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Leveraging Social Media to Meet the Needs of your Students

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The facebook page of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Check it out at www.facebook.com/cetlmona

Social media is now a formidable part of the life of millions of people worldwide. It is a dominant way in which people interact, present ideas and information. By some estimates, nearly 40% of the world's population use social media platforms across the globe. Educators, students alumni and of course, others are among the regular users of social media platforms. An important question for educators in higher education is: "how can we leverage social media to the meet the needs of educators and the needs of students?" Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Flickr, YouTube, Tumblr, Instagram, and so many

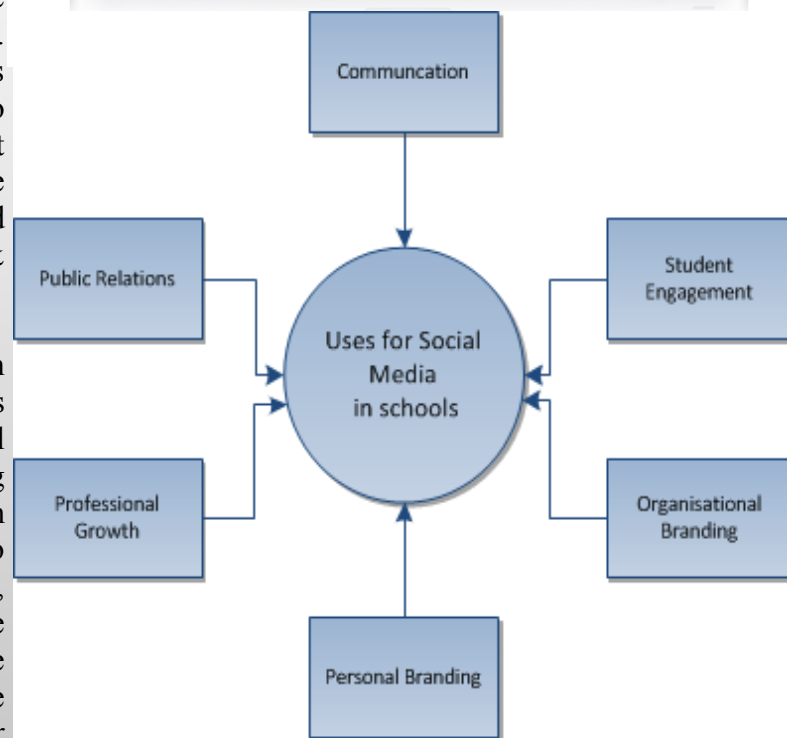
more have enabled persons from all walks of life to connect, share, find stories, and media. For institutions of higher education, social media provides opportunities for collaboration and engagement since dialogues can take place between students, prospective students, educators and the institution. With the proliferation of social networks, some educators are even using them as professional communities of practice, learning communities, and as platforms for the sharing of interesting stories on various topics that students are studying in class.

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Effective educational practice requires that we develop our teaching and learning sessions with appropriate opportunities for engagement. In online spaces, this opportunity is available through social media. Millennial learners are using social media almost from the moment they have awoken till bedtime (Mashable, 2010). There is data that suggests that college students spend nearly two hours per day on Facebook. Many faculty have mixed ideas about using social media for multiple reasons including, issues of privacy and cyber bullying. Coupled with these mixed ideas about using social media is the finding from research that suggests that students do not want to interact with faculty by way of social media since, some feel their social space is being invaded. Further, there is also the view that faculty need to keep personal and professional relationships separate. Hence, there is some ambivalence in higher education when this issue is addressed. Some faculty steer clear of social media. Yet, research is indicating that social media can be an important space to engage students. In fact, the research goes on to indicate that social media provides a cost effective method to engage students and that their usage can be associated with improved grades, engagement and satisfaction (Junco, Heiberger & Loken, 2010).

It might do well to affirm at this point that there is a sense in which social media has had a bad press. In fact, numerous numbers of negative reports have come out about social media. These have helped to skew our thinking concerning the usage of social media and its effect on students in institutions of higher education. Further, there are those who charge that students waste a lot of time on social media. Yet, it is impossible to dismiss the view that social media can have positive impact on our students. However, since some of the problems associated with use of online social media sites are real, the question continues to bedevil many in higher education: What to do about its usage? What is the ethical thing to do? Is there a place for leveraging social media to meet your needs and those of your students?

An important concern as we think about using social media is that content matters. Therefore, when we think about making pedagogical decisions, we must think about the content that we need to be teaching. How might conscientious teachers proceed? One approach might be to require that students, for instance, in a Physics class, studying string theory watch a TED talk on this and proceed to have discussions about this issue with a renowned physicist and other educators on the site. In nursing or other health care professions, students could develop a Facebook page on how to care for sickle cell patients or how to care for the feet if one is a diabetic patient. Students in Film Studies class could use Twitter to engage others in a discussion about some of the popular films they are studying. In Cultural Studies/Reggae Studies, students



could use Facebook or YouTube or Twitter to discuss some of the hallmarks of Jamaican dancehall music.

