# Teaching and Learning with Social Media

## Tools, Cultures, and Best Practices

**Alice R. Daer**
*Arizona State University*

**Liza Potts**
*Michigan State University*

**Abstract.** This article provides items to consider and best practices for implementing a strategic plan for the use of social media in technical and scientific communication programs. The authors contend that social media can be used, adopted, and implemented best when its champions are thinking strategically, not just tactically. They note that these strategies should be based on realistic expectations about what students and users can contribute to a curriculum that integrates social media tools. Challenging popular assumptions about "digital natives," the authors apply contemporary research on new literacy practices to provide concrete ideas for incorporating social media into curriculum design.

**Keywords.** Social media, internet, pedagogy, literacy, identity, privacy, digital native

With the advent of social media technologies, program leaders and classroom instructors are challenged with launching, using, and teaching a variety of digital tools across various digital spaces. The past five years have seen more than 50 published pieces on the importance of technical communicators' use of social media tools such as text messaging, instant messaging, microblogging, image-sharing, social network sites, and various mobile applications (Abel, 2011; Baehr & Henschel, 2013; Barton & Heiman, 2012; Damrau, 2011; Maggiani, 2011; Panke & Gaiser, 2009; Self, 2009; Swarts, 2011; Vashishtha, 2010). A careful search of Technical Communication Quarterly, The Journal of Business and Technical Communication, and Intercom revealed dozens of research studies in which social media applications like wikis, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn played a significant role in gathering, measuring, and/or distributing information among technical and professional communicators (Ball, 2012; Ding, 2009; Frost, 2013; Graham & Whalen, 2008; Kaufer, Gunawardena, Tan, & Cheek, 2011; Katz & Odell, 2012; Lam, 2012; Lillqvist & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013;

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Mason, 2013; McNair & Paretti, 2010; Pickering, 2009; Potts, 2009; Sherlock, 2009; Singleton & Meloncon, 2011; Spinuzzi, 2012; Stolley, 2009). Social media engagement, according to our database search, has the potential to boost careers (Maggiani, 2011), gather and analyze large data sets (Potts & Jones, 2009), and enable technical and professional communicators to build interest and maintain relationships with products and customers (Ames & Riley, 2011). Taken together, the articles cited above argue that technical and professional communicators have the potential to act as key decision-makers as organizations adapt to social media use as part of their daily communications routines (Hockenhull, Martin, Mayhall, & Stude, 2013).

Even more, jobs in technical communication are increasingly seeking social media skills. While few job advertisements use the industry phrase "social media," we found nearly all of this year's academic posts ask for candidates to be able to conduct research with digital tools while teaching digital rhetorics and literacies as course topics. Our search of the Modern Language Association's Job Information List (2013) revealed that nearly every technical and professional communications position called for candidates with experience teaching in online environments; when we accessed this data set on November 13, 2013, half of those ads specified a desire for digital media proficiencies in particular. Knowing how, when, and why to use social and digital tools is becoming increasingly important for new and established faculty, especially as we begin to engage with more technology to augment our classrooms and teaching experiences.

That said, the deployment of socially-networked tools across a multitude of digital spaces tends to cause users to assume that like magic, social media will augment classroom time, help spread the messages of the program, and increase reach. Unfortunately, these deployments can be met with resistance from teachers, administrators, and students. Such resistance is often tied to assumptions about digital literacy, privacy, and usefulness. We offer the viewpoint that social media can be used, adopted, and implemented best when its champions are thinking strategically, not just tactically. We also note that these strategies should be based on realistic expectations about what students and users can contribute to a curriculum that integrates social media tools. What follows is a discussion regarding best practices for social media implementation that are practical and backed by research in a variety of communications fields. Furthermore, we offer concrete ideas that are informed by the best research on literacy, learning, and digital technologies and grounded in our own experiences using social media tools and technologies as students, professors, and program leaders.

## Myths of the Digital Native and Realities of Participation

We have seen an enormous growth in the number of young adults participating online and the kinds of content they are willingly sharing with others in digital spaces. A 2013 report from Pew Internet and American Life states that 92% teenage Americans are using their real names on social media websites that they use the most often (Madden, et al, 2013). Over 91% are posting photos of themselves (Madden, et al, 2013). These increases show a willingness to participate, while leading us to be concerned about the kinds of personal information flowing freely across these systems.

