

**THE DIGITAL BRIDGE: ENACTING THE
GLOBAL IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA COURSE**

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Abstract

Developing and teaching a course that involves the use of digital technologies, such as mobile devices, tablets, laptops, and iPods, can be a daunting task. The additional requirements of constant in-class activation of these devices for in-depth research on the widespread application of global social media could be a difficult challenge. However, the promise of this innovative technology when linked with a solid pedagogical approach can provide multiple beneficial outcomes. First, the study of global social media permits a deeper view of world cultures as well as a concise understanding of one's place in the world. Second, the active learning and discovery methods employed through research opportunities reflect current best practices of teaching and learning. Third, individual and group course assignments allow students to effectively work with new digital literacy tools, such as social media sites and weblogs. Finally, the planning, implementation and assessment processes required to implement a globally oriented social media course into a collegiate environment can be integrated across numerous disciplines.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present and to discuss the implementation of a college course designed to assist students in understanding the global influences and regional uses of social media. It provides an overview of course design elements, teaching aspects and student online research techniques. The paper is intended to suggest an approach that can be considered for other college courses that use social media tools to examine the impact of Web 2.0 technologies.

College classrooms abound with students who have always known the Internet in their lives. Labeled as Digital Natives (Prensky, 2001), they seek rapid access to entertainment, engage in mediated communication and search for information with new technologies, such as mobile phones, tablet computers and iPods. They appear to seemingly multi-task and master new software with apparent ease even in educational settings (Junco, 2012). As a digitally literate generation, they see technology as commonplace and a central part of their environment and lifestyle (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005) and prefer challenging opportunities to discover information (Howe and Strauss, 2000; Tucker and Courts, 2010). As part of their connected lifestyle, Digital Natives join and enjoy social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr.

More specifically, their academic needs and learning styles are wide-ranging and increasingly changing. Digital Native students prefer technological learning opportunities that feature both individual (Kraus and Sears, 2008; Lambert and Cuper, 2008) and collaborative experiences (Tsay and Brady, 2010; Lo, Johnson and Tenorio, 2011).

To some degree there has been, however, an historic disconnection when Digital Native students are faced with the systematic, non-technology infused, teacher-centered pedagogy of Digital Immigrant faculty (Schmidt, 2012). While more than 90 percent of surveyed collegiate faculty (Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane, 2012) claim that they are aware of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Blogger, some instructors are, at first, fearful of introducing a technology-based exercise in which they have scant expertise. Yet, Digital Native students hold high expectations that colleges offer courses infused with technology and provide multi-media savvy instructors who can relate to them, inspire them and integrate new technologies into meaningful instruction (Sheperd and Mullane, 2010). Kvavik and Caruso (2005) reported that 40 percent of students in an EDUCAUSE survey listed they preferred instructors to make at least moderate use of information technology as a course requirement while 27 percent wanted extensive use.

An increasing amount of recent studies on student expectations reveal significant interest in the employment of social media as class assignments. In a Pew Internet and American Life study, Smith, Rainie and Zickuhr (2011) found that undergraduate students reported positive experiences with new and engaging technologies when employed as tools needed for the completion of assignments. While many students rate faculty knowledge and subject expertise as the most crucial elements in learning (Umbach and Wawrzynski, 2005), multidisciplinary student expectation studies suggest that Web 2.0 technologies enable a stronger comprehension of subject material and provide a wider range of content that can be more concisely analyzed (Jones, 2010; Bowen, Burton, Cooper, Cruz, McFadden, Reich, and Wargo, 2011).

Despite the Digital Immigrant labels, a growing number of college professors are seeking innovative, meaningful and relevant ways to both improve and enhance classroom instruction (Moran, Seaman and Tinti-Kane, 2012; Tess, 2013). According to Moran, Seaman and Tinti-Kane's (2012) recent study, 41 percent of college faculty under age thirty-five used social media in their teaching while 30 percent over the age of fifty-five used it. This increasing level of implementation, moreover, can result in a discovery of new methods and applications that enable both the student and the teacher to learn and grow. This approach is critical to improving college teaching as conveyed by Sternadori's (2012) study that surveyed 359 university journalism and mass communication professors who featured either Twitter or weblog assignments in their instruction. Sternadori discovered that the inclusion of social media as course tools lead to "enhanced communication between faculty and students" which prompted higher semester grade point averages and positive student evaluations (p. 8). These findings follow the work of Tiryakioglu and Erzurum (2011) who asserted that the use of social networking in teaching improves student problem-solving skills and increases faculty credibility.

