Hyperlinking creates meta cognition.” I was like, “Let me think about that. Oh yeah, it does.” Okay. (Laughter)

G: Yeah. See now, yeah, you're giving me new ideas.

I: Yeah. So it really shows … It makes their, um, thinking visual. Does that make any sense?

I don’t—I can’t go back now. yeah. I’m committed to it.

G: Uh-huh. Okay. How accepting of social media tools for educational purposes do you think students are?

I: Uh-huh. Yeah, so that’s where I was like, I was just … I’m a little bit shocked at the amount of resistance. And there’s this idea that we learn one thing, and we know how to use that, but they aren’t … Well, I’m shocked that they’re not as good as I thought they’d be at teaching themselves new tools.

So they keep coming to me and saying, “Now what do I do? My Wiki’s not working.” Or, you know, like, “Well, how would you fix the problem?” Like, they're not independently able to find solutions. Like, see where it says, “Help.” And then there’s all these videos about how to do stuff.

And I don’t know if that’s because, you know, the whole digital, native digital immigrants thing in that we’re digital immigrants. We had to learn the language, right?

I’m 40, I don’t know but, you know, so like I didn’t have … you know, I had to learn the language of how to do stuff I didn’t know how to do, because…

I’m new to this technology thing, whereas you were immersed in it so you never, maybe, had to learn how to maybe be independent. I don’t know what that is, but, um. So, yeah, I’m surprised by that. I’m surprised at some of their resistance but then again, like, I think in the Twitter class, I’ve definitely had converts and the wikis, too. I think the students are almost like, “Why is it different than just keeping everything up… Oh…,” and then they see, “This is a nice shard environment.” I think they like better than on Google.doc or something. Like, you're collaboratively offering something. You could see who does what marked clearly, so I think they’ve been trained to use certain platforms and that these are more rich platforms for collaborative work, and they can easily do the hyperlinks and they can use, you know…

So I think they're … I do think they come away, um, being fans. But there is resistance in the beginning from some.

G: Yeah, it’s not natural. What you’re saying is not surprising, because I heard it from several…

I: Have you? Okay.

G: Especially with Twitter.

I: Yeah.

G: Because it’s something new that they have to learn.

I: Yeah.

G: Uh, it might not be as user friendly as we think it … as Wikis. Wikis are more user friendly— And easy to use.

I: Yes. Some of the students, like there was a bunch here the first week who didn’t ever include the hashtags, so I’m like, I can’t find your … I mean I could, I could find their account and then pull up their account, but I was like, “I need to be able to pull up hashtags and CLC435, our class number, and see…” So like you're not in the conversation because when I type #risktaking, you're not in … using it.

And so, showing them how they're being left out because their formatting is wrong was sort of…

And, yeah. They're so exhausted from a teaching … There was a lot of that.

But I do feel by the end they were using it and they got it and… But I also give them written—you know, I gave them a handout, and we…

Class time for each of those things, like let’s practice together and…

G: Right.

I: Um, you know. See, you can’t just right go to it. You gotta kind of build it in.

G: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know, I know. They need a lot of guidance in the beginning.

And the people who fail, I find, don’t speak up ‘cause I don’t know if they're embarrassed or … Do you know what I mean? Like if I have an assignment they didn’t understand, I’m much more likely to have a student come and say, “I didn’t understand what we’re supposed to do for that paper.”

But for the online stuff, they just kind of get silenced for some reason and I think they think everybody else has gotten it.

And so I have to be really careful. Like I went through right away, who has not made their account yet.

Like we sat there in class for two hours and talked about it, but there were still three people who didn’t get a successful account, and why is that?

So I had to follow up with them because they were already lost in even just how to get the limited email, like, you know what I mean?

And so, or, “Gosh, this person still doesn’t have loads up to their Wiki. They're still uploading Word documents instead of creating it in a Wiki.” You know.

And so, just keep working with them while they get there, you know, um. I’m learning lots of flexibility.

G: Yeah, I know. Technology.

I: Yes.

G: And do you think students are seriously committed to these activities that are assigned through social media? I think it’s because it’s a course requirement.

I: Yes.

G: But when it’s optional, do you see students seriously committed to, um….

I: It’s really, like I … The time … Like, it will be interesting to see this year. I bet almost no people do the digital portfolio option cause it seems like more work. The idea is that it should give people some creativity. If you don’t want to do a traditional paper, you can do this kind of format. So I’ll probably have two or three people out of 30 take advantage of it.

And those people pretend to be self-motivated learners anyway and, you know, so…

G: Right. And they want to learn probably.

I: And they're excited about their topic, so…They're invested in the course, and they're invested in showing the learning, you know, so they're … That’s whose going to be the people who choose…

When I made the requirement, again, I think people don’t understand the why. I don’t think they’ve done a good job incentivizing things like portfolios and visual stories. Like, why is that better than a traditional assignment. Um, and so I think the learning for some of those comes after its done, which is so weird, like, you’ve got to force them to go through all the, you know, superfluous collecting stuff and the selecting and then the digitizing and then the email, like how they're….

And then they're like, “Oh that was really worthwhile. I hated it while I was doing it, but now I get it. And the digital story was the same. I hated that ‘cause I just couldn’t make my sound overlay my pictures the way I wanted to, but now I’m really proud of it.”

You know what I mean? But I can’t tell them that up front and so I really try to also weave in having people from prior classes come in and show their digital stories or have people come in and talk about the personal transformation project and Twitter. Like, I think that really helps because I can tell them that, but having other students say why it worked… That, the testimonials…

G: It kind of makes them…

I: Yeah.

G: Like it makes sense.

I: Yeah. Like, “I was with you and I was lost and I didn’t know why we would do that and then I… Now I’m a believer.” You know?

G: Yeah, yeah.

I: So…

G: Yeah, I’ve heard that from several faculty members.

I: Yeah?

G: They said the same.

I: Did they?

G: Students in the beginning, they are resistant, but then at the end…

I: Yeah.

G: They, uh, they enjoy it, and…

I: Yeah.

G: They use it for, like, after…

I: Yeah.

G: They graduate.

I: Oh, yeah.

G: They get the benefit from it.

I: For sure. I want to send you an email. This one woman is like…

G: Yeah.

I: This personal… The Twitter project changed her life.

G: Really? Wow.

I: You know, and they say that just … Like, I just … That’s something I learned in college and it changed my whole life.

G: Um, yeah. Wow.