It is noteworthy that in the first controlled study published on the use of social media as an educational intervention, the findings indicated that it was an effective teaching and learning space (Junco, Heiberger & Loken, 2010). Participants in that study indicated that they used Twitter to discuss their readings. These students also reported that they used Twitter to answer questions relating to their courses and organise study groups. So, if you decide to use social media in your teaching, pay attention to those who are already using it. Of course, you will need to pilot your ideas and strategies and assess them to determine if they are working. Social media can be used to distribute information, make multiple connections with students and definitely between students and of course, create opportunities for advancing learning.

Group Work: Collaborative Learning, Cooperative Learning and Problem-Based Learning



There is much interest in using group work in the college and university classroom. It is argued, and the research suggests that it promotes learning. The benefits of peers engaging with each other are well known. Further, the possibilities of students developing interpersonal skills from engaging in group work are also well known from reliable research. Of course, some persons have problems wrapping their hands around the various types of group work or group teaching and learning arrangements that we read about in the literature. There is, for instance, the term *team teaching* which is often used interchangeable with group work. Some people feel that this is a preferred term because it mirrors what is done in industry. Then, there is *collaborative learning*, *cooperative learning*, and *problem-based learning* approaches to teaching and learning and these do recommend themselves as group approaches to teaching and learning.

There is widespread usage of the terms collaborative, cooperative learning and problem-based learning. Yet, these terms are easily misunderstood and in fact, oftentimes they are used completely inappropriately. The fact that students have been placed in small groups to do work doesn't necessarily mean that they are engaged in collaborative or cooperative learning. Oftentimes, teachers make these claims. So, clearly, there is some misunderstanding of how these terms are to be used and there might be inappropriate practice as well.

The truth is that collaborative learning, cooperative learning and problem-based learning have had their loyalists over the years. They have stoutly defended each group arrangement and the benefits that are believed to be derived from each group arrangement. In some cases, those who might have greater affinity for cooperative learning might not be clear about collaborative learning or problem based learning. Yet, there are those who understand collaborative learning as a general expression for learning done in groups (Barkley, Major, & Cross, 2014). In fact, Barkley, Major and Cross cited MacGregor (1992, p.4) in offering this definition of collaborative learning: "Collaborative' learning is an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual effort by students, or students and teachers together. In most collaborative learning situations, students are working in groups of two or more, mutually searching for understanding, solutions, or meanings, or creating product." However, some persons differ in terms of their understanding of collaborative learning and do not use the term in relation to multiple group teaching and learning strategies.

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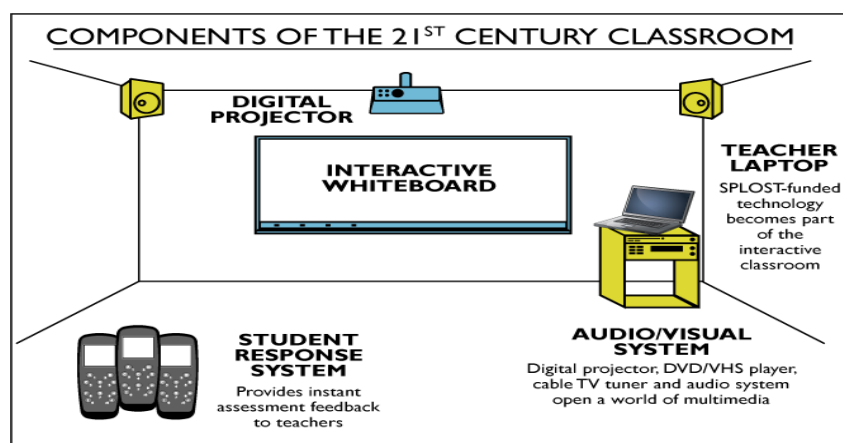
Activities of the CETL

TEACHING ASSISTANTS' SEMINAR

Each semester, the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) tries to facilitate teaching and learning training opportunities for teaching assistants. These opportunities are geared towards the development of the pedagogical expertise of teaching assistants. Last semester, the CETL was able to partner with the Department of Language, Linguistics and Philosophy (and others) to facilitate some seminars in teaching and learning for the teaching assistants of the Department. The CETL looked at "Planning the lesson" (December 11, 2014) and "Assessment Strategies" (December 17, 2014).

