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# Using Twitter as a Pedagogical Resource to Teach First-Year Composition

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USING *TWITTER* AS A PEDAGOGICAL RESOURCE TO TEACH FIRST-YEAR  
COMPOSITION

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Composition, Rhetoric, and Digital Media

Carol Reynolds-Srot

College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the incorporation of *Twitter* in a first-year composition classroom, and addresses the following question: “How can using *Twitter* as a pedagogical resource to teach writing benefit both students and professors?” The study employs mixed-methods, including surveys, textual analysis of student tweets, and an interview with the professor to assess the application and outcomes of using *Twitter*. The research finds that although students use social media for a significant amount of time daily, bringing it into the classroom does not automatically lead to better engagement or improved writing. However, students in this study did demonstrate a differentiated used of rhetorical conventions, based on their audience. And, *Twitter* was instrumental in furnishing real-world writing topics that students chose for themselves, appealing to their interests. This thesis concludes with suggestions for incorporating social media, in general, and *Twitter*, in particular, into the writing classroom.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The average college student will be required to write a number of essays, and not just for their writing class, but for all their other subjects, too. Writing is an important skill that students will need to learn and carry into their careers. Yet, many students enter college with writing deficiencies and university professors face undergraduates who lack confidence in their writing and see writing as an arduous task. Social media has been used as a pedagogical tool to enhance student engagement. But, can it help in composition classes?

To encourage students' confidence, one has to meet them where they are, professes James Manuel and Matthew Schunke: "For college students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where they are, is often social media," state the authors (112). Using social media in the classroom, purports Kendra N. Bryant, in *Engaging 21<sup>st</sup> Century Writers with Social Media*, can bring students personal online experiences into the classroom, engage learners, and teach them how to not only bolster their writing, but also write more critically and ethically (xix). Bryant points out that using social media can move students out of the preconditioned role of writing or responding to a specific audience (235). Ideally, by using social media, learners face a different and more authentic (real-world) audience where their voices can be valuable beyond pleasing just their teacher and classmates.

So, drawing on this different and more authentic audience and using social media, a pastime that students seem to enjoy outside of the classroom, is it possible that teachers can motivate undergraduates to enjoy writing and, by doing so, get them to improve? Despite some instructors' apprehension about students' privacy (Lin et al.; Delello et

al.)—and the fact that others are not versed in the pedagogical uses of social media (Delello et al.)—my thesis shows that bringing *Twitter* into the classroom can have many benefits. For students, the use of *Twitter* allows them to demonstrate a heightened rhetorical and audience awareness and connects them with relevant, timely topics. Teachers benefit from *Twitter* because they can have students use it for topic generation, which may motivate them to write because they get to choose something they find interesting to focus on in their papers. If students can relate to their topics, this, in turn, may help them enrich their writing.

In this study, I analyzed a first-year writing class where students used *Twitter* to choose their writing topics and spread awareness of a local on-campus cause. I gave the students a survey in the middle and at the end of the course to understand their social media experience, their use and perceptions of *Twitter*, and to see how they view their own writing skills. I collected their tweets for analysis using their class hashtag. In addition, I had a face-to-face interview with the professor, where I got detailed information about the class assignments and her assessment of the students' writing. My analysis shows that in addition to providing a different and more authentic audience, compared to just the teacher and classmates, using *Twitter* can increase student rhetorical and audience awareness and furnish appealing topics.

### *Research Questions and Chapter Outline*

This project attempts to answer the bigger question: How can using *Twitter* as a pedagogical resource to teach writing benefit both students and professors? Students need to learn to improve their writing, but they have to be motivated and look forward to the process. Chances are, professors who can help students feel more comfortable with

writing will see an improvement in their students' work. In addition, my thesis will address the following specific query. In what ways can integrating *Twitter* into the classroom help students to improve their writing? My research will join existing conversations about using social media in teaching; but specifically, it will add to the research available about using *Twitter* in a college writing class. My thesis is divided into four sections.

The literature review highlights scholarship and research surrounding social media in writing courses and in higher education. In this section, I discuss social media's popularity with undergraduates, and what has worked and has not worked when it is used in college classrooms. I argue that social networking's ability to provide a different and more authentic audience, and most of all its power to motivate students and spur creativity, can help them enhance their writing. *Twitter*, specifically, is a place to connect course material with relevant topics and may help students to concisely get their points across.

In the methodology section, I describe my research design, which included a mixed-methods approach with quantitative and qualitative analysis. Two surveys provided quantitative data on the students' social media use, their perceptions of *Twitter*, and their expectations of the writing class. I collected the students' tweets at the end of the semester to analyze the content for clarity, writing mechanics, and rhetorical and audience awareness. Finally, I conducted a qualitative interview with the professor, where I asked her about her purpose, the class assignments, and her assessment of student writing.

My results section shows that instructors can have students use *Twitter* as a resource to find relevant, recent topics to write about. In using Twitter, students show rhetorical and audience awareness. Being able to choose their own topics can motivate students to write. With proper scaffolding and specific boundaries, *Twitter* can be a valuable pedagogical tool for first-year writing professors. The discussion and conclusion sections illuminate the importance of instructor scaffolding and promoting student collaboration. In them, I pinpoint how using *Twitter* can augment students' rhetorical and audience awareness and provide motivation to write because they get to pick their own topics.

I conclude by suggesting that professors of writing can enlist the use of social media to teach writing in college—if they have a purpose and a plan for using it, provide guidance, have a presence online with their students, and put boundaries in place for using social media for class assignments. Ultimately, my goal throughout this thesis is for college writing instructors to gain insight into how they can use social media as a pedagogical tool to shy away from cookie-cutter assignments and to engage students and help them enrich their writing.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP

Social media's popularity, and the hold it has on most undergraduates outside the classroom, makes it a useful tool to engage students at school. In this section, I review past scholarship to develop a framework that supports using social media as a pedagogical tool. Throughout this literature review, I explore research where social media is used in the classroom to enhance engagement (a student's personal investment in the material) and create a connection between teachers and students. According to Kerri-Lee Krause and Harnish Coates, there are five dimensions to student engagement: "level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment" (495). In this study, student engagement includes using *Twitter* to communicate, following hashtags, and participating in the group projects. This use of *Twitter* aligns with Krause and Coates' definition by challenging students, increasing collaboration, and enriching their experiences. I also point out that students face a more authentic audience on social media. Prior research allows me to illustrate how stepping outside routine assignments and incorporating social networks into classroom work can provide rewards in teaching and learning if students are motivated and write more.

With proper scaffolding (Lin et al.; West et al.), social networking also can heighten collaboration and spur creativity. Once instructors get past their concerns about privacy and integrity (Delello et al.), they find that the online platforms can engage and motivate their students and build collaboration (Delello et al.; Krause and Coates; Kuh et al.). These sites also provide a real-world audience that encourages confidence for the students to present their work beyond their teacher and classmates (Darling). Using

*Twitter* as a teaching tool promotes engagement (Junco et al.). And, if the teacher is present on *Twitter*, the connection between them motivates students (Dunlap and Lowenthal).

