Assessing Web 2.0 Tools: Choose Carefully, Use Wisely

The availability of Web 2.0 tools is one of the hottest things going in higher education today. These amazing online applications allow users to create and present content digitally and interact and collaborate with others (as opposed to Web 1.0 locations, which offer only passive content as sources of information). Web 2.0 tools include blogs; social networking sites; mashups, which combine resources from multiple sources such as a digital map with interactive links to pictures or addresses; screencasts; interactive storage repositories; and wikis, which allow users to add, modify, or delete content collaboratively with others. Literally hundreds of Web 2.0 tools currently are available (see sidebar on page 2 for a list of 10 of the most popular), and new and exciting options appear regularly. Incorporating these tools into the classroom can dramatically impact any higher education course and give instructors the potential to revolutionize the way they think about teaching and learning. Given the great number of choices, faculty who wish to use Web 2.0 applications actively in the classroom must assess them carefully.

Categorizing and Assessing Web 2.0 Tools

One way instructors can make sense of all the Web 2.0 tools available is to think of how they might use them in a college course. Kitsantas and Dabbagh (2011) suggested three possibilities for using Web 2.0 tools: (a) communication (e.g., Adobe Connect, Skype), (b) experience and resource sharing (e.g., Pinterest, Instagram, Flickr, YouTube), and (c) social networking (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter). Using these categories, faculty can decide what they hope to accomplish during the class term using Web 2.0 tools and how their use might facilitate learning outcomes. For example, if the goal is resource sharing, faculty members need to specify the learning outcomes for that experience, the ways in which students should use the identified tools (e.g., Instagram, Pinterest), and the expectations for student performance as expressed in a rubric. These preliminary steps in planning will help create high-quality learning opportunities.

Secondly, Hew and Cheung (2013) suggested faculty think about prospective Web 2.0 tools in relation to synchronicity. Will students be required to engage in cooperation with other students at a set time (i.e., synchronous) or at times convenient to their schedules (i.e., asynchronous)? A variety of synchronous Web 2.0 tools can be used in the classroom, including polling tools (e.g., www.polleverywhere.com); course-related gaming strategies; or virtual environments, such as Second Life. In contrast, asynchronous tools allow students to work on their own schedules to develop course-related products, post them on a web location, share the link, and then observe and respond to one another using web-based strategies. Blogging applications (e.g., Blogger, Voicethread, WordPress) are especially well suited for this type of interaction. Asynchronous tools can be particularly effective with groups of students who, for example, attend school part-time because of employment or family-related responsibilities.

> "Thinking differently about information is going to be crucial as Web 2.0 takes off, for both teacher and learners. ... In the era of networking and emergent information systems, a whole new range of skills is necessary in our academic culture: the skills required to create online frameworks for collaborative, learner-led work."
>
> — Iposos MORI (2008, p. 42)

Sloan-C, a collaborative coalition dedicated to improving the quality of online education, offers a third set of criteria. The consortium encourages faculty to consider (a) access (e.g., availability for both Windows and Mac users, level of connectivity needed, cost), (b) usability (e.g., Will the user need an account? Is the application easy to use? Is a Help section available?), (c) privacy and intellectual property (e.g., ability to restrict access to participating students, protection of personal data), (d) workload and time management (e.g., ability to track student work for grades, ability to embed the tool into the campus learning management system), and (e) the fun factor (e.g., opportunities to be creative during the learning process, level at which this experience is enjoyable for the user). The use of external criteria such as those proposed by Sloan-C helps faculty members maintain a sense of accountability related to best practices in Web 2.0 use. The complete list of Sloan-C assessment criteria can be found at http://sloan-consortium.org/Web_2.0_Selection_Criteria_Save_Time_Choosing_an_Appropriate_Tool.

Guiding Questions

After assessing Web 2.0 tools and determining their categories of use (e.g., communication, information sharing, social networking), instructors should consider these guiding questions before introducing the applications in the classroom:

- Will using a particular Web 2.0 tool help students master identified learning outcomes?

- How much will it take (e.g., time, energy, resources) to learn to use the tool effectively?

- Will this tool seamlessly connect with other learning experiences that are part of the course?

- Is the necessary technological support available and accessible to introduce this tool, help students learn how to use it, and assist in its implementation?

- Is the tool intended to help students learn new skills or to assess their learning? and

- What assessments are available to determine whether the tool was beneficial to students and their learning?

Conclusion

Wise decisions about Web 2.0 tool selection and implementation can dramatically impact the overall success of a course and the level at which students are learning. By employing these digital interactive tools, instructors not only help students learn and apply new instructional content related to the course or discipline but also give them opportunities to visualize other ways in which these tools will be an integral part of their lives into the future.