I: Like, you just never know. (Laughter)

G: You’re not only teaching content, you’re also teaching them development and innovation, which is…

I: Yeah.

G: Really important in this world.

I: And in the … You’d—I want to bring you in maybe next time for a guest speaker—

G: Yeah.

I: For the class. We had a lot conversation about, “Can you teach innovation?”

G: Yeah. Wow.

I: So, you know, we actually invite the students … Can I … “What can I do as an instructor, a facilitator, to help you be more innovative?”

G: Yeah.

I: Is that even something that’s developable? And then I sort of show them the things I’m trying to do to get them to think.

G: Yeah.

I: You know, um, they have a webliography due this week…

G: Oh.

I: Where they have to find, um, I don’t know … I made that word up. I’m sure it’s a word somewhere, but they're … Because they're developing a personal innovation plan, they have to find 10 organizations on the web who are already addressing the social issue…

G: Oh.

I: In innovative ways and say … and actually do an annotated, um, of the website and why it’s innovative. So, if you're working on, um, hunger and homelessness, for example, or like how to address homelessness, what are ten different ways different groups have done that? So, they have to get their hand dirty. See how people are already doing it. Give me the web link, and then explain why, what they're going to steal from that to inform their own innovative project.

G: Wow.

I: Or what’s already being done. So, usually it’s a lot of, like, “Oh, it’s funny. People are already doing this.”

G: Yeah, wow. And it’s in that 400 level?

I: Yeah, that’s the 400 level class.

G: Right. You do the project?

I: Yeah.

G: Wow. That’s interesting. So let’s move to the student’s part.

I: Yeah. (Laughter)

G: As part of my research, I’m planning to do faculty interviews and also send a survey to students…

I: Cool. Awesome.

G: To see what they think about the social media activities they're doing in classes.

I: Great.

G: And how it has enhanced their learning or not.

I: Yeah.

G: Like, we want to know what the students also think about it because…

I: Absolutely.

G: As teachers, we think that’s the best thing we’re giving them.

I: Yeah.

G: But what do they think?

I: That’s right.

G: So, will you be willing to send a survey to your students, an online survey that I design?

I: Sure, sure, absolutely. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Um, and as I said, they’ve already done some reflection on that, too, so I don’t know … I don’t know how I could get you that, um…

G: Yeah.

I: Because they control their Wikis, but we could pull some of that. Like one of them I just … I could … Wendy and I co-teach this class. You probably will hear similar stories from her.

G: Yeah.

I: This is her first time teaching it, and some of these projects were made by this … I helped co-create with this woman named Heather Hare, who is not at Mason any more…

G: Oh.

I: But she was. She and I co-created the Twitter project and a bunch of stuff, so, so I know she’d be excited to share stuff too, like I feel like some of this is her kind of proprietary, but she would…

G: Wendy?

I: Heather, who’s not here. So, Heather and I created this class and taught it last year, or two years, for two years and then this year I brought Wendy on board and then Wendy’s going to go teach this at Arlington.

G: Um.

I: So, we’ll have two sections of the course, one in Fairfax and one in Arlington next year.

G: The 400 course?

I: Yeah, the 400 course.

G: Oh. Okay.

I: Because it’s become really, really popular so we have 36, which is a lot for a New Century College class.

G: I know.

I: So…

G: That you’re popular, because everybody tells me your name.

I: Well, we have fun just teaching it together. Wendy and I are good friends personally, so we have a good time. But then she’s going to be able to go and be her own unique self with it, too, so…

So, yeah, I’m happy to show … I would say I have to check with her, but I can’t imagine she would … and she’s talking to you anyway, so I think that’d be more than fine to send the survey.

G: Yeah?

I: Yeah. And if you want to, like I said, I pulled up one of the tests from one that I really want to share with you.

G: Yeah, please.

I: Just … and again, this was just something I pulled up because Wendy was having a bad day and I wanted her to share, but…

This student wrote … Here’s my… So I keep it … let’s see. She wrote, “The most effective class I have done has challenged me in ways a test never could. It pushed me to think and learn not only about course content but about myself. Because of this project, I will be more of a risk taker, and this project could change the rest of my life.”

I mean, you know, so they’ve all done this reflection about Twitter, so I asked them, “What reaction did you have to using Twitter? How did the tweets work or not work for you in the form of self-awareness? How about as a way of exchanging information with classmates? As a way of sharing encouragement?” And so they all wrote these little paragraphs, so I don’t know if you’d rather have the survey or whether … Like, we can cut the paragraphs up for you and send that to you.

G: Yeah.

I: Then you have 35, you know … This person obviously was a fan. “It was a great form of communication. Without Twitter, I’d have no idea what other people were doing or how the professors responded. I liked reading other’s risks. That spurred me to continue my own risk taking. Um, as a class we were able to respond, encourage and make each other laugh.” That’s a … Humor is another good part of social media.

G: Yeah.

I: Twitter, “I’ve told all my friends how Twitter is a great tool for class communication and even wrote about it in my senior portfolio.”

G: Wow. Can you share, like, everything, all the good and bad?

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So what I’ll have to do is get their permission, right?

G: Yeah.

I: ‘Cause they own their Wikis.

G: Right.

I: So that’s all posted on their Wikis. Um, so why don’t I just … I can just…

G: Is that a lot of work for you?

I: I mean, it would be. I have to grade stuff anyway, so it would be easy to go through and just, I could just cut this … I won’t give you the whole thing. I’ll just give you that paragraph about what do you think about Twitter. Would that be helpful?

G: Yeah, very helpful. Plus, we can match them with their responses…

I: Ooh.

G: With the surveys, and see what also they wrote there.

I: How are … So, how are you going to, um…

So are you going to ask them their names? Or I could ask them…

G: No, no. No names. I don’t need names.

I: Okay.

G: It’s anonymous. I just want the course number so that we know they're your students…

I: Gotcha.

G: Or…

I: So you can generally match. So you don’t need me…

G: No.

I: ‘Cause I wasn’t going to give you the names of all … I’ll just … Okay.

G: No names.

I: So, I’ll tell them that I’m going to anonymously cut and paste their answers to that into … and to you, and then you can sort of read the ranges and then you can look at the quantitative data. Yeah?

G: Yeah.

I: Okay.

G: Yeah, if that’s possible.

I: And then survey link.

G: Yeah.

I: Great.

G: That would be Great

Thanks for your time.

**Interview 4: Allie (Interview notes)**

It turned out that the recorder did not record the interview, so I wrote everything I remember from the interview.

