

Kevin Harris  
Writing and Research  
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## Using Facebook in the Classroom

### Abstract

This research study evaluated the number of students who log on to social networks in two different college classes. The first step in the research process was observing and counting the number of students logged on to a social network, logged on to some other website, or paying attention in class compared to the total number of students in the class. Once completed, seven interviews were carried out asking students about why they choose to log on and what they do when online. Results showed that as class progressed, the number of students choosing to log on to a social network increased linearly and the number of students paying attention to lecture decreased accordingly. From these results, I proposed a few different ideas about how teachers can reverse this distracting trend of social networking in class.

### Introduction

College students all around the country rely on social networks, specifically Facebook and MySpace, to stay connected with friends, family, peers, co-workers, etc. However, this trend has made its way into the college classroom. Most colleges require their students to have a personal laptop that they are to bring and use in class. This has consequentially led to an increase in the number of students logging on to the internet in class browsing any number of sites on the world wide web: checking the door buster sales at Nordstrom's, reading the newest and juiciest celebrity gossip hot off the desk of Perez Hilton, playing those truly addicting games on addictinggames.com, watching the newest YouTube hit video, catching up on last week's episode of *The Office*, replying to an e-mail

sent by a long-lost friend, and most prominently... Facebook. Social networks are the ultimate distraction. Their power to entice students' attention is second to none, like nothing ever seen within the world of education. Nevertheless, can teachers use this distracting discourse to their advantage?

The purpose of my research is to analyze how the use of social networks in a college classroom affects students' learning, concentration, and ability to retain knowledge. I intend to explore how teachers and professors can utilize social networks to better connect and help further the knowledge and learning capabilities of their students and peers. I believe that logging on to social networks in the classroom currently hinders the focus and knowledge intake of students, but that it can, in the future, help teachers and professors better interact and connect with students.

### **Literature Review**

Researchers argue that teachers connecting with students on online social networks could help improve self-efficacy and self-regulated learning in college students. Through these online connections, teachers can promote students' motivation to learn, participate, and interact in classroom settings. Joy Bowers-Campbell (2008) contends that teachers can help improve self-efficacy and self-regulation of their college students by utilizing social networks, Facebook and MySpace, to connect on a more personal level. Although many researchers see Facebook as destroying modern discourse and damaging students' ability to learn and decipher complex texts, Joy Bowers Campbell is sure to note that people everywhere love Facebook and this should be taken advantage of to improve learning techniques and create more communication between teachers and students in the new communication age. Communication is key in education. Knowing how students

communicate with each other and how they respond to people of authority, specifically teachers, aids in furthering their learning because education thrives on individualistic connection rather than a stringent connection.

J.P. Mazer, R.E. Murphy, and C. J. Simonds (2007) continue this rationalization by evaluating the effects of a teacher disclosing themselves, on a social network such as MySpace or Facebook, to their students and peers. The students' motivation was measured and results showed that a teacher's elevated self-disclosure leads to an elevated level of motivation and learning for their students. The final research article, written by K. Subrahmanyama, S.M. Reich, N. Waechter, and G. Espinoza (2008), evaluated adolescents' and young adults' actual usage of Facebook and MySpace. Researchers wanted to know how people use social networking sites to further their social networks and offline networking abilities with friends, family, and any other peers. The findings proved that participants use Facebook and MySpace to connect and reconnect with family members and friends. However, the results also showed that emerging adults utilize different online means of building different parts of offline and online social connections.

These three articles answer the question of my research of how social networks can be utilized to enhance students' learning. My research revolves around the implications of Facebooking and MySpacing in class while the articles about teacher disclosure take this one step further, articulating how these implications can be made advantageous. My research, however, fills two different gaps that previously went untested or unanswered. I will be studying *why* students choose to log on to Facebook and *how* this affects their concentration and learning. The previous research only recognized the proposal that teachers can utilize social networks as a tool to enhance learning, but failed to answer how

to successfully harness this tool. I fully intend on providing some possible options derived from my research concerning the actual use of social networks in class.

