

More instructors using social networking as teaching tools

Instead of forbidding its use, teachers have found a way to incorporate social networking in the classroom.

Facebook and Twitter are a daily part of most students' lives and some faculty members have been using these sites to teach and communicate with students and alumni.



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REPORTER

Rebecca Wall, an instructor in the English and Foreign Languages Department, said she attempted to use Twitter for her online Grammars of English course fall 2009.

"A blog I read suggested using Twitter to keep track of attendance for my online course," Wall said.

"I wanted to encourage students to spend time on class[work] and also know how much time they spent on class."

Wall said she tried out Twitter because Winston-Salem State's Blackboard was becoming a hassle and running very slowly. She said she would not see a use for Twitter for classroom courses and would not use it again for her online course because she experienced a problem.

Most students enrolled in Wall's online course were teachers from public schools. They tried to use the computers at work and found that Twitter was blocked.

Darius Cureton, director of the writing and computer literacy lab and instructor of English, said he uses Twitter and Facebook in his Freshman Composition I course. He requires his students to register for a basic Facebook account and join the course group. He assigns what he calls "Facebook discussion boards."

"I will normally post a current events topic and ask students to respond to it," Cureton said. "It usually

revolves around issues they may be facing or things that involve possible topics they can write their essays on."

Cureton began using Facebook and Twitter as part of a summer faculty development program called Web 2.0 Tools in the Classroom. Cureton said that he uses Twitter to remind students that drafts, essays, and assignments are due and alerts of class cancellations.

Social Network Terminology

Facebook -- free global social networking site that is operated and privately owned by Facebook, Inc.

Web 2.0 Tools -- tools that teachers could use to change from teacher-centered to student-centered or group-centered teaching with support of technology.

Twitter -- social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as tweets

Wiki -- web page that authors and users can edit.

Source: Wikipedia.org

"I thought that maybe by using social networking, I would have more in-class interaction with my students," Cureton said.

Although Cureton plans to use Facebook and Twitter in future semesters, he said that some students may be resistant because they do not want to bridge the gap between social interaction and academic success.

"They want to be able to post messages and notes uncensored but if they have to do it for class it forces them to be a bit more professional. Being professional sometimes isn't equated with having fun," Cureton said.

Dr. Carolyn Anderson is the associate director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Anderson said, "We do not encourage our professors to use these technologies [Facebook and Twitter]. We encourage the use of blogs and Wikis."

Scott Betz, associate professor of art, uses a Wiki in his introduction to art course. He said his Wiki will replace the textbook one day but now it has calendars, portfolios, demonstrations and assignments.

"It makes access to my notes easy for them [and] the links to free software keeps supply costs down," Betz said. "When one is not using up supplies, I believe there is more risk-taking and more experimentation."

Teachers have been using Facebook to stay in touch with alumni. Dr. Robert J. Cowie, professor in the department of physical therapy, is in contact with approximately 80 graduates of the Master of physical therapy program.

"I only started my network late last year," Cowie said. He said that 80 students is a significant total because the program has grown so much.

Wall also uses Facebook to stay in touch with English and Foreign Languages alumni. The group allows alumni to post what they have been doing, offer recommendations for graduate school, and allows Wall to update alumni about University and department events such as the Rams Write QEP.

But there is a caveat to social networking.

"Students and teachers should be very cautious about the information they put on [social networking] websites because everyone has access forever," Anderson said.

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