



## Building Student Engagement Through Social Media

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### ABSTRACT

Social media offers several opportunities in the classroom that include increased student engagement, building students' professional and peer networks, and developing their social media skills. This article describes the use of two platforms, Twitter and Facebook, and the advantages or disadvantages of each in five undergraduate Political Science courses and three MPA graduate courses. The article first summarizes the pedagogical benefits of social media, drawing from an interdisciplinary literature. It then reflects on the challenges and successes of social media related to student engagement in and out of the classroom and student feedback on social media contributions to learning. Finally, it offers suggestions for future directions using social media.

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### Introduction

In 2016, an estimated 69% of American adults used social media. An even greater proportion, 86%, of 18- to 29-year-olds used at least one platform (Pew Research Center 2017) while estimates for university students reach 94% at some institutions (Lieberman 2014). This is a marked increase from 2005 when only 5% of American adults used some form of social media (Pew Research Center 2017). As it has become a fixture of society, social media has changed the way society communicates and accesses information, including how students learn and engage with the world (Hitchcock and Battista 2013; Junco, Elavsky, and Heiberger 2013). Integrating this technology into courses not only promotes information sharing, collaboration, and engagement, it also develops specialized skills and media literacy that help students in the professional world. This article examines strategies for and the outcomes of integrating social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, in undergraduate and graduate courses by discussing its use in five undergraduate Political Science and three graduate MPA courses in which social media was used as a tool to increase student engagement with course material and informal learning through interaction with related external content. More specifically, the goal of integrating social media into the courses was to encourage students to engage with course concepts in and out of the classroom and as a mechanism to develop specialized skills for students as professional and personal consumers of social media.

There is a growing literature focusing on social media that compares faculty and student usage of platforms, much of which is interdisciplinary and predominantly resides in the field of Education. Its findings are useful yet broad. Although there are fewer pieces particular to the discipline of Political Science, some already advocate the benefits of social media such as professional networks, more instructor-student contact, facilitating a collaborative environment, and case studies (Aragon 2007; Lieberman 2014; Sullivan 2012). As a phenomenon, social media is of interest to a range of scholars within the field, including those studying political participation or advocacy (Zhang et al. 2010). In addition to scholarly inquiry, social media is also pedagogically useful for winning and maintaining student attention, illustrating applications of Political Science in the real world and encouraging students to think critically beyond the classroom.

Building on the existing scholarship demonstrating the benefits of social media in course design, this article first provides a brief overview of social media, its significance, and the ethics of using social media platforms in a classroom setting. Next, it describes the approaches to social media integration in college courses and shares the author's own experiences organized around two objectives: (1) increasing student engagement and (2) building peer and professional networks. Finally, it offers suggestions for the future integration of social media in the Political Science classroom using Bloom's Taxonomy as a pedagogical road map for activities related to learning objectives.

### **What is social media and why is it important?**

Social media includes platforms using the Internet and Web 2.0 technology to allow users to communicate, share, and collaborate (Mao 2014; Tess 2013). While specific definitions vary, familiar examples of social media include social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter, social publishing platforms such as wikis, and virtual gaming worlds. Facebook has been the most popular platform with more than 2 billion users worldwide, 1.37 billion of whom utilize the site daily. Also popular is Twitter, a micro-blogging platform with 330 million users who average 500 million tweets a day in more than 40 languages (Pew Research Center 2017; Twitter 2017; Facebook 2017). Facebook and Twitter both permit users to share information privately or publicly in real-time via computers or mobile devices, making them popular with individuals and organizations alike (Waters and Jamal 2011; Guo and Saxton 2014). Consequently, social media has become ubiquitous, from pop culture references such as "Down in the DM" by rapper Yo Gotti (2016) to presidential tweets. This makes social media a powerful tool to connect with students and to illustrate concepts and theories in a dynamic political environment.

### ***Contributions to learning and engagement***

Social media contributes to learning through the creation of a community, the exchange of information, and interactivity. Because it encourages interactivity, real-time content, and engagement, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter can increase student engagement, connections between peers and between students and instructors, and between

students and practitioners (Evans 2014; Lovejoy and Saxton 2012; Junco et al. 2013). The interactivity of social media readily lends itself to a participatory classroom and collaborative learning, which are shown to be more effective than individual learning and to increase student performance (Dabbagh and Kitsantas 2012; Glazier 2016; Eikenberry 2012).

