

Web 2.0 Strategies at Metropolitan Universities

Guest Editor: Roger Munger

Advances in web-based technologies and, more specifically, participatory technologies (such as social media and social networks) have radically transformed multiple disciplines from the higher education classroom to social welfare services. With declining funding and simultaneously increasing expectations, there seems to be no stop to the ongoing technological advancement, as well as the number of individuals and organizations turning to cheaper, more customizable Web 2.0 technologies to help meet their needs. While many have their eyes on the horizon, gazing at the next wave of innovations that will no doubt include cloud-based computing, greater integration of mobile technologies, and virtual reality, the purpose of this issue of *Metropolitan Universities: An International Forum* aims to address how universities currently are using Web 2.0 technologies to educate students, collaborate with community members, and work more efficiently.

It was not so long ago that having an online social presence was a mute point. Most individuals did not have access to the knowledge or resources to self-publish writing or pictures on the Internet. Large companies and Internet service providers (ISPs) served as enormous gatekeepers and decided what content would be published and posted online. While some Internet entrepreneurs did successfully establish an online presence, a majority of the Internet was inaccessible to the layperson. In this context, we see a stark difference from the Internet that we know today. This was the Web 1.0 interface—a read-only journey.

When trying to grasp just what is meant by the term “Web 2.0 technologies,” it can be helpful to consider previous and alternative naming. For example, a much less commonly used term that recently fell out of vogue in educational technology contexts is “read-write web.” The use of the verbs “read” and “write” were included to symbolize the nature of Web 2.0 technologies as opposed to Web 1.0 technologies, which were focused primarily as “read-only” technologies. The naming of Web 2.0 signifies a new version of technologies, as many software tools use versioning nomenclature to identify newer and more feature-rich editions. What is most peculiar about the use of 2.0 in Web 2.0 is that the technology supporting it and other web-based tools has existed since the beginning of the Internet. Why the 2.0? The 2.0 represents a shift in the way we see, talk about, work with, communicate, interact with, and teach with these technologies.

Two core, web-based technologies assisted in the shift away from the read-only Internet: blogs and wikis. While discussion boards and online chatting programs flourished in Web 1.0, they focused primarily in bounded and private spaces; whereas,

blogs and wikis mark a noted shift toward the unbounded public space. Blogging created an easy way for almost anyone to generate a web site and self-publish their own content in a matter of minutes. Wikis allowed a similar usability in creating web pages, but was geared toward collaboration more so than blogging. From these two technologies grew other branches of online media, including social networks such as MySpace, Friendster, Facebook, and Google+ (Plus). These tools provided an online space for users to connect and share information, while still other technologies emerged, including Google Docs and Apps, that were meant to increase productivity and collaboration online. Within this realm of Web 2.0 technologies, the name of the game is “read-write”; users are expected not only to consume (read) information, but also to produce and create (write) their own content.

Foundational to Web 2.0 technologies is the concept of sharing. Sharing is at the heart of each web-based technology—from sharing pictures of family on Facebook to the sharing of scholarship on a Google doc. While it might be next to impossible to tell the future of Web 2.0 technologies, or even guess at the terminology that will be used, we continually will need to evaluate and reflect on how these new advances shift our understandings of ourselves, our learning, our students, and our connections with others.

Web 2.0 technologies transform and emancipate the traditional classroom walls. They broaden and stretch the limitations of seat time, institutional space, and document files, with the freedom and expectation to not only participate but also engage in a community, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, at any time of day. On the web, students have the opportunity to interact and contribute as peer teachers, deepening their understandings and building greater social presence and community.

In many ways, students have led the way into this new world with life-long connections to computing, through the Internet, cell phone, and mobile technologies. As educators, we cannot assume that these so-called digital natives come to higher education with the skills necessary to harness the power of these game-changing Web 2.0 technologies. We must remember that the technologies are life-changing, and it is the people using the technology, not the technology using the people. Technologies can be used for great and wonderful purposes or can be used to harness and exploit hatred and fear. Today’s students must be empowered and given excellent examples of how to mindfully incorporate technologies into their lives. Each of the following articles is aimed at achieving this end.

In the first article, “Moving Beyond Blackboard: Using a Social Network as a Learning Management System,” Christopher Thacker examines the bottom-up structure of participation enabled by the new Web 2.0 paradigm, with focus on communication, participation, and community. In order to maximize the effects of the World Wide Web, Thacker argues that instructors should develop their own user-generated online course management system using social networking applications.

