Teaching with Social Media

CTSI Website Guide

This guide provides an overview of teaching with social media at the University of Toronto. Its goal is to help Instructors:

- understand considerations around the use of educational technologies and social media in teaching;

- explore best practices for the use of a variety of social media platforms; and

- consider how to best integrate social media use into one's teaching.

Many of the considerations we take into account when using educational technologies also apply when we are considering using social media in the classroom. For a broad overview on educational technologies, see **Engaging Students Online** (http://teaching.utoronto.ca/ed-tech/online-learning/engaging/) and **Planning Online Learning** (http://teaching.utoronto.ca/ed-tech/online-learning/toolkit/planning/).

Note: See **U of T Guidelines on Teaching with Social Media** (see page 12), for more information.

The use of social media services and applications that are not supported by the University such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and blogging platforms such as Blogger, Tumblr, Medium, Squarespace, etc., must follow university guidelines and policies.

If you would like to use social media services and applications in your course that are not included in U of T's supported educational technologies catalogue, please review our recommended guidelines on the use of **Tools Beyond the Portal** (http://teaching.utoronto.ca/ed-tech/online-learning/toolkit/beyond-portal). These guidelines cover various aspects of decision-making such as when to select alternatives to institutional tools, accountability and reduction of risk.

Key Questions

You will find prompts throughout this guide with suggested activities. These activities are meant to help you in your decision-making process as you learn about and plan for the use of social media in your teaching.

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Overview of Social Media

There are several definitions of social media, highlighting a variety of characteristics such as the promotion of user interconnectedness (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008), creation, dissemination and consumption of knowledge (Ricoy & Feliz, 2016) and the opportunity to develop relationships (Khan, 2013). In concrete terms, social media are web-based tools used to create and share content in a highly interactive way. Tools such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and Blogs achieve this interactivity by allowing creators and consumers to comment on, annotate and repurpose content, together or individually.

Why Use Social Media in Teaching?

One of the most important benefits of using technology in one's teaching practice is increased student engagement. A study by the Online Learning Consortium found that technology, in general, increases engagement with course materials, with professors and fellow students (Online Learning Consortium, 2016).

Seaman and Tinti-Kane (2013) also found that 78.9% of the time, digital communications and social media in particular had a positive impact on faculty-student communication. This demonstrates that social media can also be effectively used to simply enhance communication, and not necessarily as a tool to increase participation.

Moreover, due to the medium's interactivity and to the multiple possibilities for co-creation, social media in educational environments can "yield new forms of inquiry, communication, collaboration, identity work, knowledge development" (Greenhow & Gleason, 2014).

It should be noted that social media can have both positive and negative impacts. Some of the factors influencing outcomes in the classroom include how well activities or assessments using social media are integrated into the teaching and course rationale, as well as how much is known about students and the steps necessary to educate them on social media use.

Key Questions

What would you like to achieve in teaching with social media?

List 1 or 2 social media tools you have considered using in your teaching

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Benefits and Challenges of Using Social Media in the Classroom

Benefits:

- Learn new digital literacy skills
- Improve knowledge retention & understanding
- Increase class participation and motivate students
- Build community; connect students to each and the global community
- Become an effective member of an online community
- Improve student writing (through writing for peers, feedback)
- Learn a different style of writing
- Go beyond text, e.g. images, video, design
- Take classroom knowledge public
- Let students show their personality
- Improve student attitudes towards the course content
- Digital citizenship
- Global competency
- Internationalizing learning in **Global Classrooms** (https://www.ourglobalclassrooms.com/) where instructors and students teach and learn with peers abroad using InternetG based technologies for communication

Challenges:

Instructors cannot make assumptions about students' proficiency with social media. Student proficiency must be taken into account when designing activities. For example, they may be proficient at communicating informally, but may not fully comprehend what is required to critically assess information, engage with information and present findings in an academic environment. Other challenges include:

- Lack of technology skills or support
- Online abuse
- Time required to monitor

There are steps that can be taken to help address some of these challenges. For instance, activities and assessments should be designed carefully, based on appropriate **learning outcomes** (http://teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching-support/course-design/developing-learning-outcomes/). Comments and posts on social media platforms are public. Have a discussion with your students about communication expectations, boundaries and what is not acceptable.

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Lastly, to help prevent online abuse, students should also be reminded that online behaviour is subject to the **Student Code of Conduct** (http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppjul012002.pdf). To discuss these challenges and possible solutions, as well as for ideas on supporting students' use of critical thinking skills, instructors may wish to **request a consultation** with the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation.

See also:
Tips for Online Assessment (CTSI-PDF)
(http://teaching.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Online-Assessment-Tips.pdf)
Designing Assignments and Presenting them to Students (Writing Centre)
(http://writing.utoronto.ca/teaching-resources/designing-assignments/)

Key Questions

Think about issues you may encounter in teaching with social media, or that your students may face in using social media in your course. Brainstorm 1-2 actions that can:
- Decrease the likelihood that these issues will occur in your course; and/or
- Address problems if they do occur

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Best Practices Examples: Twitter and Blogs

In this section you will find recommended best practices on using Twitter and blogs effectively in your teaching. In addition, sample activities have been included.