## **Methods**

My research juxtaposes both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to best answer and determine a possible solution for my research question. To initiate the research I chose a seat at the back of the classroom in two of my classes, Modern Britain and Analytical Inquiry, to observe what the other students in front of me are really doing on their laptop while the teacher lectures. Modern Britain meets on Monday and Wednesday afternoons for two hours while Analytical Inquiry meets for an hour each day, Monday through Thursday. I chose these two classes because students regularly use computers in each; all students use computers in Analytical Inquiry and most use them in Modern Britain. I first counted the number of students in each class and then tallied how many of these students had laptops in front of them. On the first day of observation, I watched and observed over my peer's shoulders and noted their computer usage. Research observation notes and censuses were taken on how many of the students who had laptops present were logged on to a social network or website not pertaining to the class as opposed to the students who were typing notes, and in some cases both. I remained impartial by not telling anyone I was completing research. On the second day of research, I continued to gather more data on the number of students logged on to social networks in class. None of the observations will include scrutinizing what each student actually does on Facebook.

After each class got out, I selected three to four students to interview about their computer usage in class. These students were selected first based on if they had a class

immediately following the class I observed. Students who did have a class were automatically taken out of the possibilities for interviews because of their need to arrive in their next class on time. From the remaining students, I selected those whom I witnessed as solely logged on to a social network during class, shifting back and forth between notes and a social network, or any other usage of the computer. Two of the interviewees were close friends of mine and the other five were just acquaintances. The questions asked go as follows:

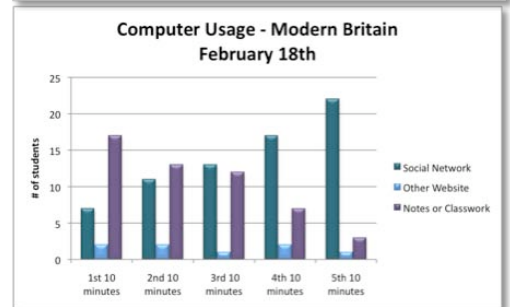
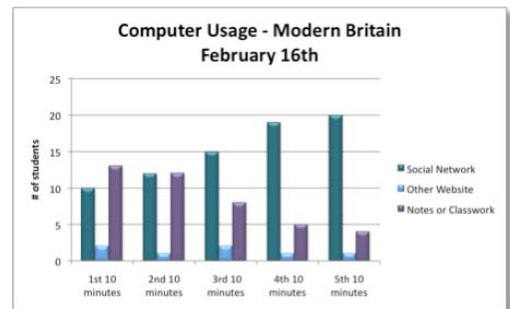
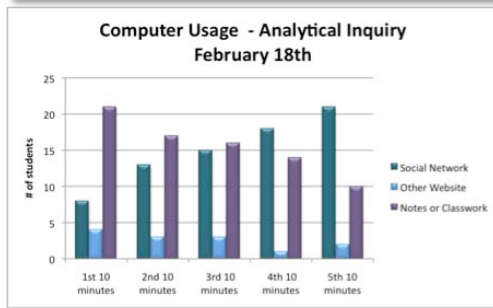
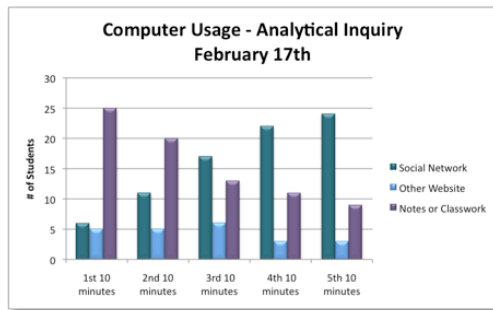
1. What social network do you prefer?
2. How much of your typical time in class do you spend on this site?
3. What instigates you to log on?
4. Do you multi-task? Do you switch attention back and forth?
5. Do you do it to pass time or are you being productive?
6. Do your logging-on habits depend on the class?

These questions were designed to uncover students' motivations for logging on to Facebook and how it affected their learning and concentration in class. Interviewees waited outside the classroom as I executed brief, five-minute, and individual interviews inside the room.

