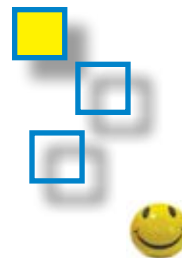


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twitter

Using Twitter to Facilitate Classroom Discussions

AS A HISTORY MAJOR I usually found most of my history courses pretty interesting. Certainly some were more interesting than others but I think that had more to do with the instructor than the content. Of course not every student who takes a history class course plans to major in it, which is why I love it when I hear about a history professor (or any educator for that matter) doing innovative things to engage students in one of those “core courses” many students often dread.

Take, for example, Monica Rankin PhD., an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Dallas who was looking to incorporate more student-centered learning activities in her U.S. History course this past spring. How she accomplished this goal is what makes it so intriguing. She used Twitter, the micro-blogging site that limits posts (known as “tweets”) to just 140 characters.

The course met Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for 50 minutes. With about 90 students in the class, Dr. Rankin delivered traditional lectures on Mondays and Wednesdays, with time set aside on Fridays for the “Twitter experiment” where students would tweet about what they learned from that week’s reading assignment.

After some trial and error, Dr. Rankin found that the most effective way to use Twitter to facilitate classroom discussions was to break students into small groups to first discuss the reading, and then have one person in each group tweet the most relevant comments from the group. The comments were projected on a screen for the rest of the class to see what others groups were discussing. Toward the end of the class, Rankin would bring all the students together to re-emphasize some of the key points brought forth by the different groups.

Students, even those who had never used Twitter before, liked the format because it made participating in class discussions less intimidating and allowed even quiet students to have their voice heard. This **YouTube video** has some great interviews with students, as well as Dr. Rankin.

“Twitter did not replace more conventional discussion formats; instead it enhanced the discussions and brought more student interaction,” Rankin concluded. “Overall, I think the Twitter experiment was successful primarily because it encouraged students to engage who otherwise would not.

“Even in smaller classes, only a small number of students actively participate in class discussions. Students knew that their class participation grade would be partially determined by their involvement in these discussions and most of them seemed comfortable with using the technology to engage with the reading materials.”

To read more about the Twitter experiment, [go here](#).

Mary Bart, June 17, 2009, Effective Teaching Strategies, Faculty Focus, [http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/using-twitter-to-facilitate-classroom-discussions/], July 16, 2009

On Go at the Bell

HERE ARE A FEW TEACHING STRATEGIES for the beginning of classes to set the “cognitive stage” for new learning.

1. Be completely ready to begin at the time class starts. This lets students know that the entire class time is for class and that your subject is important—you aren’t going to waste the time for which they (or their parents) are paying, so they shouldn’t either.

2. Review briefly the material covered during and especially at the end of the last class. This cues students to recall material on which to connect new material from the current class—it sets the stage for new learning. This can be done with a brief review or with questions to students.

3. Remind students just why what they learned was important, why you covered the content. Is it important to this class, to later

classes, to understanding content for today’s lesson, to their later life? How? Sometimes students need a reminder that what we cover in class isn’t busywork or trivial content.

4. Ask “what if . . .” questions, give an interesting example, share an anecdote, tell a joke, ask an “have you ever wondered why . . .” question, ask a “did you see in the news” question, show a brief introductory video or graphic to GAIN THEIR ATTENTION for the new material to be presented. No attention—no learning.

**Some portions adapted from 147 practical tips for teaching professors edited by Robert Magnan*

Sara Calhoun Davis, PhD, August 31, 2007, Center for Faculty Development, College of Charleston, [http://www.cofc.edu/cfd/Faculty%20Focus/Friday%20Focus%20on%20Teaching%20Aug%2031%2007.pdf], July 16, 2009

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A Behavior Contract That Made a Difference

IT SEEMED THAT ALMOST every day we would come back to our offices after our speech classes with a frown on our faces and the need to tell a story about the latest shenanigans that happened in class. A student “accidentally” showed an inappropriate image on a PowerPoint slide during his speech. A student walked in 20 minutes late during a classmate’s speech—with a pizza in one hand, a Mountain Dew in the other, and a cell phone on one ear. A student refused to give her speech as scheduled and dared us to do something about it.

