

Connecting Students

Introducing the Social Network into College Coursework

Prepared for

David Nelson, Communications Department Chairperson

Kirk Moore, UCCS Manager of Web Services

University of Colorado Colorado Springs
1420 Austin Bluffs Pkwy, Colorado Springs, CO USA 80918

Prepared by

Ryan Porter, Student at UCCS

8528 Champie Rd.

Peyton, CO 80831

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David Nelson, Department Chairperson

1420 Austin Bluffs Pkwy

Colorado Springs, CO 80918

Dear Mr. Nelson:

Improving the student experience should always be on the mind of educators .Why? Because it’s always on the minds of students. As a student I have gained valuable insight into how the student experience can be improved. After years of experience at several institutions, I have discovered that many of the educational systems in Colorado fall short in the same specific areas. To better understand this shortcoming I looked into two the main relationships of a typical student: the student-teacher relationship and the student-to-student relationship.

After conducting extensive research on communication in the classroom, I emphasize that it is a strict adherence to traditional teaching methods that causes poor communication in these two student centered relationships. These traditional teaching methods hamper the student’s ability to communicate in two ways: first, by encouraging a high power distance between the teacher and student, and second by maintaining an individualistic approach to learning that discourages social learning between students. Looking for the most economical answer to solving these problems, I came up with a technological solution. This paper intends to add a social networking element to the UCCS education that will increase student communication inside and outside of the classroom. This is done by following the Assess, Design, Deploy, and Develop Program. This program targets the 3 key groups of the UCCS population which include students, teachers, and department heads.

The ADDD program is the starting point each time a course specific social network is built. It begins by surveying each of the 3 groups with a course survey. This enables each group voice to be heard in the design of the course specific social network. The next step is design, where the prototype network is put together using the results from the survey. Following the design step is the experimental stage, where teachers and students will decide how they will use the tools presented to them. The final step is development, which describes a collaborative effort between teachers and department heads to record the results of using the course specific social network.

I would like thank you for the opportunity to develop such a meaningful proposal. As a student at UCCS, I am always looking for ways to increase the efficiency of my education. I hope this approach can be applied to alleviate some of the communication problems that students in higher education face. If you have any questions about this proposal, please give me a call.

Sincerely,

Ryan Porter, Student

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Introducing the social network into coursework

Using social networks in college education

Executive Summary

To make a University of Colorado at Colorado Springs education the best experience possible, UCCS should expand the Web Services department to include a course specific social network development team. Following the ADDD program the social network development team will design networks that increase communication among people.

Following the ADDD program is simple:

- 1. Assess.** This step surveys each of the three groups(students, teachers, and department heads) before the start of the semester. It determines each group's ambitions for the course.
- 2. Design.** In this step Web Services compiles the answers from the survey in the assessment stage and develops a custom made course specific social network. This is done by integrating all group responses into a single unit. This step will also include contacting the outside social networks to initiate partnerships. Typically, this will include simple informational exchange between UCCS and the outside network. Developing partnerships with these communities is a fundamental aspect of this stage because it offers real-world contact information for students. It also offers valuable insight into current happenings with such groups outside the UCCS community.
- 3. Deploy.** This is an experimental step that gives course instructors and students time to familiarize themselves with their new course tools and develop strategies to using it. In this step, teachers should introduce point incentives to reward successful exchanges in communication. These incentives should not only encourage communication between students in class but also increase useful communication with outside networks as well.
- 4. Develop.** This step is carried out through collaborative communication between the teachers and their department heads. It is an assessment of effectiveness of the tools. Records are kept of what works well and what does not.

Introduction

In the past decade, we have seen an explosive rise in ubiquity of technology. Computerized devices have become progressively smaller, and the software they use has become increasingly complex. Along with these devices organizational tools like social networks have also become incredibly popular.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this proposal is to encourage development of a course specific social network in UCCS education to increase student communication. This will be done by expanding the Web Services Department to include a social networking development team. This team will be dedicated to creating social networks for individual courses by using the ADDD program. Initially, the scope of this project will begin with a pilot program for a course in the communication department. Including time for development, the pilot can be launched as early the Spring semester of 2013. However, as projected acceptance increases, expanding the feature into most course offerings will be the goal.

The ADDD program attends to the three main groups that comprise the educational system; the student, the teacher, and the department heads. Each group has a role in the success of a social network on campus, which is why cooperation between the groups is critical, lending the need for incentives when necessary.