Note: The use of social media services and applications that are not supported by the University must follow university guidelines and policies. See **U of T Guidelines on Teaching with Social Media** (see page 12) for more information.

Twitter: Best Practices

- provide a short **Twitter briefing** (with class hashtag) and a Twitter glossary for your course
- Clearly communicate the **pedagogical rationale**
- **Model** for your students how to be concise and creative
- Use it in **first class**: make an **informal assignment** to devise a 140-character answer to a question, and promote the best answers in class
- **Participate regularly** on Twitter during/after class—tweet useful links, retweet often, diversify its use
- Get students to **connect in different ways**: with you, the content, and each other
- Twitter is a public channel so **be prepared for abuse**

From Chapman (2015) and Hawks (2012)

Twitter Activity/Assignment Examples:

Example 1:
Twitter 3 – 2 - 1: Hold a live chat so students can reflect on lectures and course readings.
Adapted from Paterson & Rolheiser (2009)

Purpose: To check for student understanding of course topics, and to provide students with an opportunity to give written feedback to instructor.
Procedure:

> Communicate to students the date and time on which the live chat will be held. Create a chat **hashtag** (https://support.twitter.com/articles/49309) such as #PSYC101chat or other unique hashtag, and instruct students to include the hashtag in every tweet during the chat.

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3. Before the session, decide on a format for the Chat & Learn, prompting students to prepare specific types of contributions. For instance, you may ask that they join the chat having prepared the following:
   - ➤ **3** important points from the lecture.
   - ➤ **2** Limitations of this perspective.
   - ➤ **1** Point that was unclear.
4. During the chat, look for patterns in responses and tweet your own thoughts or summaries to address students' contributions and concerns.

Example 2:
The Twitter Essay
Adapted from Stommel, 2012

Purpose: to succinctly make and support an argument.

Procedure:

Ask students to follow Twitter discussions on specific topics over a period of time. During this time, you may be instructing them on various aspects of essay writing, such as audience, brainstorming, providing support and revising.

Tweet the Twitter Essay instructions in under 140 characters. For example: "*What is a monster? Answer in a Twitter essay of exactly 140 characters using #twitteressay. Play, innovate, incite. Don't waste a character.*"

Provide complete instructions on the activity/assignment, either in class or in your syllabus. Be sure to include the assignment or class **hashtag** (https://support.twitter.com/articles/49309) in your instructions. If this is a new method of assessment for your students, consider providing a rubric detailing how their contributions will be graded.

Ask students to retweet or quote their peers, providing their feedback and insight. Again, provide students with a rubric for this peer review step.

Blogs: Best Practices

- Lead by example: create a model post demonstrating how you expect students to contribute.
- Consider your options: individual student blog, small group blog or course blog aggregating everyone's contributions?

- Think about who should be writing the content and how often, and who should be commenting on the content, and how often.
- If using a course blog, add a description to the blog. Readers should be able to understand the purpose and context of the blog.
- Public vs private: the Learning Portal offers **private blogs** (http://www.portalinfo.utoronto.ca/content/blogs-and-journals), which allow conversations to remain situated within the course site. Consider this option if you would like students to practice blogging skills without the concerns of writing to a public internet audience.

Blog Activity/Assignment Example:

Research/Writing Log

Adapted from Hedge, 2013

Purpose: To have students report on their research or writing progress, while engaging with other students and learning to provide constructive feedback.

Procedure:

Have students create their own, individual blogs. Blogs can be public (e.g. Wordpress) or private (e.g. Portal).

Present students with a detailed description of what is expected for the blog. Consider including expectations on design aspects of the assignment/activity, such as images and layout, and content aspects such as research areas of interest, personal motivations for taking the course, etc.

Students are asked to record their research process in their blog once a week.

Toward the end of the course, peers are asked to provide constructive feedback on one or two classmates' blogs. The feedback instructions can be open, or specific (e.g. state 1 thing you feel your peer did well, and 1 thing your peer could do to facilitate the research process/improve their writing).

As a final contribution, students are asked to reflect on peers' comments, providing a rationale for feedback they would like to incorporate into their work, as well as for feedback they will not incorporate.

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Integrating Social Media into Teaching and Learning

The **alignment** principle can be applied to teaching with social media to help ensure that there is coherence between intended learning outcomes and the assessments and activities used to demonstrate proficiency in those outcomes.

Dee Fink's (2015) **Integrated Course Design Model** (http://teaching.utoronto.ca/wp-content/ uploads/2015/08/Dee-Fink-Course-Design-42.pdf) is an example of this approach. The model is structured around the following factors:

- Situational Factors
- Learning Goals
- Feedback and Assessment
- Teaching and Learning Activities

Key Questions

Recall your earlier answer to what you'd like to achieve in teaching with social media, and the tools you would consider using. Upon reading Fink's article, consider the following:
What are some situation factors to consider?
> E.g.: how much knowledge of the subject do students have? Or of the tools being used?

