Integrating Web 2.0 Tools into Collegiate Seminars

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Executive Summary

St. Mary's College is a private institution in Moraga, California, following a Catholic, Lasallian liberal arts tradition and offering a variety of undergraduate and graduate programs. There is growing concern that the Collegiate Seminar, central element of a St. Mary's education, has become an intimidating challenge for our increasing number of second language students and inexperienced readers. Teachers voice concern that not all students participate actively in seminar classes.

Our goal is to increase student achievement and support the mission of the college by providing a more inclusive, supportive, and respectful Seminar Experience.

We propose to create a service that trains and assists faculty and students to integrate free Web 2.0 social networking tools into curriculum delivery and teaching methods for Freshman Seminars. Web 2.0 will be an effective outreach and support for our students. According to The 2009 Pew Internet Report, 75% of people 18-22 use social networking tools—our service will use familiar technology to support new learning.

There is added value to the university in meeting this growing need through the Library's proposal. The librarian will provide skilled research in locating new resource, offer training, and will increase access to technical support. Faculty will be able to modernize and improve instruction without a significant increase in their time invested.

Students might be assigned to post a response to the Facebook discussion question on the class page, and then to read and respond to two classmates' postings. They could use a Web 2.0 tool such as You Tube or Audacity to create a personal response to the seminar text, and then provide access to all seminar participants.

The library will first seek 3 faculty volunteers to pilot the program in Freshman Seminar. Librarians will create Web 2.0 training material for participating faculty and students, and assist faculty with locating and implementing Web 2.0 tools. Training sessions for faculty and students will be offered during the semester. Coordinating with IT and CaTS, will allow staff to monitor progress and respond quickly to needs. The library is committed to staying current with advances in Web 2.0 technology.

Evaluation will be crucial for future planning. Throughout the semester staff will gather data and will create a culminating report on plan effectiveness. We will publicize the results using Web 2.0 tools, and are confident that in the future the participation invitation will be extended to a greater number of volunteers.

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Background/Context

Saint Mary's College
- Private institution in Moraga, California
- Catholic, Lasallian and liberal arts tradition
- Variety of undergraduate and graduate programs
- 2,514 undergraduates
- 1,326 graduate students
- $33,250 tuition (cost of housing not included)

Saint Mary's College Library
- 25 library staff
- 6 Reference and Instruction Librarians
- 1 Faculty Liaison to the Collegiate Seminar

The Academic Computing Facility within the Library is maintained by Computer and Technology Services (CaTS), which currently supports students through instruction of web resources and media, making the two departments loosely connected.

Collegiate Seminars
The seminars are the foundation for individual learning at St. Mary's. In a series of four courses, students read classical texts by authors such as Plato, Montaigne, or Augustine. Round table class discussions encourage student thinking and expression, while essay assignments develop writing skills.

Service Overview

We propose to create a service that:
- Trains and assists faculty to integrate Web 2.0 social networking tools into their curriculum delivery and teaching methods.
- Creates a virtual community, in order to enhance student learning, increase student engagement within the course, and offer additional channels for student communication and participation.

We will begin with a pilot program supporting three professors who each teach one freshman Greek Thought collegiate seminar, to develop, implement, and evaluate the service for future expansion.

Mission

Our mission is to enhance student learning and engagement. One element of the St. Mary's College Mission Statement is "to create a student-centered educational community whose members support one another with mutual understanding and respect". In service of this mission we propose to:

- Extend class discussion into a virtual community, allowing for a more inclusive discussion with an increased respect for diversity.
- Offer students increased support for comprehension of complex classical texts.
- Prepare students to use Web 2.0 tools proficiently during their college and professional careers.

The Saint Mary's College Library Mission includes "serving the information needs of students and faculty located on campus and remotely." St. Mary's librarians have the:
- Technical and subject expertise to develop this service.
- Skills to negotiate and collaborate with faculty.
- Ability to select the appropriate Web 2.0 tools for the needs of the course.
- Knowledge to develop training material.
- Experience in training and assisting faculty to set up and use technology.

CaTS and Instructional Technology have developed some stand-alone workshops and tutorials for using software and online tools. Librarians will collaborate with these two departments to integrate these tutorials with specific courses and content.

Purpose and Student Needs

The student population of St. Mary's is changing. The number of multi-cultural, English language learner students is growing:
- In 2002, 9% of students at St. Mary's were identified as Latino.
- Current number of Latino students is 23%.
- The average SAT score is dropping.
- Mid-range for SAT Critical Reading and Math is considered 630 and 720, respectively.
- Average SAT range for students admitted to St. Mary's in 2009 is 541 Reading /540 Math.
- In 2002, 25% of St. Mary's students had scored higher than 590 on these tests.

These changes in the student population clearly indicate a greater need for additional support of student learning, particularly for the collegiate seminars.