## **Results**

After observing the computer usage in my Modern Britain and Analytical Inquiry classes, the results were tallied and the trends were obvious. The data explicitly prove my hypothesis that logging on to social networks in the classroom hinders students' ability to focus and absorb knowledge. I took data every ten minutes over a period of 50 minutes in each class and created graphs with the totals of each of the three measured variables:

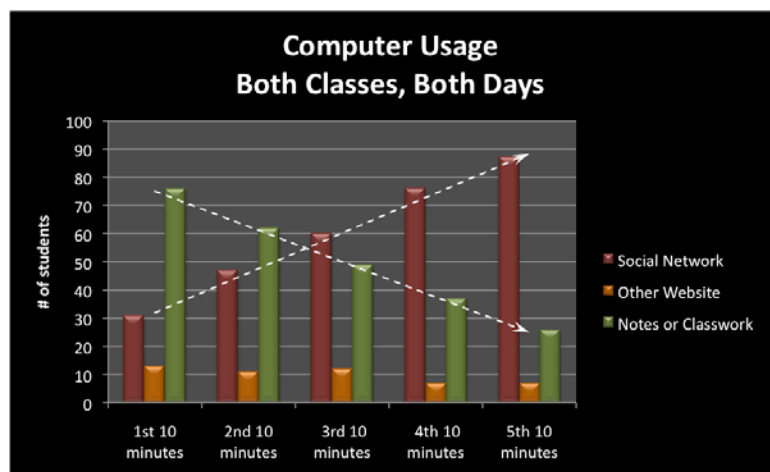
number of students on a social network, number of students on another website, and number of students doing notes or class work. As time increased, students' attention spans fell the opposite direction, decreasing rapidly. Two clear trend lines exist on each of the four shown graphs, the first being the decrease in amount of students spending their time



paying attention to the lecture and the second being the increase in students logging on to the social network of their choosing. The number of students browsing another website shows no relevancy or relationship to the other two variables. The black graph totals

the aggregates from the previous four graphs and the shown linear trend lines precisely define the uncanny trend between students on social networks as opposed to those paying attention in class.

The interviews I conducted supplement the data and graphs. Each of the seven students I interviewed admitted to logging on to a social network in class: Facebook, MySpace,



Second Life, Twitter, etc. The seven interviewees spent different amounts of time logged on to a social network. Some responded that the class they were in or what they were doing in that class determined the amount of time spent social networking during that class period while others claimed to stay online for the entire class. Most of the students' motives to log on were to simply socialize; social networks are true to their name. Students do everything from instant message online friends, to posting wall posts, to checking photos, to updating personal information, to Facebook stalking, to numerous other of the growing options Facebook continues to pump out. When asked if they were able to multi-task, the subjects had a wider spectrum of answers. A select few give their undivided attention to social networking – their life. For these students, Facebook is an addiction; they can't get enough of it and spend the entire class period ignoring the lecture and class assignments. No balance between academic progress and social networking exists. Most of the interviewees, however and thankfully, said they switch their attention back and forth between a social network and their professor's lecture. They value their education cost-wise and recognize the fact that it is their choice to learn and expand their knowledge. Professors exist to encourage and pass on knowledge. Students can either choose to accept it and take full advantage of it or not.

## **Discussion**

Because social networks are obviously so widely used while students are in class, can teachers use this distracting discourse to their advantage? The study done by J.P. Mazer, R.E. Murphy, and C. J. Simonds (2007) examined whether self-disclosure might facilitate a better connection between students and professors and in turn develop affective learning, classroom climate, and student motivation. This study suggests that a higher self-

disclosure by teachers leads to higher levels of focus, motivation, and learning in the more comfortable atmosphere of the classroom. If professors were to disclose themselves to students by means of a social network, they may be able to regain the students' attention because of the growing desire to learn and pay more attention in class. While this would not curb the problem entirely, it may be a first step to pulling students' attention away from Facebook and back to the content of the class. Professors must also be careful about their level of disclosure so as not to lose credibility among students. Disclosure of a professor over a social network should allow students to get to know who the teacher is both personally and professionally. Teachers can get to know their students while students get to know their teachers, creating a constructive communication learning experience on both ends of the hierarchy. When students can connect with their professor, they are more likely to be engaged in class because the majority of students say their logging-on habits depend on the teacher and class interest.

There are any number of reasons why students may choose to log on to a social network during class. The biggest reason is probably boredom. Some classes are simply boring and the only way a student can bear to get through class without falling asleep is Facebooking. It has become such a fad that students develop more or less of an addiction to social networking and class is the perfect place to check up on the latest updates. This raises the question about if teachers with boring classes would rather have their students asleep OR awake and on Facebook, but that's at the discretion of the teacher and would require a whole different research study to analyze. Another reason students log on to Facebook is that students do not value their education as much as they should. It is a daunting fact that college is expensive and some students are ignorant of the amount of

money their “daddy” is spending to educate them, especially here at DU. Although this is not all students, it certainly represents a large majority of the students.