The literature abounds with multiple studies that show how good teachers employ realistic and relational assignments as the best methods to propel learning, promote effective teaching and evaluate outcomes (McKeachie, 1992; Ornstein, 1993; McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Shafer, Epting, Zinn, & Buskist, 2003). A blending of fundamentally established instructive assignments with the focused use of Web 2.0 technologies, such as

social media, can yield a fresh approach for teachers. This point was supported by Guy's (2012) extensive review of how college teachers implement social media within instructional practice. Guy found that social media was often used to support faculty lectures and enhance student discussions in project-based collaborative online venues. Furthermore, the melding of learning actions with the increasingly familiar technology tools of today encourages an engaging environment for learners. This environment is extremely fertile for the inception of a new course.

But why would the study of global social media be so important to American college students? According to a TNS Digital Life research study (2010), global media consumers spent more than five and one half hours per month on social networking sites. This usage extends beyond physical borders. Global social media users provide detailed access to areas and events that traditional media cannot cover (Cottle, 2011) and they can reveal first person insights about native cultures. Increased awareness and knowledge about globalization and its mediated aspects has been urged for both the education of students and teachers as relevant 21st century skills (Zhao, 2010).

More critically, global awareness is a pivotal goal of modern learning as today's students are called to process and reflect upon information in new and more meaningful ways. This "information literacy" skill set, as described by Waycott, Bennet, Kennedy, Dalgamo and Gray (2010) in their study of college Education majors, engenders the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively information for global endeavors. Information literacy has developed a "global recognition" that supports "everyday tasks,

lifelong learning and successful engagement with the local and international community” (Carmichael and Farrell, 2012: 2). Additionally, the need for cultivating globalization topics in higher education courses relates to both crucial citizenship qualities and career opportunities. In her study of small private U.S. universities that feature specific courses that address international news and global issues, Lisosky (2011) stated that global efforts in American higher education have a two-fold purpose that include an improvement of the knowledge and skills to function adequately in an increasingly intense global environment and to “sensitize U. S. students to variations in cultural similarities and differences, which contribute significantly to students’ critical thinking abilities” (p. 20).

This worldview is accentuated by the mastery of communication technologies that can be used for the deep research of other cultures. For example, Beise (2006) incorporated social media weblogs in a Global Information Systems Management course that focused on researching how social media are used by businesses in other nations. Moreover, social media as research aids are increasingly being adopted and accepted in academia (Bouwma-Gearhart and Bess, 2012). Nackerud and Scaletta (2008) suggest that weblogs are especially useful as “forms of academic production “ and as “a vehicle for scholars to become public intellectuals” (p. 71). Mortensen and Walker (2002) confirm that “to blog is an activity similar in many ways to the work of the researcher” (p. 250) where a mass of data are filtered, selected for relevance, commented upon, analyzed for significance and connected to research themes. Using and mastering social media in a process of studying how others employ social media is a 21st century skill that is very beneficial. Various empirical studies (Kanagavel and Velayutham, 2010; Parameswaran, 2010) have

shown that the need to teach and research the global influences of social media are growing due to the rapid use of digital devices and Web 2.0 applications in international business, tourism and politics. Careers and the digital devices of commerce are converging in ways not imagined only a few years ago. More importantly, the “culture of connectivity” (Van Dijck, 2013) promises a dynamic evolution in an “online ecosystem embedded in a larger sociocultural and a political-economic context” (p. 9). In essence, the study of global social media helps us learn about our future. It is a digital bridge that extends our understanding of own future and that of other world citizens.

The Global Impact of Social Media course:

The motivation to create a course that extended the technological and worldview abilities of college students formed the rationale for the inception and design of the JDM 405 The Global Impact of Social Media (GISM) course at Ashland University. The fundamental intent of designing a course that studied the global influence of social media was to move students beyond their areas of comfort and into a new realm of knowledge. Another desired goal was to increase students’ comprehension of the internal and external applications of Web 2.0 technology within diverse countries and cultures that could potentially both broaden and deepen perspective. A potential outcome might accent learners’ abilities to communicate with others on a global scale to expand values, attitudes and beliefs about other cultures. In this respect, the course could function as the framework of a digital bridge---one that spanned cultural awareness and linked learners to increased and varied methods of social media use.