THE UWI 21ST CENTURY CLASSROOM PROJECT

(Coming August 2015)



SPECIAL FACULTY DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

In January 2015, the CETL was able to host two important special workshops that were well supported by faculty. These were the *Teaching with 21st Century Technologies Workshop* held January 12 & 13, 2015 and the *Annual Teaching Skills Workshop*, held January 14, 15 & 16, 2015. Both workshops were facilitated to better prepare university teachers to teach millennial learners.

TEACHING WITH 21ST CENTURY TECHNOLOGIES WORKSHOP

A major part of the programme emphasises of the CETL is to provide opportunities for faculty to learn to use 21st century technologies to advance learning at the UWI Mona Campus. At this two day workshop, the themes were **DAY ONE**: "From podium to podcasts: How to flip your classroom and enhance student engagement" and **DAY TWO** "Game changing course apps and tools for teaching and learning." The facilitator was Mrs Michelle Stewart-McKoy and the sessions were held in the Mona School of Business and Management South Computer Laboratory.

On the first day of this two day workshop, faculty were exposed to the essential techniques that were required in preparing to flip their classes and they engaged in creating meaningful course content that had the possibility of increasing student engagement in the flipped classroom. Then, on the second day, faculty were taught how to use a variety of emerging course apps/tools (e.g. hot potatoes, text2mind map and padlet) to make learning more exciting and interactive and thus increase student engagement.



Members of faculty at a 21st century Technologies Workshop focusing on "Game Changing Course Apps"

Leveraging Social Media to Meet the Needs of your Students

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Meeting Students where they are

There are numerous examples of people using social media to meet their students where they are. For instance, T.J. Logan, Associate Director of Housing at the University of Florida has used social media to give incoming students the ability to select their roommates. Art Esposito, Director of Discovery Advising at Virginia Commonwealth University has used social media, in this instance, Facebook to post tips, videos and suggestions to his advisees. He has also indicated that he has answered questions on Facebook from his advisees. At the University of Wisconsin, Waukesha, the Director of Marketing and Communications, Liz Gross has used Facebook ads to attract persons to the school's Facebook page where they receive updates, ask questions about the university and connect with current students and faculty. She has made using Twitter a priority (following community members who might be potential students or parents of potential students and listening to local chatter) to get in touch with the pulse of the multiple publics served by her institution and to gain insights on how the university might more effectively serve students. Many faculty members have also been able to use blogs successfully to enhance the writing skills of students and help them to develop their prose. Some faculty have had their graduate students blog about weekly readings and discussions. Numerous videos are available on YouTube to assist with teaching many difficult concepts.

Teaching with social media has the potential to add fun and additional meaning to the learning experience. This is an approach to teaching and learning that calls for educators to be personally and professionally invested in it in order for success to be realised.

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Activities of the CETL

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THE TEACHING SKILLS WORKSHOP



Faculty in training at Teaching Skills Workshop 2015.

The Teaching Skills Workshop continues to be the premier workshop offered by the CETL. This year 28 persons attended and the facilitators were Dr Beryl Allen, Dr Mairette Newman, Dr Michele Kennedy and Dr Mervin E. Chisholm. Over the three days of the experience, faculty were exposed to the major elements of the teaching act and how these might be improved. The overall objectives of the workshop were:

- ◆ To increase participants' awareness of how students learn;
- ◆ To identify problems students have coping with university teaching and learning;
- ◆ To design instructional objectives for teaching and assessment;
- ◆ To determine best strategies for active and interactive learning and teaching;
- ◆ To develop teaching skills through engagement in micro teaching activities;
- ◆ To enhance pedagogy by critical reflection on micro teaching activities and personal university teaching activities;
- ◆ To decide on approaches to effective assessment strategies;
- ◆ To develop and enjoy new collegial relationships.



Faculty doing a group exercise at Teaching skills Workshop 2015 being observed by one of the facilitators, Dr. Mairette Newman (standing).



Dr. Paula Daley –Morris, Lecturer, Information Technology/Computer Science Education (in foreground standing) makes a point to the 6th cohort of the Certificate in University Teaching and Learning Programme, taking the course CUTL5106: Advancing Teaching and Learning with Technology.

The sixth cohort of students for the Certificate in University Teaching and Learning began in August 2014 as part of the CETL Faculty Development Summer Institute. It started with the facilitation of the course CUTL 5001: Teaching and Learning, Theory to Practice. This was taught by Dr Mervin E. Chisholm. The second course CUTL 5104: Technology in Higher Education in the programme was held January 12-16, 2015. Unfortunately, the cohort was reduced to 19 students from 28 since, some persons had found it impossible to continue based on work commitments and the inability to devote the necessary time to satisfactorily complete the programme. However, the sessions provided opportunities for faculty to be exposed to technology in teaching and learning in higher education. This faculty development activity was facilitated by Dr Paula Daley-Morris of the School of Education.

