Social Media Learning Goals

Students in ANT 101 will:
- Engage peers using social media during and outside of class
- Gain awareness of broader cultural effects of new media
- Connect anthropological course topics to daily their lives

Student’s blog posts, term descriptions, and comments demonstrate achievement of social media learning goals:

Students also tweet to ask questions during lecture.

Image blog post on “Village Head”

“Michael Wesch describes a blog as talking to yourself” through audience privacy. The pattern of the video is to choose your interests, thoughts, and stories relevant to different things. Blogs on this blog are rooted in anthropological research: they are not a product of a research cluster. The research blog is important when talking about digital anthropology because it is a reflection of how academics think. Anthropological research authority figures share ideas and perspectives online to further explain how academics understand how the data they gathered came to be.

Outcomes

Real-life examples make connections that help students remember and understand key concepts.

Student-generated content supplements lectures

Background

Anthropologists are now studying how social media draw new communities of people together despite previously limiting factors of distance and time. Students in UW-L’s four-field Introduction to Anthropology class (ANT 101 or #ANT101UWL) learn about digital culture, use social media to connect with peers, and discuss course topics online. During the cultural anthropology unit, students read an article and watch a YouTube video by anthropologist Michael Wesch, who has researched how new media like online video blogs shape human interactions (Wesch 2009). Course content emphasizes the important role of new technologies driving globalization and shaping how people of different cultures interact and influence one another using the internet. In #ANT101UWL students participate in digital anthropology by contributing personal insights to their online anthropology learning community and sharing their experiences with digital followers outside of the classroom.

Methods

Two different social media platforms allow students to interact.

1) Wordpress blog, where students earn participation points by:
   - Posting their own images and discussions of key vocabulary terms
   - Finding and summarizing relevant educational web content in “media link” posts
   - Commenting on other students posts and discussion questions

   Media Link: Students identify and post educational content related to current topics

   This is a video of Dr. Hawass finding items in the Nile River. This ship was well known to be a trade route and thus would sometimes sink, which is why we see mummies. These mummies could be archaeologically valuable. (Had we thought of it, it might have ended up in the Nile River. It would be interesting to do an archaeology on the great lakes to see what sort of items would be found there.)
   L: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRT_kzEeRYI

2) Twitter hashtag #ANT101UWL allows students to:
   - Respond to in-class prompts from lecture slides
   - Summarize key points from discussions and lectures
   - Extend class discussion and share knowledge outside the classroom

   The class twitser feed appears on D2L, so that even students who do not choose to use twitser can view the discussion.

Social Media in #ANT101UWL: A Case Study in Digital Anthropology

Heather Walder — Sociology and Archaeology

UW-L Conference on Teaching & Learning — Jan. 21, 2014

Students in #ANT101UWL:

- Connect with an audience and make them feel connected to
- Share your interests, thoughts, and/or opinions on different things.
- Engage peers using social media during and outside of class
- Gain awareness of broader cultural effects of new media
- Connect anthropological course topics to daily their lives

"I loved that we had our blog based on the textbook. This helped us to stay engaged in our textbook readings. I also loved that she made personal comments on the blog to show that she was reading them and keeping engaged."

"I loved the blogs and videos in class. It was a nice change of pace and I had never thought of it before, so it was a great experience for me!"

"Overall I thought that the entire project, from the pictures to the media links was a very effective way to teach the information."

"Blog was a great idea to make sure that a large class still participated."

"I loved doing the blogs and videos in class. It was a nice change of pace and I had never thought of it before, so it was a great experience for me!"

"The blog was a great resource and was much better than assignments or mini-quizzes. You could do them on your own time and it was actually pretty fun!"

"We posted our own examples of the class terms which was interesting because we had to look at examples in every day life."

Problems and Drawbacks

- Differential access to Twitter-capable devices means not all students can participate in real-time in class
- Some students initially struggle to learn how to blog, sometimes a frustrating experience
- Time-consuming to grade blog posts and tally tweets

Student Feedback

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Image blog post on “Village Head”

“Our textbook describes a village head as a local tribal leader such as a Chief or a tribal leader from the tribe. Although a picture of my mom’s lasagna isn’t really the best way to describe anthropology, it is the better example.”

Image blog post and comments on “Village Head”

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