

Title of Grant: Social Networking: the Application of Interconnected Internet Communities as a Way to Enhance Curriculum

F2008 – 201P-FF

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Abstract:

This proposed action research project covered the “exploration and application” of social networks. These interconnected Internet communities (sometimes known as personal networks) help learners make contacts that would be good for them to know, but that they would be unlikely to have met otherwise. Benefits include using social networks and new social technologies (i.e. create internet profiles, blogs, wiki’s, etc.) in my classes to enhance curriculum, and support different learning styles. In addition, disseminating the way Social Networking can be part of a multi-faceted teaching approach that blends learning theory and social technologies in any curriculum will benefit my discipline.

Actual Outcomes:

1. Suggested reference materials were researched and chosen.
2. A project, online discussion questions, and a webpage were developed. The web page includes a tutorial on Web 2.0 and some examples of social networking tools.
3. The IST Advisory committee and the IST faculty were presented with the concept and asked for input on what ought to be included in the class component content. This supplies valuable instructional information from multiple sources.
4. An annotated bibliography was developed and posted to the webpage.
5. A pre and post evaluation was done on the class. This supplies valuable instructional information from multiple of sources and the foundation for a case study.
6. The dean and the program head were consulted for feedback about incorporating the social networking concept in the IST 115 classes. This supplies valuable information from multiple of sources that can be used to refine the concept.
7. Based on the lessons learned, a new Blackboard module was introduced to five ITE 115 this spring that are taught in a mixture of formats (i.e., regular, hybrid, distance ed). The Blackboard module incorporates the class materials developed and a new social network approach to learning in an ITE 115 class.

Benefits:

1. The IST faculty benefited by starting a dialog about how social networking can be used in the classroom.
2. Faculty and adjuncts were introduced to the most up-to-date instruction/training using social networking lessons learned to benefit their students.
3. The project will help satisfy the educational /school system demand for increased hands-on educational experiences in the use of technology. Not just how to use it but, ways to use it that support teaching.
4. As social networking continues to grow, faculty can help provide students that are well-trained and technologically ready for today's world.
5. Faculty can use the information to help engage their students in an ever changing environment in an Internet enabled world.
6. This will include meeting the Virginia technology standards of:
 - A. Instructional personnel shall be able to apply computer productivity tools for professional use.
 - B. Instructional personnel shall be able to use electronic technologies to access and exchange information.
 - C. Instructional personnel shall be able to use educational technologies for data collection, information management, problem solving, decision making, communication, and presentation within the curriculum.

Other Colleges: n/a

Discussion and Critique:

The purpose of my research effort was to do the research and development of a class that would be particularly designed to include social networking.

I believe the project was too ambitious for a one semester project. I would scale the project down so that more attention could be paid to the details and building the relationship with student learning.

I would change the way I wrote up the research project before I started. I would do more thinking about the specifics and break the project into two parts. I would develop a more realistic timeline of the actual events that need to be done to have overall successful results/outcomes.

Evaluation:

I incorporated an appropriate social technology and social network in one class, at approximately mid-semester, for use as a social networking case study. This supplied a "real world" example in a community college setting.

I gave a pre-test and post-test in two ITE 115 – Introduction to Computer Applications and Concepts classes. One section of this class would have social networking concepts and technologies introduced and used and a different section of the same class would not. This allowed me to measure if any significant difference in learning occurred. This chart can be seen

http://teach.jsr.vccs.edu/amattia/sn_grant.htm

Actual Evaluation Results

	ITE 115 Social Networking				ITE 115 No Social Networking			
	Pretest	SN Activity	SN Activity	Posttest	Pretest	B Activity	B Activity	Posttest
MIN Score	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
MAX Score	20	10	10	20	20	10	10	19
AVG Score	13.4	6.1	9.3	15.6	15.4	6.8	7.4	13.4
Attendance Count	27	19	28	30	29	21	23	27

The findings are from two Introduction to Computer Applications and Concepts classes where students had an opportunity to interact with classmates online in discussion boards. They studied and created a wiki, added their own content and shared information with classmates. The students were also introduced to networks, such as professional development network (Linked In), that they would otherwise have been unlikely to experience. Some students were already doing things similar to what we studied, so that allowed us to capitalize on their knowledge and apply it to the classroom. This allowed other students to learn from them. This takes advantage of a new way of understanding, learning and processing information.

The social networking (SN) section of ITE 115 had an increase in the average score compared to the non social networking (SN) section of ITE 115 which had a decrease in the average score. In both sections, the activities average score increased. The SN section increased more, even though it had a lower score on the first activity.

The social networking (SN) section of ITE 115 had an increase in attendance compared to the non social networking (SN) section of ITE 115 which had a decrease in the average score. In both sections, the activities attendance increased. The SN section increased considerably more than the non SN section.

The findings of the study suggest that this is a way to constructively use social energy in the classroom. As a result, attendance improved, students showed more interest in the class content, and new class materials were developed for Spring Semester.

Lessons Learned:

In education, Web 2.0 is social, it's about the student, and it's mixing the global perspective with the local perspective. Web 2.0 is about new interfaces - new ways of searching and accessing Web content. And last but not least, Web 2.0 is a platform - and not just for developers to create web applications like Gmail and Flickr. The Web is a platform to build on for educators and students. It is collaborative form of interaction in and outside the classroom.

Take a look at what the ITE 115 classroom is doing with the Web. For example, the students are not only starting to use the tools of Web 2.0 - blogs, wikis, podcasts, etc. They're also adapting to a new way of interacting with classmates and educators and a new way of doing and submitting their assignments. The challenge for students now and for the future is to learn to be Internet and information literate. They need to be comfortable conversing and collaborating with their instructors, employer and each other using social networking and other web tools. They must make sense of new tools and the huge amounts of information and media that surround us.

Based on the lessons learned, a new Blackboard module was introduced to five ITE 115 this spring that are taught in a mixture of formats (i.e., regular, hybrid, distance ed). The Blackboard module incorporates the class materials developed and a new social network approach to learning in an ITE 115 class.

In addition, the developed Blackboard module is being reviewed by program heads, faculty, and adjuncts for use in other ITE 115 classes.

Dissemination:

Fall 2008 IT Advisory Meeting, IST Meeting

Plan to: Fall 2009 Peer group conference