At the same time, we contend that it is a mistake to assume that the majority of students in communications classrooms are "native" to learning, thinking, and producing with digital media. The myth of the so-called "digital native" is a tempting narrative that is just persuasive enough to be believable. The term dates to 2001, when self-described "author, speaker, consultant" Marc Prensky (2001) conceptualized a dichotomy between "digital natives" (today's plugged-in young people) and "digital immigrants" (their ignorant elders and teachers), emphasizing the idea that a new generation of more digitally-savvy students has made its way into our classrooms, expecting to be entertained by their education. Prensky's argument is so pervasive that his writings have become a rhetorical strong man for numerous studies across the fields of educational technology, sociology, information science, media studies and neuroscience (Bierma, 2012).

The heart of the issue is this: while it is true that young people are producing, distributing, sharing, and remixing digital content more now than they ever have, it is not safe to assume that all or even most students are experts or even intermediate users of digital tools. It may indeed seem like our classes are filled with students checking Facebook or using their smart phones to assess their fantasy sports standings, but we cannot say that students are critical experts of either the tools or the cultures that emerge from them. Recent data from the Pew Internet and American Life Project confirms our thesis, reporting that the majority of 18–29 year-olds are using social networking sites but use of other social media is extremely varied (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Just 16% of those people surveyed said they use Twitter; 15% use Pinterest, and 13% use Instagram (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Each service appeals to a different demographic, too: Twitter is popular with urbanites; Pinterest appeals to older white women; and Instagram is a favorite for African Americans, especially women living in cities (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Some market researchers claim that

Facebook is trending older and Twitter is trending younger (Pingdom.com, 2012) but that the majority of young people online are visiting niche sites like DeviantArt, HackerNews, and reddit (Pingdom.com, 2012). In the world of measuring social media use, variety is a constant.

For instance, a significant study conducted by Northwestern University professor Esther Hargittai (2010) showed that "considerable variation exists even among fully wired college students when it comes to understanding various aspects of Internet use." Hargittai's report shows that the popular rhetoric surrounding the concept of the "digital native" is not supported by the empirical data. She concludes by arguing for a "much more nuanced approach" to the study of internet use, one that accounts for particular differences—such as social inequality and context of use—that we tend to ignore when we think about what young people do with digital media. In other words, yes: the largest group of social media users is young people. But where they are and what they are doing while they are there is not definitive. There are just as many spaces, tools, and rules for sharing, posting, and checking in as there are demographic categories. Therefore it might be true that younger students never knew a time without the Internet, but we cannot assume that they have equal access to it, consistent participation with it, or homogeneous experiences as a result of exposure to it.

At the same time we caution against being too persuaded by the myth of the digital native, it is nevertheless true that more Americans are using the internet than ever before. For those who are online, the vast majority claim to use social networking sites with some regularity (Duggan and Brenner, 2013). But what are people doing online? There are varying degrees of participation, and when they do participate, they may not follow the cultural norms or unspoken rules for posting, responding, and commenting. In the next section, we argue for viewing social media activities as important literacy practices, rather than skills. Our claim is that mastery in the world of social media is not the goal—practice is our goal. No one is an expert; there are only those who engage more or less with the media and methods available to them.

## Literacy is a Practice, Not a Skill

One of the hallmarks of contemporary literacy research is to emphasize the concept of literacy as a practice and not a skill (Barton, D., 2000). Literacy is something we do, not something we have. The reason for the distinction between skill and practice is that contemporary research on literacy emphasizes the dangerous societal implications of equating knowledge and literacy. Put another way, to say that someone "has" a literacy "skill" is

to draw a line between those who do and those who do not, when in fact neither is true (Graff, 2011). It's a false binary. We all have varying degrees to which we are knowledgeable and communicative, but what is truly critical is whether someone can read contextual cues and say or write the right thing at the right time for the right audience.