There is no denying that students love social networking, specifically Facebook. So why not use their own remedy as a professor’s remedy as well? Professors are always searching for new ways to connect and communicate with students, keyword being communicate. Stripping down social networks of all the extras, knickknacks, and fancy applications reveals the basic function and idea behind social networks – communication. Professors have yet to take advantage of this channel of communication with students. Professors have certainly embraced email as a primary form of exchanging messages and important updates with students, but why not use the more preferable, at least in the student’s mind, Facebook? Email already seems to be making its way out of the “social lives” of college students. Using Facebook to communicate with students may allow professors to reach out to a larger segment of the student population. Within the realms of Facebook, professors have numerous options of ways they can interact with students. They can create a “Facebook Group” for the class where they post homework assignments, readings, class notes, and even reminders about, well, anything. These reminders could notify students that a paper is due in two days or that midterms are a week away or that there is a new reading posted. An infinite number of options exist. Most teachers have some sort of webpage that already gives this information, but why not consolidate and put the information on Facebook? Students are basically guaranteed to be on Facebook anyway so why not use it for educational purposes as well? However, students’ acceptance of this idea may be minimal, which is why further research trials need to be done to test how it works and evaluate the effectiveness and perception among students.

My research falls short of answering questions concerning the effectiveness of Facebook as a tool for students to connect and communicate with their teachers. My testing population was minimal and needs to be much larger in order to come up with accurate generalizations about how students use Facebook and other social networks when they are in class. I need to interview many more people, at least several hundred, and observe more than just two classes. The data coming from the two classes may be quite skewed because in one of the classes computers are required for each student, while in the other class, computers are optional. A broader range of class types needs to be evaluated and observed in order to come up with a more accurate conclusion about how much of a distraction Facebook truly can be in a classroom setting.

With social aspect information technology advancing at the rate that it is in this current age, educationalists must keep up with the advancements in order to best connect with students. Educators can easily choose to ignore the fact that students obsessively utilize social networking technology in the classroom or they can choose to take advantage of this phenomenon and explore new ways of reaching out, connecting and communicating with students. The possibilities are endless and the outcomes of improving education are even more promising.

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## Appendix A

Tuesday February 17th		1st 10 minutes			2nd 10 minutes			3rd 10 minutes			4th 10 minutes			5th 10 minutes		
Total # of Students	Students with Laptop Present	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork
36	36	6	5	25	11	5	20	17	6	13	22	3	11	24	3	9
<b>Wednesday February 18th</b>																
Logged on to?		1st 10 minutes			2nd 10 minutes			3rd 10 minutes			4th 10 minutes			5th 10 minutes		
Total # of Students	Students with Laptop Present	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork
33	33	8	4	21	13	3	17	15	3	16	18	1	14	21	2	10
<b>Modern Britain</b>																
Monday February 16th		Logged on to? 1st 10 minutes			Logged on to? 2nd 10 minutes			Logged on to? 3rd 10 minutes			Logged on to? 4th 10 minutes			Logged on to? 5th 10 minutes		
Total # of Students	Students with Laptop Present	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork
40	25	10	2	13	12	1	12	15	2	8	19	1	5	20	1	4
<b>Wednesday February 18th</b>																
Logged on to?		1st 10 minutes			2nd 10 minutes			3rd 10 minutes			4th 10 minutes			5th 10 minutes		
Total # of Students	Students with Laptop Present	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork	Social Network	Other Website	Notes or Classwork
38	26	7	2	17	11	2	13	13	1	12	17	2	7	22	1	3

## Appendix B

Interviews – Wednesday February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009

### *Analytical Inquiry*

#### *Subject 1*

1. What social network do you prefer?  
-Facebook mostly
2. How much of your typical time in class do you spend on this site?  
-Depends on the class, usually averaging around half.
3. What instigates you to log on?  
-Boredom, teachers can get so monotonous and Facebook is my release.  
-It gets me through so many classes.
4. Do you multi-task? Do you switch attention back and forth? Why or why not?  
-Sometimes I take notes and Facebook at the same time.  
-I don't dedicate ALL my attention to Facebook.  
-It costs a lot to come here, I need to get at least some of my money out of my classes.
5. Why do you log on?  
-It's the only way I can get through class without falling asleep.
6. How does your choice of social network affect your ability to learn in class?  
-I can usually retain just as much information as I would if I weren't logged on to Facebook.
7. Do your logging-on habits depend on the class?  
-Yes of course.

