

## Presentation of: Teaching with Social Media in Higher Education

**Catheryn Cheal**  
**Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan**

[cheal@oakland.edu](mailto:cheal@oakland.edu)

NOTE: A version of this work was published in Cheal, C. (2011). Teaching and Learning with Social Media. *e-Mentor*, 5, 42. Warsaw School of Economics. <http://www.e-mentor.edu.pl/artykul/index/numer/42/id/892>

### Abstract

Teaching is still fundamentally about relationships (or should be at its best) in spite of current socio/economic movements to commercialize and industrialize all facets of higher education. Because of this, social media should have great value for teaching and learning. Since a majority of college students spend an average of more than 30 minutes a day on Facebook, (Stollak, Vandenberg, Burklund, and Weiss, Getting Social: The impact of social networking usage on grades among college students, Proceedings of ASBBS Annual Conference, Las Vegas 2011, 18:1.) it would seem that social media has great potential for engagement.

The latest in a series of surveys on social media by the Babson Survey Research Group and Pearson Learning Solutions questioned a random group of 1920 higher education faculty about their use of social media in teaching. (Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane, Teaching, Learning, and Sharing: How Today's Higher Education Faculty Use Social Media, Pearson Learning Solutions, Babson Survey Research Group, and New Marketing Labs, Boston, MA 2011.) Two survey results show the current extent of faculty use of social media and clearly show that social media's effectiveness needs more in-depth study.

Figure 1. Faculty use of social media in class and for student assignments

Faculty Use of Social Media	
Used in class	64%
Assigned students to read/view	42%
Posted content for class	30%
Assigned students to post	20%

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Figure 2. Comparison of faculty personal and professional use of social media by site.

	Professional	Personal
YouTube (video-sharing)	40%	49%
Facebook (net-working)	30%	57%
Blogs (webpage posting)	24%	21%
LinkedIn (net-working)	18%	22%
Wikis (shared file editing)	16%	14%
Twitter (micro-blogs)	7%	11%
Flickr (image-sharing)	4%	6%
SlideShare (presentations)	3%	2%
Myspace (net-working)	2%	2%

A fundamental problem is whether or not specific social media applications will promote student engagement and learning. Critics would say that there is little proof that using social media for teaching works. Because social media's popularity is so recent, teaching methods that use specific software applications are in the nature of pilot studies. But initial studies in a collection of studies from 20 faculties, using varied social media in different disciplines, show the following benefits that are each illustrated with one example. (C. Cheal, J. Coughlin, S. Moore, *Transformation in Teaching: Social Media Strategies in Higher Education*, Informing Science Press, Santa Rosa, CA to be published 2011.)

**1. Student perception surveys show positive feedback.** Guthrie from Florida State University teaches a leadership education course and uses YouTube assignments for video creation and reflection. One assignment asks students to interview at least 5 individuals about their definition of leadership. The students then made short videos from the interviews and uploaded them to YouTube. Although the campus media support office provided technology help, the majority of students had their own phones and cameras with video capability. Formats for the projects varied from a late night talk show to musical backgrounds to parodies. In addition to creating media, the students reflected on both their own learning and each other's work. Guthrie conducted a student perception study based on a survey with 12 course sections over 3 semesters (N=127) and 6 focus groups over 3 semesters (N=43), which demonstrated that students believed that YouTube assignments contributed to their learning experience. They appreciated the opportunity for interacting with the well-known video platform, the intentional development of a public persona, and the verbal and nonverbal communication opportunities for analysis and critical thinking.

**2. Increased quality of student work.** Smydra and Mitzelfeld from Oakland University, Michigan, adapted Blogger for an honors writing course, developing both personal reflection and public discussion. The authors used two types of blogs for course learning—the individual student blog for creating their own writing voice and a common course blog for developing community. The importance of blogs depends upon their public nature and the assistance they give the student to construct knowledge over time, which become subject matter experts. Public comments on a student's writing encourage re-evaluation and highlight writing as a process of making meaning jointly with one's audience. Smydra and Mitzelfeld have compared student work before and after using online blogging methods and found increased quality after the blogging assignments.

