

eTools: Using Facebook in the Classroom

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Introduction

There are many technologies that are specifically designed for educational purposes. However, there are several general purpose technologies that may not initially come to mind when thinking of educational technology, such as social media. One such social medium that can be used for instruction is Facebook, which just reported that 1 billion people used it on August 24, 2015 (Zuckerberg, 2015)

What is Facebook?

You undoubtedly are familiar with Facebook because you either currently use it, have used it in the past, or at least have heard of it. Here is Facebook's mission statement:

Founded in 2004, Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them (Facebook, n.d.)

Nowhere in this mission is education directly mentioned. However, Facebook can be a powerful tool for education, and one of the most useful Facebook tools for education is a class Facebook group. This is a group that you create and either invite students to join or have students request access to join. Importantly, students do not

have to be Facebook friends with you to be part of your Facebook group. This is important information to tell them, as they often worry that you will be able to see what they post on their own Facebook page which, unless their pages are public, you will not be able to do.

How can I get Facebook for use in the classroom?

Very possibly, you are already on Facebook. And so are your students, which is one advantage of using Facebook for class. If you are not, you can create a free account at <https://www.facebook.com/r.php>. Once you have done so, you can create a group by (1) looking under the "Groups" heading on the left hand side of the landing page and (2) clicking on the "Create Group" tab. From there, you can name the group, set its privacy restrictions, and add members. Consider that you must add at least one member to initiate the group, but then you can choose to add other members yourself or let students request access to the group on their own.

How can I use Facebook in the classroom?

As an incredibly general social tool, Facebook allows for many educational possibilities. More specifically, Facebook can be used to:

1. *bring the classroom outside the physical and temporal limits of the classroom.*

Once a class group is created, it can be used to extend the classroom outside the physical location and the time that the course traditionally meets. For example, one use of a Facebook group is to post links to content relevant to class material as this material

is found online. The group also allows a space for students to respond to and discuss any posted items. Another possibility is that individuals from outside the course can be invited to participate in the class group. Whether it is a scholar from another university, a local businessperson, or a journalist, “outsiders” can help contribute to a class, and can help students realize that learning does not just take place within the classroom.

2. *use the space for exam review.* To do this, schedule a time and let your students know that you will be monitoring the page during this scheduled time. Students can then submit questions and get those questions answered. You can also ask students to use the search box located near the middle, right hand side of the group page to determine if the question has already been asked and answered, particularly if the course page has been reused from a previous semester. Another way to work this review is to maintain the page all semester, which enables students to post questions whenever they have them and have their peers answer these questions as they are posted. It is essential, though, that instructors check periodically to make sure any posted questions have been answered correctly as this will help decrease having to answer the same questions repeatedly.

3. *find examples for class discussion.* For just about any communication course, examples of Facebook posts can be found for class discussion and shared/discussed on a course group page. There are obvious ethical issues with sharing these posts directly without consent, perhaps, but these posts provide many examples for students to view

many communication concepts in action.

4. *create assignments*. As a communication space, there are a myriad of possibilities for students to learn how to communicate more effectively or to critique the communication of others. Whether it an assignment on how to make a message spread, critiquing an "apologetic" post from a company or politician, or thinking about how to compose an effective message, there are many possibilities for creating "real" assignments that help illuminate course content.

5. *conduct class polls*. A simple tool that Facebook provides is the possibility of creating polls or questions for students to answer. Under the group's photo near the middle of the landing page, there is a "Ask Question" tab. Simply click the tab, ask your question, and wait for answers to be submitted. This tool can be used both during and outside of class time.

Conclusion

Although not designed as an educational tool, Facebook provides many opportunities for educational use. One big disadvantage is that you likely cannot require students to join a class Facebook group due to FERPA policies. However, there is some evidence to suggest participating in a course Facebook page positively affects students' perceptions of their affective and cognitive learning (Bowman & Akcaoglu, 2014).

References

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