What are the course's learning goals?
> E.g.: Students will be able to use social media tools to create a professional Community of

How can I design feedback assessments to be learning centered?

> E.g.: On your group blog, post an executive summary of the article you read. Evaluate 2 peers' blog posts on the same subject, using the criteria studied in class.
> E.g.: In 140 characters or less, tell me about the most important takeaway from today's lesson.

What kinds of active learning activities will help to attain the learning goals I've established?
> E.g. Using the private blog tool in the Learning Portal, reflect on

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Considerations for Selecting and Using Educational Technologies

The considerations for selecting social media tools in education are not vastly different from those of selecting educational technologies in general. When thinking about designing an activity and selecting a social media tool, consider the following:

- Space/setting: teaching face-to-face or online
- Difficulty of level of engagement: simple activity vs complex activity
- Duration of engagement: under 5 minutes; under 1 hour; over an entire lecture
- Timing of engagement: synchronous or asynchronous; before, during or after class
- Privacy: public vs. private
- Technical knowledge and support: skill level; tool reliability; technical support
- Type of engagement: students interacting with other students; with content only; directly with the instructor
- Organization of collaboration: individuals, pairs, groups, class

Please note that, in the table below, the Portal **Discussion Board** (http://www.portalinfo.utoronto.ca/content/discussion-board) has been added for comparison purposes, as it may be a more familiar tool.

Engagement Considerations		Web Tools		Portal Tools	
		Twitter	**Public Blog**	**Portal Blog**	**Discussion Board**
Difficulty & Timing	Quick engagement with material	✓			✓
	Lengthier engagement with materials	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Synchronous engagement	✓			
Space	Also effective face-to-face	✓			
	Private			✓	✓

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Organization of Collaboration					
Groupwork		✓	✓	✓
Student-student	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student-instructor	✓	✓	✓	✓
Student-content	✓	✓	✓	✓

Key Questions

Which of the above engagement considerations will be particularly important in your course? For instance, if you would like to use the same tool for synchronous or face-to-face engagement as you do for activities outside class time, Twitter will be more effective than blogs.

Furthermore, consult with your local unit to identify guidelines that may impact tool selection and implementation. For example, your Chair may accept the use of Twitter, but only if tweets are protected (private), or may make other recommendations.

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U of T Guidelines on Teaching with Social Media

The use of social media services and applications that are not supported by the University of Toronto such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and blog platforms (e.g., Blogger, Tumblr, Medium, Squarespace etc.) must follow university guidelines and policies. View the **current catalogue of educational technology tools and services** supported at the University of Toronto (http://act.utoronto.ca/edtech-catalogue/).

Beyond the educational or technological considerations that will help you select a tool or shape an activity, there are also institutional guidelines that inform our decision making. These guidelines pertain to the use of tools beyond the Portal, which are considered alternatives to institutionally supported learning environments.

The guidelines for **Tools Beyond the Portal** (http://teaching.utoronto.ca/ed-tech/online-learning/toolkit/beyond-portal/) cover various aspects of decision-making such as when to select alternatives to institutional tools, accountability and reduction of risk. The guidelines also recommend the following steps to reduce risk and ensure security of student data:

1. Provide an alternative if a student does not wish to use an external environment hosted outside the institution
2. Don't put any information classified as highly sensitive into a third-party service
3. Don't give away intellectual property owned by others

(Adapted from Lavagnino (2010), Policy as an Enabler of Student Engagement, Educause Review.)

These guidelines apply to all educational technologies.

Key Questions

How might the guidelines impact how you structure your course activities and assessments? What steps can you take to reduce risk given the social media tool you intend to use?

Support

If you have any questions about academic and collaborative technologies, please email **portal.help@utoronto.ca**. To request a consultation, please fill out the Consultation Request form: http://teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching-support/consultations/

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Resources

General:
- **Academic Technology Information & Portal Help website**
  (http://www.portalinfo.utoronto.ca/)

Blogs:
- **UofT blog service (Personal Spaces) for students** (upcoming)
  (http://ngews.act.utoronto.ca/)
- Blog examples: <u>Blogging the Just City</u> | <u>Crossing the River</u> | <u>Devouring the Book</u>

Twitter:
- **"Twessays" and Composition in the Digital Age**
  (http://www.digitalpedagogylab.com/hybridped/twessays-and-composition-in-the-digital-age/)
- **Framework for Teaching with Twitter**
  (http://www.chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/a-framework-for-teaching-with-twitter/26223)

EdTech Considerations:
- **Use of cloudbased technologies (including social media) at UofT** – see points 2 and 4
  (http://teaching.utoronto.ca/ed-tech/online-learning/toolkit/beyond-portal/)
- **Appropriate use of information and communication technologies at UofT**
  (http://www.provost.utoronto.ca/policy/use.htm)
- **Educational Technology Catalogue**
  (http://act.utoronto.ca/edtech-catalogue/)

Accessibility:
- **AODA Office at UofT – Teaching and Educational Resources**
  (http://aoda.hrandequity.utoronto.ca/)
- **Accessible Communications at UofT**
  (http://aoda.hrandequity.utoronto.ca/communications/)

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