Teaching Cross-Cultural Diversity through Social Networking:
or How I Started off to Teach a Course but Wound up on Facebook Instead

Online communities are rapidly increasing across the full spectrum of learning experiences both formally and informally for our students at our various institutions. This presentation takes a pragmatic look at the highest aspirations of the participatory Web, examining some of the ways it can be incorporated into courses, research groups, and higher education pedagogy.

Social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace boast of millions and millions of users interacting, sharing, and engaging online. But, as educators, do we have a clear sense of what is happening in these spaces? What lessons can we learn from these informal learning interactions? What lessons can be taken up into more formal learning opportunities for our students?

In this presentation I will demonstrate how I used social networking software like BaseCamp, MySpace, Facebook, Photobucket and Skype to teach a project-based undergraduate course taught in the department of Comparative History of Ideas at the University of Washington. Coupled with this course, in this presentation, I will also demonstrate how working with a group of students, artists and teachers from South Africa we utilized social networking tools to plan and manage a Culture and Arts Festival which took place in South Africa in August of 2007.

Though utilizing a variety of social networking tools brought flexibility and functionality to the course, it also presented a set of access and coordinating issues with the students. With any emerging technology that crosses social norms regarding the way people interact, we had to address and overcome social etiquette issues.

Social networking tools can indeed be utilized to create authenticate learning experiences for students. However, in order to fully explore innovation and collaboration in the service of teaching and learning both teacher and student need to work out new ways to engage with each other and disciplinary content in the participatory web.

Scott Macklin bio

Scott Macklin, formerly the Director of the Program for the Educational Transformation through Technology, now serves as the CIO of the College of Education at the University of Washington. Scott seeks to create a rich infrastructure that supports innovation and collaboration in the service of teaching and learning at the University of Washington, and thus of the institution itself, by creating a campus framework to promote the thoughtful exploration,
development, assessment, and dissemination of next-generation technologies and strategies. In 2000, his co-authored article, The Catalyst Project: Supporting Faculty Uses of the Web...with the Web, won the EDUCAUSE contribution of the year award. Scott serves as VP of Education on the executive board of the Society of Information Managers. He also serves on the EDUCAUSE Systemic Progress in Teaching and Learning Award committee and is a member of the Society of the Learning Sciences. During his spare time he makes award winning documentary films.