1. She is teaching 2 courses this semester. The first course is an advanced research course in the Phd program and it meets face to face, and the other one is a hybrid course and it’s EDIT 590 and it meets face to face 3 times a semester. In the 590 course, it is more like an independent study due to the reduced number of students (6 in total).
2. The professor is using Wikis within Blackboard this semester in the 590 course. She is mainly using it so that 5 of the 6 students collaborate to review each other’s research proposals and give each other feedback. Also the wiki is used as a communication tool with the professor who in turn gives them feedback on their research proposals. The professor also tried to use Twitter in this course but the students seemed to be resistant to use this tool. The professor thinks that the students’ older age is the first barrier and the second is barrier is that they are special education teachers and they don’t want their students’ parents to follow them on Twitter and know about their personal lives.
3. Wikis are a course requirement whereas Twitter was optional. The students refused to create a Twitter account. Wikis are part of course requirements because the students have to post their artifacts their and give each other feedback there. So it is a collaborative space for them. The professor chose these tools, first, wikis create an order for files and students can use it as a repertoire of their artifacts and they can visit it any time to reflect on their growth. The professor also chose twitter (but students disagreed to use it) because of its immediacy. She could get instant updates from students especially when the class number is large. Blackboard does not have this affordance of updating faculty on students’ postings. The professor also finds blackboard discussion boards as boring because they are very formal and students feel forced to participate in them. Whereas in social media communication is more immediate and informal and it creates a relationship between students and the teacher which might be absent in an online course.
4. A copy of the syllabus will be provided by the faculty.
5. The professor does not see a difference between classes in which social media as opposed to classes in which social media is not used. The reason is because she teaches face 2 face and blended courses so the experience does not compare in types of course delivery. But the professor thinks that the students learn more in an online course and they learn more when they collaborate through blackboard wiki. The professor think that wikis can help students learn more because they can come back and look at their progress and give each other feedback.

**Interview 5- Haley**

G: Okay. Okay. All right. So, um, basically my research question is how are faculty members using social media in higher education and how effective do they perceive these tools as enhancing their students’ learning? So the first question is what are the courses that you’re teaching this semester?

I: I’m teaching one course that’s targeted for juniors and seniors that’s on leadership and change. I think you met with Julia and we’re co-facilitating that course. There’s that one. The other course I’m teaching is really interesting. I’m, I’m… Not by design, this isn’t typical but I’m also teaching a leadership and community engagement course that’s targeted for freshmen. So I’ve got seniors and freshmen in the same semester with the same topic which has been really interesting. Um, so in the … as you know, in the leadership and change course we had a Twitter assignment that was really interesting. And the, um, the freshmen level leadership and community engagement course, I’m doing something new with them where I’m having them blog together, so they are all posting to the same blog and then responding to each other. So I’m trying to continue the conversation outside of the classroom by having them discuss it in that context.

What’s interesting in that class, the um, that class is connected to a living learning experience so all of the students in that class also live together in the same residence hall floor. So, and the RA, the residence assistant that lives on the floor and helps the resident hall staff is also my teaching assistant in the class. It’s a very connected, and the community in that class is stellar. Like by the first day of class – like you didn’t have to do like introductions, they already knew each other. They’d been up all night talking, you know, for several days and they’d spent their weekends together doing social things. So they are a very, very close community already anyway. What was interesting about that class is they also started before fall classes began, and these are freshmen – they started their own Facebook group. So they were already using social media to connect as a class which was really interesting.

Something that I loved is that the second week of class when we sort of started introducing the topic … Like you’d get beyond all right let’s introduce each other, let’s look at the syllabus we’ll get that out of the way. The second week of class we sort of introduce how do we look at leadership and how do people look at it differently, and I saw on a Facebook group a couple of posts that people like ‘I’m still thinking about class today, do you guys really think that, blah, blah, blah. So.

G: How did you see that? Do you post?

I: I’m on the group. They invited me to the group as well.

G: Oh. So they have the group and then your – it’s not…

I: They invited me. I didn’t start the group, no, and I don’t know who did but somebody in the group said let’s have a Facebook group for everybody on our floor and they invited everyone, included me. So I joined the group so I can see all their chatter which is also really interesting. When it’s stuff like we’re all going to South Side to eat at six, anybody who wants to join us can come. Does anybody want to go to the mall with me, I have to ride the bus. You know, like, I will go to the bus stop at six if anybody wants to go with me. So I can see all of that, but mixed in there are very – I mean students who self-selected onto a floor where they are interested in community engagement and leadership, so I can also see the other things they are posting. Like oh, stuff about voting. Oh, there’s a great speaker tonight on homelessness, I’m going – it’s at six if anybody wants to go with me. You know like oh, I’m in the student organization that’s packing food baskets to send to Sudan, who wants to go with me? You know, so they are all engaged in these things so they use the Facebook group to invite each other to go, which means that since I’m on it that I know they are doing these things. So I can weave that into class so when we’re talking about getting involved in the community I can say, so who did go to that Sudan thing?

G: Wow.

I: What was that about. So I can …

G: So dynamic.

I: Yeah, it’s great. The whole living learning program is great in concept anyway, but the social media aspect just makes it so that I’m just so much more in the know about what they’re doing. So it’s been, the Facebook part has been great and that was not part of the course design. But, and I’m able to use it.

G: Right, so part of the … Course requirements, the course requirements are using Twitter and…?

I: Twitter is for the other class.

G: Which is you and Julie.

I: So I thought since you had already talked to Julie I thought you and I could mostly talk about my freshmen class.

G: Yeah, sure.

I: That we’re not using Twitter, but … So the Facebook group they started. Um, what I do as an assignment I created a new blog, which for me I have wanted for a long time for our center to have a blog. Um, so that, just to try to start to foster a dialogue in a way that you know we haven’t been. It seems like you have the event and you have a great conversation and then everybody disperses. You know, I would love to have a way for us to keep talking about it and for people who couldn’t come to get on and see - wow, that one looked good, I’m going to the next one. Also the students that go on these trips for Spring break, for them to have a forum where they can say … Because they have really powerful reflection discussions. So for them to come back and say here’s a photo and I had this, I really struggled with this, I’m not sure we did any good there or can you make an impact in a week. For them to have a place to say that. Like a forum.