In addition, social media platforms offer instructors opportunities to affect more than student achievement. While many students arrive at college with personal social media experience, integrating social media into course design can help students gain practical credentials to help them successfully find jobs in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors (Mergel 2012; Eikenberry 2012). Employers often look to younger employees for social media expertise, yet these individuals frequently lack skills in a professional context.<sup>1</sup> By including social media as a course component, students learn the consequences of voice and identity in a professional online context while also learning to be savvy consumers of social media. With constructive class feedback, social media can also facilitate student connections with classmates and practitioners. In the author's experience, social media offers two main pedagogical benefits. First, it encourages students to apply course concepts and theories to the real world, thereby encouraging them to think critically beyond the classroom throughout the semester and to continue to apply the concepts and theories after the course concludes in the real world and in other courses. Second, social media may be used by instructors to facilitate learning objectives such as group work or as an early warning tool to flag content with which students are struggling, allowing for clarification or deeper discussion earlier rather than later.

### ***Disadvantages of social media***

Despite its advantages, social media also poses risks and places greater burdens on some students than others. Consequently, it is important to consider these alongside its benefits. Certain disadvantages may be used to educate students about identifying valid sources of information or sources of misinformation. For example, many instructors find it necessary to discuss Wikipedia with students when addressing research. Identifying biases and good and bad sources of information, including fake news, have also emerged in the author's graduate and undergraduate courses. This should be viewed as an opportunity to educate students about social media literacy and more generally about misinformation and participation rather than a detriment of social media. Further illustrating ways in which social media offers examples of the applied discipline, such conversations might even be further developed into teachable moments through prompts for debates about the first amendment.<sup>2</sup>

Social media in the classroom also carries more serious risks for students, such as privacy and abuse, that should be taken into consideration. For example, the privacy of LGBTQ students may be eroded by asking students to post or tweet from personal accounts and women are at greater risk for harassment in online forums (Watts et al. 2017; Myers and Cowie 2017). These risks become particularly problematic if students are unaware of how to use privacy settings on platforms such as Facebook. As such, expectations about student participation, appropriate behavior, repercussions, and precautions students can take to protect themselves should be carefully discussed.

Encouraging students to establish course-specific accounts rather than using personal ones protects privacy to a greater degree, but this also burdens them with managing multiple profiles. A social media platform such as HootSuite may be helpful in managing this while also demonstrating tools to efficiently manage multiple accounts in a professional setting. Limiting the type of social media interactions in which students engage in as part of the course and setting stringent expectations for professional conduct that includes making clear the university's courses of action for misconduct may also curb exposure to risks such as online abuse from internal and external threats. For example, an instructor may choose to limit student interactions to peer networks instead of exposing students to public online forums.

The primary challenge that emerged during the author's experience integrating social media into the courses described were related to issues of student access. This manifested itself in two ways. First, students without access to a computer or Internet at home were obliged to rely on campus computer labs. Those lacking this type of access or who did not own a smart phone were also less likely to be familiar with how to use social media, placing them at a comparative disadvantage to their peers. Although these students participated in social media exercises, they did so in a less organic way than their classmates. Second, students were less likely to be familiar with Twitter regardless of computer and Internet access. This also placed an additional burden on these students compared to peers who possessed greater social media literacy. Students who expressed concerns about access were both male and female, primarily traditional students, and included undergraduate and graduate students.

To bridge the digital divide, activities designed to introduce students to the platforms and their capabilities can be included as in-class exercises or as out of class tutorials so that students are provided with a space to familiarize themselves with platforms. This also serves as a first opportunity to demonstrate the technology in a professional setting. Correspondingly, making use of peers is an effective way for students to learn. For example, students tweeting questions about the syllabus using the course hashtag and a second substantive hashtag creates a question and answer repository while teaching students to craft and thread tweets and hashtags. At a more advanced level, student experts might lead mini-workshops on features such as Twitter's in-app video streaming that replaced Vine to build presentation skills, share knowledge, and expand peer networks.

