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TEACHING MATTERS: DEVELOPING AS A TEACHER/LIBRARIAN [COLUMN]

Web 2.0: Opportunities for Information Literacy Instruction

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This column will focus on the conceptual and practical aspects of teaching information literacy. Column co-editor Janelle Zauha and I will write about trends and issues that have come to our attention, but we also solicit contributions to this space. Readers with ideas for Teaching Matters may contact me at ragains@unr.edu, or the editors of Communications in Information Literacy at editors@comminfolit.org.

Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, wikis, and social networking sites promote interaction, collaboration, and sharing of information. Depending on the particular tool or platform, visitors to Web 2.0 sites can easily contribute text, images, and audio while online, without password access or special authoring software. In this first column, I'll discuss some ways educators have used Web 2.0 and identify issues for us to consider.

We already know that that young Americans are fully exploiting Web 2.0 tools for social pursuits. Teenagers comprise the single largest age group in the United States who use these collaborative platforms. A recent Pew survey (2007) found that 55% of online teens have created an online profile, predominantly in MySpace, which they use to stay in touch with current friends, make new ones, and flirt. Other segments of society are taking advantage of

online collaboration via Web 2.0 tools, although somewhat more cautiously. News organizations, businesses, and professional associations are among those using blogs and wikis to collaborate and disseminate information within their own organizations and to their external audiences. Many small businesses, artists, and independent musicians use social networking sites such as MySpace to develop their customer base or audience and communicate with them. For businesses that sell a product or service, blogs and wikis present free or low-cost alternatives to paid advertising in print and broadcast media, conference calls, and travel.

Educators, including librarians, are influenced by these trends, and some are using Web 2.0 tools in an experimental mode. As we look to the future, there is some urgency in these efforts. Teens' involvement in online social networking appears to be a juggernaut that will

only gather speed as time passes. Today's students are our audience; tomorrow, they will be society's leaders, bringing with them their expanding skills and preferences for communicating. Librarians have, of course, used Internet-based communication tools, including email, chat and the Web, since those tools' inception. Today it seems incumbent on instructional librarians to use Web 2.0 effectively in educating students and delivering services to constituents.

How can we start using the social networking tools of Web 2.0 in ways that are intellectually rigorous and promote learning? Martha Groom, a professor at the University of Washington Bothell, turned the online encyclopedia Wikipedia (to which anyone can contribute or edit) on its head by assigning her environmental history students either to write a new Wikipedia entry or to thoroughly revise an existing one. Like many teachers, she had become concerned that her students were citing poor sources, but found that those who completed the Wikipedia experiment produced better writing than she had expected from undergraduates. ("Wikipedia Becomes a Class Assignment," 2007). Students wrote to the course instructor's standards, in a public forum that incorporates elements of peer and editorial review. The assignment also encouraged students to view Wikipedia's content and editorial process critically. This is an outstanding example of using the Web in learning. William Badke offers some good general ideas in his recent article, "What To Do with Wikipedia" (2008) and Wikipedia's managers encourage use of the site in teaching, providing suggestions, templates, and links to several dozen educational projects ("Wikipedia," 2008).

The University of Pennsylvania has created PennTags, a social bookmarking tool for its user community (<http://tags.library.upenn.edu/>). There are currently several hundred projects on the site, with topics of greatest interest shown in a "cloud" on the PennTags home page. The site's managers stress the advantages of bookmarks that users can view and share with anyone on the Web. This mirrors the

functionality of social bookmarking sites such as del.icio.us, which some thesis and dissertation advisors use to share their sources with students.

H2O Playlist (<http://h2obeta.law.harvard.edu/home.do>), a Harvard Law School project, initially looks like a simple adaptation of course reserve readings. However, it's much more than that: H2O Playlist is an open forum that allows participants to share documents and other Web-based information. Members can subscribe to playlists and receive updates on many topics, such as the Communications Decency Act, "Remix Culture," and "Free Culture and Municipal Wi-fi." The study of law is well suited for such a platform, since published cases are often available from free online sources like Findlaw, but H2O now features course content and discussions from colleges, universities, and high schools in the fields of business, the humanities, and other subject areas. The site's promotional video highlights H2O's openness and the educational benefits of wide-ranging collaboration and discussion. I work as a liaison with the College of Business Administration at the University of Nevada, Reno, and upon discovering H2O, immediately thought of its applicability to the required undergraduate course in international marketing. Such courses stress cultural fluency in business environments, and some faculty in the United States have employed video links and email with business students and faculty in other countries in order to facilitate this (Simon, Haghirian, & Schlegelmilch, 2003). A platform like H2O invites even more wide-ranging contacts. One can easily imagine the opportunity for greater cross-cultural communication using free Web 2.0 tools, including discussion forums and instant messaging.

Librarians looking for better ways to disseminate time-sensitive information about their collections and services can use RSS feeds to post alerts on course Web sites, where the target audience will see them. Steven Bell describes how to do this in his chapter "Library blogs: the new technology bandwagon" in *Using Interactive Technology in Libraries* (2007). This

kind of effort requires collaboration with instructors and possibly instructional design staff, who may hold the keys to your institution's online courseware (e.g., WebCT, Blackboard, Moodle).

Increasingly, libraries are implementing collaborative tools into their Web sites and online catalogs. Instructional librarians can use these platforms as testing grounds to learn about tagging, blogs, RSS feeds, and more. The next steps require collaboration with teaching faculty, using appropriate Web 2.0 tools to enhance learning and encourage the sharing of ideas in specific contexts, such as courses, new student orientations and academic programs.

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