GISM was designed to serve all student populations as an upper-division core elective and as a global focus Border Crossings course. A link to definitions of Ashland University Border Crossing courses can be accessed [here](#). The course design called for an overview and examination of social media's history and how it changed the way society and individuals communicate on a global scale. The course's intent was to focus on relevant media and cultural theories in order to better understand how social media shapes and restructures interpersonal and mass communication on a global level.

Andrews and Varenne (2011) stated that learning a new technology, such as computer tablets or smart phones, is not as critical as comprehending the technology's methods and impact upon individuals and groups. This concept fueled the reasoning that social media's impact could be more important than the mastery of any Web 2.0 technology and it required deeper academic inspection. As part of the course content, students would actively engage in the use of social media as part of the learning process and conduct their own empirical studies of global and cultural social media usage. The assessment phase would center on tests, research papers, a collaborative research project, and a capstone project of social media's impact upon a specific domain within another country with a presentation of findings.

The student learning outcomes for the course were as follows:

- 1) Describe what qualifies as social media and demonstrate an understanding of its history and evolution in global society.
- 2) Demonstrate an understanding of how social media has changed the way individuals communicate with each other.

- 3) Critically evaluate how social media has influenced business, education, politics, news, advertising and information dissemination and consumption.
- 4) Effectively use social media to communicate on an interpersonal and mass communication level and demonstrate how this communication is different from traditional communication channels.
- 5) Demonstrate an understanding of how to apply empirical research strategies to conduct a social scientific study of social media in another country and its effects on that society.
- 6) Critically ascertain how social media impacts regional and national cultures by assessing both historical and current contexts.

Implementation of the course

During the first meeting of the class, students were asked about their uses of social media. The responses elicited further questioning on their understanding of global issues and how social media fit into the exploration of those issues. Subsequent discussion led to an initial examination of both cultural and media theories that helped to explain how social media could both reflect and report culture. It was important to introduce historical, social and cultural issues to give a context to the subjects that would be researched. During the first two weeks of the class, instructor-led lectures and online search strategies were the primary components of the course. This intent was to provide a solid foundation of rich theories and proven research techniques that students could refer to during the research and analysis phases of the course.

After the grounding of cultural, media, research and technology theories was instilled, a concerted effort was made by the instructor to enhance the analytical ability of GISM students by employing strategies tailored to active learning. This preparation was included to shift the class from domination of teacher lectures and toward more experiential learning activities. One such strategy was inquiry learning. Inquiry learning develops when “students are presented with a problem and some suggestions and tools for finding the answer to that problem” (Neuby, 2010: 5). This strategy also serves as a powerful counter to the passive learning environment established by the traditional teacher-centered lecture format. One such inquiry learning technique used in the GISM course was a 60 Minute research report. Students were asked to search the Internet for three different ways social media are used in education. They were to synthesize the data to fit a central theme and issue an in-class report of five minutes at the end of the research period.

Another measure employed to avoid the teacher-centered mode and develop strong student autonomy was the employment of student-owned mobile technologies during class sessions. GISM students were asked to bring their mobile devices, computer tablets and laptops to each class meeting. More specifically, they were urged to turn on and use the devices during each session. By intent, the digital tools were a prime component of this course and essential for research study. The rationale of this act was clear---Digital Native students were comfortable with their personal technologies, the course centered on the applications and outcomes of social media and the pedagogy shifted from instructor-

dominated lecturing to student experiential learning. This approach produced “an expedited, holistic learning experience” (Huang, 2009: 1).

The initial graded inquiry learning experience for the students was centered on a critical review of a Facebook page. Facebook is the world’s most popular social media site and most of the GISM students had individual Facebook pages. They were, however, unfamiliar with accessing social media with the intent to ascertain the viability, strengths, and shortcomings needed for conducting a deeper and more effective research endeavor. To assist their understanding of advanced social media research techniques and assessment outcomes, each student was given a general checklist that displayed key elements from an instructor-led Facebook analysis. The in-class analysis served as a model for students’ subsequent research. The pedagogical importance of modeling was to provide essential cues and create a foundation for research discovery methods that would be used on each course assignment. Students then selected a Facebook site, used the basic checklist, modified and developed additional evaluation criteria, wrote a research report and reported on findings during an in-class presentation.