Finally, one day we decided we had had enough. We created a list of behavioral expectations, which we asked students to sign, and thus was born the Speech Department Behavior Contract. Since then it has grown into a well-defined instrument that has had as much impact on student retention, success, and well-being as any other strategy we have added to the curriculum. Initially the document contained 10 items—rudimentary things like students taking responsibility for reading the syllabus, signing the attendance sheet, taking the pretests and pre-assessments, meeting deadlines, etc., and understanding the consequences of making excuses for missing speeches. Even in its early format, the contract positively impacted retention and behavior in the classroom as observed by us and noted by our dean. Students told us that they appreciated the precise listing of their responsibilities because it made the rules and consequences clear.

At the end of each semester, we revise the document based on the events of the previous semester. For example, we added a statement concerning the campus electronic policy based on a serious plagiarism case that occurred in one of our sections. Once it became prevalent and blatant, we added a statement about text messaging in class. Some of our other colleagues are using contracts similar to ours, and they report the same positive effect. We hope that by sharing our contract, you will consider how it might help in creating an ideal learning environment in your classroom.

Classroom Ethics Contract

1. I received, read, and understand the department general syllabus for this course, including the attendance policy.
2. I understand failure to sign an attendance

sheet at the appropriate time and date results in me being marked absent.

3. I verify that my professor has requested that I meet with him/her first should I have any concerns about the conduct of the course. If that meeting does not resolve the concerns, then my professor will recommend I meet with the department’s lead faculty member or department chair.

4. I understand that my professor expects respect from everyone in the classroom at all times. This includes rules about sleeping, inappropriate talking, rudeness, doing homework, answering cell phones, and any disruptive behavior as defined by each professor, etc.

5. I understand it is my responsibility to take the online content pre- and post-test(s) by the assigned date(s).

6. I understand it is my responsibility to complete the written pre- and post-assessment(s) by the assigned date (PRCA, Speech Anxiety, Listening).

7. I understand it is my responsibility to complete all assignments on time and that there are penalties for late assignments (if allowed) at each professor’s discretion.

8. I agree that if I don’t understand an assignment it is my responsibility to ask for clarification.

9. I understand my professor’s policy about being tardy and the consequences of not following his/her policy.

10. I understand the ramifications of missing a scheduled speaking day.

11. I understand that should I miss class it is my responsibility to get any handouts, etc.

12. I understand it is my responsibility to check my e-mail daily or weekly depending on my professor’s guidelines.

13. I understand it is my responsibility to follow directions and that failure to do so will result in a loss of points.

14. I understand it is my responsibility to read and follow the Electronic Communications Policy. The link is available at the bottom of the UA-Fort Smith homepage <http://www.uafortsmith.edu>.

15. I understand I should not enter the classroom during a student speech. I should wait to hear applause and then enter.

16. I understand that plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated and may result in receiving a zero (0) for the assignment, withdrawal from the course, or suspension from the university.

17. I understand that cell phones must be turned off or turned to vibrate during class and that each professor may, at his/her discretion, enforce a consequence for any cell phone ringing or text messaging during class.

18. I understand that iPods and/or MP3 players must be turned off during class and that each professor may, at his/her discretion, enforce a consequence for any music being played during class.

19. I read, understand, and agree to abide by the student handbook guidelines for classroom ethics.

20. I understand that each professor may add additional rules in writing to this departmental document.

21. I understand that failure to sign this document does not exclude me from its requirements.

Student Signature: _____ *Class Time:* _____

Lori Norin & Tom Walton, 10 Effective Classroom Management Techniques Every Faculty Member Should Know, www.FacultyFocus.com, [http://www.facultyfocus.com/free-report/10-effective-classroom-management-techniques-every-faculty-member-should-know/], July 20, 2009

CHOICES

LIVING IN A WORLD with no choice is awful. It’s worse than awful - it’s absolute misery. A little choice is nice. A little more choice is nicer still. A moderate amount of choice may even be better. But at some point in this process, the tables turn. At some point, we enter into a situation where there is too much choice. So much choice in fact, that we become paralyzed and unable to make any decision whatsoever. Too much choice can in fact be overwhelming. While many see a link between this abundance of choice in our modern society and an increase in mental illnesses such as depression, we can also relate this to the classroom. While choice is one of the key components to successful classroom instruction, be careful not to pass your students’ threshold and enter into the realm of paralysis. And of course different students have different thresholds for choice tolerance. *Schwartz, B. (2005). Paradox of Choice: Why more is less. Invited address, August 29th at the annual American Psychological Association convention, Washington, DC.*

Dr. Kathie F. Nunley, June 19, 2009, Hot Topics from Psychology and Neuroscience, Dr. Kathie Nunley’s Layered Curriculum, [http://help4teachers.com/hottopics.htm#misc], July 20, 2009.