According to Natalie Wexler, in a 2015 *Washington Post* article, a “nationwide test found that only 24% of students in 8th and 12th grades were proficient in writing, and just 3% were advanced” based on tests by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Wexler also points out that most high school students are not familiar with basic grammar and punctuation rules. This lack of knowledge goes with them to college, where professors are faced with poor writers. But, research shows that pounding students with rules about grammar and sentence structure doesn’t help them to learn to write. “Grammar makes people anxious,” declares Laura R. Micciche in “Making a Case for Rhetorical Grammar” (716). Throughout her article, Micciche argues that

. . . Effective communication, which entails grammar knowledge, is essential to achieving many of the goals regularly articulated in composition studies. Chief among them are teaching students to produce effective writing that has some relevancy to the world we live in, to see language as having an empowering and sometimes transformative potential. . . . (717)

Micciche is pointing out the importance of using grammar in rhetorically appropriate ways and in making students realize the role of grammar in making their writing more significant. But, while students need to learn the basics to write properly, to get their buy-in we cannot foster anxiety by trying to force-feed them with mechanics and grammar. We must engage them, so they can see, feel, and enjoy the potential of good writing in a context that is relevant to them.

Another way we can encourage students to see the connection between writing and their lives is by helping them to find authority in their voice and ideas. Donald M. Murray states, in “Teach Writing as a Process not Product,” that “we must respect our student for his potential truth and his potential voice. We are coaches, encouragers, developers, creators of environments in which our students can experience the writing process for themselves” (5). Murray believes that students need to choose their own subjects, tell their stories, and that as teachers we should not force choices on them. He calls attention to the fact that we need students to become good writers and must give the student ample room to use his or her own conviction. Murray asserts that the student should be “encouraged to attempt any form of writing which may help him discover and communicate what he has to say” (6). He contends that the teaching of mechanics comes last, and the process of writing has to take center stage.

Like Murray, Peter Elbow, in *Writing Without Teachers*, touts writing, lots of it. He believes that practice makes perfect. Mostly, Elbow encourages innovative methods to help students to learn the process of writing. He maintains that by stimulating confidence one creates inspiration. Both self-assurance and creativity stem from making the student comfortable with the writing environment, which includes providing topics and ideas that are familiar or peak the student’s interest.

While research shows that spending a lot of time trying to teach students just grammar is ineffective, studies hail putting students in environments that motivate them to write. The way to erase deficiencies and boost students’ proficiency is to get them to want to write, and to write a lot.



### *Social Media*

Social media seems to be one way to address Micciche, Murray, and Elbow's call for teaching students writing that is applicable to today's lifestyle using what is familiar to them. Writing for social media platforms means students are participating in a popular mode of communication. And, social media can offer a fresh approach to the writing process. Micciche, Murray, and Elbow reinforce that students need to make sure writing takes center stage and can be cultivated and nurtured. If students are often comfortable on social networking sites, where they use their own voice and writing to share their beliefs, that writing can be sculpted to fit into the professional world that students will have to enter.

While research on the use of social media in the classroom is varied, prior studies and data point to students' attraction to the platforms as a main reason why it may be beneficial as a pedagogical tool. Manuel and Schunke, specifically, consider the use of social media in the classroom as a way of getting students to use the sites more meaningfully. In addition to using social media for interaction, students can use it to hone their writing skills. In *Engaging 21<sup>st</sup> Century Writers with Social Media*, Bryant points out many ways in which social media platforms positively contribute to students' learning. She says, "social media allows writing teachers and their students a space to explore multimodal literacies, audience, voice, rhetorical elements and modes, and composition in ways still yet imagined" (xix). For Bryant, social media offers students a place to learn, contribute, and enhance their composition skills.

And, presumably, bringing social media into the classroom will not be difficult because of its extreme popularity. For starters, statistics gathered by researchers at the

Pew Research Center (PRC) show the attraction of social media with the fact that “seven-in-ten Americans use social media to connect with one another, engage with news content, share information, and entertain themselves” (“Demographics”). Additionally, the PRC report states that at least “69 percent of the public uses some type of social media.” Research through November 6, 2016, from the PRC, shows that adults 18-29 top the chart with 86% of them being regular users of social media; while, 80% of adults 30-49 account for the second highest number of users. In the 18–29 age group, 88% use *Facebook* (the most popular social media site), with 59% regularly on *Instagram*, 36% on *Pinterest* and *Twitter*, and 34% on *LinkedIn*. The statistics show that social media is ingrained into many daily lives. Its popularity offers many possibilities for teachers to create learning experiences that offer students a voice based on the environment where they already spend most of their time.

The reach to social media as a teaching tool seems even more appropriate because of the amount of time people already spend using social networking sites. It is extremely popular, students often are familiar with its use, it offers a large audience, and some of the platforms can offer the opportunity for lots of writing. And, if students are stimulated by these online sites that they find interesting, then turning toward social media in a classroom setting would capitalize on the digital environments they already use.

Instant connection—between students and their peers, teachers, and the outside world—is another benefit of using social media in the classroom. Social presence, connection, and interaction were front and center in a study by Joanna C. Dunlap and Patrick R. Lowenthal where *Twitter* was used to enhance interactions in an online class. Dunlap and Lowenthal conclude that, “Contact between students and faculty in and

outside of the class is critical for student engagement because it influences student motivation and involvement” (130). To enhance engagement in online learning, Dunlap and Lowenthal examined the changes to student-faculty contact when *Twitter* was used for communication in place of the institution’s learning management system (LMS). In their article, Dunlap and Lowenthal illustrate that a standard LMS is cumbersome, because one has to log into it, post the query, and wait for an answer. Often, instructors don’t see the question unless they happen to be logged into the LMS or will only see it once they log in. So, it could take a while for a response and it doesn’t foster the informal banter that occurs on *Twitter*, which creates an immediate link between the student and teacher.

In their research, Dunlap and Lowenthal list several examples where using *Twitter* was more beneficial than using a traditional LMS, because students sent private messages, a query to a class member or teacher, or a note to professionals in the field and got quick (if not immediate) responses. The immediacy of a response provided a real link for the student—a physical presence. Despite the positive responses to interactions, Dunlap and Lowenthal indicate that because of the word-count limitation, students may rush their writing and use incorrect language trying to pack their thoughts into 140 characters. But, the researchers also emphasize that using *Twitter* cultivates the need to write succinctly and briefly. So, if students take their time, and choose their words wisely, then they can learn to use that brevity to improve their work.

### *Teachers and Technology*

To bring social media into the classroom, instructors would need to get on board and become more comfortable with different technologies in general, taking on the task

of learning about social networking sites, and developing a comfort level when using them in class (Kilis et al.). Teachers need to go beyond using the class content management system and even farther than using just videos as a teaching tool (Delello et al.). Stephanie Vie contends that most students are more technologically savvy than their teachers. So, if instructors don't have the proficiency, they can't effectively integrate digital literacies into the classroom. So, while instructors should consider mixing technology into the teaching of composition, first they need to be able to understand these technologies, so they can utilize them (Vie 9). With instructors' buy-in, social media has a better chance of being a pedagogical resource to teach writing in college.