So I’ve been wanting to have this blog for a long, long time – but a) it got back burned and b) it was hard to imagine how it would you know get something behind it. You know, like you can create a space but you can’t get students to come on and say something, you know. So this course came along and I just kind of thought you know this would be a great way for us to try to get this blog going. So the blog itself is actually the center’s blog, but we’re making … We’re tagging it by categories so that if people are posting because they went on an AB trip, they can categorize for that, and if they are posting because they went to an event. If they’re posting it because they are required to for this class, they tag it for that.

So right now, 99 percent of the posts and the commenting chatter are from this class, because they have to. But I’m hoping that that starts a critical mass and students can go on and see other students posting, so the students when they came back from Winter break … We have two trips going for Winter break this year, so I’m hoping to be able to show those students, look at this blog that already exists. Other students are posting, you guys should do this so they know you’re here to. It’s not just an LLC out there, we have AB. Kind of like a point of pride. So I’m hoping that it will help us to use social media for learning about community engagement and all the different pockets that we have and not just this class because they are required to.

Um, but the way that I set it up is that they need … They do five posts through the semester, every other week and I put them into teams so that one week team A is posting and team B is responding, and the next week team B posts and team A responds. So they have to comment on at least three of their classmate’s posts, and I had some, you know, I had this discussion about what a comment is. Not just yeah, good idea, me too, I agree. Like it has to be sort of substantial, like I had, you know I had an experience like that to, it was, you know, it was like this. Or I see what your point is, but don’t you also think that … You know, sort of like evidence of why you agree or evidence of why you disagree.

G: Right.

I: Any personal example or connection to … Um, so their posts have been good to. Um, so yeah – so that’s been going through the semester. I, since the students were self-selected into this floor and into the class and they had their own interests in community engagement, and it’s my first time doing it, I went into it saying you know you already have your own interest in this. So I didn’t want to put any parameters around like, your first post will be about this topic and your second post will be about this topic. I was just sort of like just post about what you’re thinking about. And that was, the jury is still out for me.

A part of me is like I can see some posts that were really, really interesting that because I didn’t confine them to what they can post about. You know, there was one student whose parents are Nigerian so she was posting about you know, this is what’s going on in Nigeria right now and, you know, like, so community engagement thinking about globally and thinking about the things that you do here that affects people that you don’t know, because you’re not thinking. So she posted about that and that was interesting, and I kind of feel like that would not have come out if I had made – you know, post about community service that you have done before, or whatever. Or you know post about how you see yourself as a leader. But on the other hand there also is, it’s kind of tough to read through because they are really – they are about all kinds of random things.

And I think it also would be interesting to say this week, let’s all post about … You know this week in class we talked about x, let’s make all the posts about x. I can see advantages to that too, so I’m sort of wrestling with that part of it. But yeah, I do think it serves to you know extend the conversation beyond just the hour I have with them in the classroom. So they are still talking with each other about the academic topic throughout the week and not just when I have them, so for that purpose it’s definitely met the goal I had for it, so …

G: But, do you ever ask them to say read something and post reflections on what they have read also?

I: That’s what a lot of them do. The day that I introduced the blogging assignment, I actually had a faculty member here – what is his name? Now, if you don’t know his name … Doug Ireman? Yeah. Doug Ireman. Do you know him? He is in … He’s a rhetorician, but all of his work is on online, on rhetoric in the online space. There’s actually … He’s the … One of the … On the editing board on a national journal on online rhetoric and teaching online rhetoric. So he is really, really knowledge so he came in and did a great, hour long presentation you know with powerpoints that had tons and tons of examples of what blogging can look like. And he gave them a great structure, he told them to be brief and he told them to use visuals and he told them to link everywhere, like the whole point is not to have one written piece but to have a piece that – you should have hot links throughout to link people around to what you’re saying.

G: He’s an expert in blogging …

I: Yeah, so he taught them how kind of. As much as you can in an hour – I mean he has a whole course on blogging, so he just …

G: Really? Here at GMU?

I: Mm-hmm. We have a minor in online journalism, so, I think that’s in the com department. So he’s in the English department. So we have lots of folks that are … We also have a … As soon as I started looking into this to find guest speakers and people that could help me figure out how to do this, um, all of this stuff at Mason that I didn’t realize was here …

G: I know. And now I’m learning from you, I didn’t know there was someone, an expert in blogging.

I: Yeah. We actually, the com department actually has several folks that are teaching social media for things like PR and advertising, because they have a great PR thing, so they definitely have social media courses related to PR. But yeah, blogging as a journalistic avenue, they have a whole area in that. So anyway, so he gave them a great structure where we had types of blog posts, and that was one of them. So one thing that you can do, that people do, is they find something else online, like some other post another blogger has made or an article in the news, or something that’s tre … You know, some stupid video that’s trending, you know. Link to that and then write about that, so that’s one.

Another option is to tell a personal story, and he was great with weaving in what theirs would likely be. So like say you go this, you know, packing sack lunches for the Sudan event – tell about that, and then connect that to what you think about … Like is that, like what you think about community engagement and the leadership role in that and is this helpful? Is this making change or is this supporting people in … You know is this direct service that makes people more comfortable in their poverty or is it changing poverty, you know. Other issues that we’ve been wrestling with. Sort of evaluating the events they go to in light of what we’re talking about in class. So that was another option.

But he gave them like all these different, a structure, you know, and that was super helpful. I don’t know if it’s because that was the first on his list, but what most of the students did in the first round was found an article and link to it and wrote about it. That was the method that most of them chose.

I’ve been blogging too, and my first one – so I saw what they were doing and I was like well I need to do something different, so I can show them that that’s okay. So I posted a video, I think my first post was a video. There was this school that did a, they were trying to encourage students to vote, and they did a Gangnam Style video where they changed all the words to be about voting. It’s all these dorky teachers and librarians going vote, vote, vote. Wow. (Laughs) Yeah, so I posted that. Again, do you plan to vote, if you were sort of on the fence about whether voting was important, what’s the role of videos like this. It was more about trying to make voting cool so that the people who are voting are more comfortable saying yeah, I vote. Like, what’s the point of a video like this, is this effective, you know. Because clearly they had good intentions but it was also clearly a lot of work. So it was just like well what do you think about this video. That was another piece that Doug was really great about, like explaining to them what success is in a blog. Like if you write a paper, you’ve got a good grade, done. But in blogging, success is well who got the most comments, right? Like, are other people taking your post and posting it on their blog. The success in a blog…

G: Following you.

