

## Chapter 68

# Should Traditional Classrooms Have Formal Facebook Groups?

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### ABSTRACT

*As students, teachers, and school professionals work to determine boundaries between the classroom and social media, often implementation choices are being made between the lines of school technology policies. In response to formal barriers, many students are taking it upon themselves to make their own social media sites, such as Facebook, to supplement their classroom learning. In this study, a class Facebook page encompassing five sections of an AP United States History course at Ida Baker High School was captured for an entire school year, and the results were recorded and coded to show how students used the page. Whether to consider Facebook as a viable official tool for the school ultimately becomes the decision of the District's Technology Officer, the Principal, the Department Chair, and the teachers. To help guide this decision, a survey was conducted to determine the participants' perception of the online tool. Ultimately, this case examines whether one school should embrace this widely used, free tool to accompany traditional classes or continue with more formal software to supplement the classroom.*

### ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Ida Baker High School, located in Cape Coral, Florida, is an academy-style high school and was the first of its kind in the state. In addition to its traditional curriculum, each student picks a major in a specialized field, and takes elective courses within the academy. In total,

the school offers seven academies: journalism, education, automotive, firefighting, business, graphic design, and construction. According to Lee County Schools (2011), at the start of the 2010-2011 school year, Ida Baker High School had an enrollment of 1,878 students with 30% of the students eligible for free lunch and 13% of students eligible for reduced lunch. In addition to socioeconomic demographics, the school was comprised of 73% white Caucasian students, 21%

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*Table 1. APUSH website student demographics (2010-2011)*

	# of students in classes (total)	%	# of students who joined page	%
Females	79	64.2	61	65.5
Males	46	35.8	32	34.5
Total	123	100.00	93	100.00

Hispanic students, 5% African-American students and 1% Asian students. The demographics of the website itself, broke down to 61 females and 32 males (see Table 1).

While Ida Baker High School has a focus on its innovative academy-style curriculum, beyond these elective credits the school operates as a traditional school. The school offers regular track classes, as well as honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes. The school day follows a rotating block-schedule, meaning students meet for 85 minute classes every other day. Ida Baker follows the district-wide policy for acceptable technology usage, which includes the filtering of sites which do not “promote research and inquiry opportunities of the learner with directed guidance of the faculty and staff” (Lee County Code of Conduct). The filtering of social media sites, including Facebook, is in effect during school hours and for anyone accessing the district’s network. As for supplements to the traditional classroom, defined for this paper as a synchronous course taught face-to-face within a school, Blackboard is the district wide approved Learning Management System. This system, however, has only been provided by the district for the previous two years and was not used by the majority of teachers. Student usage within Blackboard was also sparse, unless required by the instructor.

To get a more focused perspective on the choices and barriers facing students and teachers at Ida Baker High School, the social studies department can be viewed as a microcosm for issues facing all departments. The social studies department at Ida Baker High School has nine teachers who teach four required courses and four elective

courses to all of the students over their four years at the school. Required courses include: World History, United States History, American Government and Economics. Within these required courses the students are often segmented into on-level classes, honors classes and classes. All nine teachers are issued email accounts and given access to a class Blackboard page if they request one for their course. In total, the teachers at Ida Baker High School have been given three hours of training on the software, but do have access to online tutorials and district-wide technicians. Of the nine teachers in the department only two teachers chose to create Blackboard pages, and both only used the site for primarily for posting announcements and file sharing. Neither instructor using a Blackboard page utilized the discussion board feature. One instructor, however, asked the Department Head and Principal if it would be okay to add a supplemental Facebook page to the United States History AP course.

In considering the request to allow for a Facebook page to be associated with a traditional class at Ida Baker High School, the agenda for each party needs to be considered. From the perspective of the school’s District Technology Officer, the acceptance of Facebook as an approved tool for teacher’s district wide could be difficult to monitor. Traditionally, after the school day ends, teachers and students do not interact with one another from home. With that said, teachers are always expected to maintain a professional relationship with students and periodically interact with students outside of the classroom through athletics, activities, and community events. The Technology Officer appreciates that Facebook is

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