### **Social media in the political science classroom**

Although most social media was developed for personal and not educational use, Mao (2014) notes that technology may be successfully and completely integrated into a course if it relates to learning objectives (Callens 2014, 19; Mao 2014). However, an opportunity for student engagement is missed when technology is used infrequently by the instructor or the students; for example, social media as an independent activity instead of an integrated collaborative dialogue tool. Rather than using social media solely for the sake of using technology, it should be routinely integrated into the course design and clearly related to the course learning objectives. Thoughtful integration provides a bridge between formal and informal learning, encouraging students to reflect on course material throughout the semester, after its conclusion, and even postgraduation

**Table 1.** The 2016 institutional characteristics.

Institution (2016)	Total Students	Total Admitted	Pell Grants	Graduation— Bachelor w/in 6 years	Graduation— Black, non-Hispanic	Full-time Retention	Student-to- Faculty Ratio
Louisiana State University	31,414	76%	21%	65%	56%	83%	22:1
University of Oklahoma	31,250	71%	22%	68%	51%	90%	18:1

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics; Louisiana State University, Budget & Planning; University of Oklahoma, Institutional Research and Reporting.

(Hitchcock and Battista 2013, 40). In addition, it supplements course content by illustrating concepts such as freedom of speech, citizen participation, or by prompting discussion about the roles and norms of the executive.

Facebook and Twitter were integrated in five undergraduate courses and three graduate-level courses in a professional degree program at two public flagship research universities. These courses are being compared along two objectives: increasing student engagement and building peer and practitioner networks. These objectives are applicable at both the undergraduate and professional graduate levels. The student bodies at the two institutions are also similar, with a comparable number of undergraduate Pell Grant recipients, 6-year graduation rates from a Bachelor's degree program, full-time student retention, and student-to-faculty ratios. Table 1 describes the institutional characteristics in further detail. The University of Oklahoma enrolls more Hispanic and American Indian students than Louisiana State University; however, enrollment across other race and ethnicity categories is similar. The MPA program at University of Oklahoma is housed within the Political Science department whereas it is a standalone unit at Louisiana State University.

Each course used either Facebook or Twitter with the following goals: increasing student engagement, building student peer and professional networks, encouraging formal-informal learning, and developing social media skillsets for use in and out of the classroom. Table 2 outlines the platform and assignments used in each course. There are many applications of social media in classrooms beyond these two platforms, however, Twitter and Facebook were initially selected for student and instructor familiarity. The following section the author's observations related to Twitter and Facebook as classroom tools to build engagement.

### ***Increasing student engagement***

Both Facebook and Twitter were used as a tool to increase student engagement by illustrating the relevance of the course material and the application of theories and concepts to the real world and the students' lives. At both the graduate and undergraduate levels, students used social media to post news related to either an assigned topic or one that corresponded with a weekly theme. In iterations of the courses that used Facebook, the author created a closed Facebook group in which students could control their individual privacy settings and the instructor could change the group settings, controlling who was able to join, post, or view the group's activity. In the iteration of the course using Twitter, students were asked to tweet as groups at the undergraduate-level and individually at the graduate-level.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 2.** Course assignments and platforms.

Course	Platform	Assignment Type	In-Class	Out-of-Class
Intro. Comparative Politics (U)	Facebook	Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current events discussion</li> <li>• Application to lecture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1–2 news posts/week related to course themes</li> </ul>
Nonprofit Management (U)	Facebook	Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current events discussion</li> <li>• Incorporate social media posts in lecture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post 8 articles/semester</li> <li>• Post 6 comments/semester related to discussion and/or readings</li> <li>• Critique one social media outlet of a nonprofit</li> </ul>
Nonprofit Management (U)	Twitter	Small Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current events discussion</li> <li>• Incorporate social media posts in lecture</li> <li>• “How To” Twitter session</li> <li>• Social media lecture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2–3 tweets/week</li> <li>• 1–2 comments on peer tweets/week related to discussion and/or readings</li> </ul>
Nonprofit Management (G)	Facebook	Individual and Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current events discussion</li> <li>• Student-led discussion of reading</li> <li>• Social media lecture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2–3 posts/week related to the topic of the week</li> <li>• 2–3 comments/week related to readings and/or discussion</li> <li>• Design nonprofit social media plan (group)</li> <li>• Post 2 discussion questions/week to course management platform drawing on readings, news, etc.</li> </ul>