Our distinction between practice and skill is fundamental to understanding the importance of developing opportunities for students to practice using social media. At the heart of contemporary research on literacy and writing is the need to study how humans use language informally to better create opportunities for learning in formal academic settings (Nystrand, Greene, & Wiemelt, 1993; Rose, 1989; Shaughnessy, 1979). We say that literacy is a practice because we want to point to the multiple ways people are making meaning with texts and tools in multiple contexts for all kinds of audiences (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). It matters less whether someone "can write" in the abstract sense and more whether she knows what to write for whom and in what way with which tools. It is one thing to "be able to" write an email to a teacher and quite another to choose the appropriate medium, tone, style, argument, design, and content for that teacher. We therefore prefer to think of literacy as literacies: that is, literacies are ways of knowing, doing, and making meaning across contexts and audiences. Literacies should be thought of as ecosystems of practices rather than as acquired sets of skills. After all, we are always practicing literacies in some particular way for some specific reason; all communicative acts are rarely (if ever) abstract, decontextualized proficiencies.

Every social media user learns to use the tools in different ways for different purposes, which is why we emphasize the need for sustained, guided practice and reflection in lieu of emphasis on measurable outcomes (see Figure 1). What counts as proficiency in the world of social media is so deeply situated and perpetually changing that to think of social media use as a "skill" that can be "mastered" is to work under an inaccurate definition of the very terms "literacy" and "social media"—neither is a fixed constant. Instead, we assert that social media users must be given ample opportunity to practice multiple literacies for different purposes. Therefore we advocate for policies, curricula, and learning experiences that reflect the distinction between learning outcomes (whereby absolute mastery is implied) from literacy practices that are embedded in contexts of use.

For practitioners in technical and professional communication, such literacy practices will be called upon in the workplace. It follows then that current students should be expected and encouraged to navigate multiple

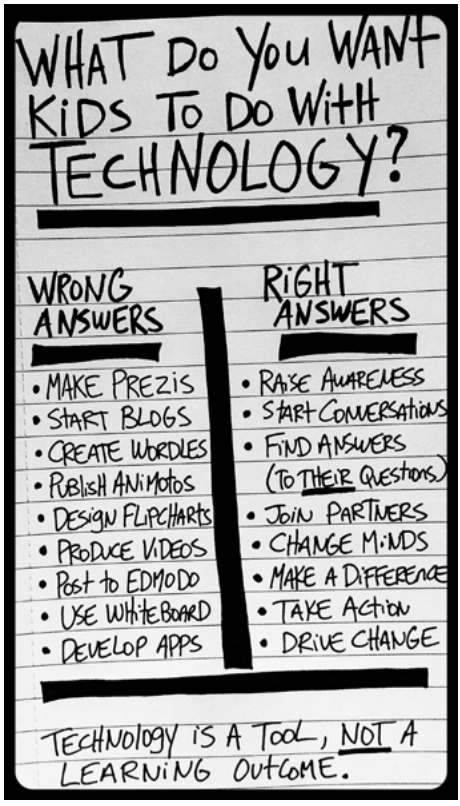


**Figure 1: Technology is a tool**

Image credit: William M. Ferriter, blog.williamferriter.com via Flickr, Creative Commons Share-Alike license

social media environments. Whether they are writing content for websites, running social media campaigns, presenting themselves on LinkedIn, or setting policies for online communities, professionals will need to understand these practices to be effective communicators with and around social media.

We acknowledge that this socially-situated model of literacy has challenging implications for evaluation and assessment. Increasingly, scholars in the field of learning sciences and new literacies research have called for measurement tools that capture and highlight what students can do to apply literacy practices in designated situations and contexts (Shute & Becker, 2010). In that sense, problem-based and inquiry-based learning models are particularly useful because they ask students to evaluate a problem, "read" its signs and symbols, and then make what they know relevant to the situation to solve a problem with several potentially viable solutions. What is being measured then is the degree to which a student interprets a problem, recognizes how their learning can inform a solution, and then

produces a context-appropriate solution. To many instructors, this method of measurement is more authentic than standard skill-and-drill approaches as it allows them to better gauge how students are learning, not just what they have memorized.

## Practicing Social Media Literacies

When designing learning experiences around social media practices, we like to reflect on the difference between media consumption and media participation (Jenkins, et al., 2009). That is, we acknowledge the difference between having an account and being a critical and sustained member of that social community (i.e., making an edit to a Wikipedia page versus being a Wikipedian). Put simply, we caution against presuming that simple uses of social media connote critical engagement with it. Like many digital technologies, social media suffer from what some media scholars refer to as the "transparency problem" (Jenkins, et al., 2009). The sophisticated messages and complex uses of media are not always obvious to our students. Many social media tools are designed to be easy to add content to, but that does not necessarily mean that users foresee, for example, potential privacy issues or misappropriation of content. Each medium and tool has different features, implementations, and audiences. YouTube might be great for viewing a friend's streaming video, but it can be useless for distribution because it does not allow downloading (as of November, 2013). Twitter can be useful for talking with strangers about a live event, but it can be difficult for location friends and colleagues because of the use of inconsistent usernames. Tumblr is useful for viewing and sharing web-based content, but it is unreliable if the goal is to trace content back to its original source.