The Facebook analysis demonstrated a clear focus on learning research outcomes rather than performing mere techniques which were paramount to both teaching and developing the digital mind (Jones, Harmon and O’Grady-Jones, 2005). The identification of emerging patterns in this exercise revealed a few key qualities of social media literacy, such as changing cultural norms, the perception of mediated information and the production of ideas.

During the inaugural semester of the course, the Facebook research assignment produced a few studies that related to familiar topics---friends, social organizations and popular entertainment. While purposeful and enlightening, the scope of their projects did not fully expand the knowledge of Facebook's international impact. However, a greater amount of students produced studies that encapsulated a broader range, such as Facebook's use for a variety of nations' government, business, religious, tourism and political domains. In course evaluations, a majority of students cited that this project helped them find their ground on introductory social media research techniques and that they employed knowledge learned here to more efficiently research subsequent assignments.

This experience permitted a stronger, and more detailed, analysis of social media's global influence. It prepared students for the next phase of the course that involved the creation of a blog based on the research findings of small collaborative groups. Moreover, the Facebook research project promoted critical thinking attributes, as shown by students' in-class research presentations and course evaluation statements. Critical thinking is a central component of the pedagogical outcomes within higher education (Behar-Horenstein and Niu, 2011). Teaching students critical thinking skills builds confidence in both individual and group endeavors. Critical thinking abilities assist the development of responsible citizenship and global awareness qualities. Essentially, it generates careful evaluation of complex issues and permits objectivity and informed reflection (Burke, 2011).

A social media research assignment was used as an introductory information-gathering element for the subsequent global social media project. This component was installed to keep students on a focused path toward information-gathering and propel a discovery of unique global social media types. The project called for a full-scale evaluation of an international or regional social media application, such as Twitter, Ren Ren, Weibo, or Orkut. Students selected a topic from an instructor prepared list or they were permitted to add an international site that was relatively new. After the selection phase, the instructor provided a model of information-gathering techniques and displayed a few regional sites for review and ascertainment. Students were given two weeks to research and write reports about the nature and applications of the sites. Specific detail was addressed as to how the social media services related to various disciplines (education, commerce, communication, entertainment, politics). Data relating to the inception, history, site intent and intended users were collected and evaluated. This discovery of information about these social media sites provided an archive of data about the national orientation, the specific focus and the utility of each site. The archive then could be used as a foundation in conducting further research for the small project team assignment.

The next inquiry learning experience required the formation of small project teams that would research how social media were used in a specific country or region. The domain focus could be very specific (Social Media as Entertainment in India) or very general (Social Media Use in Europe). The teams would produce a social media blog site that would visually, aurally and textually represent the scope of the study. The projects were

evaluated on the following criteria: Organization, originality, technical quality, research depth and diversity and communication effectiveness.

Designing and implementing collaborative projects in a collegiate setting can be very problematic. Installing collaborative teams in a class constituted of diverse academic majors, who tended to be strangers, was daunting. How to form bonded teams that could effectively communicate and share workloads was a paramount question. The answer came from another course assignment. To promote engagement during class sessions, the required text, *The Digital Divide* by Bauerlein (2011), offered excellent articles on the pros and cons of the Internet and social media. Students were required to read assigned chapters and complete a brief Discussion Points analysis. At the beginning of the next class meeting, students offered their observations regarding the article. This served as an effective transition to the topic lecture. Not only did this exercise birth well constructed, insightful and elaborated concepts, it also enabled students to learn about the interests, beliefs and comprehension levels of classmates. By listening and observing others in the early semester Discussion Points class sessions, students vetted classmates and gravitated to peers with shared interests and abilities. This self-selection process made the task of team formation much easier and quicker than expected. They were now ready to collaborate, research and produce their global social media blogs.

Weblogs as global research sites

This section explores the role of weblogs, or blogs, as a valuable class assignment platform for the establishment of a global research effort. Blogs are popular social media

sites that allow for descriptive multimodal digital narratives complete with an archive of autobiographical writing, video, audio, still images, and hyperlinks. A study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr, 2010) found that 72 percent of American young adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine use social networking websites while 15 percent of this group maintain a personal blog site. An EDUCAUSE study reported that nearly 28 percent of college students are bloggers (Salaway and Caruso, 2007). Many college students, therefore, hold a working understanding and relationship with social media and blogs. Yet some of those students have little training regarding the myriad possibilities, such as information gathering and research collation, of the technology (Head and Eisenberg, 2010).

