

New course integrates social media into classroom learning

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In “Power, Politics & New Media” (SOC 237), a new sociology course, Prof. Cassie Hays never tells her Gettysburg College students to get off of Twitter or put the iPads down. In fact, students are not only encouraged, but expected to use new media platforms like Twitter, YouTube, and iPad apps regularly in their coursework. All class readings are on iPads, provided for students to use throughout the semester by a [Mellon Foundation grant](#), and group essay assignments are collected virtually on a class [Wiki page](#).

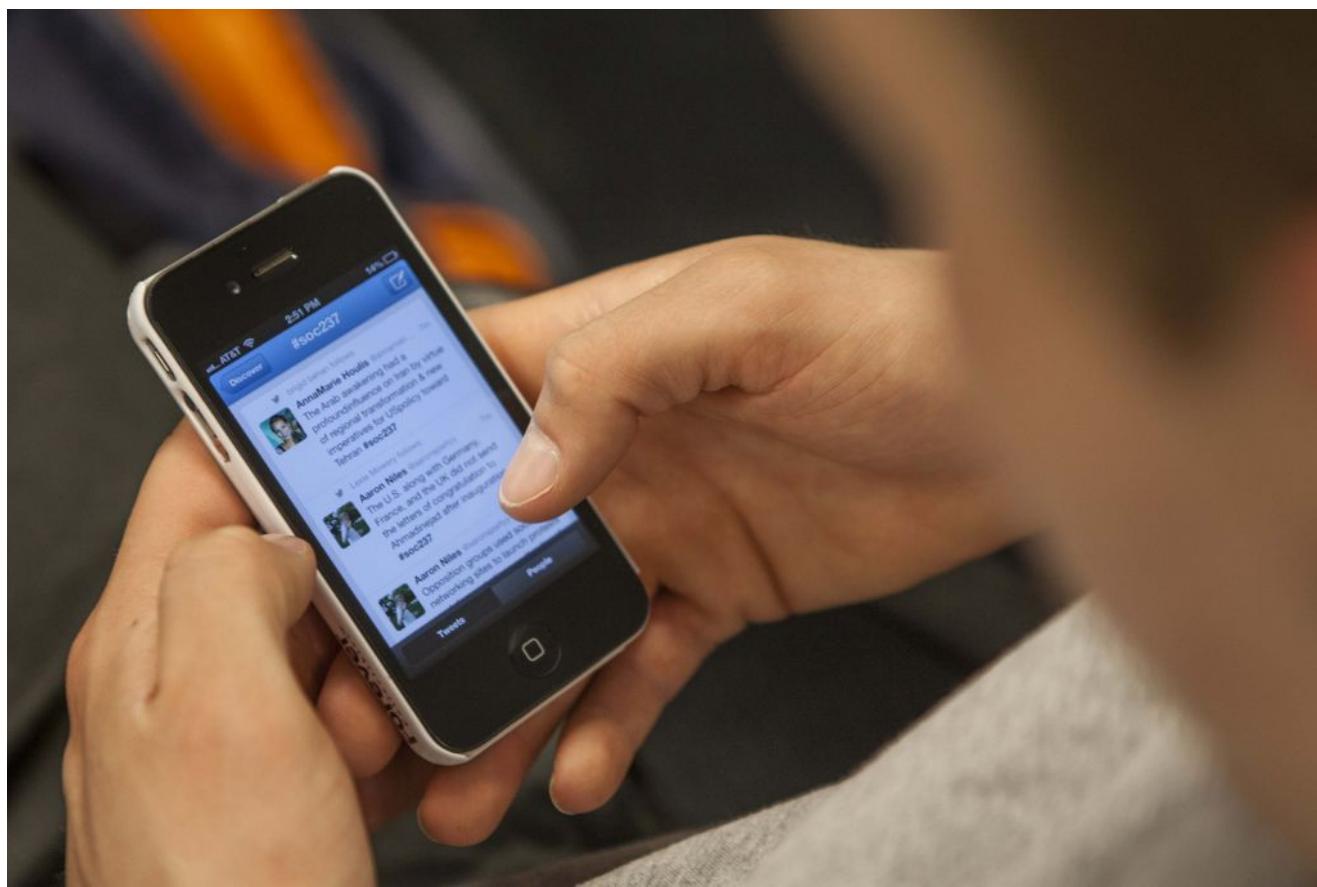
“I’ve never taught anything like this before—it was a pilot class both for me and for the College,” Hays said (pictured above, left). “The administration wanted to integrate iPads into the classroom as way of using new technology and this class fit the bill since the content is all about new media.”

Although students get to use new media platforms in class, the course has a considerable learning objective—to discover the crucial role new media plays in shaping national identities, global assemblages, international information flows, legal structures, and socio-

political change. Each week, the class examines a different topic, from “hacktivism” and “cyberwarfare” to Iran’s Green Revolution and the global Occupy movement.

“Though I had heard of the so-called ‘Twitter Revolution,’ I had never really understood how much of a role social media could have in politics or how seriously governments had to take the new forms of communication,” said Annie Skrabak ’15, a sociology and French double major.

Skrabak’s favorite aspect of SOC 237 has been using new media to communicate with students on coursework outside of the classroom. Students regularly use Twitter while reading for class, making it faster and easier for them to share connections they make with current events. They are also encouraged to communicate with each other over Twitter while viewing documentaries in class. This allows students to gain a deeper understanding of the material by asking and answering each others’ questions and linking to relevant links and commentary.



“Students are already using new media in their personal lives,” Hays said. “Now they’re using it to follow news and do research. The idea is to take something that is already a part of their lives and get students to think about it in new ways and make connections with their academic work.”

The level of engagement from class members over the course of the semester has been very positive. Students are expected to tweet several times a week and are graded on the content of their tweets. Posts must not only contain original text, but also utilize multiple media platforms by linking to relevant articles and retweeting posts from credible sources. Students are also assigned to live-tweet class sessions on a rotating basis, using the hashtag #SOC237 for outside followers. For their final papers, students have been researching how current political events are covered on Twitter by creating ethnographies of specific hashtags and digging into Twitter analytics available on the Web.

“This class has had a great impact on the ways I think about and utilize new media,” said Sam Daniel ’13, a sociology major. “Prior to the course, I had a Facebook page and a Twitter account, but used them almost unconsciously, as part of routine. I was previously unable to grasp the power of new media in mobilizing, connecting, and even liberating groups of people.”

On April 18, the class used new media to organize and cover a flash mob on campus—an impromptu performance of a choreographed dance in the middle of Musselman Library. Class members tracked the responses from viewers—both in person and online—and uploaded a video of the event on YouTube. The flash mob project gave students a hands-on way to approach two main learning goals of the course—to explore how people use social media to cover current events and to look at how new media platforms are used to promote social movements and facilitate political change.

Founded in 1832, Gettysburg College is a highly selective four-year residential college of liberal arts and sciences with a strong academic tradition. Alumni include Rhodes Scholars, a Nobel laureate, and other distinguished scholars. The college enrolls 2,600 undergraduate students and is located on a 200-acre campus adjacent to the Gettysburg National Military Park in Pennsylvania.

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Brilliant! I only wish this technology had been available 35 (yikes!) years ago!!

Teena Stewart Mowery - 1979 | Posted Apr 30, 2013 03:21 PM

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