In February 2015, the CETL was pleased to offer the Certificate in University Teaching and Learning to the faculty of the UWI School of Clinical Medicine and Research in Nassau, The Bahamas. The programme was delivered to meet the needs of these lecturers whose teaching took place mainly in clinical situations. Dr Mairrette Newman of the School of Education joined Dr Mervin E. Chisholm of the CETL in facilitating (co-teaching) weekend face-to face sessions in Nassau during the months of February to May, 2015. Over this time, they taught the courses CUTL 5001: Teaching and Learning: Theory to Practice and CUTL 5104: Assessment in Higher Education. In June and July, Dr Paula Daley Morris will teach the course CUTL 5106: Advancing Teaching and Learning with Technology and hopefully the students will commence the final course CUTL5207: Reflective Teaching for Learning in September for completion by December 31, 2015.

Throughout the period under review, November 2014 – April 2015, several faculty development activities, particularly seminars were held. These included Revised GPA, Writing Learning Outcomes and Developing Teaching Skills for tutors of the Faculty of Social Sciences. All of these seminars were well received and advanced the mission of the CETL.

THE ANNUAL CROSS CAMPUS MEETING OF THE CENTRES FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING



One of the sessions of the annual cross campus meeting of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning held at the Mona campus, February 9-10, 2015.

The annual cross campus meeting of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning was held at the CETL, Mona Campus from February 9-10, 2015. All educational developers in centres attended and reviewed the work of the centres and made plans to continue the work of educational development/faculty development on the campuses of the University of the West Indies.

Highlights of the meeting included:

- ◆ A session with PVC Professor Yvette Jackson concerning the CETLs participation in the holding of the Supervisors Development Course on the three land campuses and a determination of how to improve the activity for the next staging;
- ◆ A presentation by Dr. Georgiana Gordon-Strachan from the Mona Office of Research and Innovation (MORI) on grant funding and how faculty development officers might seek grant funding opportunities for teaching and learning in higher education;
- ◆ Plans to reorganize the Certificate in University Teaching and Learning;
- ◆ Developing a strategy for the evaluation of the Certificate in University Teaching and Learning on the three land campuses;
- ◆ Decisions on the approach to the upcoming Quality Assurance review of the CETL.



St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago | June 24-26, 2015
Email: bestpractices@sta.uwi.edu

The Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning joined with the Quality Assurance Unit of the UWI in planning for, and hosting a conference called Institutionalising Best Practices in Higher Education. This was planned for the UWI St. Augustine Campus in Trinidad and Tobago from June 24-26, 2015. The goal of the conference was to consider best practices in institutions of higher education particularly, in relation to planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating higher education products and services and to determine how these might be institutionalise for ongoing use and improvements to universities and colleges.

Group Work: Collaborative Learning, Cooperative Learning and Problem-Based Learning

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Above, it was mentioned that collaborative learning, cooperative learning and problem based learning are three approaches to small group teaching and learning and they share some common features. But bear in mind that this is not the only perspective in the literature. When we look at the three approaches mentioned, it is safe to say that in terms of pedagogical practice, all three usually begin with a common task or learning activity that can be completed by the learners working together in a group or in a team. They usually talk to each other about the learning activity assigned to the group. They work cooperatively or they are involved in co-labouring activities to complete the assigned task. In these group arrangements, the students are responsible for their own learning and they are expected to contribute to the achievement of the learning goal of the group/team. Obviously also, there is definitely intentional design.

Each of the forms of group work mentioned has important elements that are not shared and it is important to realise these. It has been acknowledged by some that: "Cooperative learning is more structured and employs more active teacher facilitation than collaborative learning" (Davidson & Major, 2014, p.32). Problem based learning is organized in very similar ways to cooperative learning with its exclusive focus on problems and this is certainly the major difference. Collaborative learning is more concerned with open-ended interactions and its goal is the discovery, understanding or production of knowledge. In cooperative learning, roles are usually assigned. However, in collaborative learning, roles are not usually assigned and group interaction skills are usually not taught. In cooperative learning, teachers usually form the

groups and in collaborative learning, students usually form themselves into groups. Problem-based learning groups tend to be larger than both cooperative and collaborative learning groups.

Collaborative learning groups have been used extensively in the humanities and somewhat in the social sciences but rarely in the sciences or professional programmes. Cooperative learning approaches have been extensively used in the sciences, maths engineering and professional programmes. Problem based learning has been used in all disciplines but was developed largely in medical education. It is still used extensively in the health professions.

The association between group work type and the discipline has been studied for cooperative learning and problem based learning. In most instances, rigorous imperial studies have been done and the results have been quite impressive. Collaborative learning has not been studied much empirically.

Over the years research studies have shown that learners in colleges working in small groups outperform their counterparts in a number of key areas. These include knowledge development, thinking skills, social skills and course satisfaction.

References

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