

PROMOTING AND SUPPORTING THE USE OF
SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN ENGLISH COMPOSITION

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Various free online tools are available to educators and Instructional Designers which can enhance English Composition courses. These tools allow students to develop their own websites to be used as digital portfolios. The production of these portfolios bolsters traditional content, student engagement, and authentic learning.

What problem is being addressed?

English composition at New Jersey City University, as at many universities, is an “an introduction to and concentration on the basic communication skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening” (p. 27, New Jersey City University, 2014). Due to inherent use of technology in the 21st century, digital literacy plays a role in the English composition classroom. There are opportunities for both faculty and students to incorporate digital communication tools and educational technologies.

What research exists on this topic?

College courses have seen structural changes in recent years as educational technologies became available. Over the past decade, “many [face-to-face] composition instructors have shifted their curriculum to attend to multimodal literacies” (para. 5, Bourelle et al., 2017). Even when social media is not the focus of the course, “social media dissemination of public writing” is a fact that probably deserves our focus in composition classrooms (para. 35, Warren-Riley et al., 2017).

Today’s students are experienced in many discourses – blogging, texting, posting to social networking sites, and generally using language in many different ways (Wardle et al., 2011). The “creation, consumption, and circulation of public digital media” is dependent on “an array of

literacies, literacies that we can and should cultivate in our classrooms” (para. 39, Warren-Riley et. al., 2017). Multimodal assignments bring academic focus, rigor, and critical thinking to these discourses.

Educational technologies allow faculty to engage students with class material using interactive tools and to facilitate multimodal literacy. This advancement also allows instructors to participate in student-centered educational activities in which the experience is modified to address specific learning styles (Lumpkin et al., 2015).

Active learning has also come to be an integral part of effective college-level courses. Students’ active participation in the learning community typically results in positive student outcomes (Romanov & Nevgi, 2007). Incorporation of active learning strategies, particularly in web-enhanced classes, has proven to positively affect the student experience. Social media integration into college-level courses, moreover, allows for opportunities for heightened student interest, greater group collaboration (MacDonald, 2005). Social media provides students an opportunity for public participation, and as McVey and Woods (2016) explain, “the organizational and deliberative capacities of social media allow for the formation of publics that are simultaneously temporary and durable” (para. 5).

Web 2.0 technologies, specifically social media, provide students with opportunities to enhance their academic experience by providing additional modalities to interact with their peers, their instructors, and authentic audiences outside of the classroom. Student outcomes are improved with these additional avenues for collaboration and support (Piotrowski, 2015).

Video integration in online educational settings allows students to build stronger relationships with their peers and professors. The incorporation of video enables students to express themselves and communicate with classmates in an alternative way.

What can be implemented to address these issues?

Interactions with free online video tools such as Flipgrid (www.flipgrid.com) allow students to record and share video responses using mobile devices or by webcams. The recordings can be embedded in learning management systems, websites, blog entries, emails or on the video tool's website. These video tools encourage students to interact with the instructor and each other in relation to the course content in alternative ways (Romanov & Nevgi, 2007).

A project was implemented at NJCU to utilize social media to enhance English Composition courses. As part of the class and throughout the semester, students worked to create a personal, professional website which serves as a digital portfolio to house their educational and professional work, showcase their accomplishments, and publicly record their aspirations.

Students were given autonomy when creating their digital portfolios. This provided them with the opportunity to customize their design and to highlight activities and assignments that offer evidence of meeting their learning goals (Roberts & Herrington, 2016). While being supported in developing their websites, students gained technical skills in addition to their primary learning objectives and coursework. The student-developed websites serve as a platform that can be utilized throughout their academic careers and into their professional lives.

Conclusion

Digital literacy is commonplace in our students' lives. Our task as educators is to harness the power of these digital outlets and the wealth of free online educational tools to create deeper student engagement and investment. The website (or "digital portfolio") is the perfect vehicle for this project, serving as a public, multimodal space in which students can shape and define a public, professional persona as they hone their reading, writing, and speaking skills. With these

improved skills, students will begin to build a powerful toolkit which will benefit them as they begin their careers or other educational endeavors.

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APPENDIX A

PROMOTING AND SUPPORTING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN ENGLISH COMPOSITION

This session will allow educators and Instructional Designers to collaborate on a project to incorporate digital literacy into a face-to-face English Composition class. We will model the use of free online tools for the development of a student-developed website as a digital portfolio and present research on how this digital portfolio bolsters traditional content, student engagement, and authentic learning.

What problem is being addressed?

English composition at New Jersey City University, as at many universities, is an “an introduction to and concentration on the basic communication skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.” But what are the basic communication skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening in the 21st century? What role does digital literacy play in the English composition classroom? And what opportunities do digital communication tools and educational technologies provide for students and faculty today?