In both scenarios, students’ Facebook posts and tweets were incorporated into class time as a mechanism to draw students into discussion, reinforce course concepts, emphasize key points, and to aid recall of news and course material. This discussion provided students with an avenue to share their interests or experiences in class while encouraging them to retain, refresh, and digest information. Drawing on and revisiting themes in this manner involves as active instead of passive learners. Such engagement also encourages students to participate in formal and informal learning, applying what is learned in a reading or a lecture outside of the classroom, engaging with assignments such as research papers, or using social media to illustrate arguments in exams throughout the semester. To diversify the interests and perspectives shared, the author highlighted posts or tweets that complemented the theme of the week. Students were then called upon to summarize the story and why it was of interest. Social media platforms provided an alternative means of participation for students while noting applicable posts and tweets can reinforce a student’s confidence in his or her mastery of the material and boost engagement as a result.

In addition, students were offered an opportunity to share course-related events on or around campus during this opening discussion and via the class social media channel. This served a dual purpose. First, it generated excitement on the part of individual students for causes and organizations in which they were involved as well as support from peers and involvement in cocurricular activities. Second, it provided another outlet for students to connect course content with their own lives, further increasing student engagement.

While social media encouraged student engagement, it is a tool that requires some effort to facilitate meaningful and lasting engagement. For example, tweets and posts provided documentary evidence that students were reading course related content from sources such as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, yet students frequently forgot the details of their tweets and posts come class time. The time at the beginning of each class to recap and discuss posts or tweets set a predictable schedule for students and with the help of the instructor set the stage for discussion; however, this also suggests less intergroup and peer interaction than anticipated. Lieberman (2014) observed that social media activity is more interactive when initiated by the individual. In the author's experience, social media as an exercise on its own also failed to capture the interactivity and engagement potential of the platforms and required more leading on the instructor's behalf to reiterate the purpose and relationship to the course objectives to students.

### ***Building peer and professional networks***

Following a colloquy on innovative teaching methods,<sup>4</sup> the author implemented Twitter as the social media platform instead of Facebook. The colloquy emphasized the ongoing public dialogue enabled by Twitter, which allowed instructors to monitor learning and students to engage with peers and practitioners by asking questions, following individuals or organizations, and by crowdsourcing knowledge about themes and the work of relevant organizations or individuals through peer networks. This provided a more interactive platform for networking than Facebook, which facilitated peer networks well but made it more difficult for students to connect with practitioners. Twitter is also found to be an effective tool for facilitating formal-informal learning by including students in the learning process as knowledge producers rather than pure consumers (Stephansen and Couldry 2014). For the Twitter exercise, students were asked to tweet one to two times per week in small thematically-based groups at the undergraduate level or individually about weekly themes at the graduate level. This was intended to facilitate teamwork among the teams and to build peer networks and connections with practitioners at both levels. Group themes may be tailored to any course; for example, this course included an advocacy-lobbying group and a group on nonprofit-government relations. Each group or individual followed users related to their theme as well as the others in the course.

In addition to peer networks, Twitter also provided students with a platform to build or to expand professional networks through direct and indirect connections with practitioners. For example, an advocacy and lobbying group might follow Amnesty International or tweet a question about lobbying to the Internal Revenue Service.

Students were able to observe professionalized usage of social media while also building their own skillsets. In addition, the exposure to practitioners and organizations familiarized students with their scopes of work, internship and employment opportunities, and professional networks within that thematic area. By following classmates, students were further exposed to organizations, networks, and opportunities outside of their assigned theme or individual exposure. As practitioners began to follow class and retweet student posts, student enthusiasm increased, and networks were reinforced. In some cases, students gained points of contact at organizations. In three instances students secured paid internships by either inquiring about opportunities through these points of contact or after learning about opportunities via Twitter. Because the author was active on social media alongside the students, the students' practitioner networks also benefitted and expanded the instructor's professional network. This was helpful in diversifying guest speakers in subsequent semesters and for creating community engagement.

