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Social Media in the Classroom. The New Normal for University Education after COVID

Abstract: *The current pandemic is quickly changing the way professors teach students. In a previous anecdotal study done five years ago, it was difficult finding professors who used social media and online resources effectively in the classroom. With the new normal of online classroom instruction, professors should consider the following three principles as they modify their delivery of information: (1) Instructors should become proficient in using social media and new computer programs before using them in the classroom, (2) social media should be used strategically, not as busy work, and (3) professors should still focus on active learning in their classrooms. The restrictions of social distancing may engender a restructuring of universities. Efficient online institutions may expand their commoditized knowledge delivery while research universities specializing in more specialized, active, hands-on learning finding more creative solutions to fund their institutions.*
Keywords: *COVID-19, Social Media, Teaching, University Education,*

摘要 *(玛丽安娜·理查森: 课堂上的社交媒体。 新冠状病毒之后高等教育的新常态): 当前的病毒大流行正在迅速改变着教授的授课方式。在五年前进行的一项传闻研究中，很难找到在课堂上有效使用社交媒体和在线资源的教授。随着在线课堂教学的这一新常态，教授们在修改信息传递时应考虑以下三个原则：（1）教师们应已熟练使用社交媒体和新的计算机程序，然后再将它们运用在课堂中。（2）社交媒体应有策略地被使用，而非是繁忙的工作；（3）教授们仍应专注于在课堂上积极学习。 社会距离的限制可能会导致大学的重组。高效的在线机构可以扩大其商品化的知识传递，而专注于更专业的，主动的，动手学习的研究型大学则可以找到更具创造性的解决方案来为其机构提供资金。*
关键词： *新冠状病毒，社交媒体，教学，大学教育*

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摘要 *(玛丽安娜 ·理查森: 课堂上的社交媒体。新冠状病毒之后高等教育的新常态): 當前的病毒大流行正在迅速改變著教授的授課方式。在五年前進行的一項傳聞研究中，很難找到在課堂上有效使用社交媒體和在線資源的教授。隨著在線課堂教學的這一新常態，教授們在修改信息傳遞時應考慮以下三個原則：（1）教師們應已熟練使用社交媒體和新的計算機程序，然後再將它們運用在課堂中。（2）社交媒體應有策略地被使用，而非是繁忙的工作；（3）教授們仍應專注於在課堂上積極學習。社會距離的限制可能會導致大學的重組。 高效的在線機構可以擴大其商品化的知識傳遞，而專注於更專業的，主動的，動手學習的研究型大學則可以找到更具創造性的解決方案來為其機構提供資金。*
關鍵詞： *新冠状病毒，社交媒體，教學，大學教育*

Zusammenfassung *(Marianna E. Richardson: Soziale Medien im Klassenzimmer. Die neue Normalität für die Hochschulausbildung nach COVID): Die aktuelle Pandemie verändert schnell die Art und Weise, wie ProfessorInnen Studierende unterrichten. In einer früheren anekdotischen Studie, die vor fünf Jahren durchgeführt wurde, war es schwierig, ProfessorInnen zu finden, die soziale Medien und Online-Ressourcen im Klassenzimmer effektiv nutzen. Mit der neuen Norm des Online-Unterrichtens im Seminarraum sollten ProfessorInnen die folgenden drei Prinzipien berücksichtigen, wenn sie ihre Informationsvermittlung verändern: (1) sie sollten im Umgang mit sozialen Medien und neuen Computerprogrammen geübt sein, bevor sie diese einsetzen; (2) soziale Medien sollten strategisch eingesetzt werden und nicht als bloßes geschäftiges Arbeiten; (3) Professoren sollten sich weiterhin auf aktives Lernen in ihren Unterrichtsräumen konzentrieren. Die Einschränkungen der sozialen Distanzierung können zu einer Umstrukturierung der Universitäten führen. Effiziente Online-Institutionen können ihre kommerzielle Wissensvermittlung ausweiten, während Forschungsuniversitäten, die sich auf spezialisierteres, aktiveres, praktisches Lernen spezialisieren, kreativere Lösungen zur Finanzierung ihrer Institutionen finden.*
Schlüsselwörter: *COVID-19, Soziale Medien, Lehre, Hochschulbildung*