The U.S. Department of Education's 2010 *Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology Plan*, called for training educators in using technology to improve instruction and student literacy. The plan provided a model for an education procedure that was more captivating for students, to not only improve learning, but to give teachers resources to be more effective instructors. The plan included taking a look at "online social networks for information, collaboration and learning" ("U.S. Department of Education"). It stated that teachers needed to understand how to make the learning process more engaging, catering to the interests of students. The plan predicted that technology in the form of digital material and social networks could contribute to learning and teamwork. But, the report made clear that technology would only be effective if coupled with powerful teaching. "Technology will never replace good teachers," assured Arne Duncan, U.S. Education Secretary. "We all know that the most important factor in a student's success is the teacher leading the class. That will not change," he added, making it clear that technology would only be a tool to aid teachers

(“U.S. Department of Education”). While adding more technology may not have been aimed specifically at college-level teaching, the report did have an approach that touted the importance and necessity to focus on the future by utilizing today’s technology.

One of the problems with successfully integrating social media in the class may lie with teachers’ comfort levels. While many instructors use social media on a personal level, they can sometimes have concerns about using it in the classroom, citing that it can be time-consuming to blend it into the classroom, and create issues of privacy and integrity (Delello et al. 165). Plus, many instructors aren’t sure how to assimilate it into lesson plans. For example, a 2011 Pearson Learning Solutions and the Babson Survey Research Group survey reported that of 1,920 college-level instructors, more than 90% said they were using social media in their instruction (qtd. in Delello et al. 165).

However, the academic use was focused mainly on using online videos in the classroom at 61%, compared to the application of social media like *Facebook*, 4%, and *Twitter*, 2%, that only accounted for a small percentage (Delello et al. 165). And, many of the teachers used the technology solely for providing instructions to the students rather than for material created by the students (Delello et al. 165). If platforms like *Facebook* and *Twitter* were used, they were utilized mostly for posts from the instructor (Delello et al. 165).

In a closer look at the 2011 survey, instructors cited concerns about how much time it takes to integrate social media into their curriculum, its lack of integrity, and being worried about privacy issues (Delello et al. 173). But, according to Delello et al., the Pearson report never spells out the instructors’ specific concerns nor gives any examples of why incorporating social media into lesson plans was so time-consuming. Despite

apprehensions, many teachers in Delello et al.'s research did agree that social media had positive benefits, including enhancing collaborative learning.

Spotlighting teachers and their use of social media for instruction, Kilis et al. conducted a study of 583 higher education instructors from 39 countries and showed that very few used social media in their classrooms, mainly because they, too, were unsure about how to incorporate it into their lessons and did not have access to support from their institutions (1). The Kilis et al. study created a SoMe (Social Media) ToolKit for instructors outlining instructional methods, knowledge levels, content types, and assessment types to help them understand and contemplate the use of social media in the classroom. According to Kilis et al., "The idea behind the toolkit is simple; to provide pedagogically sound guidance direct to instructors on their quest to effectively integrate the right social media into their teaching situation" (Kilis et al. 2). The toolkit's aim was to help instructors face problems they may encounter when applying social media to their teaching. By using the toolkit, educators could analyze their situation and choose the social media outlet best suited for their class.

Social media's overall popularity with students gives it a presence and potential as a pedagogical tool. And, it is this potential "that educational institutions must acknowledge, explore, and embrace," advise Lajuan Davis and L. Roger Yin (36). Those in higher education need to realize the possibilities that social media offers for teaching and delve into them. Davis and Yin's research—which included 201 business students who used *Twitter* for free-writing assignments—supports that students want technology in their learning and that incorporating it into the classroom is doable. Similarly, Roblyer et al. purport that "Traditionally, students come to school 'powered-up' and wired with

the newest technologies available—but often they must leave them at the door, since faculty do not use them in classrooms and may even regard them with suspicion” (134). Roblyer et al. are highlighting that students are tied to their electronic devices, especially their smartphones. But, in school these devices often are seen as a distraction and not recognized for the educational help they can offer. If the students are ready, willing, and able to bring their technologies into the classroom, then teachers must also be prepared. Perhaps if educators got institutional support and training on how to effectively use social media in class, their comfort level would increase. Also, research, like this thesis, can show the value of using social networking sites as a pedagogical tool and pinpoint ways to incorporate them into the curricula. More importantly, if instructors realize all the possible benefits of using social media to teach—like heightened engagement that leads to creativity and better grades—they may be more apt to give it a try.

### *Engagement is Key*

Using social media in the classroom can attract students by engaging them—offering them a reason for personal investment. Universities need to harness this engagement (Krause and Coates), to create more paths for students to take to make connections beyond the classroom with their peers and the outside community (Darling; Rutherford), and boost motivation and fervor (Butts; Delello et al.).

According to Krause and Coates, it is necessary for universities to pay attention to engaging its students in all learning areas. The institutions “are responsible for creating environments that make learning possible, and that afford the opportunities to learn” (494). And, social media seems to fit the bill for fulfilling student engagement. It offers academic challenge and enrichment by bringing real-world situations into the classroom,

promotes teamwork, can enhance student-teacher affiliation in and out of the classroom, and gives students an environment similar to their personal one, where social networking takes center stage. These dimensions cover a range of qualities that are important to a student's experience in college (494).

Along with enhancing student experience in college, the online atmosphere can boost student interaction. For example, Camille Rutherford states in "Using Online Social Media to Support Preservice Student Engagement," that "The 'social' element of these social media resources supports the development of learning environments that offer learners the ability to connect, interact, and share ideas in efficient and effective way" (703). Because these environments are social, and not serious or academic ones, they cultivate an area where students are not as apprehensive and may enjoy collaboration and learning. She adds that "the educational use of these resources has the potential to foster a radical and transformational shift in teaching and learning as we know it" (703). Rutherford sees social media as conduit for education, linking students with new ways to learn.

Further, social media use brings the real world into the classroom, enhances engagement, and promotes a higher level of learning. For instance, social media used in a multidisciplinary study by Delello et al. primarily showed student engagement and community building (167). The researchers evaluated participants' reflections after social media (*Pinterest, Skype, Second Life, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube*) was used in classrooms across three different disciplines. Students admitted "that the use of social media in the classroom was engaging and fun" (173). Participants showed an uptick in



incentive and zeal and reported a sense of community because they could share collaboratively with their classmates and the outside world (173, 175).

Students in other studies also showed more excitement and engagement when using and mixing social media platforms. For instance, in Shannon Butts' writing classes, she asked students to create podcasts, *Instagram* narratives, and *Twitter* remediation (retelling the *Instagram* narrative on *Twitter*). Butts assigned different writing assignments paired with different forms of media (video, sound, images), among them was a podcast. In addition, an assignment called for the students to tell a single story using three different platforms—*Instagram*, *Twitter*, and one of their choice. According to Butts, students showed more excitement and engagement in doing this kind of work, and overall, earned better grades. Instead of just being writers, the students had to pinpoint strategies and rhetorical approaches to tell their stories and became composers of the messages they were trying to send.