I: Yeah. So he tried to explain to them that like what achievement means. Again they are self-selecting into a leadership class and many of them are very achievement-oriented. He was helpful in that he framed it in terms of what you’re shooting for here is the most people putting your post on their blog, and people commenting. Like the person with 15 comments clearly did better than the person with two. You know, that was really helpful too because now when they post, they’re really careful … The ones that are achievement-oriented are really careful about always saying so what do you think friends, is it A or is it B. They are framing it in terms of, have you ever had an experience like that? Post it in the comments. You know, they are very much seeing this as the one with the most comments wins, so they put that on the comments. Which is great, because then that gets the comment stuff flying around, which is awesome.

G: Yeah. Which is the purpose, the whole purpose of blogging.

I: Right. It’s a conversation and not a, you know sort of statement to the masses. They definitely, having him help kick us off was definitely good because it started them out on doing this really well.

G: I haven’t thought about that before, because I’ve used blogs before but I never thought about asking a guest speaker to talk to my students about how to blog. I did the research and I told them these are examples.

I: Right, here’s what I’m looking for. Yeah, yeah.

G: Let me just make sure that this is recording. Yeah, I think it is but I just want to make sure

I: (Laughs) It’s so funny how many options we have. I’m working with a faculty working group on student and undergraduate research, and it’s a campus wide effort that they are trying to engage more students in undergraduate research. So there was a grant that we got to support that and one of the ideas that folks had for how to spend that funding was to buy the students iPad minis because they could make notes and record. I was sort of like well fun gadgetry is always fun but really? We’re going to spend thousands of dollars on iPad minis when we can just use what we already have available to be checked out. But whatever. It gets students excited about…

G: Because….

I: Of course I love doing focus groups or whatever.

G: It’s like they are playing with the latest tools, mini iPads.

I: Yep

G: It’s nice. So you’ve probably talked a little bit about the purpose of using blogs in your class. Um can you elaborate a little bit on it and if you can also tell me about Twitter, why you chose Twitter? You and Julie.

I: Similar issues, similar issues. Well for me, I think I have multiple reasons. The first one, like in terms of thinking about trying to use social media in any class in general, for me I’m always just interested in having students have this on the brain. Have the content, like the topic of this class, I want them to have it on the brain more than just like I said the hour that I get them inside the classroom, or the time that they are writing a paper or reading, like I want them to be … Maybe it’s because of the topics that I teach. If I taught something else I might not care. But the whole thing about leadership and leadership development, there is a mindfulness aspect to it, right? You have to have lenses and everywhere you go, we want them to start seeing interactions with other people and seeing interactions in groups with a leadership lens. We want it to be on the brain.

You can go and do a meeting or go into a classroom or have a small group project that you’re working on and it’s really easy to just not be mindful and just do it. But to do it and also be watching it and also be watching the dynamics, oh, like those two – that person is not saying a word. Does that mean they agree, or does that mean they disagree, you know. What? Nobody is doing anything to pull them in. We’re just letting them not engage. You have to be aware of the process and that’s a huge, huge part of leadership development, developing that constant awareness. So if you’re going to learn that it takes practice to just get to the point where you don’t have to remind yourself to pay attention, you just always do, you know. So it takes practice, you’ve got to, we want students to be thinking about this stuff all the time.

If we talk about interpersonal communication, if we talk about non-verbal we want them to be watching for that now, in your real life. Go out and watch for this, it’s everywhere. So for me that’s a big part, that’s probably the biggest chunk of why I wanted to be doing this, because it keeps it on the brain more than just the hour that I have them in the classroom, right. So …

G: You mean with blogging?

I: Yeah, yeah. So if they’re going on to, they’ve got their computers on anyway, so if they click over to the blog just to see if anybody else has posted, then that’s leadership – so they can see, so somebody else read this news article and saw community engagement in that – oh, okay. Like right, that’s true, that’s true. Like seeing how somebody else sees … And somebody else is like oh I went to this event, or I was working on this group project and I heard somebody say oh, well that seems sexist. You know, so like oh – I wouldn’t have triggered me but it probably was sexist. All of the things that we want them to be sort of paying attention to, if they can have – like they’re seeing other students do it because of this assignment. So you get done reading that and you look around you’re like … Then you go and have lunch with somebody and you’re paying attention. You’re thinking, you know you’ve get that in your head so you’re paying attention to the discussion and you’re thinking about it in terms of any of these leadership topics, right?

G: Right.

I: So yeah. I just want them to – it’s just more of an opportunity for them to be having it on the brain, and seeing leadership everywhere they go. Or any of the topics – you know we talk about diversity and we talk about connecting with other people and interpersonal skills and you know. Using their strengths, like I want them to be thinking about that in all the different contexts that they are in. They go to their job, I want them to be seeing it there, you know. So that’s my main thing, and that was completely what that twitter assignment was about. So we were trying to get them to do a personal change. If you’re trying to do that, you’re trying to develop new habits, you can’t think about that twice a week in class, right? So it was sort of a daily check in. Like oh right, I’m trying to remember to have more gratitude in my life, have I done that yet today? You know, so if you have to do a daily check in. That’s what that was about. So there’s your own daily check in, but since it’s on Twitter, you’re getting everybody else’s, so it was like oh that’s right. Oh that’s right, I changed projects. Oh that’s right, I changed projects. Just sort of that, for a three week period, that you know multiple times of day having that reminder of oh, that’s right, I’m supposed to be trying to have more gratitude. I mean that’s, you know, that’s going to help that goal.

G: So that’s what … That assignment was only for three weeks?

I: It was a three week period where it was that every single day they needed to be making a post. So again like so if it was twenty five students in class, so they’re seeing – that’s a lot of traffic for a three week period. So yeah, we don’t ask them to do the whole semester of daily … Yeah.

G: Okay. What was the students’ responses when you told them that you are using Twitter in class that semester?

I: Um, it was interesting. Twitter seems to be something that is just now reaching this demographic. Even a year ago, to say, we’re using Twitter they would have been like, I have to learn this new thing? Whereas this year, maybe not a full half of the class, but a third of the class at least was already tweeting, like they already had an account, right? So their issue was, uh, if you’re going to follow me I don’t want you to follow everything I’m saying, I just want you to … So for them we were like well you need to think about – are you going to, you probably want to create a different account for this class because we don’t want to follow all the other things you’re tweeting necessarily. Like oh, I got drunk again last night. Like, I don’t want to know that.