In “Web 2.0 for the Online Graduate Student: Technology Immersion for Both Curriculum and Residency,” Anne M. Hewitt and Susan S. Spencer describe a successful twelve-year technology immersion initiative in a graduate online program. Moving beyond a simple information-sharing model to an interactive, student-friendly, connected, experiential model, the authors offer the best practices for strategic imperatives, embedded technology infrastructure, and program technology infusion plans.

Marketing professors Philippe Duverger and Erin M. Steffes, in “Using YouTube Videos as a Primer to Affect Academic Content Retention,” report the results of their study investigating the impact of the use of YouTube videos on student material retention. Duverger and Steffes argue that not only are Net Gen students ideal users of Web 2.0 applications, but also such applications can increase the levels of student engagement through visual stimulation.

Jiuguang Feng and Wei Wang provide an international perspective in “Using Web 2.0 to Design Meaningful Language Learning Environments.” Feng and Wang detail how using a social networking site can provide students with a meaningful learning environment in a foreign language course. Specifically, the authors report on how students in China use the social network Ning to practice their English with students outside the course, to collaborate with classmates, and to interact with the instructor in a less stressful context. It is noted, however, the use of a social network in the course did introduce concerns about student privacy, copyright infringement, and academic dishonesty.

In “Blog Attack: New Teaching Strategies to Engage Today’s College Students,” Denise Castro describes the benefits of blogging in a “Foundations of Wellness” course. Because the course focuses on learning about one’s own personal health, blogging as opposed to private paper-based journals represents an ideal activity. Weekly entries on the class blog held students accountable to their classmates who then also support and commiserate with each other throughout the behavior change project. Blogging provides a voice for all students while adding a sense of empowerment stemming from self-expression and inclusion. The use of Web 2.0 can supersede classroom confines to build a social community that is not just limited to the participants in one class or even the context of one semester.

Using a case-study approach in “Using Web 2.0 for Tracking and Assessing the Impacts of Civic Engagement Activities,” Stephen E. Kauffman discusses how one university harnessed the interactive opportunities of a Web 2.0 survey tool to assess the scope and impact of the university’s civic engagement activities. After reviewing the literature on assessing civic engagement and approaches to evaluation research, Kauffman argues that the interactive web plays a critical role by providing greater reach across constituencies and the best chance of identifying impacts of activities.

Matthew J. Kruger-Ross and Lori B. Holcomb conclude this issue with “Educational Technology as a Subversive Activity: Questioning Assumptions Related to Teaching

and Leading with Technology,” in which they examine some everyday assumptions and beliefs about web-based technologies that some educators take for granted. They argue that although Web 2.0 tools often determine how learning is structured, it is the instructors and students who are truly driving the innovation. Rather than reacting to technologies already a part of their students’ lives, they note instructors should take a leadership role, try new technologies in the classroom, and encourage their students to do the same.

Although varied in both topic and approach, I believe common threads do exist, pointing to topics of general interest to administrators and faculty at urban campuses, and suggesting directions for innovative new uses of Web 2.0 tools. One common thread, for example, highlights the focus on user-participation. Our students are no longer mere consumers of information. Instead, they help generate, shape, and share information. A second common thread concerns the use of existing social networking applications for educational purposes. Such social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, for example) encourage participation and widen communication networks beyond the classroom.

I want to close this introduction by acknowledging the people whose assistance helped make this issue a reality. First, I want to thank Barbara Holland, the editor of *Metropolitan Universities* journal, for inviting me to serve as a guest editor of this issue and for her support and guidance throughout the project. I also want to thank Lori Pennington for her assistance with editing the manuscripts. I am grateful to the authors for their insights and willingness to revise their articles. In true Web 2.0 spirit, the authors and I collaborated on this introduction using Google Docs. Finally, I would like to thank the students in my graduate course on “Web 2.0 and Technical Communication.” They helped me better understand how people use Web 2.0 technologies in the workplace. This issue is stronger for their contributions.

Our students use Web 2.0 tools every day. We have an opportunity as administrators and faculty on campuses in urban and metropolitan regions to use the World Wide Web to build networks of communities and encourage our students to take an active role in creating their own learning opportunities.

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