Furthermore, each of these spaces changes so frequently that it can be almost impossible to pin down for even those of us who study the internet. Facebook is notorious for changing its privacy features regularly (and failing to provide a truly user-friendly explanation for using those features to maximum benefit). It seems as though we read news reports daily about people making egregious statements and trying to retract or hide those posts after the fact. Even the most avid users of these spaces cannot anticipate how a post, share, tweet, or check-in might come back to haunt them.

So, what can we do to help users of social media maximize their critical use of these spaces? What can we teach our students about decorum, privacy protection, anticipating audience responses, and curating their online identities? What follows is a list of general principles that should

guide the specific designs, assignments, policies, and rules to establish when incorporating social media and social networking into technical and professional communication programs and classes. We recognize that every instructor and classroom is a deeply contextualized space with its own culture and audience. That is why this list is meant to inform a strategy so that program directors and instructors can develop their own tactics. Every education professional knows the importance of having a solid purpose or rationale to support a policy or lesson. Below are some suggestions to begin conversations that will inform these practices.

1. **Get familiar enough with the tools**. By "familiar enough" we mean that instructors should download the app, set up an account, and post content. Today's social web tools are meant to be learned as they are used. Participating within these systems is imperative if we are going to teach within them or conduct research in them (Potts, 2013). That means locating a community and becoming immersed. The instructor's knowledge of how these spaces work—the common language, the tropes, the tricks—are all critical knowledge that students will need to participate fully in these spaces.

   Thankfully, good designers of popular sites are working hard to make their designs as user-friendly as possible, and many of them pay attention to what participants do with the tools they are given. That is part of the reason why social web tools are constantly being redesigned. It might seem to the user that an application like Foursquare is in a constant state of what we like to call "forever beta," but those frequent software updates are part of today's iterative design process. Participants are expected to roll with the changes, and developers are expected to respond to the ways that participants tweak their content within these spaces. This back-and-forth is fundamental to the culture of social media use.
2. **Actively maintain and own online presence across multiple digital spaces.** As researchers, instructors, and program directors, we are already in the public eye. It is important that we do our best to model appropriate ways of being present online both as a professional practice and to model behaviors for our students. This is not to say that everyone should jump on Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Foursquare, reddit, Facebook, and Tumblr right now and launch their accounts. What it does mean is that

program directors and instructors should at least have some sort of online identity that they check in with every few days to keep a foot in the world of digital culture.

Twitter is one tool program leaders and instructors can use to practice these skills and connect with other academics. Create lists to organize these communities, making them public or private depending on whether you want to share this information. Consider both professional and social uses, just as your students will need to. Use Twitter to follow other academics in technical communication or fans of a science fiction western television show. Use a tool such as Tweetbot to make it easier to manage lists, follow hashtags, and send direct messages. Participate—tweet, retweet (RT), and use hashtags (#msupw). If students follow instructors on Twitter, follow the students so that they can send each other Direct Messages (DMs).

Most applications allow users to toggle privacy settings on or off depending on a given activity, so experimentation is available. For example, instructors can use Foursquare to let students know when they are on campus, but not when they are at a movie with their families. Program leaders can create public pages for their programs on Facebook or invite members to a Facebook Group to discuss newsworthy events for a club. The goal should be to find something that interests the group enough to participate frequently in a way that makes each other comfortable and in control over what content is visible when people search for these programs online.

3. **Teach students how to curate their online presence, too.** Part of what we must do is help students recognize that their movements online are always an identity building exercise. Their LinkedIn profiles, their public Facebook user profile pictures and banners, and their Instagram photos are all part of their identities. We must teach students how to carefully assemble this material and curate it.