Assumptions

This proposal was created with the assumption that University of Colorado at Colorado Springs is a college dedicated to providing the best educational experience possible to its students. This includes investigating the use of any and all modern advancements in technology that might benefit the student population. Any advancements that are capable of achieving and maintaining a higher standard of progress for the students should be pursued according to their usefulness and viability.

Methods

In conceptualizing the course specific social network, I relied on a variety of online sources and references to help accurately portray my idea. I reviewed as many sources as possible to better understand what a social network is and is capable of. I also relied heavily on peer discussion, which helped me organize my thoughts into how this concept might work.

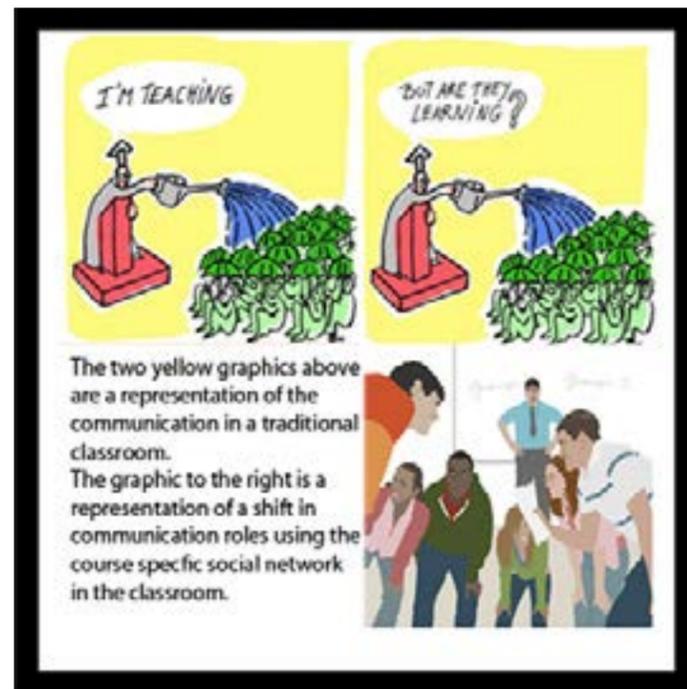
Limitations

This proposal does have some limitations. Current UCCS technological approaches to education reform are already underway. UCCS is holding a "Teaching with Technology Showcase" on the 13th of August. Information gathered here could have helped tremendously in this proposal. Another limitation came to light as I read "The Future of Higher Education" by Janna Anderson. In this article Anderson dispenses several persuasive arguments for traditional education reform using technology. Unfortunately, I could not incorporate the articles findings into this proposal because I came across the research too late.

Communication in a Traditional Classroom

Today's classroom setting follows what is known as the "traditional approach" to education. This approach emphasizes teacher-centered instruction, lecture-based materials, and a single unified curriculum. Unfortunately, schools that use this approach alone are proving to be less and less effective. Young students want to be engaged in their education as much they are engaged outside of it. That is why organizations like "ePals", "iEARN", and "Globaloria" have emerged and adopted a new technology based approach to education. These organizations use new social networking tools, along with core traditional methodology, to connect students together using technology. Suffice to say, it's working. According to the website, "iEARN" has become successful with "130 countries, 30 languages, 40,000 educators, and two million youth." Many initiatives like this have sprung up in recent years, and each has developed a distinct path to bettering education for students. However, most of these well-established organizations are focused to primary and secondary education levels. So what about higher education? Although collegiate level institutions can boast a much more dedicated student body, higher education students want more too, more inter-activity with their course material, and more socialization with their peers. That is why UCCS needs to develop its own course specific social networking system designed to utilize the social networking tool in coursework. By creating a course specific social network, UCCS can alleviate some of the problems a traditionally delivered education creates while encouraging communication both inside and outside of the classroom.