Every St. Mary's student is required to take the collegiate seminar, though the unfamiliar content can be very challenging, and the face-to-face round table discussions especially intimidating. The need for discussion beyond the classroom is clear. Students who have taken the collegiate seminar report the desire to have longer class times in order to continue the conversation. Creating a virtual community for the class provides a platform for students to continue the discussion in both real time and asynchronously, giving them additional learning opportunities as they interact more frequently with each other and the professor.

- More discussion can assist students to complete thought processes and receive encouragement when stymied.
- Students who are uncomfortable speaking in class will build confidence in their expression through the less-intimidating online discussion media.

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- In modern language instructional theory, "wait time" after asking a question is a cornerstone of good pedagogy; post-class online discussions allow for this processing time.

Why Web 2.0 Tools?

- Ninety-three percent of people ages 18-29 are online
- Nineteen percent of 18-22 year-olds use Twitter; and
- 75% use some type of social networking tool, such as Facebook, MySpace, or LinkedIn.
- Web 2.O shareware applications offer much support to a reader rising to new challenges.

This service will assist professors in teaching students to use Web 2.0 tools in a professional way, which will develop students' skills for working in the business community after graduation.

Target Audience

- Professors teaching freshman collegiate seminars in Greek Thought.
- For the pilot study: three professors and three sections.

One of the advantages of choosing freshman seminars for our pilot is that all St. Mary's professors teach these seminars. Outside their comfort zone of subject authority, instructors may prove more open to and flexible about new tools to increase student success.

While students are familiar and comfortable with using Web 2.0 tools such as Facebook and Twitter, professors may not have had as much hands-on experience with them. This service:
- Enhances faculty skill with Web 2.0 tools,
- Provides hands-on experience,
- Brings teaching methods into the online environment.
- Helps professors engage students using interactive methods available 24/7.

Proposed Use of Web 2.0 Tools

Facebook and Twitter are "where the students are." Using tools that students enjoy increases the likelihood of increased participation beyond the class requirements.

Facebook:
- Create a class group page on Facebook, which students join.
- Discussions occur by 'writing on the wall' so that class posts are private.
- Clobby, a new Facebook application, allows a group to chat via text.
- If Clobby gains popularity, Facebook will likely make chat an integral part of its services.

Sample Assignment: Each student, in addition to attendance at regular face-to-face meetings, would be required to post to Facebook at least once a week, and also to respond weekly to an online posting.

Twitter:
- Create a class account which students would follow.
- Have brief discussions by including @account_name in their posts.
- Hash tags are also used to aggregate posts, for example, #plato, for students to discuss Plato's works. This aggregates all posts with this tag and displays them on one page.

Discussion Forums:
- Librarians assist faculty in expanding use of forums on existing course management systems Blackboard and Moodle.
- Aimoo provides a free forum, chat room, and blog with greater privacy than Facebook.

Podcasts and Vidcasts:
- Students present their ideas and opinions about a particular text to each other.
- Provides experience in speaking and creating presentations.
- Particularly useful for students who are shy or reticent during class, allowing for practice and chances to speak without people looking at them.
- Allows time for extended work on topics of greater interest to the class.
- Audacity is free software used for creating podcasts.
- Videos can be posted to YouTube and shared on the class blog. Podcasts can be posted to the blog.

Sample Assignment: Each student will create and share one podcast and one vidcast during the semester.

Wikis and Blogs:
- WetPaint provides free wikis.
- Free blogs are available from WordPress, Blogger, and BlogSpot.
- Class wiki and/or blog used for short essays.
- Provide an alternative forum for comments and rebuttal.

Support:
Librarians will assist professors in finding and embedding freely available content such as:
- Podcasts (hear a BBC discussion of the Odyssey at http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/features/in-our-time/).
- International discussion groups (http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1371.The_Iliad).
- Free audio versions (http://librivox.org/the-iliad-by-homer-translated-by-samuel-butler/).

Implementation

- Assess Web 2.0 tool functionalities and ease of use.
- Create basic step-by-step user guides.
- Collaborate with each professor to select specific Web 2.0 tools that are appropriate for the seminar, and develop methods for use of these tools that will enhance student learning.

- Collaborate with CaTS and Instructional Technology to create workshops and tutorials on the use of the selected tools, geared to the specific seminar.
- Recruit a student trainer to provide assistance to professors and students during hours that librarians are unavailable.
- Assist professors to set up necessary class accounts.
- Provide training to professors and students in use of the tools, either during or outside of class.
- Provide assistance contact information for professors and students.
- Monitor and adjust program as semester progresses.

Resources

In his 1996 presentation "The Critical Features of Innovation," Delbecq wrote of "the time overload which burdened those trying to do innovation while at the same time continuing to do their everyday work." Providing library staff and faculty time for development of the proposed innovation will be the main expense projected for our pilot plan. Web 2.0 applications are available at no cost—this is an integral part of the nature of shareware.