Better yet, ask them to teach each other. Chances are, in any given classroom some students are already active participants in social media and can teach each others about managing privacy settings, optimizing search engines, and pushing notifications to alert them to when someone is mentioning or tagging them. In fact, it is likely that every student knows how to do something useful with social media, whether it is as simple as searching for a

common hashtag or as complicated as generating traffic toward a remix uploaded to Soundcloud. Asking students to generate their own list of "do's" and "don'ts" for social media use could be an enlightening exercise. Instructors might be surprised by how much students do and do not know already. And, of course, be at the ready to clarify and enlighten them about privacy policies and security issues.

4. **Design exercises that emphasize practice, not mastery.** Instead of creating lesson plans that ultimately measure a student's ability to create a finished product using one instrument or tool, focus on the alternative: lots and lots of practice with multiple media across platforms. Think of it as an ecosystem, rather than one single space where activity takes place. For example, give students experience with creating and sharing images to mark a historical event. Instructors could ask students to use their phones to snap original photos, upload them to a designated site like flickr, and tag them with the same word or group of words to see how they get shared and searched for by others interested in that same event. But what results from such an exercise is not much more than simple sorting and labeling of information, as all this assignment demands is following simple uploading and posting instructions.

   A richer experience would involve allowing students to follow the event over multiple social media as it happens. Asking them to follow a hashtag like #SFBatkid or #BostonMarathon might be better for teaching them how information spreads across media and how users manipulate tools to express their thoughts. This is where tools like Storify.com might be handy: students can use that site to collect all the social media they want, as long as that tool has an open API. The result could be a collection of Instagram posts that show how people take screenshots of thoughts they write using simple note-taking applications on their phones. A follow-up discussion would involve questions like "why do you suppose these users did not just post tweets about their feelings? Why did they use Instagram instead?" Discussions would center on participation within communities and across platforms, instead of focusing on basic tool use.

5. **Highlight good uses of social media already happening at the institution.** Many educational and instructional technologists, librarians, information scientists, and student support ser-

vices are already implementing clearinghouses for their institutions. Investigate whether the university already has something like this in place. Chances are, there are at least a few great examples within the university already. Ask about partnerships with those who are interested in developing and presenting locally relevant materials together. Know another instructor with a great idea or policy for using social media in her classroom? Tell others! Better yet, ask her to write up a short description and highlight it on the program's web page or newsletter. And, by asking instructors to share their ideas, leaders are giving them the opportunity to draw attention to the good work they are doing.

6. **Be aware of the differences between social media and social networking.** This might seem like semantics on the surface, but we stress the difference between social media and social networking because it matters when it comes time to evaluate student performance. When instructors design an assignment that involves using social media, it is important to remember that the media are the tools for communicating within and across networks. But building networks of strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1983) takes a lot of time and effort. Instructors will need to have conversations with students about who to "friend" or "like" or "follow" and why. Encourage them to be open about how they build their networks, feeds, and lists. Does it matter whether students know someone "IRL" (in real life) before adding this person to a network? Why or why not? Which media are more conducive to building and creating networks? What design features enable us to turn weak ties into stronger ones? Are some social media better for social networking than others?
7. **Build students' awareness of how networks and media work over time and across space and place.** Media literacy educators have been creating these kinds of exercises for years, and they are a key part of our technology-focused sections of the First Year Writing program curriculum at Michigan State University. They usually involve asking students to write short essays on all the media they encounter on a daily basis. We recommend focusing on how networks and their media compare by going beyond the "notice and report" exercise. Ask students to provide evidence of the difference between a network and a medium, for example. Or ask them to trace a network as it exists across multiple media

for a given event. This exercise will help them also understand the different genres available to them and others across these spaces.

The objective is to help our students see how people within certain networks behave differently depending on the tools, platforms, and contexts. A student might be an active user of Twitter but only when she is participating in a shared event like watching a soccer game. Another student might work hard to protect his privacy on Facebook but has an easily traceable gamertag on XBox Live. It is important to generate regular discussions of how we establish identities across social media, within and among networks, so that we are constantly reminded that none of us uses the same tool in the same way for the same purpose.

