UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES
DAILY BRUIN

Tech-savvy professors take to tweeting

Social media websites like Twitter and Facebook offer students outside-classroom learning

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More information

Professors on Twitter

A number of professors at UCLA have incorporated the use of Twitter and other social media websites into their courses. The following includes a few of these instructors, accompanied by a link to either their Twitter feed, Facebook page or blog.
• Ronald D. Hays, professor of public health: `RonDHays` • Robert Cargill, professor of Near Eastern languages and culture: `jerusalem_class`, www.facebook.com/xkv8r, robertcargill.com
• Daniel J.B. Mitchell, professor for the School of Public Affairs and Anderson School of Management: @CalPolicy

SOURCE: Twitter.com, Facebook.com, Wordpress.com
Compiled by: Flavia Casas, Bruin contributor.

Logging onto Facebook, Twitter and Blogspot are all part of a hard day's work for Professor Robert R. Cargill.

At any given time, Cargill may be uploading lecture notes, links to articles, or posting last-minute announcements on the Twitter account he created specifically for his UCLA course on Jerusalem.

Cargill is one of a few UCLA professors who have taken the uncommon step of integrating Twitter and other social media websites into their courses.

"The idea for me is to go to where the students are," Cargill said. "If I'm truly interested in teaching students, I'll meet them halfway."

Integrating social media websites into the classroom is a novel practice at UCLA, so novel that the Office of Instructional Development has not heard about it, said Larry Loeher, associate vice provost and director for the office.

However, Cargill and other professors, such as public health Professor Ronald D. Hays, said they have been using Twitter for at least a year.

When it comes to cyber academics, instructors share more than just the same social media website in common. Although professors use many forms of technology for a wide array of purposes, student-use of these webpages does not factor into class grades.

Twitter feeds, Facebook pages, blogs, YouTube videos and other online tools are used to share announcements, lecture material and links related to a course, where tweets almost always identify the attached link or make a brief announcement.

"I use (Twitter) as a source of reference," Hays said. "It's not a requirement, just a supplemental type of thing."

The appeal of using Twitter for classroom purposes instead of using general-use websites or sending out an e-mail, is the "live" nature of it, Hays said. In addition, new documents that would otherwise be unavailable or harder to access are now instantly popping up on students' computer screens.

Cargill's reasoning behind the use of social media is to give students something beneficial to do since they are already routinely on these sites. Using technology and social networking academically, he said, gives students the chance to act as scholars outside of the classroom.

According to Hays, Twitter also tests his ability to effectively communicate to his class within the 140 character limit.

"You have to get to the essence of what you're trying to say," Hays said. "You have to work on being precise, being a good writer and getting the message across."

Adding a little incentive to class participation, Cargill promised his students extra credit if they created their own blog about his class on Jerusalem. The tactic has worked.

"Blogging forces me to review after lecture and convey personal thoughts I wouldn't be able to convey in any other class," said Christine Choi, a fourth-year physiological science student.

The blogs will be especially helpful during finals and midterms, Choi said.

Andrew Freudman, a third-year neuroscience student and fellow classmate, said he finds the use of technology in class helpful, yet professors must work to find a balance between being supplemental and burdening.

"Some professors take it too far. Because there's so much use of technology and everything's so instant, they can just do a lot more and bombard us," Freudman said. "Life is about being out there, not stuck to a computer."

Both Hays and Cargill said they have received positive student feedback on their social media use, yet Daniel J.B. Mitchell, professor for the UCLA Anderson School of Management, said student responses from his Twitter postings were slim to none.

However, the quarter is still in its first few weeks, and the professor expects student feedback to pick up. Even if it fails to do so, Mitchell said his use of Twitter and other technological features still have an upside – a wide-ranged availability to post documents that were previously inaccessible. With such wide student use of social media websites, if student response does pick up, Mitchell and his colleagues may start receiving one too many status updates than they bargained for.