REQUIRED

- One full-time librarian knowledgeable and prepared to serve as an expert in Web 2.0 resources will lead in developing and piloting our new service.
- Librarian will devote approximately 12 hours per week to this project. Tasks to be addressed during this time include:
    - Coordinating with CaTS and IT
    - Recruiting and collaborating with pilot faculty members
    - Developing marketing plan
    - Finding, assessing, and implementing class-specific Web 2.0 resources
    - Preparing and providing Web 2.0 instruction to faculty and students
    - Revising and maintaining service to target class
    - Gathering data for evaluation of plan success
- An increase in staffing to cover a segment of the librarian's former responsibilities may be necessary. Alternatively, work could be delegated to a junior librarian or assistant, serving as staff development.
- The cooperation of faculty in reviewing the proposal presentations, and subsequent collaborative planning also represents a substantial investment of resources.
- One day a week of student assistant time allocated to this project during the pilot phase.
- Increased use of existing technological infrastructure: server space, bandwidth, etc.
- Purchase of Web 2.0 activity tools such as small video cameras, microphones, or editing software may be necessary.
- Minor copying, printing, and use of office resources.

Marketing Plan

The statistics on incoming St. Mary's students provided in the Context report paints a clear picture of freshmen who will need support in reading and responding to the challenging classic works used in the Collegiate Seminars. First time instructors or those teaching far outside their subject area will want access to a service which offers ready-made, student-friendly, effective classroom support—our marketing plan will spread the news that this program now exists.

I. Video Introduction--Showcase potential of Web 2.0 service by posting a password protected video to YouTube.

- Use digital camera and editing program to create a brief video showing need for support if collegiate seminars are to thrive. St. Mary's videos on the collegiate seminar contain many comments about shy students and the difficulty of encouraging student participation. Include these excerpts with interviews demonstrating students' familiarity with online interaction and resource sharing. Use graphics and screen shots to illustrate the nature of the service proposed. Conclude with invitation and contact information.
- Send link in an email with subject line: How Facebook, Twitter, and You Tube can Improve your Freshmen Seminar
- Follow up with print flyer in faculty boxes.

II. Start Small.

- Recruit three willing and enthusiastic professors who are willing to participate in the pilot study.
- Encourage other professors to observe progress of pilot effort. Obtain permission for observers to participate in online forum or Facebook discussions. Use Twitter to broadcast progress, news, and highlights of the service throughout the semester. Save copies of student videos and record sample class sessions for future marketing efforts. Forward lesson resources to faculty.

III. Grow.

- Document successes throughout semester—Use evidence of success collected by evaluators throughout the semester, which is evidence of increased student participation and achievement, create a report, perhaps continuing in video form.
- At end of semester, ask one satisfied professor to invite four potential participants to a lunch meeting. Provide lunch. Share the original video and new report; have the professor speak.
- Propose increase in resources to support additional classes during the next semester and year.

Evaluation

Evaluation of this service is essential to discover how well it is working and to identify elements that require revision to support improved student learning success. The data from the pilot study can be used both to assess the program, and to support future expansion efforts.

Critical Success Factors

- Constant support and encouragement of the pilot faculty.
- Library guarantees easy and continuous access to technical and curricular support.
- Communication and collaboration between library, faculty, and CaTS/Instructional Technology group is effective and continuous.
- Stay current with existing technology and update training program.

Measuring Success

If adopted by faculty, chances of success are excellent. Early focus group interviews indicate a strong student interest in extending class discussion into online formats, and also a clear desire for support in accessing seminar material. To measure the success of implementation:

Interviews:
- Faculty will be interviewed at beginning of pilot to assess knowledge of Web 2.0 tools.
- Librarian will meet briefly with faculty at mid-semester, checking for issues, problems, or feedback.
- At the end of semester, a final interview will gauge the effectiveness of the librarian/faculty collaboration.
- Interview will also gather faculty observations on the effectiveness of Web 2.0 products as teaching tools. Did faculty partners observe that student learning and engagement increased during use of the service?
- Feedback on speed and effectiveness of the technical assistance would also be sought.

Surveys:
A Likert scale survey, aimed at students taking part in the three separate pilot projects, would be conducted at the beginning, middle, and end of the project, when all responses would be compiled.
    Student survey #1:
- Assess existing technological ability of each student.
- Assess his/her familiarity with Web 2.0 tools.

    Student survey #2:
- Assess students' comfort level with tools at end of semester:
- In what ways have their skills improved,
- Has usage increased, and
- Which Web 2.0 learning experiences were valued most by students.

The surveys would include additional space for open-ended student comments and responses.

Other Measurements:
- Web statistics available through Facebook and other sites used to gather valuable data would determine the exact amount of usage for each social networking tool; in number of students and time spent.
- Statistics would also show when students are most online.

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By comparing the survey as well as responses from faculty interviews, we will determine if evidence exists of student engagement and improved academic performance. We would also determine which social networking tools were used the most, in order to determine which ones we want to continue using, and also look closely at which learning experiences students particularly enjoyed. These aspects are valuable input in the continual development of the service.

Ultimately success will depend upon the enrichment of student learning as well as faculty satisfaction with the program. If faculty members are satisfied enough with the pilot project to continue with this service, we would expand it to additional collegiate seminar sections, and then to other classes.

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