

Chapter 2

Should Traditional Classrooms Have Formal Facebook Groups?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As students, teachers, and school professionals work to determine boundaries between the classroom and social media, often implementation choices are being made between the lines of school technology policies. In response to formal barriers, many students are taking it upon themselves to make their own social media sites, such as Facebook, to supplement their classroom learning. In this study, a class Facebook page encompassing five sections of an AP United States History course at Ida Baker High School was captured for an entire school year, and the results were recorded and coded to show how students used the page. Whether to consider Facebook as a viable official tool for the school ultimately becomes the decision of the District's Technology Officer, the Principal, the Department Chair, and the teachers. To help guide this decision, a survey was conducted to determine the participants' perception of the online tool. Ultimately, this case examines whether one school should embrace this widely used, free tool to accompany traditional classes or continue with more formal software to supplement the classroom.

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ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Ida Baker High School, located in Cape Coral, Florida, is an academy-style high school and was the first of its kind in the state. In addition to its traditional curriculum, each student picks a major in a specialized field, and takes elective courses within the academy. In total, the school offers seven academies: journalism, education, automotive, firefighting, business, graphic design, and construction. According to Lee County Schools (2011), at the start of the 2010-2011 school year, Ida Baker High School had an enrollment of 1,878 students with 30% of the students eligible for free lunch and 13% of students eligible for reduced lunch. In addition to socioeconomic demographics, the school was comprised of 73% white Caucasian students, 21% Hispanic students, 5% African-American students and 1% Asian students. The demographics of the website itself, broke down to 61 females and 32 males (see Table 1).

While Ida Baker High School has a focus on its innovative academy-style curriculum, beyond these elective credits the school operates as a traditional school. The school offers regular track classes, as well as honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes. The school day follows a rotating block-schedule, meaning students meet for 85 minute classes every other day. Ida Baker follows the district-wide policy for acceptable technology usage, which includes the filtering of sites which do not “promote research and inquiry opportunities of the learner with directed guidance of the faculty and staff” (Lee County Code of Conduct). The filtering of social media sites, including Facebook, is in effect during school hours and for anyone accessing the district’s network. As for supplements to the traditional classroom, defined for this paper as a synchronous course taught face-to-face within a school, Blackboard is the district wide approved Learning Management System. This system, however, has only been provided by the district for the previous two

Table 1. APUSH website student demographics (2010-2011)

| | # of Students in Classes (Total) | % | # of Students Who Joined Page | % |
|---------|-------------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------|--------|
| Females | 79 | 64.2 | 61 | 65.5 |
| Males | 46 | 35.8 | 32 | 34.5 |
| TOTAL | 123 | 100.00 | 93 | 100.00 |

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