Along with engaging students in classrooms, and bringing in real-world composing situations, other researchers have explored how using technology draws students' attention and enhances traditional learning. In Rutherford's study, she argues that when social media is used, students are not just listening to the teacher lecturing in the classroom. Instead, she maintains that instructors can use social media in academia to help foster student success. According to Rutherford, social media offers teachers "differentiated learning paths that can be bundled together to create dynamic learning modules" (704). For example, instead of learning that involves traditional one-step assignments (like asking students to write an essay on a given topic), instructors can use social networks, like *Facebook* and *Twitter*, to give students a place to find, follow, and

learn more about controversial or trending topics before they research and write about the subject.

Social media also offers students a different kind of route for learning and writing compared to conventional methods. In her study, “From Expository Blog to Engaged E-Portfolio: A Student-Centered Pedagogy in Process,” Jill Darling had her students create blogs and e-portfolios. Darling believes that “students learn by doing, they also learn about culture through critique, public writing, and reflection” (51). She encouraged her students “to do reflective blog writing and make connection among texts and ideas, instead of writing generic summaries” (58). By trying to link texts and ideas, students were encouraged to do more interpretive writing that brought in their personal views. Darling reiterates that it is important to teach writing as a process and not a product. She claims “that both process and product improve when students are personally engaged with the material” (53). It is that personal connection that makes students enjoy writing more and create better text. And, social media can enhance that engagement.

### *Creativity and Collaboration*

While engaging students helps them to improve their learning, this engagement can also heighten creativity and collaboration. In this thesis, I see collaboration as involving students working together to promote the group causes that were the center of their final projects. And, they utilized creativity with this project, too, in working together to figure out how to publicize their causes and get feedback from their audience. Social media provides a forum for ingenuity (Cao et al.), produces an environment that lacks intimidation, allows students more comfort to contribute to teamwork (Rutherford), and establishes a communal area for students to work and communicate with each other, their

teacher, and the community (Krause and Coates; Rutherford). Most of all, collaboration gives students a chance to get in on the conversation (Bruffee).

By providing a variety of platforms, social media gives students many places to listen, learn, get involved, and be innovative. Researchers Cao et al. purport that “Social media provide advantages over traditional teaching technology (e.g., lectures, written content, and face-to-face communications) with new opportunities and outlets for creativity” (583). According to Cao et al., employing social media in teaching “provides multiple formats, directions, and channels of communication which can improve educational outcomes” (583). They believe that using social media in the classroom furnishes a non-conventional method for teaching and communicating that gives students many choices and chances to be creative.

Cao et al. indicate that using social media for teaching has been credited with achieving the educational objectives of Bloom’s taxonomy—which is a three-level scale that measures students’ outcomes in learning (Smith)—by providing a variety of measures for facilitation, comprehension, analysis, and remembering that enriches learning and spurs creativity. In their research, Cao et al. cite an Australian study where social media was credited with stimulating students into productive learning and higher achievement. Cao et al. report that social media provided positive outcomes “through content enhancement, creativity experiences, connectivity enrichment, and collaborative engagements” (585). Students had more and different content at their fingertips. By being on the Internet they had an instant connection and association with their classmates, teachers, and many others.

In her report, Rutherford illustrates the many positives of using social media in teaching, particularly, collaboration. When social media is employed in a classroom, Rutherford points out that students are in an arena that allows them to share and comment without being intimidated; they can use their individuality even when there is teamwork; students have more access to their teachers; and social media fosters the notion that students are in a supportive network. In addition, Rutherford states, social networking means students can connect with each other and sometimes with an outside community where they can avail other people's experience. Additionally, Rutherford maintains that prior research shows a dynamic connection between technology and academia where teacher-student interaction is enhanced and collaborative learning flourishes (704).

Collaboration creates a connection that can enhance learning. Krause and Coates point out that collaboration contributes to building knowledge—the more students interact the more they learn. Collaboration also enhances educational experiences, and overall it adds to a supportive atmosphere, not only between students, but between students and teachers. Kenneth Bruffee calls collaborative learning

. . . a social and not an individual process. . . . We establish knowledge or justify belief collaboratively by challenging each other's biases and presuppositions; by negotiating collectively toward new paradigms of perceptions, thought, feeling, and expression; and by joining larger, more experienced communities of knowledgeable peers. . . . Collaborative learning is an arena in which students can negotiate their way into that conversation. (407)

As Bruffee asserts, collaboration is a process that brings different views and varied experiences and backgrounds into the same realm, where ideas are debated and tossed

around until a compromise can be reached or a conclusion can be drawn. Even though they may enter individually, collaboration provides a sphere for students to test and enhance their teamwork skills all the while gaining knowledge. And social media offers students a chance to experience and build on collaborative interactions (Delello et al.; Krause and Coates; Kuh et al.).

### *Students Gain a More Authentic Audience*

Social media not only brings that collaborative learning into the classroom, but along with it, provides students with a real-world group of spectators. When social media is used, undergraduates may no longer be writing just for the teacher or classmates. Whether or not they are writing for an imagined audience or each other (Litt), researchers seem to agree that having that expanded audience in cyberspace motivates young writers, boosts confidence, and ignites creativity (Bryant; Darling).

According to Eden Litt, “the imagined audience has long guided our thoughts and actions during everyday writing and speaking” (330). In “Knock, Knock. Who’s There? The Imagined Audience,” Litt professes that the imagined audience is the one we mentally picture when we communicate. So, whether an undergraduate envisions a peer, a family member, or a stranger when using social networking sites, the fact is that an invisible audience actually stirs the imagination and can elicit certain behaviors (331). If what is imagined pleases the participant, it can actually put a smile on his or her face, says Litt (332). Walter J. Ong also argues that most often audiences are invisible, because they are fictionalized. They are concocted in the writer’s mind. And, it is “the ‘audience’ that fires the writer’s imagination” (Ong 58). The writer creates their work in order to please this imagined reader. And, while the online audience is real, the fact that students

are not directly facing that audience may add to the students' comfort when sharing. By dealing with an audience that is not physically there, students may feel less intimidated and freer to share.

While the spectators that students face may be invisible, Darling believes that those spectators are a real-world audience that creates confidence. She says that professors should take advantage of all the writing students do online. Even though students don't realize it, they are constantly writing—especially on their social media accounts. As Darling states, students are “developing and negotiating their ideas and identities in the world” (57). In writing for social media, students are often taking a stance, or offering an opinion. While academic writing is not how students participate on social networking sites, Darling indicates that they can still “learn basic skills and how to write strong papers” (57), gain self-assurance, and learn to actually like writing. In online spaces, students get practice in low-risk contexts, so they can develop confidence and may even enjoy writing.

Paul Walker agrees that “an audience without traditional gatekeepers” adds to the popularity of writing on the Internet (43). Students are more comfortable to share their thoughts and ideas because no one is controlling them. He also believes that immediacy and the capacity to advance communication adds to a writer's “powerful initial desire to record ideas or random thoughts” (43). Young adults like the instant connection of social media, because they can express themselves immediately.