Резюме *(Марианна Е. Ричардсон: Социальные медиа в обучении. Новая нормальность в высшей школе после пандемии COVID): Новые условия, связанные с распространением коронавирусной инфекции, стремительно изменяют методы и подходы профессорско-преподавательского состава к обучению студентов. И если пять лет назад согласно одному из исследований практически было невозможно*

найти преподавателей, которые эффективно использовали в обучении социальные медиа и онлайн-ресурсы, то сейчас, в связи с необходимостью переключаться на новые форматы преподавания и трансфера информации, педагогам необходимо учитывать следующие принципы: 1) преподаватели должны обладать навыком применения социальных медиа и новых компьютерных программ, прежде чем внедрять их в процесс обучения; 2) применять социальные медиа необходимо под конкретные цели на уроке, а не просто «для проформы»; 3) преподавателям все равно нужно исходить из того, что «активное» обучение должно иметь приоритет. Ограничения, накладываемые социальной дистанцией, могут привести к переструктурированию университетской системы. Эффективные онлайн-организации получат возможность расширить спектр коммерческого трансфера знаний, а исследовательские университеты, специализирующиеся на активном, практикоориентированном обучении, будут искать креативные решения своего финансирования.
Ключевые слова: *COVID-19, социальные медиа, обучение, высшее образование*

Five years ago, I published an article about using social media in the college classroom (Richardson, 2015). At the time, I reviewed the latest research done by educational theorists and interviewed professors who used social media while teaching their university students; it was difficult finding professors who used social media regularly and well. The current pandemic, along with possible future social distancing needs is quickly changing university campuses everywhere. Students are not sitting in the ivory towers of learning closeted away, searching for knowledge in a sterile environment, often disconnected from home and family. Now, they are sitting in their living room or lying on their bed in front of a computer screen. Many students have lost their internships this summer, their jobs, and other opportunities to make money for tuition in the fall; they are concerned about being able to afford coming back to school. Students pay big bucks for the experience of college, campus life. A face-to-face learning environment has been substituted by Zoom and Team meetings, at least for the near future and maybe even longer.

Points to Remember When Teaching Online University Courses

This is not the first time that physical classrooms have had to move completely online in the United States. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina forced instructors at Southern University of New Orleans (SUNO) to quickly incorporate online instruction using social media and other computer technologies as their students were scattered across the western United States. Instructors and administrators soon realized "the danger of losing these students permanently if they did not reach them and work with them to continue and complete their programs of study" (Ralph, & Ralph, 2013, p. 450). Instructors were trained in online technologies and if they met the rigorous standards set by the university, they were given a laptop and monetary incentives to continue their online innovations. In 2009, SUNO established the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning to study advantages and challenges of social media use. Currently, many other universities are following this same pattern of training instructors to teach online and repurpose their classroom activities into online learning experiences.

A decade ago, Harvard professors and students started the Digital Native Project (Berkman Center, 2010) focusing on the generation born in the digital age. The purpose of the center is to encourage creative ways for society to better understand and harness digital fluency based on Palfrey and Gasser's (2008) book, *Born Digital*. This book seems almost prophetic as the authors tried "to separate what we need to worry about from what's not so scary, what we ought to resist from what we ought to embrace" (Palfrey, & Gasser, 2008, p. 9). Currently, university professors are having to figure out this balance between what they need to learn and embrace in teaching with social media and new computer programs versus what they ought to resist, depending upon their teaching style, curriculum, and ability to use technology.

The three points I stressed in my previous article have even more relevance today. First, as universities are forced to move ahead in using technology, instructors need ready access to relevant instruction geared to their level of expertise. Instructors who use social media applications before they are proficient may confuse and complicate student learning. Kentaro Toyama (2015) observed that the value students place on any technology is in direct proportion to the instructor's capability to use it. With the forced use of virtual meetings in universities today, continuous professional development should be given to

instructors to keep them aware of new ways to incorporate technologies into their teaching (Ralph, & Ralph, 2013, p. 451).