Weblogs are increasingly useful learning tools with comprehensive curricular applications. These pedagogical blogs (Pimpare and Fast, 2008) effectively work in numerous disciplines, such as political science, art, history, business and communication studies. Beyond the apparent utility of blogs within an educational technology curriculum, the multi-disciplinary role of academic weblogs has immense potential (Larsson and Hrastinski, 2011). In this capacity, course-related blog projects can increase digital fluency (Huffaker, 2005).

As noted in this paper's Introduction section, blogs are useful tools for conducting academic research. They are portals that provide in-depth, rapid, extensive and interactive capabilities. Kjeliberg (2010) posits that blogging for research purposes supports creativity and provides a feeling of being connected to one's work as a

researcher. In their study of research blog assignments used in multiple undergraduate courses, Halic, Lee, Paulus and Spence (2010) conclude that a student's use of blogs for research purposes increased retention, supported reflection, built a sense of community and prompted collaboration.

Students need to be literate in Internet and digital technologies to work in a globally connected environment. Web 2.0 technologies, such as social media, are rapidly becoming the standard means for international and work-related communication. To enhance this point, the act of blogging informs idea generation and propels multiliteracies that help students in research creation skills, such as organization, information gathering, writing, audio-visual acuity and evaluation. To this end, mastery of social media research is good professional preparation.

The GISM collaborative research and individual global social media projects required a digital home to serve as a repository of findings. The powerful yet versatile qualities of weblogs were well suited for this dynamic. Research (Abbott, 2010) suggests that a student's use of digital technologies such as weblogs presents a valuable venue for creating, sharing, storing and accessing course assignments and a helpful guide (McCoy, 2012) for instructor evaluation.

The creation of multiple projects, both group and individual, for the course needed to be both economically efficient and easy to master. Blogs were low or no cost alternatives to having a personal website. With Blogger and WordPress, no fee for a domain name was

required. Moreover, this open source toolware was designed for those without advanced web design or programming skills; yet, each software company provided quick set-up, ample professional look templates and intuitive menu displays.

Students were required to set up a weblog site, design a professional look from provided templates, create text posts, devise and generate multiple relevant still images and hyperlink to sites for additive content. The projects were evaluated on content, quality, clarity, depth of research and organization. An important feature was to stress the scholarly value of effective research and how the site could add to the body of knowledge regarding social media's global impact.

It was essential to devote class time to explaining the process of creating weblogs and reviewing some excellent examples. As a practice, students were asked to find a weblog site, review its basic components and report on its attributes. Further class time was allocated to the reexamination of essential research components, the electronic adaptation of research findings and the process of creating concise summaries. The remainder of in-class time was delegated to the laboratory phase of individual student experimentation with the software and the eventual planning and execution by the research teams. By using these learning sessions within many classes, the students acclimated to the software's capabilities in a swift manner while efficiently planning, designing, delegating responsibilities and researching. The instructor offered help when solicited, however, students asked fewer questions once a mastery of the software was achieved.

The GISM course featured a structured timeframe for project deadlines. The course design called for multiple achievement mileposts during the semester. At the quarter semester mark, all students needed to form teams for the group research project. During the midterm week, students selected topics for the social media research assignment. At week 10, topics were finalized for the global research project. When the semester was at week twelve, a working blog with hyperlinks to one's region of study, a blog title and a few posts relating to the topic served as the focal point for a student and instructor critique meeting. During the last week of classes, students presented their global research sites and findings to classmates and the instructor for additional feedback. The refined sites were then formally presented to the class during the assigned course Finals session.

Project Summary:

In course evaluations, a majority of students reported that the weblog social media projects, both group-oriented and individual versions, greatly assisted their knowledge both about other countries and social media research fundamentals. They felt that the sites facilitated a new way to look at research---one that was described as being “fun” and “enjoyable” to use. They stated that the discovery of new and unique regional forms of social media presented an opportunity to broaden their understanding that the Web 2.0 technology is much more than Twitter or Facebook. Furthermore, students expressed that the experience caused them to realize how much they did not know about other countries' use of social media and appreciate what they discovered during their research. In general, they described the impact of social media as “real, enlightening and important” to understanding how the Internet affects everyone's life.

In retrospect, the use of social media tools to research the impact of global social media permitted the expansion of student learning beyond the walls of the classroom, as students planned, researched, collaborated, wrote and learned about global activities. The selected student project sites listed below provide a cogent illustration of the effective introductory scholarly work produced in the GISM course.