Twitter improved student peer and practitioner connections; however, the platform's character limits curtailed the depth of discussion possible.<sup>5</sup> To mirror the advantages of Twitter, the author returned to Facebook in subsequent courses and added the requirement that students also comment several times a week on peer posts in addition to posting their own content in the closed Facebook group. This produced a dialogue that ranged from reflections on news stories and personal experiences to the application of theory and its empirical validity. Often, there was a spillover effect where online debates carried over into class. While undergraduates were asked to work in groups, graduate students were asked to post individually and to synthesize material across the semester. This model encouraged peer networks, but students' practitioner networks suffered due to the peer network focused nature of Facebook. To overcome this, a course might instead use Twitter as its social media platform while incorporating complementary activities to create opportunities for critical thinking and professionalization.

## Student feedback

An assessment of 134 anonymous end-of-semester student evaluations between Fall 2013 and Spring 2017 showed that students responded positively to both Twitter and Facebook as a part of the courses. A greater number of the evaluation results are drawn from undergraduates, who made up a larger proportion of the total students enrolled in the courses. Twenty-one percent of the evaluations explicitly noted the use of social media in the course design, while 37% commented indirectly on its use through themes such as engagement, and 18% on the contribution of assignments to learning.

Comments directly addressing social media were rated on a scale of  $-1$  to  $1$  ( $-1 =$  negative,  $1 =$  positive). Facebook received greater attention than Twitter, with 18 positive comments. However, students commenting about Twitter in their course evaluations tended to use stronger adverbs to describe their feelings about the platform (very, really, so [much], etc.). In addition, Twitter received no negative comments and one neutral comment whereas Facebook received four neutral comments and one negative comment. Only three graduate students commented directly on the use of social media; however, all comments were positive.<sup>6</sup>



Positive comments from course evaluations included “Twitter assignment was excellent,” “Facebook made it easy to keep track of discussions and examples,” and “really demonstrates the relevance of topics.” One student also remarked that “students were really engaged in discussions . . . loved learning about how they [Facebook posts] relate to class.” At least one student objected to the assigned themes, preferring more freedom to choose current events that interested him or her. A second critique that emerged in the evaluations was a desire for better incorporation of social media into the course; this comment led to the introduction of two assignments the following semester, a social media critique at the undergraduate level and a social media plan at the graduate level, to supplement class discussions. This comment emphasizes the earlier point about routinization and full integration of social media: students and instructors must both be committed to its integration and the purpose clearly delineated for students. Two other students, both graduate-level, felt that that social media in addition to the course management software and traditional course requirements was overwhelming.

Student engagement was analyzed using a scale of  $-1$  to  $2$  ( $-1$  = not engaging,  $2$  = very engaging). The same scale was used to evaluate student comments related to how assignments contributed to learning. Although these comments did not always directly include social media, they are a useful indicator of overall student engagement, including social media as a tool to increase such engagement. Thirty-five percent of students commented on engagement, with more than half of graduate students acknowledging engagement in their course evaluations and one third of undergraduates doing so. The graduate student mode was  $1$ , meaning that they felt the course was engaging and enjoyed the format. One graduate student rated the course a  $2$ , indicating that he or she felt the course was very engaging. Graduate students responded more positively to the assignments with  $16\%$  rating assignments very positively in their comments and  $8\%$  rating assignment contributions to learning as positive. Eight percent of comments about assignments were negative, which was related to the course load rather than the assignments themselves. Facebook was used as the social media platform in the courses receiving these negative comments. The undergraduate evaluations were more mixed, with  $20\%$  of comments either positively or very positively evaluating engagement and  $12\%$  negatively evaluating engagement. Undergraduates commented on assignments less compared to graduate students. However,  $4\%$  of those that did so said that the assignments made a very positive contribution while  $7\%$  commented positively. The assignments received negative comments from  $5\%$  of evaluations with such comments. These negative comments all related to not understanding the learning objectives. Because engagement and assignment comments addressed the overall course, it is difficult to definitively say whether social media was a contributing factor or if managing student engagement as a new instructor was a more important factor based only on evaluations. Consequently, interim evaluations that ask students specifically about social media in course design would be helpful to recalibrate current and future courses.