### *Twitter Overview*

If social media captivates students, heightens creativity and collaboration, and opens the door to a more authentic audience, how and what does an instructor use to not

only engage pupils, but to teach writing? As the number of social media sites increases, so do the choices available for professors. According to Moreau, the top 10 social networking spots as of November 2017 were (in order of popular usage): *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *LinkedIn*, *Google+*, *YouTube*, *Instagram*, *Pinterest*, *Tumblr*, *Snapchat*, and *Reddit*. Among those top sites, a handful has been used in the classroom (Moreau).

While *Facebook* is the social networking site most often used educationally (Moreau), *Twitter* is right behind, climbing up the ladder. Both social networking sites offer quick and easy access, instant communication, and networking. While *Twitter* has entered the classroom in different forms as a pedagogical tool, it is also used by professional groups for marketing, public relations, and live-tweeting. The platform gives students a reach into an array of real-time, authentic conversations where they can either peruse or take part. They can follow their favorite TV star, do research on a multitude of topics, track an issue by its hashtag, reach out to a congressman, and become politically active. Whether or not one signs up on *Twitter* with his or her real name or a pseudonym, everyone uses a handle that begins with the @ symbol. After joining, a user begins by sending a tweet, or comment. In addition to being posted on the user's page, these tweets appear on the home pages of all the people who are following that person. Users can like the comment by clicking a heart symbol, reply to the comment, re-tweet it, or send it as a private message to anyone.

Originally, *Twitter*, which started in 2006, was available only on mobile phones and tweets were limited to 140 characters because of text messaging restraints (MacArthur). In November 2017, following a few weeks of testing, the company decided to double the count and increased tweets to 280 characters (Tsukayama). *Twitter* stated

that the increase would allow users to say more in one tweet and increase “‘engagement’—an umbrella term for likes, replies, and retweets” (Tsukayama). During the testing phase, from September through November 2017, only 5 percent of users were using more than the usual 140 characters. There is an average of 9,100 tweets per second, more than 695-million registered users on *Twitter*, and 342-million active users (“Twitter Statistics”).

When you sign up for *Twitter* your tweets are automatically made public. But, a user can control who can follow and see their tweets by making their account private. Users can pick as many public profiles as they like to follow. They can also ask permission to follow someone whose account is private. *Twitter* uses hashtags. These hashtags are placed within the body of the tweet, label it, and keep all the tweets about the topic in one place. For example, #blacklivesmatter would link all the tweets with that hashtag for easy access. One can find a topic that interests him or her and follow it. A user can choose to contribute publicly to the ongoing conversations, or privately to a specific person’s ideas. Even though tweets have a limited number of characters, they can generate lengthy discussions and could be a good tool to engage students in conversation—not only online, but in the classroom.

#### *Twitter as a Pedagogical Resource*

Researchers have demonstrated that *Twitter* has been instrumental in connecting students with newsworthy topics (Jacquemin et al.), and helping students to get their points across by writing concisely (Davis and Yin; Dunlap and Lowenthal; Kinsky and Bruce). *Twitter* can also encourage participation for students who may otherwise shy away from contributing to class discussion (Davis and Yin). Whether used alongside an LMS, for research, or debate, *Twitter* promotes collaboration. If teachers use it with



purpose, provide proper scaffolding, and make it a point to interact with their students, both the students and the instructor can reap benefits—including engagement, increased learning, and higher grades (Davis and Yin).

Using *Twitter* as a teaching tool, Junco et al. performed two studies with the social media site to measure student engagement and collaboration. In the first study, seven sections (with 132 students) of a first-year seminar class for pre-health professional majors used the social media sites *Twitter* and *Ning*. In the first study, four sections were assigned to the experimental group (using *Twitter*) and three to the control group (using *Ning*). One hundred and eighteen students fully participated in the study, making it 89% of the total 132. The study was broken down into 65 using *Twitter* and 53 using *Ning*. Both groups received training on how to use the social media platforms and both sites were used outside of regular class time. Junco et al. studied *Ning* and *Twitter*'s use for several things. The platforms were utilized to continue discussions after class, for students to post questions, and for instructors to post assignments, exam due dates, and other things. The students' level of engagement was measured using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) instrument. Results showed that the *Twitter* students scored higher engagement than the *Ning* group. In addition, the experimental group participants also had higher overall GPAs. Neither score could be correlated with any prior ability, so they were associated with the use of *Twitter*. The study also showed that *Twitter* contributed to more constant exchange of ideas and communication than *Ning*.

In Junco et al.'s second study, 135 students in a media and democracy general education class (of 179) agreed to take part. The students had the option to use *Twitter* of their own volition. While 66 used *Twitter* for in-class communication, 69 did not. The

tweets were projected during the large lecture hall class once a week for discussion. The professors reported that the addition of *Twitter* was “stimulating.” They also said, “the results were nonetheless mixed, most often depending on the quality of commentary posted to the feed by the students” (9). There was no difference found between the *Twitter* users and the nonusers. Junco et al. also did not find any differences in overall grades. In Study 2, less than half the class—66 participants out of 135—tweeted, no incentives were offered, and the teachers rarely interacted with the students on *Twitter* (11).

Although *Twitter* was being used in the class in Junco et al.’s second study, it was optional and did not have a definitive purpose as it did in Study 1. The researchers surmised that when students were expected to use *Twitter*, activities were clearly defined and assigned, and the professor also engaged with them, as was the case in Study 1, there was a higher level of engagement and grades climbed. Collaboration (in this case, by organizing study groups and service-learning projects) seemed to foster stimulation in the first study. The Junco et al. project points out the benefits that *Twitter* has to offer as a pedagogical resource in teaching.

Unlike the Junco et al. research, a study by Jacquemin et al. at the Ball State University Department of Biology in fall 2012 did not get positive results. The researchers surveyed 22 undergraduate students, 16 graduate students, and 17 faculty members about the “familiarity, baseline usage, and perceptions of social media” (23). In addition, *Twitter* was used in a graduate class on ecology for discussion and to provide news in the subject area. Students had to take part in the online conversations. After the semester was over, a follow-up survey was sent to the students in the ecology class.

Results from the Jacquemin et al. study showed that 88% of faculty members did not personally use social media or only used one platform (24). Answers to specific questions aimed at the students showed that a large number (64% undergrads and 75% grads) thought social media was better suited as a course management system, like Blackboard (25). Interestingly, 100% of the grad students who used *Twitter* in their class did not find it favorable for class discussion. Though, 67% said they stumbled on information on the site that they may otherwise have not found. Overall the researchers discovered that students used social media more than their teachers.

Students in Jacquemin et al.'s stud failed to engage in discussion on *Twitter*. However, in the part of the study that actually used *Twitter*, the site proved beneficial for connecting class topics with outside news sources. When compared to the Junco et al. Study 1, with 118 participants, the Jacquemin et al. research had a much smaller number of people, 55. Plus, 88% of the faculty members in the Jacquemin et al. study did not personally use social media. However, in the Junco, et al. Study 2, with 135 participants, the teachers rarely interacted with the students, and also got poor results. The interesting connection between both studies seems to be the lack of participation by the faculty members. Jacquemin et al. also suggest that social media was not conducive to the discussion of the sciences.

