Chapter 2
How Social Design Influences Student Retention and Self-Motivation in Online Learning Environments

Derek E. Baird
Facebook for Educators, USA

Mercedes Fisher
Milwaukee Area Technical College, USA

ABSTRACT

Investigating the social structure that works in online courses helps us design for and facilitate student collaboration. The integration of social technologies, and collaborative activities into the course design has a positive influence on student retention in online courses. In this chapter, the authors present an exploratory study of computer-mediated groups that utilized this collaborative-based model to participate in online and/or blended learning courses. Participants were put into groups and observed as they constructed new knowledge using both online dialogue (synchronous and asynchronous), and social media technologies (blogs, Facebook, Twitter, wiki) as tools to support and facilitate their learning in the program.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we describe our approach to utilizing current and emerging social media to support Millennial learners, facilitate the formation of learning communities, foster student engagement, reflection, and enhance the overall learning experience for students in synchronous and asynchronous learning environments.

The proliferation of old and new media, including the Internet and other emerging digital (and mobile) technologies, has changed the way

students communicate, interact, and learn. The pedagogy of teaching and learning online is based on authentic learning activities, observation, collaboration, intrinsic motivation, and self-organizing social systems.

In many cases, students spend as much (or more) time, receive more feedback, and interact with peers more in an online environment than they do with their teachers in the classroom.

While traditional approaches in the past preferred learners to act "under order", a new look at the learner as constructing his or her knowledge has resulted in a change of theoretical concepts. It is our contention that current research on the topic of online course design has focused, for the most part, solely on the instructor's perspective.

While we see the value and place for this type of research, we also feel that the perspective of distance learning from the student's perspective can also yield some valuable insights for online course design. In addition, design principles for learner self-regulation and social support in online courses will be explored and examined in terms of trying different structures for presenting online content and learning.

The data included in this paper is intended as a directional means to help instructors and course designers identify social and participatory media resources and other emerging technologies that will enhance the delivery of instruction while meeting the needs of today's digital learning styles.

1.1 Growth of Online Learning

In the past decade, online learning programs have gone from being summarily dismissed by traditional institutions of education to a widely accepted and booming industry (Nagel, 2011).

Due to the rapid expansion of distance learning programs educators need to re-evaluate traditional pedagogical strategies and find ways to integrate a new generation of emerging social media technologies in a manner which supports and fosters

student motivation and self-confidence in online learning environments.

A recent report conducted by US-based Instructional Technology Council that looked at the impact of online learning at community colleges (ITC Council, 2010) and provides some key insights on the growth of online learning:

- Online student services remain a priority on most campuses.
- Growth in the use of blended/hybrid and web-assisted/web-enhanced/web-facilitated classes continues.
- The completion rate gap between distance learning and face-to-face students has significantly narrowed. Completion rates jumped to a reported 72%, just below the 76% rate for face-to-face classes.
- Online education administrators continue to address the need for course quality and design, faculty training and improving student readiness and retention. Due to financial restraints, many online programs are challenged by a lack of adequately trained staff and resources to be successful.
- Older, non-traditional students are attracted to online classes and degree programs since they fit into their busy schedules to offer a solution for career advancement and/or change.

As colleges continue to navigate the costs associated with maintaining traditional educational structures online learning programs--often more cost-effective than campus-based courses--will continue to grow in popularity.

This shift in student population and teaching models will require administrators to effectively address the need for faculty training to teach online courses and provide them with the tools and resources needed to improve student learning, self-regulation and retention.

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/social-design-influences-student-retention/73306

Related Content

Artificial Neural Network Research in Online Social Networks
Steven Walczak (2018). *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking (pp. 1-15).*
www.irma-international.org/article/artificial-neural-network-research-in-online-social-networks/235457

An Evidence-Based Approach to the Use of Social Media to Promote Political Literacy among Youth in the Sultanate of Oman
Mohammed Nasser Al-Suqri, Salim Said AlKindiand Abdullah Khamis Al-Kindi (2017). *International Journal of E-Politics (pp. 30-39).*
www.irma-international.org/article/an-evidence-based-approach-to-the-use-of-social-media-to-promote-political-literacy-among-youth-in-the-sultanate-of-oman/180336

Managing Organizational Knowledge in the Age of Social Computing
V.P. Kochikar (2010). *Social Computing: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 1317-1324).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/managing-organizational-knowledge-age-social/39789

Geographic Information Networks in American Indian Governments and Communities
Mark H. Palmerand Jack Hanney (2010). *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking (pp. 1-10).*
www.irma-international.org/article/geographic-information-networks-american-indian/45775

Adaptive Peer-to-Peer Social Networks for Distributed Content-Based Web Search
Le-Shin Wu, Ruj Akavipat, Ana Gabriela Maguitmanand Filippo Menczer (2008). *Social Information Retrieval Systems: Emerging Technologies and Applications for Searching the Web Effectively (pp. 155-178).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/adaptive-peer-peer-social-networks/29164