So this year was the different issue was some of them were already tweeting so they had their separate account for the class. Whereas in previous years, the issue was, well nobody’s using this, nobody knows how to use it. We had to teach, you know there was some resistance to having to learn another kind of online communication technology. So that part I see a shift. With the blogging it was well, you know, I was about to say with the blogging it was the same issue but there were far fewer, there were – I would say a handful. In a class of 25 maybe five who already were blogging. That I found interesting, right?

G: Five.

I: Yeah, just…. For freshmen? I don’t know. I was impressed. So there’s a woman that is American, grew up in Las Vegas but her family is all immigrant and she … I’m trying to think, she has an interesting positionality in terms of social identity. She’s a Muslim woman. Oh, I know, she’s a Muslim woman but her family had spent several decades in Germany. So they immigrated first to Germany and then to the US, so she has this wacky German accent but she clearly, you can tell she’s Muslim when she walks in the door, you know. But she just speaks with a German accent, it was really odd. So that’s a salient issue for her, so she blogs about being a Muslim woman in America and a freshman. I don’t know, I thought it was really interesting. The other bloggers are like blogging about clothes and stuff – like I have a fashion blog. Okay.

G: Oh, so you have like – you’re talking about your freshman? So sometimes they blog about topics that are not …

I: Not on the class blog. I’m saying like when we introduced this what was their reaction? I had five students that shrugged and were like sure, that’s easy. Then I had 20 students who were like we have to what? I don’t know how to do that. You know, so I had to show them, you click here, click here, start writing. If you want to make a link, like we had to show them how to do it. But for those five students they were like, you know, right. I feel like as time goes on we’ll get a little bit less of the students that are like, I don’t know how to do this. Umm …

G: Time, like blogging and tweeting, requires extra time.

I: Mm-hmm. But I feel like – I’ve certainly adjusted the other assignments accordingly, right. So this is – I know that it’s different than just saying I want five papers, right? To be expecting them to get on there and respond to each other’s, it is a lot more time than just saying I want five papers. Um, and the other pieces, having them, what I think has been a residual success is the writing. Because when you tell them, I mean their expectations about, you know, in terms of length if nothing else, about what is a quality paper is there’s a whole lot of filler in there, you know. So like I want a two page paper, you get about a half a page of real content and the rest of it is lots of, lots of filler. So when you tell them you have to keep it above this, nobody wants to scroll, right, so this is going to be really short, and you can use … You know, put in cartoons, put in a photo, put in a drawing, you know.

I showed them a great, there’s a really cool blog that I found that a person blogs every day an index card with just drawings on it, right? A lot of it is graphs, you know, like a great one is sort of this graph of how much you know to how much confusion you have. It’s sort of like, when you don’t know anything you’re very confused, and then you know some amount and you’re not confused, and then you know even more and you’re even more confused. Right, so it’s things like that, sort of very simple, in a snap shot. She literally takes a felt tip marker on an index card and takes a picture of it and posts one every day.

G: Does she write about it?

I: No, this particular person. She’s not in the class, I was just showing them, I was trying to show them examples of what … Like, how much length is okay? So I was trying to show them examples of it, you don’t have to write anything. Right?

G: And you’re okay with that?

I: Well, if it’s something like that that’s clearly thoughtful, like if they came up with like you know what, the more you know the more you get confused, even though, like … That’s a really thoughtful sort of commentary on, you know … So if it’s something that’s that thoughtful, and they can convey it, I don’t think you need to write any more. I think you’ve just conveyed something pretty complex. So yeah, I mean that was something that somebody else made and they linked to it, then yes they need to write something about how they see that connected to the class. But if they came up with it, I think you’ve made your point, right? So I’ve been trying to … So anyways, so for them to sort of learn how to convey their ideas in a brief, brief way, their writing actually gets a lot better, because they realize that it actually is harder to write in a short space than it is to go on and on for two pages when your thought really is about this big.

So that part’s been a good piece too – I see their writing getting better. Their early blogs were too long because I think they were just used to quality being about how long it is. So.

G: Oh. Interesting.

I: Anyway, we were on purposes. I tend to go blah, blah, which is not helpful for your note taking at all.

G: No, no, I’m just learning new things from you.

I: The purpose of this for me is A) it’s about like for any class generally it’s about trying to have them have this on the brain more than when I have them. But for this class it’s about leadership and community engagement, so we had one day of class where we talked about engaging in discourse as a form of civic engagement, which I do believe that it is. So that part of it, I feel like you know getting them so that they know how to be a blogger, and they know how to give the comments that you know aren’t polarizing the discussion, that are civil, you know – I disagree with you, but I’m not going to haul off and call you an idiot. Like learning how to do that is important too.

So we’ve talked about if you want to create change in an issue, like the first thing this generation thinks of is doing community service. They’ve had service requirements in high school and everybody told them, to get into college you have to show that you’ve done volunteering. I don’t know where they get that message, but they do. Um, so their first thought is anything that’s important to you, animals or the environment, or poverty – their first go to is well we should do some community service thing. So we talked about, does that … That certainly helps the people that you’re serving, but have you gotten rid of poverty issues by doing service? You know, like so we talk about what you really want to do to make change, we need to learn about policy and we need to learn about capitalism and we need to learn about … and once you know it you need to educate others. So awareness raising as an important form of civic engagement, educating the public as an important form of civic engagement, if you really want to make change.

So we talk about all of that, so engaging in a forum that is public. I mean so far I don’t think we’re getting a lot of viewers from outside of the class, but it is, it’s not closed. It’s something that anybody can go onto.

G: Yeah, your blog is public, right?

I: Mm-hmm, and it’s public for that reason. If I was teaching a class for a different topic I might make it closed because that would, you know, for whatever people’s comfort level is. But for me, this is part of the point … Right, like learning to do this in a forum where anybody could see this, so you think about you know like how to convey your point in a way that doesn’t turn people off, but actually engages them in thinking that maybe you might be right. So learning how to have political discourse in a way that isn’t, you know, so polarized. You know, all those sorts of things. So that’s part of the course content, right, so that’s another big reason why I’m having them do the blog.

G: What tool do you use for the blog?

I: Um, right now I’m using On Mason. So it’s Wordpress, right, which I also like because when they get out there in the world they also do Wordpress and they’ll be able to do that. Um, I’m in this, uh, there’s a faculty learning group that’s doing, we’re learning how to do self-study. Have you heard about this?

G: Yeah. There’s also seminars with my professor, and I’m doing interviews for her course and for another study I’m working on.

I: Okay, so you already know this self-study group.