### *Scaffolding is Significant*

A 2010 study by Lin et al. at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, focused on how *Twitter* was used to supplement regular classes in the College of Education. Three classes received an extra-credit assignment that involved using *Twitter*. Two classes of “Computers in Education,” a fully online undergraduate course, and one class of “Mobile

Learning,” a face-to-face graduate class, were part of the study. All three classes were taught by the same professor. Students had to use the class hashtag, follow it, follow each other, and tweet 75 times during that fall. Also, students had to fill out three separate reports during the semester that, among other things, queried their understanding of *Twitter* and asked for their perceptions of its academic worth. Of the 44 possible participants, only 14 actually took all the required steps for the extra credit assignment. Twenty-two students never tweeted. Eight students started and then their use dwindled. While 1,175 tweets were collected from the 3 classes, 4 students contributed the most with 100 tweets each.

So, what happened? Some students were concerned about privacy, though, only one student created a separate account just for the class (Lin et al.). There also seemed to be confusion on how to use *Twitter* and the class hashtag. Some students tweeted without the hashtag. While others read tweets and followed the hashtags, they did not contribute to the conversations. One student even said that since the tweets don’t show up in a thread, he would forget what he had written by the time he got responses (43). Also, because the class had no mandatory written edicts or guidelines—as students did in the Junco et al. study 1—students tweeted personal information and some of their classmates got tired of it. According to Lin et al., some students “saw the amount of tweets and the non-class related content as a continuing problem” (43). To top it off, many students complained that they were stymied by the 140-character limit. Despite all these problems, by the third progress report, students indicated to the researchers that they wanted *Twitter* integrated into the class curricula because they enjoyed receiving the interesting articles that were shared. They also welcomed the fact that *Twitter* gave them “the opportunity to

communicate on a more personal level” (43). The researchers concluded that students preferred *Twitter* to get updates, assignments, and reminders but did not take advantage of its ability to offer them a chance for collaboration.

Lin et al.’s research showed that the students needed instruction and clarity on how to use *Twitter*. Other scholarship echoes how student inexperience contributes to the lack of *Twitter* use and that not knowing how to maneuver the social media platform can cause the absence of engagement and learning (West et al.). In the Lin et al. study, the instructor needed to provide proper scaffolding and could have found ways to more adequately address students’ privacy concerns. Students could have created a separate account for class. But, more importantly, there needed to be a purpose for the use of *Twitter* and guidelines put into place for its use for class. For the Lin et al. study, students mainly were provided information from the professor via *Twitter*, and the students had no direction or idea of what to do with that information. Also, peer interaction was not encouraged nor was it part of the extra credit assignment.

In other classroom-based studies, requiring students to use *Twitter* (rather than making it an optional part of the assignment) increased the number of students who tweeted as part of the course. In comparison to the Lin et al. study, students in West et al.’s project received an in-person lesson on how to use *Twitter* for the class and more instruction was available on request. West et al. studied 411 participants at a large Canadian university—231 from the marketing class, “Introduction to Marketing” and 180 from the fashion class, “Fashion Concepts and Theory.” The goal of the study was to offer undergraduates in large classes a chance to connect outside and inside the classroom (160). The study addressed several questions including: What baseline levels of

experience do first-year students have using *Twitter*? How does the mandatory incorporation of *Twitter* for classroom learning purposes affect student evaluations of their learning through this course component? (163).

In West et al.'s study, the use of *Twitter* was mandatory, unlike the Lin et al. study. From the students' perspective, using *Twitter* improved interaction in and out of the class. The students also reported that they felt more connected with their professor, classmates, and the business world when using the site (West et al. 164). Some of the students in the study even said that they learned the class material better (West et al. 164), which substantiates Rutherford's point that technology can engage students and enrich learning. When asked to agree or disagree with a statement on their end-of-semester questionnaire that listed *Twitter* as a distraction and waste of time, students disagreed. Instead, they acknowledged that they enjoyed using it, and would deem it as a good part of learning in another class (West et al. 164).

#### *Effective Teaching Tool*

*Twitter* users scored better in freewriting assignments than those who turned in their work on paper in the Davis and Yin mixed methods study. The research included 201 students in 6 business communication classes taught by the same instructor over 3 semesters between spring 2011 and spring 2012. The students were given topics for freewriting assignments. Approximately half of the students, 101, used *Twitter* and the other 100 students turned their assignments in on paper. The students who used *Twitter* scored slightly higher for their overall grades than those who did not. They averaged a 3.546 (A-) on a 4.0 scale compared to a 3.398 (B+) for the students who did not use *Twitter*. While the female students showed no significant difference between the ones

who used *Twitter* and the ones who did not, male *Twitter* users had average scores of 3.50 while the male nonusers had a 3.33 mean score.

The students' reflection papers also highlighted that they were "excited to be using *Twitter*" (Davis and Yin 49) because they are already using it. The researchers concluded that "with the 140-character limit on messaging, *Twitter* is compatible with the way people think and work within the contexts of being brief, clear, and concise in writing and communication" (50). Tweeting forces writers to get rid of extraneous words and make an effort to get their points across succinctly. Stephanie N. Phillips, a doctoral student from the University of South Florida, also used *Twitter* in her first-year composition class and showed that it could be an effective tool for teaching students to explore digital compositions. She asked students to create *Twitter* accounts that were not linked to them personally. Taking advantage of the opportunity that *Twitter* provides for evaluating political discourse, she gave the students a set of questions for guidance in examining a community or posts. The students created fictional characters and used their accounts to analyze trending topics or hashtags, like #YesAllWomen (which discussed sexual, mental, and physical abuse).

In Phillips' class, the students ended up tweeting mostly among themselves rather than with the communities they were surveying. Nevertheless, the *Twitter* assignment created discussion. What students learn from using *Twitter* needs "to include audience awareness, the ability to enter into an already existent discussion with meaningful contribution, establishing ethos for social networking, and both the ability to work within the constraints of a particular medium while simultaneously mastery of the medium to work in the writer's interests," Phillips declared (11). In other words, students need to be

aware of who is receiving their information, be able to understand and significantly contribute to a discussion in progress, pay attention to the ethics required for online sharing, and utilize what the medium has to offer.

While Phillips' students mostly engaged with each other, in "Blog Love: Blogging (And Microblogging) Communities as Writing Classroom Companions," Clarissa J. Walker used *Twitter* to teach her students how to enter a room where the discussion is already in progress, listen to the conversation, figure out the topic, and then contribute to the discussion. Walker likens entering a *Twitter* discussion to entering the Burkean parlor. She sees it as a place of collaboration where new knowledge is constantly being created (20). In both Phillips' and Walker's studies, students had to monitor an ongoing discussion on *Twitter*. While Phillips' students did not engage anyone from the *Twitter* audience and only discussed the topics with each other, Walker's students actually contributed to the public discussions. Tweeting was a success in the West et al. research. Students tweeted questions, examples, or links that were displayed on the screen for the entire class to discuss. For example, as the researchers explain, "This form of active tweeting by students, rather than passively accepting tweets from a professor, subsequently contributes to their positive perceptions of *Twitter* as an effective learning tool as well as a means to improve interclass interaction among students" (West, et al. 168). By being able to use *Twitter* to address course issues, students could not only be collaborating with classmates and the professor, but could also be increasing their knowledge.