**3. Increased motivation.** Macbride and Hall from Emerson College, Boston, Massachusetts, described experiences using Facebook for specific role-playing assignments in an Abnormal Psychology class. Students become famous psychologists by creating profiles, images, notes, and status updates about their biographies and contributions to theory. High enthusiasm for the assignment motivated students to tackle the challenge of more difficult theoretical material and make extensive postings.

4. **Enhanced course content.** Nugent and Lindgren from Boston College, Massachusetts have helped students build a location-based web-service, *Walking Ulysses: Joyce's Dublin Today*, so readers of James Joyce's *Ulysses* can journey through 19<sup>th</sup> century Dublin with their smart phones. Like Homer's Odysseus, Joyce's hero is on a journey, so place is particularly important. Students collected descriptions of Dublin locations from 19<sup>th</sup> century primary texts. They then traced the journeys of the characters and embedded content as notes into Google Maps at the relevant locations. Using a small grant, the database of content was put into the open source content management system, Drupal, as the students outgrew their wiki. A JavaScript was written to enable users of the map to toggle between map layers of old Dublin and modern Dublin. A mobile interface, a walking tour with audio, text, and images for the relevant locations, was also built for users who were actually walking the path of the characters in Dublin with their cell phones. This is a remarkable project in which the students created their own learning and developed their own social media application for others. Each subsequent class continues building on the work of the class that came before.

5. **Better grades and learning outcomes.** Crabill, Youngquist, and Cayanus from Oakland University, Michigan conduct exciting research in reducing public speaking apprehension in Second Life, a virtual world. Because the fear of public speaking is one of the most commonly known fears, topping even the fear of death, it would be a benefit for students to acclimatize to public speaking by practicing first in a virtual world and then in real life. In a controlled study, 27 undergraduates in a public-speaking course participated in an experiment to present in a virtual world, inhabiting an avatar on a stage in front of other avatars seated in a coliseum. The students answered surveys that measured their communication apprehension, computer-mediated communication apprehension, and general technology use. Those who were nervous about speaking to a live audience, who did not generally relate to their audience for prompts, found speaking in a virtual world a less threatening and excellent place to practice. Exercises in this virtual world could systematically desensitize the apprehension of those students.

## Conclusion

Social media allows for student learning through collaboration whether with text or other media. Adapting learning in higher education from former lecture methodologies is not without problems, such as finding relevant assignments, taking the time for students to learn the software interfaces, and finding the right hardware solutions. But the possibilities of high student engagement and active learning through doing or constructivist learning validate the extra effort and time required to experiment with new pedagogies.

## Biography



**Catheryn Cheal.** After finishing her doctorate in Classical Archaeology at Brown University and her BA in Classical Archaeology at University of Michigan, Catheryn Cheal taught art history at California State University, Northridge from 1981 to 2004. She has numerous publications in her original field of ancient art and a book chapter, entitled "The Meaning Of Skin Color in Eighteenth Dynasty Egyptian Painting" was published by African World Press in Dec. 2004. She created and directed the Office of Online Instruction at CSUN for four years, which trained and mentored faculty, campus-wide, in teaching with technology. She moved to Oakland University, Michigan as Assistant Vice President of e-Learning and Instructional Support in 2004 to facilitate the creation of online courses and programs and manage all technology for teaching. A book chapter entitled, "A Taxonomy Showing Relationships between Digital Learning Objects and Instructional Design" was published in Summer 2006 by Informing Science Press and an article, "Second Life-Hype or Hyperlearning" in *On the Horizon*, Fall 2007. A chapter on "Implications of Open Source E-Portfolios" was published in *The e-Portfolio Paradigm* by Informing Science Press in 2010. She has co-edited a book about teaching with social media in higher education called, *Transformation in Teaching*, Informing Science Press, 2012