G: Yeah. Well, she recommended you, because I was looking for participants, you know …

I: Oh good. And she knew because of this, because of that. Got you, got you. So what’s emerged, at least in my small group, we have the critical friends group. What’s emerged there is interesting. I’m the only person there that’s not using Blackboard for all of this stuff. Um, because Blackboard does have a wiki and it does have a blog and it has all of those things, but I guess for me I’m hoping to build skills that you know, once students graduate and they get out there, you know employers are fully expected this generation to know how to do all of this stuff. You know, like we’ve got this young new graduate, let’s have them make a web page for us. You know, and if they’ve been using Blackboard all this time, Blackboard isn’t an environment that exists outside of higher ed, right? Whenever I’m, I actually don’t use Blackboard for anything. I use Wiki a lot but I always use Pbworks or, there’s some other …

G: Are you using Pbworks this semester?

I: Um, we use Pbworks for the leadership and change class that Julie and I do together, yeah. There we’re using it in kind of a wacky way, because they each have their own, and it’s where they’re posting all their assignments.

G: It’s not interactive?

I: It’s not a collaborative thing. But in other classes where I’ve used it, I’ve used it for collaborative note taking. I have a real issue with, in NTC we don’t really lecture. So it’s all based on like in class activities and discussions, so if the students haven’t done the reading, it’s sort of like you just have to wait for someone to say something interesting, nobody did the reading so you’re going to wait a long time. So really, really important that students have done the reading and you know … It’s a frustration that, so the wiki thing, a friend of mine sent me an article about having students get into small groups. The same small groups the whole semester and they do collaborative note taking on the readings, on the wiki. So they all do the reading and then post like here’s what I found to be the most important aspects of this reading. So as a group they have a summary of their thoughts. So they do that on the wiki collaboratively, so when they show up in the classroom they’ve already done that much so we can get rolling, and I’ve had really good success with that. It’s been good.

G: But this semester, you’re not doing …

I: No, because we’re not … It’s just a different, I mean yeah, the leadership and … The freshman course, there’s not a pile of, it’s not really heavily based on responding to readings. I mean I’ve given them some things to, readings to ponder, but it’s much more been experiential, so they’ve been doing service projects and they, you know, we took them on a bus on the weekend to do a beach cleanup and … They built fencing to keep the beach from eroding, and anyway. So it’s been much more experiential so we’ve been discussing those sorts of things in the classroom. It’s not been reading heavy, so I didn’t do the wiki thing for that class. Um, then the leadership and change class, we’ve talked about actually doing it next time we teach this, having them do … Collaborative note taking on the wiki. Right now we have an assignment where for the critical readings that are taught so often, they are the ones that students don’t read, we already know which ones those are. So for those, we’ve had, you know, get on to your own wiki and post your notes and answer these few questions about the reading, and they have to do that before they show up in class. But again, that’s not in a collaborative, it’s just on their own. So we’ve talked about whether we want them to do a collaborative note-taking instead of individual, but …

G: Okay.

I: So this semester I’ve not been using wikis. Anyway, the point being that for the, Blackboard has a wiki function and it has a blog function but I’ve been having them use Pbworks, I’ve been having them use Wordpress. You know, whatever I’m doing I’m trying to have them do it on stuff that’s like free for anybody to use so when they get out there they’re not dependent on this platform that doesn’t exist anymore, so …

G: So do you mention these, like, the blog and Twitter and everything in your syllabus, or…. It’s mentioned? It’s clearly stated?

I: Yeah. Obviously it’s an assignment, so …

G: Yeah.

I: When I list the assignments it’s like all right, so blog posting … Yeah.

G: Do you mind sharing it with me? If I want to include it in my study? Because I’m trying to look at different assignments and how they are used, is that okay?

I: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

G: Thank you. And, so can you tell me … Can you think about a course that you have taught without using social media, and how your experience was different or similar to these courses that you’re teaching now with social media.

I: Mm-hmm. Um, let me think about it. I’m trying to think – my brain instantly goes to the courses I taught at my last institution, but it would be a better comparison to think here. Um, okay my first semester here I didn’t, but yeah since my very first semester I’ve started … So, actually I can think of a direct. It’s not about any of the courses that I’ve talked about yet. Um, I teach, well I used to teach the introduction to non-profit studies course, and one of the assignments that they have in there is to work in small groups … They get into small groups and they need to create a new non-profit organization and … They, so we spend the first part of the semester really speaking about their passions and you know, what are the social issues that they’re interested in so we can put them into groups that align. So there’s always one or two environmental groups and there’s a group that looks at poverty and often a group that looks at animals, so you get those people to sort each other out and find each other.

So, you start out there and then they have to choose a specific topic that their organization is going to address and research it so that they know, you know what other organizations are addressing this issue and what do the experts know about how to address this issue and what are the challenges. So they do their research first, and then the rest of the class is sort of, each class you look at different facets of the non-profit organization. So we look at your board. How do you choose who’s going to be on your board. We look at volunteer management, we look at budgeting and finance, we look at fund raising. We look at you know all the different pieces. Um, so each week we talk about, you know we have the reading and we talk about managing your volunteers. All right so what to do next week, is how is your organization going to handle volunteer management. So they are doing it as a small group.

So the first semester I taught it, they gave me a big fat binder at the end that had a section for each of those. Right, so here’s our organization, here’s the section on all of the research we’ve done, here’s the section … So it was a binder. So what I found was, so students … this requires students to get together in person, which is tough, right. I mean we’re, a lot of them commute to campus and there’s most in higher ed. So, you know, so to imagine these students – so you envision the students sitting around the table and going well how we’re going to fundraise? You know, that didn’t happen. They didn’t want to meet again outside of class. So essentially what happened, and it was very obvious, was that, you take fundraising; I’ll take volunteer management, right. I’ll write the budget, everybody disperses, they put their sections in, and here’s an organization.

So it’s very disjointed, right, and not at all what the assignment was, right. The assignment was for each of you to think about all these issues in a real context. Instead, I didn’t think about volunteer management at all, I just did the budget. Right? So what the wiki has allowed me to do is actually … They don’t … They probably still don’t meet in person, but they are all touching on each of those issues. The very same class, but instead, the class created each small group had a wiki. So instead of sections in a binder, there was a page for each of those, right. So here’s our page on volunteer management with links, and here’s our page where we found ten organizations that also address this issue, links to all of them.

So yeah, I came up with three, you came up with three, you came up with three – oops, we came up with the same one, we’ll have to find a different one. And since it’s in a wiki I can go onto the page history and I can see every single one of them posted pieces, and I know that they didn’t just hand off different sections to different people – this was a collaborative effort on each of the topics, like I wanted it to be. Um, so yeah. There you can see a definite improvement, in terms of the goals that I wanted for the assignment and the wiki helps me with that.