8. **Resist the urge to evaluate based on quantifiable outcomes.** If there is anything we know from instructors' use of blogs, wikis, and online discussion boards, it is this: grading students on the number of posts they produce is fruitless. Instead, take a more reflective, analytical approach. If the goal is to create community, then consider requiring them to interact with each other. Ask students to evaluate their friends' identity performances in different social media contexts. Get them to notice how their use changes when they switch between mobile and desktop versions of the same applications. Invite comparisons of similar actions such as liking (Facebook) and pinning (Pinterest) or retweeting (Twitter) and reblogging (Tumblr). Create social assignments whereby students interview people they view as novice and expert users, synthesizing and visualizing the data when the transcriptions are complete. There are so many ways to design assignments that put students in the position of thinking more about the quality of their analysis instead of the quantity of their production. Remember, this is about practice, not skill; make sure assignments emphasize that knowing who to follow and when to post is just as valuable as crafting the perfect status update or tweet.
9. **Allow for "throwaway" accounts.** It is very possible that a given classroom will include students who either will not or cannot use their real names and real identities in their social media accounts. The reasons may vary from fear of stalking to outside obligations. While we want everyone to try these systems, it is important that we also allow them to have a safe learning environment.

We have both had experiences where students needed to

create throwaway accounts to participate. These accounts may have false information about the student's location, gender, age, and other attributes. They may use a stock image for their profile picture. When students ask to create fake accounts, we include them as if they were their real accounts, sharing their information with their peers, following them on Twitter and Tumblr, unless they ask us not to include them. If that is the case, we identify their online selves during class in lieu of publicly linking to their accounts. Again, there are real reasons why a student may be unable to participate in a public way, and we believe strongly in accommodating their privacy preferences.

10. **Remind students (and instructors) that nothing is private on the internet and that the internet has a very, very long memory.** Absolutely, positively nothing is private on the internet. Direct Messages in Twitter can accidentally be exposed, encryption can be broken, and email is easily forwarded. Remember those old Usenet posts? Google has lovingly archived them for us.

    We must make it apparent to our students that whatever they share, tweet, upload, or post has the possibility of being publicly accessible. These are actions that they may never be able to erase. While this sounds incredibly daunting, this point must be made to students. The Public Service Announcement website Take This Lollipop (Zada, 2011) can help students reassess what they are sharing online by watching a horror movie unfold, using their Facebook data as the central actor. Extreme? Sure, but in a climate in which the CEO of Google suggests that teenagers should be able to change their names when they reach adulthood specifically so that they can shed their past search histories (Jenkins, 2010), it is imperative that we are aware of the spaces in which we are asking our students to participate. See the discussion above about throwaway accounts.

11. **Emphasize accessible technologies.** When we ask our students to participate with social media, we must also be aware of issues of accessibility. Here we mean issues of internet access (do students have fast, reliable internet connections?), machine access (do they need special equipment, such as iPads?), financial access (are these spaces pay for play, do they require app purchases?), and capability (are the tools 508-compliant?). It is

possible that the department is providing equipment, space, and access. That said, a plan is needed for students who may need more help, assistance, and even alternatives.

## Resources for Designing Learning Experiences with Social Media

Dozens of freely available and very well researched resources contain simple, instructor-friendly advice for putting social media to use in learning environments. Below is a list of some of our favorites, with annotations.

**CommonCraft** (http://www.commoncraft.com/)

Put simply, CommonCraft does a fantastic job of visually explaining how things work. This is a collection of short videos (about 3 minutes each) that use clever analogies to explain everything from APIs to Zombies. We like to use them during class discussions if someone brings up a term the rest of the class does not know, such as "crowdsourcing" or "social bookmarking." An institution can purchase a membership to gain access to the full site's resources or instructors can simply share videos one at a time for free.

**Educause's "Overcoming Hurdles to Social Media in Education"** (http://www.educause.edu/ero/article/overcoming-hurdles-social-media-education/)

Educause is a nonprofit organization for IT educators and professionals working in higher education. This article from April 2013 summarizes the current research on how colleges and universities are using social media. Reviewing everything from barriers to adoption to a rundown of popular uses of Twitter, Pinterest, and Wordle, the piece is a smart survey of how and why educators use social media (or not). If program leaders are trying to gauge the current state of how social media is being used in higher education, this article is relevant.

**Edutopia's "How To Create Social Media Guidelines For Your School"** (http://www.edutopia.org/how-to-create-social-media-guidelines-school)

Edutopia is an initiative of the George Lucas Educational Foundation. This 2012 collection of articles and resources was written by school district instructional technologist Steven Anderson. It is a great first stop for administrators and officials hoping to design step-by-step guidelines tailored to their own learning environments. Note the multiple links within the document to other blogs, writers, and resources that offer even more current information. Follow @edutopia on Twitter for the most up-to-date information and advice or visit Steven Anderson's blog page at http://www.edutopia.org/blog/social-media-guidelines-steven-anderson.