What research exists around these questions?

We know that college courses have seen structural changes in recent years as educational technologies became available. Over the past decade, “many f2f composition instructors have shifted their curriculum to attend to multimodal literacies” (Bouelle et al., 2017). Even when social media is not the focus of the course, “social media dissemination of public writing” is a fact that probably deserves our focus in composition classrooms (Warren-Riley et al., 2017).

Today’s students are experienced in many discourses – blogging, texting, posting to social networking sites, and generally using language in many different ways (Wardle et al., 2011). The “creation, consumption, and circulation of public digital media” is dependent on “an array of literacies, literacies that we can and should cultivate in our classrooms” (Warren-Riley et. al., 2017). Multimodal assignments bring the academic focus, rigor, and critical thinking to these discourses.

Educational technologies allow faculty to engage students with class material using interactive tools and to facilitate multimodal literacy. This advancement also allows instructors to participate in student-centered educational activities in which the experience is modified to address specific learning styles (Lumpkin et al., 2015).

Active learning has also come to be an integral part of effective college-level courses. Students’ active participation in the learning community typically results in positive student outcomes (Romanov & Nevgi, 2007). Incorporation of active learning strategies, particularly in web-enhanced classes, has proven to positively affect the student experience. Social media integration into college-level courses, moreover, allows for opportunities for heightened student interest, greater group collaboration (MacDonald, 2005), and public participation and deliberation within writing studies (McVey and Woods, 2016; Parks, 2012; Portman-Daley, 2010).

Web 2.0 technologies, specifically social media, provide students with opportunities to enhance their academic experience by providing additional possibilities to interact with their peers, their instructors, and authentic audiences outside of the classroom. Student outcomes are improved with these additional opportunities for collaboration and support (Piotrowski, 2015).

Video integration in online educational settings allows students to build stronger relationships with their peers and professors. The incorporation of video enables students express themselves and communicate with classmates in an alternative way.

What did we implement to address these issues?

Interactions with free online video tools such as Flipgrid (www.flipgrid.com) allow students to record and share video responses recorded on mobile devices or by webcams. The recordings can be embedded in learning management systems, websites, blog entries, emails or on the video tool's website. These video tools encourage students to interact with the instructor and each other in relation to the course content in alternative ways (Romanov & Nevgi, 2007).

With this research base, we implemented a project at NJCU to harness the power of social media in English Composition courses. As part of the class and throughout the semester, students worked to create a personal, professional website which serves as a digital portfolio to house their professional work, showcase their accomplishments, and publicly record their aspirations. Students were given autonomy when creating their digital portfolios. This provided them with the opportunity to customize their design and to showcase accomplishments that offer evidence of meeting their learning goals (Roberts & Herrington, 2016). The student-developed websites (a first for nearly all of our first-generation student body at NJCU) serve as a platform that can be utilized throughout their academic careers and into their professional lives.

In this session, we will discuss how we developed and implemented this project, what obstacles and challenges we encountered, what tips we can offer to other educators, qualitative and quantitative data about the success of the project, and concrete, step-by-step directions for how to enable collaborations between instructional designers and faculty teaching composition on your campus.

How will participants work collaboratively to prototype a meaningful solution to a particular problem using design thinking?

After being provided with an overview of best practices for engaging students with course content by incorporating free online digital technology tools and sharing our qualitative and quantitative data about our project, participants will be placed into groups for hands-on practice. Step-by-step instructions will be provided to the participants as a guide for:

1. Created a free website on www.wix.com with an existing template.
2. Creating placeholders for various components.
3. Incorporating a blog tool to the site.
4. Embedding a video created with a free online video creation tool.
5. Embedding student-created professional social media feeds.

What is an applicable deliverable with which participants will leave the session?

Participants will leave this session with a website they can use as a sample to showcase for faculty and instructional design teams who wish to implement a similar project. Instructional Designers and instructors will be able to facilitate similar exercises in order to web-enhance their own courses by following the best practices and procedures which were followed in this presentation. Participants will leave the session with a website (i.e., Digital Portfolio) including: a personal introductory video, an embedded professional Twitter feed, a resume placeholder, a professional growth plan placeholder, and a space dedicated for a professional blog.

How will the session assist participants to identify emerging trends in educational technology and their potential uses?

Digital literacy is a commonplace in our students' lives. Our task as educators is to harness the power of these digital outlets and the wealth of free online educational tools to create deeper student engagement and agency. The website as digital portfolio is the perfect vehicle for this project, serving as a public, multimodal space in which students can shape and define a public, professional persona as they hone their reading, writing, and speaking skills.