G: Yeah. So do you feel that social media has an impact on student’s learning, is that right?

I: I think that … It has to be designed intentionally, right. Like I think it’s one of those things where … and I talked to other faculty, they’re just not into this and I really don’t … I’m evangelical about it to the people that I can hear their course goals, and I can be like oh, if you used a wiki that would help, you know. But for people that are … You know like Andrew next door hates all this tech stuff. And I don’t think Andrew should start using tech stuff, just to do it, you know. I feel like, you know, if you don’t see it connecting to you …

G: Text?

I: Tech. I’m sorry, IT.

G: Oh.

I: Tech right? So I don’t think it’s something that should necessarily be pushed on faculty that, you know, I don’t think it’s something that should be sold, right. I think it’s … You know …

G: But do you think it helps students learn or it’s like same experience for students?

I: No, I definitely think it helps students learn, but I think it helps students learn because it’s something that’s been intentionally designed to do so, you know what I mean? So like you take somebody who is not into using IT and you tell him, well you’ve got to start doing it now. If they design their assignment exactly the same … You know, like look at the, take the blog example. If you’re like right now you have students write five reflection papers and instead somebody says we’ve got to start using online stuff. Okay, so you have to do five blogs, and they don’t change any other aspect of the assignment. I don’t know that that would be a benefit to that, right?

G: But the design of the assignments should be more …

I: You know, I think the design of the assignment needs to take advantage of what social media can do. But if you’re using it in exactly the same way than no, there’s probably not any benefit at all. If my students were just writing five reflection papers and posting them to a blog instead of what I’m asking them to do which is truly a blog, like link around, comment on each other’s stuff – and I can tell them, once the first round of blogs is done, if you want your second blog to be in response to somebody else’s first blog, awesome. Right? So they love that too. And that’s not something that can happen if you just say five reflection papers. Except for post them on a blog instead of typing them. Right?

G: It’s the interactive nature.

I: Right, it’s not just that you’re using social … It’s not just the platform, it’s the design of the … The platform allows you to design the assignment differently, and that is what I think enhances student learning.

G: Okay. So you were just talking about an experience you’ve had with a class where you did not use any social media and where another class where you used wikis. So do you think students in the class in which you used wikis had a different learning experience than students…

I: Yeah, definitely. Definitely.

G: Do you think they learnt more?

I: Umm, well yeah, certainly because … If, like I say, if I do the assignments such that the assignment is intended to make you think about all these different topics we cover in the class, the assignment is intended to make you think about budgeting and volunteer management and your board and what you … And in practice you really only did the part of the assignment that was about the budget, well then you really didn’t think … I mean maybe you thought deeply about volunteer management the day we talked about it in class, but you never really had to apply it, you never really had to wrestle with what does this look like when we’re talking about saving the parrots? You know, like it’s sort of, it’s different. You don’t have to wrestle with well, is the random volunteer office really going to know anything about parrots? Right, like so you have to think about all those things differently when you’re thinking about it in a specific context.

So the fact that I can say this is my, it is my goal that you think about all these things so I can look on the page history and I can know how much of this you contributed to, and how much, you know … So all of a sudden they know that I can check on those things so they are having to do all those pieces that before they didn’t necessarily have to do.

G: Okay. I think, yeah, you answered the very major question in my interview. Um, and do you think students are seriously committed to these kinds of assignments on social media? Do you think they put a lot of effort, or … Do they take it seriously?

I: That’s the interesting … Um, you know there’s variants. There’s well, but what I think is interesting is that in my experience in a way it targets different students. Like students that are, I mean students that are comfortable with it, like the ones that already were blogging are the ones that, maybe they’ve never done it before but they get on and they see it’s not as hard as they thought, it’s all here for you. You just click here and click here, like I don’t have to know html. As soon as they get on and they clicks for them, yeah I think … There are some students that really … They engage in the class differently than they would have without it. I can think of, like several, like I can name names of students that in the classroom rarely say a word. Like if you ask them, what do you think they will speak up but they’re not going to jump in there. Um, but you get them on a blog or on Twitter and all of a sudden it’s like kaboom. Hello, nice to meet you, and it’s like – there was one particular woman in the Twitter assignment that I don’t know if I could tell you what her voice sounds like.

She doesn’t speak up in class at all, but as soon as, and she always sits in the back corner, you know – it’s like I can visualize her back there in the class. Um, and I, it’s really easy to assume that she’s that student that’s like not really into this, but had to take this class and she’ll survive this semester and never think about it again. It’s easy to imagine, like you can make assumptions about that student that doesn’t really engage in class. Then the twitter assignment started and she was tweeting like two or three or four times a day, and they were … It was like hi, really, like nice to meet you. And all of a sudden it’s like yes, she actually really is interested in this, you know. And I did not see that, I did not see that in her at all, you know. So all of a sudden, you know, so she’s engaging in this and now all of a sudden, the other students are responding to her. So, I don’t know, and in the other class that I’m teaching I can see that too. Like there’s a couple of students that, when I meet with them one on one, you know, they have all kinds of energy but in the class they just don’t. Yet we have a lot of really boisterous people, people who I self-identify as leaders. We’ve got a good handful of them that won’t shut up.

There are some other folks that are quiet, but see themselves as change makers maybe, I wouldn’t put the term leader on them, you know. But they are passionate about the issues that they are passionate about, but they are not the person that wants to stand up in front of the room and lead the meeting. So those are the ones where the blogging assignment has been a great forum for them, because they are like all right, here I am and I’m going to be bold in a way that they would never be in the classroom. So.

G: Interesting. So as you’re talking about students, the next step in my study is to try to understand or explore students’ perceptions on using, about using social media in the classroom. Would you be interested in sending an online survey to your students?

I: Sure. Yeah, yeah, I would love them.

G: To try to see what they’re thinking about these blogs and your class. Because for Twitter, because your co-teacher was … You’re teaching the same class or different sections?

I: Same class, same class.

G: Okay. Julie, I talked to Julie and she was okay to send the link to her, to your students. So is that okay if you send it to your freshmen students?

I: Yeah, absolutely. Is it okay if I see it? Because for my self study, that would be really helpful.

G: Sure, sure.

I: Awesome.

G: Thank you, that’s the end of our interview.

I: Love it, yay.