**Faceing Each Other: Facebook as a Tool for Academic Learning and Professional Networking**

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**Project Description:**
Facebook, an online social networking tool which boasts 350 million active users (http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics, 2009), seems to function without boundaries, standards, etiquette, or ethics; yet, individuals have been held accountable for information posted on personal Facebook accounts (Foulger, Ewbank, Kay, Popp, and Carter, 2009; Thompson, 2009; Steinbach and Deavers, 2007; Finder, 2006; Bugeja, 2006). So why then would we submit a beautiful idea that focuses on the potential usefulness of Facebook, social networking, or other technologies, especially when Facebook has a bit of bad press? Currently, the tool has less to do with an academic education than it has to do with social networking and peer-to-peer engagement and interaction, obviously. However, the project developers believe that the skills involved in navigating and using Facebook can and should be aligned with learning. In particular, the skills involved are closely related to the Hostos General Education core competencies of oral and written communication as well as reading. Additionally, some principles of excellence addressed include: teaching the arts of inquiry and innovation, engaging the big questions, connecting knowledge with choices and action, and fostering civic, intercultural and ethical learning. Because there are so many users of Facebook and other online networking tools, the likelihood of Hostos students begin engaged in someway with social networking technology is high, and since successful retention programs are centered on ways in which students become engaged with the campus either academically or socially (Braxton, Hirschy, McClendon, 2004), Facebook is a strong candidate through which faculty can professionally and academically connect with students, given the right parameters.

**Purpose** Facing Each Other is an exploration of the attitudes of faculty and students toward using Facebook as an educational and professional development tool. Normally, Facebook offers opportunities for users to edit and revise their postings but its format can be subject to misinterpretation. More importantly, Facebook demands that users read frequently and employ writing techniques to communicate message and purpose. As such, this tool has the potential to assist faculty in making new academic connections with students; connections that reach students in ways that are beyond the existing imagination. What better way to motivate and connect with students than to approach them in their own territory where they think, edit, respond, and publically display their writing to others? Big questions include: will this medium of interpersonal interaction improve communication and clarity in writing and will positive experiences communicating online transfer to strengthening verbal forms of communication? Or, will the negative habits of writing: forming incomplete sentences, thinking superficially, or conversing in abbreviated forms morph the acceptable standards of communication? This project intends to: (1) research faculty, staff, and student use and attitudes toward using social forms of technology for educational and professional development purposes; (2) synthesize and share of that research with the college, CUNY-wide, and external audiences.

**Additional Support from Literature**

Much of the literature reviewed so far tends to be about Facebook and unanticipated outcomes for users when used for social purposes. It primarily focuses on student development issues. For example,

Pennsylvania State University students created a Facebook group entitled “I rushed the field,” to which students joined and posted photographs and names of people on the field after the school’s win over Ohio State in football. After accessing the Facebook group’s Web page, university police used that information to identify more than 50 students who violated the school’s policy by rushing the field after the game (Steinbach and Deavers, 2007).

In a separate article, journalist Alan Finder (2006) reports several examples of employers rejecting applicants based on information discovered on Facebook. A small amount of scholarly literature has been found to explore ways to prepare future professionals to use social networking and other technological tools responsibly and ethically; otherwise, face possible ramifications for using this technology as a personal means of social communication (Foulger et al, 2009). In Bugeja’s (2006) title, Facing the Facebook, Christine Rosen warns academic practitioners against “… failing to realize that the younger generation views technology largely as a means of delivering entertainment…and secondarily as a means of communication.” Still the project co-developers maintain that inherent in the functionality of Facebook, communication and learning is taking
place even though the learning may be in a different form from the traditional classroom and traditional face-to-face interpersonal engagements with which we “old-timers” are familiar and more comfortable.

**Goals of Facing Each Other**
- Identify the number of students using Facebook for social, professional, academic purposes
- Explore student attitudes towards using Facebook as an productive academic learning/professional networking tool
- Identify the number of faculty using Facebook for social, professional, academic purposes
- Explore faculty attitudes towards using Facebook as an academic learning/professional networking tool
- Review the literature

**Outcomes of Facing Each Other**
- Produce a paper exploring the benefits and drawbacks of using Facebook as an academic learning/professional networking tool
- Offer a college-wide set of recommendations and code of ethics for professional and academic use of Facebook based on student and faculty focus groups, survey results, and literature review
- Share the project outcomes with a college-wide audience through Center for Teaching and Learning Signature Programming
- Share project outcomes on the CTL or other appropriate website
- Explore the possibility of a library workshop for faculty and students about the responsible and ethical use of Facebook for professional development and academic purposes

**Timeline**

**a) Fall 2010**
- Review the literature
- Conduct separate focus groups with faculty and students
- Develop, distribute and collect electronic surveys for faculty, staff, and students
- Research some initiatives that exist/are being developed at other institutions of higher education (i.e. Monroe Community College, SUNY, has a new Social Media Committee that addresses college community use of technology)

**b) Spring 2011**
- Compile and analyze survey and focus group results
- Create a code of ethics for responsible use of Facebook, professionally and academically, by Hostos community members
- If possible, design new library workshop about using Facebook academically and professionally
- Share project and outcomes, in person, with a college-wide audience
- Post project and outcomes online through the Center for Teaching and Learning

**Sources**


Facebook is Student Engagement: Michael Tracey, a journalism professor at the University of Colorado, recounts a class discussion during which he asked how many people had seen the previous night’s *NewsHour* on PBS or read that day’s *New York Times*. “A couple of hands went up out of about 140 students who were present,” he recalls. “One student chimed: ‘Ask them how many use Facebook.’ I did. Every hand in the room went up. She then said: ‘Ask them how many used it today.’ I did. Every hand in the room went up. I was amazed.” (Bugeja, 2006)