REFERENCES

Hew, K. F., & Cheung, W. S. (2013). Use of Web 2.0 technologies in K-12 and higher education: The research for evidence-based practice. *Educational Research Review, 9,* 47–64.

Iposos MORI on behalf of the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). (2008). Great expectations of ICT: How higher education institutions are measuring up. Retrieved from http://sitecore.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/jiscgreatexpectationsfinalreportjune08.pdf

Kitsantas, A., & Dabbagh, N. (2011). The role of Web 2.0 technologies in self-regulated learning. In H. Bembenutty (Ed.), *Self-regulated learning* (New Directions in Teaching and Learning, No. 126, pp. 99-106). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Ten of the most popular Web 2.0 sites are:

- YouTube, an interactive video repository;

- Wikipedia, an open-source document creation platform;

- Twitter, an interactive social networking application;

- Craigslist, a centralized network of online communities;

- WordPress, a content management system and open-source blog publishing application;

- Flickr, an online photo management and sharing location;

- IMDB, an interactive database focused on movies and television programs;

- Photobucket, an image-hosting, video-hosting, slideshow-creation, and photo-sharing website;

- Blogger, a blog creation tool; and

- Tumblr, a blogging platform that allows users to post text, images, videos, links, quotes, and audio.

(Courtesy of www.ebizmba.com)

Sign up for

E SOURCE FOR COLLEGE TRANSITIONS

Looking for new teaching strategies or fresh ideas for first-year seminars? *E-Source*, the National Resource Center's online newsletter for college transition, offers a wealth of information. *E-Source* also is accepting submissions for the spring 2014 issue. To view the archives, review submission guidelines, and to receive content alerts for new issues, please go to http://tech.sa.sc.edu/fye/esource/web/index.php

What's Happening at The National Resource Center

Conferences and Continuing Education

Online Courses

The National Resource Center offers online courses on topics of interest in higher education. The courses provide participants with the same content and opportunities for interaction with peers and an instructor as traditional (i.e., classroom-based) learning environments while taking advantage of pedagogy and teaching techniques that are not possible or common in those settings. The courses have limited enrollment and use tools such as e-mail, threaded discussions and forums, listservs, and blogs. For more information, visit http://www.sc.edu/fye/oc.

Online Course Offerings:

September 30-November 1, 2013

Fostering First-Year Student Success—facilitated by Stephanie M. Foote, associate professor of Education in the Department of First-Year Programs at Kennesaw State University. This course is designed to engage participants in an exploration of the fundamental aspects of first-year student success. To register, go to http://www.sc.edu/fye/oc/index.html.

Conferences and Institutes

20th National Conference on Students in Transition

October 19-21, 2013

Atlanta, Georgia (Buckhead area)

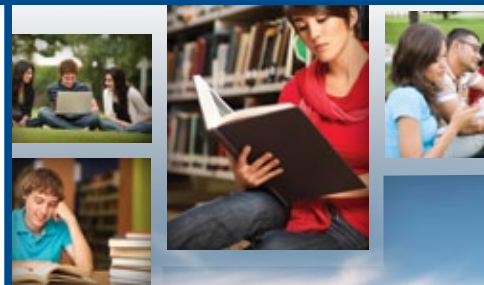*Early Registration Deadline: September 27, 2013*

M. Stuart Hunter, associate vice president and executive director for University 101 Programs and the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, and Marilee J. Bresciani, professor of Postsecondary Educational Leadership at San Diego State University, will be the featured speakers at the 20th National Conference on Students in Transition. The conference offers participants the opportunity to share with and learn from each other the latest trends, initiatives, best practices, ideas, research, and assessment strategies focused on supporting student success through the full spectrum of college transitions. For more information on the conference or to register, please visit www.sc.edu/fye/sit.

Institute on Effective Teaching and Learning Practices for First-Year Students

October 25-27, 2013

University of South Carolina (Capstone Campus Room)

Institute faculty will build a framework in which participants will examine trends and practices related to actively engaging first-year students through compelling and interactive approaches to teaching and learning. Individual sessions are designed to build on one another so that participants leave with a personalized action plan for use on their home campuses. Modeling active pedagogies, the Institute faculty will employ group work, problem solving, case studies, discussion, and other active strategies to engage participants in learning. Topics will include principles of sound course design, creative and effective ways to assess student learning, active and problem-based learning strategies, and techniques for engaging diverse learners. For information or to register, please visit http://www.sc.edu/fye/tlfy/index.html#topics.