Second, social media should be used strategically (Lin, Hoffman, & Borengasser, 2013). Eyler (2013) stressed that the relevance of social media assignments should be made clear to students. If not, these assignments can seem like busy work rather than a necessary part of the curriculum. Lara Burton, who teaches computer science at Brigham Young University, made the point, "I worry that sometimes people jump to use a technology because it is new. I call that the 'shiny' effect. 'It's shiny! I want it!' I approach technology more by asking the question: 'How can this serve my needs and the needs of my students?'" (personal communication, April 12, 2015)

University professors should assess assignments based on their instructional value, rather than assigning busy work because students are not in the classroom.

Third, technology does not impede, nor improve learning (Toyama, 2015); instead, it is the instructor's delivery and the push towards active, rather than passive learning that makes the difference in student learning. Jensen, Kummer, & Godoy (2015) compared two freshman biology classes with the same instructor, lectures, assignments, activities, and classrooms. In an interview about the study, Kummer noted, "the key to successful learning gains is likely more attributable to active learning; a teaching model where students are actively involved in the process, constructing knowledge themselves instead of just listening" (Hollingshead, 2015, para. 3). As more university courses become online courses, professors must creatively tackle the problem of fostering active and experiential learning, even though students are being taught remotely.

Problems Associated with COVID Instruction

Many universities are still trying to decide what will happen to their classrooms, near and long term . The status of the delivery of information could change drastically given future local and global catastrophic situations. In a recent opinion piece, Norman Clark (2020) imagined how a student might navigate a day in class with social distancing and pandemic restrictions. The professor's voice is muffled by a surgeon's mask, students are constantly concerned about being exactly six feet apart from each other rather than enjoying the camaraderie of fellow learners, and the hallways are monitored like highways with lanes and stop and go signs, restricting students' comings and goings.

Lederman (2020) expressed the worry of many faculty members whose universities open for face-to-face instruction that their institutions are "putting financial and enrollment considerations ahead of their students and employees' safety." He also questions whether active learning can even occur in a classroom where both teacher and students are afraid to get too close and risk talking together. His conjecture is that an active learning environment would be better served online than in person given the current societal constraints, restrictions, and fears.

Restructuring of University Instruction

A global restructuring of university instruction and educational delivery may seem to be a modern phenomenon. But six years ago, Longstaff (2014) argued that historically, universities consistently go through a cyclical model of change "where waves of inclusivity alternate with bouts of exclusivity" (p. 167). Universities seem to be going through one of those "waves" of change. The first universities were accessible and mobile communities that moved from town to town, depending upon where the students lived. The origin of a campus-based education as a stationary place of learning was developed over time (Byrd, 2001, p. 289). With the corona virus pandemic and possible future threats of illness that may require additional social distancing, the campus-based model of higher education may revert to the original structure of accessible and mobile communities of education through online technology. This latest reincarnation of higher education may "invoke a wholesale shift to the boundless model" (Longstaff, 2014, p. 117) of a university education being offered to any student in the world who wants to learn. The confines of the ivory tower may be exploding to include anyone who owns a computer.

The tension between research and teaching at universities also poses a problem. The financial pressures on colleges exacerbated by COVID has been brewing for a long time, as illustrated by the outrageously high tuition rates of many institutions of higher education which is causing huge student debt (Blumstyk, 2015, p. 147). These rates emphasize that education often subsidizes research and expensive labs (and vice versa). When one suffers, so does the other. There will continue to be an emergence of efficient educational enterprises inside and outside of traditional universities that will hopefully sever this tie in many ways. This change may force research to foster more creative funding sources rather than taxing students.

In my previous article, I concluded with the statement: "Personally, I am not worried about the fate of university and college campuses" (Richardson, 2015, p. 221). I would not end with that statement today. I am worried that face-to-face communication and learning, along with university classrooms with four walls, whiteboards, chairs, and desks may become obsolete. The traditional model of university instruction will be replaced by hybrid models of part online instruction, part face-to-face instruction, or completely online courses, including competency-based degrees, badges and stackable credentials (Blumstyk, 2015, p. 154). The apprentice-style education of graduate students, such as doctoral students who are trained by mentors doing research at the cutting edge of knowledge, will hopefully continue (Morson, & Schapiro, 2015). But education is becoming more commoditized with online education getting better and better. Universities will need to focus on specialized, hands-on, active learning, leaving commoditized knowledge delivery to more efficient online organizations, as well as discovering more creative solutions to fund their institutions.

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