**Facebook for Educators Guide** (https://www.facebook.com/safety/.../Facebook%20for%20Educators.pdf)
A downloadable guide commissioned by Facebook to help educators make smart decisions about how best to use Facebook as a part of their teaching. Includes some excellent thoughts and resources on privacy settings, bullying, and digital citizenship. Some of its information is a bit outdated, but the concepts and ideas are worth consideration. Visit their Facebook page for updates to the guide: https://www.facebook.com/FB-forEducators.

**Facebook in Education** (https://www.facebook.com/education)
To the best of our knowledge, Facebook owns and maintains this page; it is nevertheless a nice resource for keeping track of what is going on in the world of social networking and education. For those who use Facebook as part of their teaching already, it is worth "liking" this page and following it frequently for updates on how educators across the world are using Facebook in learning settings.

**Lesson Plans from The University of Texas-Austin's Digital Writing Research Lab** (http://lessonplans.dwrl.utexas.edu/)
This excellent collection of lesson plans and writing exercises is meant for undergraduate writing instructors, but it can be used or modified to fit any communications classroom. Click on the "social networking" tag to find several pages' worth of ideas for using social media in a course on written communication. All the lessons are shared via a Creative Commons license, so be sure to give credit and "share alike," but know that these plans are meant to be distributed and redesigned according to context of use. Instructors can even submit their own ideas and add to this repository.

**Pinterest Boards**
Online trend forecasters are speculating that the future of social media will be centered around the "visual web." Communities that focus on the sharing of visual media are terrific for collecting and sharing teaching ideas in small chunks. Infographics, listicles, and data visualizations can be posted and traded easily, allowing for users to curate their own collections of favorites in a simple, easy-to-read format. To get started, use Pinterest's search bar or click on the "Education" feed. Also look for popular bloggers and educational organizations by searching for them by name. Starting a big collection is easy but overwhelming, so if you need a launch point, visit Alice Daer's board at http://pinterest.com/alicedaer/teaching-with-social-media/.

**10 Signs You Shouldn't Be Doing Social Media** (http://www.slideshare.net/robin2go/10-signs-you-shouldnt-be-doing-social-media) Robin Smail, an educational technologist at Penn State University, put together this short slide deck that humorously captions what most of us already know: There are limits to what we can expect from social media. It is a concise list of friendly reminders that if we use these tools, we need to maintain a sense of humor and a thick skin. Our favorite piece of advice is Smail's note that simply using social media does not guarantee an automatic audience of fans.

In closing, it is important to have a strategic plan before launching any new initiative. The use of social media in technical and scientific programs is no different. In using these systems, leaders and instructors can participate with students, support their learning of these technologies, and connect with other academics. Done well, social media participation can widen any academic circle, help students manage their online identities, and enrich a program. We welcome feedback and want to hear how you are using social media in your programs. We look forward to seeing you online.

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## Author information

Alice Daer is an assistant professor in the Rhetoric and Composition Studies Program within the English Department at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona, where she has been named the 2014–2015 ASU Associated Students' Centennial Professor for her excellence in teaching. At ASU, Professor Daer also holds affiliations with ASU Writing Programs and The Center for Games and Impact. Her research and teaching interests include digital literacies and rhetorics; social media design and use; internet culture; sociolinguistic discourse analysis; and postsecondary curriculum design. Most recently, her work has been focused on documenting and theorizing the ways that people write and use language in social media contexts so that we might better design learning experiences that appeal to those uses of language. Her professional affiliations include the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) and the Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on the Design of Communication (ACM SIGDOC).

Liza Potts is an associate professor in the department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures at Michigan State University. At MSU, she is a senior researcher at WIDE, Director of the Experience Architecture Program, and the Director of the Creativity Exploratory. Her research interests include digital rhetoric, internet studies, participatory culture, and social user experience. She is the Chair of ACM's SIGDOC, a leader in the Women in Technical Communication group, and affiliated with the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR). Her work has been published in *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, and *Technical Communication*. Her new book, Social Media in Disaster Response, is the first in the ATTW series by Routledge.