National Conference on
STUDENTS IN TRANSITION
CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

October 19-21, 2013
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

EARLY REGISTRATION DEADLINE:
SEPT 27, 2013

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER
FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

WWW.SC.EDU/FYE/**SIT**

33rd Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience
February 15-18, 2014
San Diego, California
Proposal Deadline: October 11, 2013
Early Registration Deadline: January 16, 2014

Diane R. Dean, associate professor for Higher Education Administration and Policy at Illinois State University; Arthur Levine, president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation and president emeritus of Teachers College, Columbia University; and Vasti Torres, dean of the College of Education at the University of South Florida, will be the featured speakers at the 33rd Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience. Conferences are meetings where educators from two- and four-year institutions come together to openly share ideas, concepts, resources, assessment tools, programmatic interventions, and research results focused on the first college year. Registration and proposal information is available at http://www.sc.edu/fye/annual.

Save the Dates

Institute on Creating Effective Partnerships for the Success of Returning Veterans
April 4-6, 2014
University of South Carolina (Capstone Campus Room)

New Releases

Writing in the Senior Capstone: Theory and Practice
Lea Masiello and Tracy L. Skipper
Writing facilitates learning, helps students gain skills in analysis and synthesis, and supports a range of other personal and intellectual developmental outcomes important to employers. Yet, surveys of employers continually highlight the need for better communication skills among recent college graduates. To that end, *Writing in the Senior Capstone* offers the rationale and practical guidance for infusing writing into culminating academic experiences for college seniors. Recognizing that writing-intensive capstones already exist on many campuses, the authors also offer a range of strategies and activities to support the development of independent senior projects, while honing students' thinking, writing, and presentation skills. ISBN 978-1-889-27187-3. 156 pages. $30.00. To order your copy, visit us online at http://www.nrcpubs.com/p/118/writing-in-senior-capstone.

National Resource Center Exhibits and Presentations

Like many of you, the staff of the National Resource Center is actively involved in the conference circuit. We are pleased to share the following upcoming opportunities to hear about the results of research studies conducted by the Center, learn about best practices, and meet staff members.

The First-Year Seminar as a Driver of High-Impact Practice in the First College Year: Findings From a National Survey, 1:40 - 2:40 p.m., and **A Writer's Workshop: Tips on Shaping Pieces for a Variety of Audiences and Purposes,** 11:10 a.m. - 12:10 p.m. Presentations by Tracy Skipper, National Resource Center assistant director for publications; at the Midwest First-Year Conference; September 27, 2013; Elgin Community College, Elgin, Illinois.

WWW.SC.EDU/FYE/ANNUAL

33rd ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON
THE FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE®

San Diego, California
February 15-18, 2014

Proposal Deadline: October 11, 2013

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER
FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Living-Learning Communities as a High-Impact Educational Practice. Keynote address by Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center director; at the 2013 ACUHO-I Living-Learning Programs Conference; 11:45 a.m.; October 5, 2013; Providence, Rhode Island.

Turning Theory Into Practice: Bringing the Residential Curriculum to Life. Plenary address by Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center director; at the 2013 ACPA Residential Curriculum Institute; 9:45 a.m.; October 22, 2013; Columbia, South Carolina.

2011 Survey of Senior Capstone Experiences. Introductory remarks by Mary Stuart Hunter, National Resource Center associate vice president and executive director; at the Thriving in College: Developing Students' Strengths to Succeed conference; October 24-26, 2013; Pasadena, California.

Examining the National Picture of Assessment of First-Year Seminars, A High-Impact Educational Practice. Concurrent session by Dallin George Young, National Resource Center assistant director for research, grants, and assessment; at the 2013 Assessment Institute; 3:15-4:15 p.m.; October 29, 2013; Indianapolis, Indiana.

The First-Year Seminar as a Driver of High-Impact Practice in the First College Year: Findings From a National Survey. Presentation by Tracy Skipper, National Resource Center assistant director for publications; at the 2013 NODA Conference; 3:30-4:20 p.m.; November 5, 2013; San Antonio, Texas.

The Impact of Compensation Models on the Outcomes of Peer Leadership Experiences. Presentation by Jennifer R. Keup, National Resource Center director; at the 2013 ASHE Annual Conference; 1-2:15 p.m.; November 14, 2013; Park View, Hyatt Regency at the Arch; St. Louis, Missouri.

A National Picture of the Incorporation of High-Impact Educational Practices in the First-Year Seminar. Roundtable presentation by Dallin George Young, National Resource Center assistant director for research, grants, and assessment; at the 2013 ASHE Annual Conference; 9:15-10 a.m.; November 15, 2013; Grand DE on the fourth level, Hyatt Regency at the Arch; St. Louis, Missouri.

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