For example, the movies and Latin America site described the multipurpose applications of social media in showing the role of Latin American film culture within a changing technological sphere. An overview chart of Internet users in Latin America was combined with multiple information graphics showing the amount of both Twitter and Facebook Latin America users to provide foundational data. This data gave empirical value to the research theme of a growing presence of social media in the industry. The design is uncluttered as it displayed easily readable headlines and subheadings that were pertinent to the topics illustrated. The hyperlinks fit the studied subject and provided unique and in-depth reports from primary sources. Since weblogs work in a reverse chronological order, the summary text is the first section read by an observer. This could be difficult to process for those grounded in the traditional linear path of introduction to body of work to summary. However, the non-linear design fits the model of Web 2.0 interactivity and reflects Digital Native information processing patterns (Minocha, 2009). One major criticism of the site centered on the lack of inclusion of a few empirical studies about Latin American film interest as a cultural phenomenon.

The experiential education realized in these sites was a valuable additive to each student's intellectual and personal growth. The semester-long improvement, as witnessed in first-person by this instructor, depicted qualities such as researching, writing, information analysis and social media technology mastery that can best be comprehended by viewing these final works. Of particular interest to faculty who wish to implement similar projects into a course is the integrated use of information graphics, videos and web links to support student textual summaries. This multimedia approach, with its blend of verbal and visual acuity, presents a useful alternative to conventional undergraduate written research papers and it conveys a method that can be integral to displaying modern college students' higher-level understanding of data.

Selected student project sites are provided here:

<http://egyptianwomensrights.blogspot.com/>

<http://finlandeduimpact.blogspot.com/>

<http://moviesandlatinamerica.blogspot.com/>

<http://eurososialmedia.blogspot.com/>

<http://mkrindia.blogspot.com/>

<http://australiansportsandsosialmedia.blogspot.com/>

Recommendations

Based upon the experience gained from this course, a few essential steps are recommended for implementing a similar version.

- Provide context of historical, cultural and social issues.
- Encourage the use of digital devices in the class.
- Design assignments that work well with the accessibility advantage of social media.
- Install active learning pedagogy into each class session.

First, an instructor should detail a comprehensive examination about the study of historical, cultural and social issues as a template for subsequent research. One does not need to be an all-encompassing expert on each area; however, a basic knowledge about global and regional history, how cultures are formed and maintained and how economics, education and politics influence societies is strongly advised. Second, encourage and employ digital device use in each class. This act will give flexibility in the selection of a classroom, as not all college classrooms are computer and Internet equipped. More importantly, it will allow the devices so familiar and apt to social media to be harnessed. Third, design a workable flow that coincides with active course assignments. In this manner, web-based assignments get completed and loaded to blog sites without problems. Finally, the instructor needs to create a solid pedagogy that first guides and then permits students to freely search and discover new knowledge. Thus, a teacher assists learning in meaningful ways and students glean information, gain new academic techniques and grow awareness at their own pace.

Conclusion

This article examined the key steps required for the enactment of a course that uses social media to study Web 2.0 engagement in other cultures. Examples drawn from this course served as both a foundation of pedagogy and a call to further inquiry. As the use of Web 2.0 technologies and digital devices becomes more and more prevalent in higher education, faculty can discover new ways to incorporate social media applications into the curriculum and ensure third millennium educational quality and relevance for students of all disciplines.

As professors, our role is to provide students with both the solid foundations of subject matter and the insight needed for critical analysis. Good teaching, however, does not live in a vacuum. Twenty-first century instructors must be adaptable in designing a curricular approach that embraces new forms of teaching and learning, such as project communication creation, opportunities for discovery and the fluid mastery of new technology. This blend of pedagogy and technology aspects propels a constant need for students to stay current, because current means aware and knowing. Teachers, moreover, should stay up-to-date with new instructional techniques and technologies because current means relevant.

Effective scholarship is paramount to learning. The importance of inquiry and subsequent discovery cannot be overestimated as a cogent goal for students in higher education courses. The use and mastery of new technologies, such as social media, lend credence to enhanced scholarship. In the Global Impact of Social Media course, students combined their growing research acumen with creative constructions of social media

sites. They became independent learners when they developed the ability to critically judge their own work and gauge the efforts of peers. They learned about others as they tested the communication innovations at their disposal. Here the digital devices often used for entertainment purposes became scholarly tools that constructed a digital bridge that increased global awareness and improved experiential understanding.

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