*Part of the Writing Process*

*Twitter* has been used alongside an LMS, as a collaboration tool, and for freewriting, but it also can be used to teach the traditional writing process of drafting, revising, and editing. Hong et al. incorporated *Twitter* into a conventional writing assignment for college freshmen in their research at a midsize Northeastern university. Nineteen students from a first year seminar/basic reading class tweeted reflections and ideas twice weekly about their experience as freshmen. The students compiled and edited their tweets (with the help of their instructors) and then the tweets were published as a “Freshman Survival Guide” (Hong et al. 4). During the 11½ weeks, the 19 students tweeted 363 times, averaging about 19 tweets each.

When faced with revising/editing their tweets, most students created complete sentences (often rewritten to be more formal), checked grammar and spelling, paid attention to capitalization, got rid of abbreviations and emoticons, fixed punctuation, added more details, and made different word choices (Hong et al. 5-6). While students used *Twitter* to generate and share ideas, by being walked through the writing process they applied steps to make their writing more formal. Hong et al. summarized that

The use of *Twitter* facilitated the prewriting stage of the writing process, which is an area that students often struggle within academic writing. In addition, students demonstrated the ability to classify the ideas that they initially generated via *Twitter* and sorted them into the specific categories appropriate for expository text. The study further suggests that digital communication tools hold a potential for developing collaborative writing projects and for motivating students to write.

(8)

Even though the students' tweets were revised after they were posted, the tweets served as a freewriting exercise. The undergraduates shared their thoughts and ideas about being freshmen, and their contributions were then categorized. *Twitter* was used to talk about the major topic, freshman survival, and the collaboration between the students went from online to the classroom, where traditional writing processes were used. The students revised their writing, edited those revisions, proofread them, and then produced their survival guide. The Hong et al. research showed that college professors can bring *Twitter* into the class without having to eliminate traditional writing assignments, and students get to incorporate social networking and enhance collaboration and creativity.

*Twitter* fosters dialogue that is more conversational and it extends the classroom discussion outside the brick and mortar walls. Likened to the modern day "watercooler" (Kinsky and Bruce 36), *Twitter* offers a pipeline into conversations near and far and personal and professional. Whether it is used in conjunction with an LMS, for live-tweeting, as the first step in the writing process (disseminating ideas), or as a place to distribute information, teacher interaction and student collaboration are needed to make *Twitter* a useful tool to enhance engagement and encourage and enrich writing.

The online platform provides a plethora of information where one can learn or share and connect with celebrities, professionals, and each other. The most important thing to remember for teachers willing to use *Twitter* is that they need to have a purpose for its use, and they need to provide students with scaffolding. One can't presume that all students know how to use the site. In addition, privacy issues are easily addressed by adjusting the settings at the onset of using the social media site. While many may worry

about the lack of a face-to-face setting, *Twitter* is not being recommended as a replacement to regular classroom teaching, but rather, as a supplement.

Prior research outlines what has worked and what has not when it comes to using *Twitter* in the classroom. However, studies on using *Twitter* as a tool for teaching writing are limited. Within Composition and Rhetoric, social media and digital technology use is often discussed more broadly and in the context of particular composing practices. For example, collections like Claire Lutkewitte's *Mobile Technologies and Writing Classrooms* look more broadly at the tools of composing, rather than specific apps. Beyond broad pedagogical approaches, specific research is being conducted on the practices of individual composers across platforms and spaces. For instance, Stacey Pigg's work on student writing processes across technologies and spaces examines how composers utilize a broad range of digital composing tools across various spaces without singling out a particular platform. Other case studies, such as Amber Buck's "Examining Digital Literacy Practices on Social Network Sites," explore things like self-presentation and identity formation in online spaces. These studies recognize the composing that takes place across multiple platforms and the complexities of studying digital literacy practices.

Beyond focused discussions of composing technologies, much research on Twitter centers around how it gets used as a platform for activism (Dadas). For example, Dadas' research highlights hashtag activism and how the speedy circulation of tweets can bring attention to and incite social and political activism (Dadas 17). Social media is "the dominant form of delivery that the public uses to discuss issues of activism and public trust," purport Douglas M. Walls and Stephanie Vie, and they propose that social media "should take on greater importance in terms of writing studies research" (7). Walls and

Vie assert that rhetoric and writing scholars need to pay attention to the writing that is done on social networks, like *Twitter*—because many of the authors on social media highlight problems and engage in various writing methods to achieve their goals. In their book *Social Writing/Social Media—Publics, Presentations, and Pedagogies*, Walls and Vie present a compilation of essays that take a look at social media and writing. Authors within this collection focus on *Twitter* as a place for activism (17), marketing (19), and a way to continue discussion between students and students and the teacher outside of the classroom (274). Outside of classroom environments, “*Twitter* has become an important platform not only to connect with scholars who share research interests, but also to interact at conferences” (A. Buck, “Grad” 161).

Within classroom-based scholarship in the field, *Twitter* often gets discussed within higher education online platforms like the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Sample; Young), or on specific scholarly blogs (e.g., Andrea Lunsford’s “Bits—Ideas for Teaching Composition”). Within composition scholarship, *Twitter* has been explored as a platform for teaching students about audience and to increase rhetorical awareness. For example, Amber Buck studies how one undergraduate student negotiated his *Facebook* and *Twitter* identity based on his audience (“Examining”). Buck points out how the student adapted his identity to suit each social media platform with *Twitter* being his “stream of consciousness” where he shared daily thoughts with close friends and his roommates (15). Alternatively, *Facebook* posts were adapted to feature his collegiate activities and geared for a wider, more general audience. Along with case studies like Buck’s, Bryant’s edited collection, among other things, takes a look at blogging in the writing classroom and social media’s role in expanding students’ rhetorical awareness. In

addition, in her *Kairos* article, Elisabeth Buck examines students' intuitive rhetorical efficacy on social media platforms. Finally, in Shelley Rodrigo and Elaine Jolayemi's "Focused Topic Tweets for Surface Level Tricks & Treats," they provide instructors with grammatical exercises that include tweeting sentences that show the three main uses of the comma, using a coordinating conjunction, and showing the proper uses of a semicolon.

My thesis will add to these conversations about using online platforms as pedagogical tools to help students, and it will further the dialogue by focusing on *Twitter's* use within a first-year writing classroom as a resource for students to choose writing topics and to help bolster rhetorical and audience awareness. This will add another dimension to the possibilities of how writing instructors can augment students' digital literacies.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

For my research, I evaluated how *Twitter* was brought into a first-year writing class at Nova Southeastern University—Comp 1500: College Writing, taught by Molly Scanlon, Ph.D., on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:00–2:15 p.m. during the fall 2017 semester. In preparing for my thesis I found out that Scanlon planned to teach a class using social media, so I took advantage of the opportunity of convenience to assess a class at my college campus. Nova Southeastern University is a private, nonprofit institution of higher education located in South Florida.