Figure 1



How Can UCCS Benefit From a Course Specific Social Network

Student

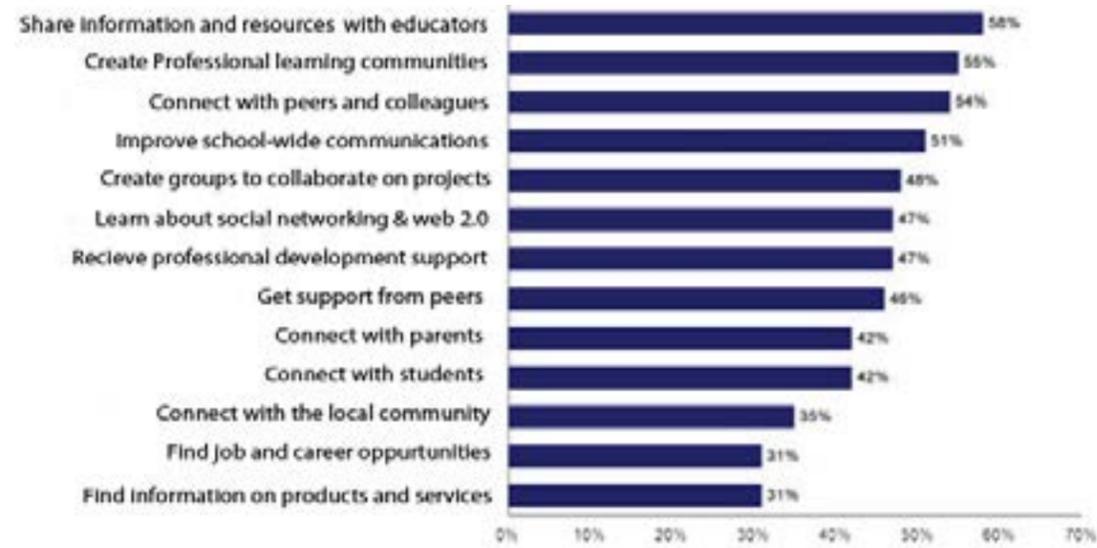
The benefits of a course specific social network should permeate throughout operations on the UCCS campus. However, the most immediate and hopefully most striking changes will be evident to the student. One of the most crippling aspects of the traditional approach to education is its teacher-centered instruction. As most seasoned students can attest, not every teacher "speaks to them". A course specific social network would help to alleviate this common ailment by encouraging student-to-student communications in coursework. Situations where multiple perspectives are necessary can be achieved through consistently encouraged communication. Another declining function of the traditional classroom is the heavy reliance on lecture-based delivery of information. Using online social networks and the various tools that accompany them, teachers can lessen their reliance on traditional material dense lectures and focus on the more effective inquiry or active based approach to student learning. Finally, one of the most appealing objectives of the course specific social network is its access to diverse resources for learning. One of the most tedious aspects of the traditional approach to education is its focus on the single unified curriculum. Using the course specific social network will make the students' learning experiences as diverse and distinct as each conversation they have. The ISTE standards for Digital age learning will help provide the necessary benchmarks capable of determining student progress.

Teacher

Although the course specific social network is geared towards benefitting the student, the teacher is not left without benefits. The most immediate effect a teacher should notice from a successfully implemented course specific social network is a fully engaged classroom. This is because students will be encouraged to communicate with one another from the start of the course and not just through goals to complete assignments from within the course. Another immediate benefit available to the teacher will be the modern toolkit for creating course curriculum. Video libraries, chat rooms, question-answer forums, and millions of other digital tools will all become available for creating the most effective and stimulating coursework possible. Many educators already see the value of social networking sites in education.

Figure 2

Teachers weigh in on potential value of social networks in education



Department Head

The last group that benefits from a course specific social network at UCCS is the department head. Successful acceptance from students and effective implementation from teachers will make a chain-reaction of positive effects. Students showing an increased interactivity in their coursework should contribute to a more productive campus as a whole. Teachers that use the social network tools effectively should notice a decreasing demand for time intensive lecture based curriculums. Overall, these effects should positively contribute to an increase in community, cultural diversity, and general knowledge dispersion in all departments.

Building a Course Specific Social Network: Using the ADDD Program

Introducing a course based social network into UCCS educational system is a monumental task. The first step of this process is going to be developing a functional prototype for a UCCS home network. This will be the portal that all UCCS course specific social networks will go through to communicate to outside social networks. This will need to be an appealing, easy-to-use product that utilizes both simplicity and ingenuity all-at-once. Considering the intellectual resources available at UCCS, this prototype can be built by the students themselves. This will be done with an incentivized contest. Once complete, linking the home network to outside networks will follow the ADDD program.

The ADDD Program goes as follows:

1. **Assess.** In this first step, the social network development team will introduce a pre-designed survey to the three group populations before the start of a course. This survey will closely resemble questions presented in the FCQ questionnaires presented at middle and end of current UCCS courses. The survey will ask questions like:

- **Expectations**
 - What are your expectations for this course?
- **Teaching strategies**
 - What approaches/aids would facilitate your learning and why?
 - Do you feel comfortable participating in small or large group discussion? Why or Why not?
 - Does working in a team environment improve your learning experience?
 - What would encourage you to participate more?
- **Interest in Subject**
 - What about this subject matter interests you and why? Disinterests?