Comments related to peer and practitioner networks were coded using a  $-1$  to  $1$  scale ( $-1$  = negative,  $1$  = positive). Only one graduate student commented on networks, expressing satisfaction with the exercise and a desire for more opportunities to engage with practitioners. Ten percent of undergraduates responded very positively to

practitioner networking. Each of these students specifically noted the opportunity to connect with practitioners online and later to meet with them in person. An additional 3% of evaluations made positive comments about networking, noting that the experience was “informative,” “[exposed the class to] a variety of professionals,” “made me excited to learn,” and was “very relevant.” There were fewer comments on peer networks, but the handful of evaluations that noted peer networks “focused my learning” and “helped me grasp concepts.”

## Suggestions and future directions

The following suggestions are offered as strategies to improve and to facilitate the use of social media, specific to student engagement and peer and practitioner networks, based on the author’s experiences:

- Clearly set student expectations about when it is appropriate to use social media (e.g., during class) and how to communicate (e.g., questions about class, response times, public posts, private messages, etc.)
- Establish a social media etiquette policy that includes what the instructor expects in interactions with students, between students, and with the online community
- Create a unique course hashtag to easily track tweets and use a second community hashtag to connect course tweets to broader conversations beyond the classroom<sup>7</sup>
- Use a questionnaire to create groups so that students are forced to make new connections instead of joining friends
- Incorporate student-led briefings on weekly social media activity to encourage information retention and student engagement
- Safeguard privacy by discussing privacy settings with students or creating course accounts that may be reused in the future
- Follow other instructors using social media in Political Science and other fields to learn best practices and innovative pedagogy

Instructors may find Bloom’s Taxonomy to be a helpful framework to implement these suggestions, develop activities, and to maximize social media as a classroom tool. Bloom’s Taxonomy has been used primarily in the field of Education, but there are several examples of its use within the discipline of Political Science (Callens 2014; Mulcare and Shwedel 2017; Pennock 2011).

Bloom’s Taxonomy categorizes levels of critical thinking into six levels of progressively higher abstraction that are intended to help students remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create knowledge. At the most basic level, students are asked to recall important pieces of information learned, for example, the date the European Union was formed. Students are then asked to interpret facts instead of simply remembering them, such as the implications of European Union expansion. At the next level, students are asked to apply what they have learned, such as solving the legal problem of the United Kingdom’s exit from the European Union. As students build knowledge, they are asked to engage with that knowledge at progressively higher levels

by analyzing, evaluating, and finally creating knowledge. For example, students may be asked to analyze the responses of existing European Union members compared to new or departing members; next evaluating primary and secondary sources on the topic by diagramming actors in the policy community; and then creating knowledge using multiple sources, such as tweeting as a political actor the issue of Brexit (Rao 2013).<sup>8</sup>

Applied to social media, Bloom's Taxonomy can be used to design exercises that facilitate specific objectives. For example, the act of searching for and retweeting course-related content engages students with course material outside of class on a platform that is already of interest. This bridges formal-informal learning and may also increase student engagement by providing an innovative assignment. To incorporate social media at the next level, students might be asked to post and comment on the course-related content for which they previously searched, demonstrating that they can not only recall concepts but also understand them by commenting and describing the post. The next step, applying material, might include asking students to select a nonprofit or foreign office and critique its social media practices. For example, which platforms are being used and how does the activity reflect the concepts or theories discussed in the course? This grants students some freedom to choose an entity or topic of interest to them while encouraging them to think critically about what is being learned. At a more advanced level, students might be asked to further expand their assessment of a social media presence by mapping stakeholders within a policy area, encouraging them to consider the actors' connections while continuing to think critically about concepts. An evaluation of these connections or a comparative study of social media presence further challenges students' level of expertise while maintaining a common thread. Finally, asking students to create new knowledge while drawing on the various levels of expertise is perhaps the most challenging. This might involve asking students to create a podcast while role playing or to design a social media plan for a chosen organization. Creating engages students and asks them to demonstrate the professionalized skills they have observed. If posted publicly, it also contributes to peer and practitioner networks by exhibiting students' work and creating engagement opportunities. A summary of assignments and their relationship to Bloom's Taxonomy and learning objectives is provided in Table 3.