#### *Subject 2*

1. What social network do you prefer?  
-Facebook, MySpace, Second Life, Twitter, etc.
2. How much of your typical time in class do you spend on this site?  
-Usually the entire class
3. What instigates you to log on?  
-I thrive off of social networks, I wouldn't survive without them.
4. Do you multi-task? Do you switch attention back and forth? Why or why not?  
-Rarely. Facebook gets my full and undivided attention.
5. Why do you log on?  
-Why not?
6. How does your choice social network affect your ability to learn in class?  
-My presence means I learn.
7. Do your logging-on habits depend on the class?  
-NOPE!!!

#### *Subject 3*

1. What social network do you prefer?

- Facebook or MySpace
- I'm thinking about deleting my MySpace.
- 2. How much of your typical time in class do you spend on this site?
  - I just check it to see if there is any epic new drama or to see if I have any new wall posts. Sometimes I respond, sometimes I don't.
- 3. What instigates you to log on?
  - Gossip
- 4. Do you multi-task? Do you switch attention back and forth? Why or why not?
  - Yes, I usually pay more attention to the professor than I do to Facebook, unless there is something truly juicy.
- 5. Why do you log on?
  - To keep informed
- 6. How does your choice social network affect your ability to learn in class?
  - It doesn't have any effect. Well maybe when there is something like totally risqué.
- 7. Do your logging-on habits depend on the class?
  - I usually log on in every class.

#### *Subject 4*

- 1. What social network do you prefer?
  - Facebook
- 2. How much of your typical time in class do you spend on this site?
  - I keep logged on the entire class, and only use the site if someone I want to talk to is online.
- 3. What instigates you to log on?
  - Friends that are online. Staying in touch.
- 4. Do you multi-task? Do you switch attention back and forth? Why or why not?
  - I'm the queen of multi-tasking!
- 5. Why do you log on?
  - Talk to friends
- 6. How does your choice social network affect your ability to learn in class?
  - Sometimes I zone out if I'm talking to someone cool or funny. I delve into Facebook chat.
- 7. Do your logging-on habits depend on the class?
  - Usually not

#### **Modern Britain**

##### *Subject 1*

- 1. What social network do you prefer?
  - Facebook and sometimes MySpace
- 2. How much of your typical time in class do you spend on this site?
  - Depends on what we are doing in class. Sometimes it's the whole class, sometimes it's never.
- 3. What instigates you to log on?
  - Socializing with the rest of the world
- 4. Do you multi-task? Do you switch attention back and forth? Why or why not?

- Again, it depends on what the class is doing.
- 5. Why do you log on?
  - Socialization and to counter boredom
- 6. How does your choice social network affect your ability to learn in class?
  - I choose what I want to learn and what I do not want to learn. I am my own motivation.
- 7. Do your logging-on habits depend on the class?
  - I choose wisely, depending on the value of the class.

### *Subject 2*

1. What social network do you prefer?
  - Facebook is the only way to go .
2. How much of your typical time in class do you spend on this site?
  - It's rare that I'm not logged on.
3. What instigates you to log on?
  - I love everything about Facebook.
4. Do you multi-task? Do you switch attention back and forth? Why or why not?
  - Priorities: 1. Facebook 2. Family 3. Friends 4. School 5. Church
5. Why do you log on?
  - I'm addicted.
6. How does your choice social network affect your ability to learn in class?
  - All my classes are a waste of time.
7. Do your logging-on habits depend on the class?
  - Are you kidding? OMG no.

### *Subject 3*

1. What social network do you prefer?
  - MySpace or Facebook
2. How much of your typical time in class do you spend on this site?
  - Different everyday. Usually no more than like 5-10 minutes.
3. What instigates you to log on?
  - Just to check up on the latest news and photos
4. Do you multi-task? Do you switch attention back and forth? Why or why not?
  - I usually log on when the teacher isn't lecturing or when we aren't doing anything that Facebook will pull my attention away from.
5. Why do you log on?
  - It's fun to stay connected and informed.
6. How does your choice social network affect your ability to learn in class?
  - I don't let it affect my learning.
7. Do your logging-on habits depend on the class?
  - Depends on what we're doing in specific classes.