The purpose of this survey is to assess the interests of the course population, including both the course teacher and department head. Collecting data from all of these groups is important because each group has a separate vision of what they want from this course. Integrating all of three visions into one happens in the next step.

2. **Design.** In this next step, the social network development team will collect and analyze the results from the assessment step. Using the results, the team will combine results into a single mission statement. Guided by this statement the team will choose which tools will help achieve the greatest amount of communication during the course. The team will choose from a list of tools like:

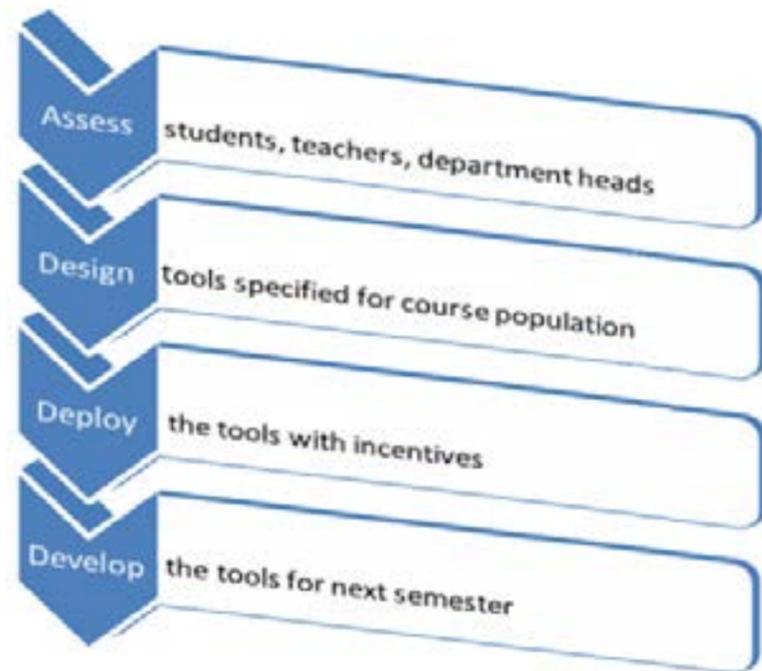
- Answerbag.com- A general online question and answer site.
- Globaloria.com- Educational games made by students.
- Culturequest.com- Cross-cultural based social network site.
- Askphilosophers.org- Philosophy centered question and answer site.
- Ballroomdancers.org- Video library of instructional content for learning ballroom dancing.
- Socialvibe.com- Opt-in based digital advertising site.
- Linked-in.com-Social network for business professionals.

One of key features of this step is not just embedding links into a UCCS home network for ease-of-access, but partnership development. This step includes opening lines of communication with site owners. Typically this will include a general information exchange between UCCS and the outside social network.

Conclusions and Recommendations

3. **Deploy.** The third step is the deployment step or experimental stage. This step is critical in doing two things:
- Measuring the success of steps one and two by analyzing the choices of outside social networks from the survey results.
 - Including teacher guidance to students in how to achieve effective communication with outside social networks. This highlights how to keep discussions with others educationally centered. This step encourages teachers to introduce incentives to students rewarding any successful exchanges in communication using the social network beneficial to course objectives.
4. **Develop.** The final step is development. This focuses on measuring student and teacher growth following International Society for Technology in Education standards (ISTE). This step allows time for review on what worked and what didn't for consideration in the following semesters population.

Figure 3
The ADDD Program



Effective communication methods are one of the most important aspects of a successful education. That is why utilizing modern tools that increase communication should be used more than just a reward to good students. Using social networks in education can change education all together.

UCCS should adopt the ADDD program to improve communication in the classroom:

Assess. Surveys students, teachers, and Supervisors to determine their:

- Expectations
- Teaching/learning strategies
- Interest in Subject

Design. After survey collection and analysis, related online social-networking tools will be linked to on the UCCS run social network. Organizational partnerships are also developed.

Deploy. Experimental stage. Includes:

- Measuring success of steps one and two
- Guidance to communicating with an educational purpose with others

Develop. Measure growth following ISTE standards.

After successfully implementation of the ADDD program, I am confident that UCCS will notice more communication and positive growth in all three of the critical population areas. Students will notice a reduced concern for engaging course structure and an increase in in-class and out-of-class social communication. Teachers will see an increase in social learning and themselves learn to rely less on their traditional tool kit for communicating with their students. Department heads will notice increased diversity and engagement from the student population. In conclusion, this program overall will lead to a better educational experience for everyone.

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