## Conclusion

Integrating social media into courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels aids the objectives of increased student engagement and building peer and practitioner networks by illustrating real world connections with course content to students and creating opportunities for such connections. Exercises including weekly social media posts help students engage in formal-informal learning, applying material outside the classroom. As observed in the student feedback and in previous scholarship, this can also be used as a tool to increase students' excitement about content (Aragon 2007; Evans 2014), ultimately creating a more participatory and engaged classroom. The social media exercises described above also provide an avenue for students to connect with peers and practitioners. When many students seek college degrees as a means to secure a job (Evans 2014, 2), integrating social media in courses is an opportunity to

**Table 3.** Bloom's taxonomy and social media.

Level of Expertise	Description	Example of Social Media	Learning Objective
Knowledge	Recall concepts, terms, and theories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Searching for blogs, tweets, or posts</li> <li>• Retweeting news stories related to course content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student engagement</li> <li>• Formal-informal learning</li> <li>• Peer and practitioner networks</li> <li>• Professionalized social media skills</li> </ul>
Comprehension	Interpret and extrapolate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retweeting or posting course-related content</li> <li>• Describing relationship between post and the course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student engagement</li> <li>• Formal-informal learning</li> </ul>
Application	Apply concepts, principles, and methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critique of an organization's social media practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student engagement</li> <li>• Formal-informal learning</li> </ul>
Analysis	Understand the relationship between a whole and its parts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mind mapping social media actors in policy areas</li> <li>• Examining online citizen participation</li> <li>• Student-led surveys or polls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal-informal learning</li> <li>• Professionalized social media skills</li> </ul>
Evaluating	Incorporate multiple sources to form new ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderating peer discussions</li> <li>• Critique of an organization's social media effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student engagement</li> <li>• Peer networks</li> </ul>
Creating	Judge ideas or evidence using external evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blogging from the perspective of a nonprofit</li> <li>• Podcasting in the role of a political actor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student engagement</li> <li>• Peer and practitioner networks</li> <li>• Professionalized social media skills</li> </ul>

show students how and why the course matters, to equip those students with professional skillsets, and to build a network of peers and practitioners, all of which helps students relate course content beyond the classroom. Consequently, integrating social media in an intentional manner may be beneficial to a range of courses, from theory to regional studies.

## Notes

1. This observation comes from an informal conversation between the instructor and a guest speaker in Spring 2014 regarding what skills employers seek in entry-level college graduate employees or college-level interns.
2. Thank you to Reviewers 1 and 2 for their suggestions to improve this section, especially the recommendation to transform disadvantages into teachable moments such as a discussion about freedom of speech.
3. The author created group accounts on behalf of the class to facilitate the exercise and continuity across courses. This also served as an archive and example for future courses. Twitter limits the number of accounts that can be created using a single email address and how many accounts can be created during a certain period. Depending on how many accounts are needed for a course, it may be necessary to create the accounts over 1 to 2 weeks to avoid Twitter-imposed caps.
4. Thanks to panelists, especially Heather Carpenter, of "Innovate Methods for Teaching Nonprofit Management" at the 2014 Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) for sharing their lessons learned.

5. At the time of this course, tweets were limited to 140 characters. In 2017, Twitter increased the number of characters allowed in each tweet to 280 and added features to more easily thread tweets.
6. Louisiana State University transitioned from paper to online evaluations in Spring 2017. In subsequent semesters, evaluation response rates have been lower and there have been fewer comments.
7. The author utilizes the course number and department codes as hashtags, which have been unique enough for searches to produce only course content and easily remembered by instructor and students. For example, #PADM7925 and #CAS2033 are two recent examples in a graduate-level and undergraduate-level course, respectively.
8. Kristen Hernandez at the Louisiana State University Faculty Technology Center was an integral to developing the next steps to overcome the challenges encountered by the author and ways to integrate other social media technology in courses.

## Notes on contributor

**Meghann R. Dragseth** is an Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Administration at Louisiana State University. Before joining LSU, she received her PhD in Political Science from the University of Oklahoma. She has taught courses on nonprofit management, comparative politics, and public policy. Her research interests include international nonprofit management and comparative public policy and administration.

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