In this section I will outline the research methods I used and the instruments I chose to collect my data, and discuss why I chose them, and how I used them. My research design used a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach that included qualitative and quantitative design (Creswell 15). As a quantitative method, I used closed-ended questions in the surveys to measure students' use of social media and *Twitter*. My qualitative methods included using open-ended questions in the surveys, interviewing the teacher, and collecting the students' tweets. I did a textual analysis on the student tweets and content analysis on the results from the surveys. It was important to see if the use of social media enhanced teaching and learning and did indeed foster engagement, or if it was unappealing for the students to bring a pastime into the classroom. Specific questions targeted the students' perceptions of *Twitter* before and after they used it for class and elicited their opinions on engagement and learning.

The use of multiple methods allowed me to put the varied information together—from the surveys that were given, as well as from the students' tweets—to identify themes or patterns in a fairly quick manner and give a more complete view of my topic

and answer my research questions (Creswell 12–19). I began and ended my research with an electronic survey. I chose surveys because they enabled me to get information directly from the students and to use structured, brief, open-ended and closed-ended questions to gather specific data. Because the surveys were easily accessible, I was hopeful that there would be a stronger likelihood that the research participants would reply (Vogt 16).

I also collected the tweets that were posted by the students and teacher during the fall semester. At the end of the semester, I read through all the collected data to get a general idea of what information I had gathered. I searched the class hashtag and copied all the tweets into an Excel file in chronological order of when they were sent and did a textual analysis for patterns and themes. Certain words, like hashtag, rhetoric, genres, and writing kept popping up, so I coded the tweets looking for those words specifically. In addition, I evaluated the tweets for content, grammar, spelling, and punctuation; but most of all, I assessed the tweets for rhetorical and audience awareness. In particular, I compared the use of various rhetorical conventions (like hashtags, clarity in writing, and use of multimedia) between the individual and group tweets. After analyzing the data, I provided results and assessments in my discussion narrative.

The students in the Comp 1500 class responded to survey 1 (see Appendix A for Online Survey 1) between October 31, 2017, and November 14, 2017. Since IRB approval wasn't confirmed until October 27, and the students were not approached until October 31, the class had already started. Survey 2 (see Appendix B for Online Survey 2) was sent to students electronically during the last week of class.

Using a list of 20 questions, each survey asked students about their social media habits, likes, dislikes, and familiarity with *Twitter*. Survey 1 specifically asked about the

students' expectations about using social media in their writing class. In addition, the participants were asked if they pay attention to grammar, spelling, and punctuation when posting, and to rate their level of writing ability. Survey 2 included similar questions to survey 1 about student general use of social media (amount of time spent online, their top 3 platforms, how often they took a stand online, and about their use and perceptions of *Twitter*). In survey 2, the participants were also queried about their writing style on social media and asked how much attention they paid to the mechanics of their writing when posting content. In addition, survey 2 asked for student feedback about using social media in the writing class. The surveys gave me the opportunity to compare the students' perceptions of social media (especially of using *Twitter*) before and after they tweeted for class. The information gathered from the surveys helped to measure how often students use social media and what platforms they frequented before the class and during the class. The surveys also helped to gauge students' social media patterns.

Along with collecting survey data, I also gathered and analyzed the students' tweets. Like prior research (Junco et al.; Krause and Coates; Kuh et al.; Rutherford; West et al.), I wanted to examine whether or not the use of *Twitter* propelled student engagement specifically in a writing classroom, therefore adding research to the area of composition. Unlike previous scholarship that often used *Twitter* as a method of communication between the students and between the students and their professor (Dunlap and Lowenthal; Jacquemin et al.), I expected to take my evaluation of the class's use of *Twitter* a step further by assessing the participants' tweets for content, clarity, writing mechanics, and rhetorical awareness. I hoped to analyze the content of the tweets to see if the students' writing showed improvement in the aforementioned areas from the



beginning to the end of the class. In addition, I wanted to see if the presentation of the tweets changed, depending on the intended audience.

However, the students did very little tweeting. A hurricane caused classes to be cancelled for two weeks and a sentence-level writing activity was eliminated. The writing exercise would have added to the volume and generated tweets specifically produced with a focus on content, clarity, and writing mechanics. Instead, the students primarily used *Twitter* to find trending, relevant topics to follow and analyze for their papers. They also used *Twitter* as a platform to share information about advocacy projects near the end of the term. Despite there being fewer tweets than anticipated, I was still able to perform my aforementioned assessment, as well as look at *Twitter*'s role in the composition class.

The tweets also helped to confirm some of the students' answers to certain queries on the survey (e.g., "How much attention do you pay to content, grammar, spelling, and punctuation when you post on social media?"). Paired with the results from the surveys, the tweets gave me a more concrete view of how the Comp 1500 students used *Twitter* for their class. Although *Twitter* is lauded as a great way for students to learn to be brief and clear in their writing (Dunlap and Lowenthal 132), looking at how students actually use *Twitter* when it is part of their class can give teachers a bird's-eye view and a better understanding of how to implement and use the social media platform as a pedagogical tool.

### *Procedures*

I met with the class in person on Tuesday, October 31, 2017. I outlined my project and went over the consent form (see Appendix C for the Participant's Consent Form) with 14 students. Since one of the students was younger than 18, and 3 declined to be

included in the research, I received signed consent from 10 students who agreed to participate in the study by responding to both surveys and to having their tweets collected and evaluated. On that same day, right after the in-person meeting with the students, I emailed Scanlon a link to survey 1 (see Appendix A), which she posted in a general Blackboard announcement for all the participants. Ten students completed the survey within two weeks. On Thursday, November 30, 2017, I sent Scanlon another email, with a link to survey 2 (see Appendix B) to forward to her Comp 1500 students. Again, the link was posted on Blackboard and most of the students responded that day, with the last response sent in on December 4, 2017. Nine out of 10 completed the second survey.

After the class ended on December 7, 2017, I collected participants' tweets by searching the class hashtag on *Twitter* (#1500DAF). When I first gathered and started to peruse the material under the hashtag, I realized that there were only 41 tweets. So, I contacted Scanlon and was told that the class received special group assignments that included using different handles apart from the class #1500DAF hashtag. These new handles included @NSUCommunicates, @NSUNeedsWheels, @NSU\_Food, and @hcaccessibility. Although the groups were supposed to include #1500DAF on their tweets, only a few tweets from the group handles actually carried the class hashtag. So, after learning about the new handles, I then searched those group handles specifically.

I collected all the tweets through my *Twitter* account. I first searched #1500DAF. Then, I used the students' individual handles, which were included on both survey 1 and survey 2, to make sure I had compiled all the tweets. Since some students had not always included the class hashtag, looking them up individually ensured that I collected all the tweets associated with the class. I did a frame grab of the tweets, copied and pasted them

into Word documents, and then stored those documents on a password-protected computer. To protect their real identities, the participants were given pseudonyms for this report. The tracking of IP addresses was disabled for the survey responses, so the students also had anonymity when they returned surveys 1 and 2. Once all of the tweets were collected, I manually entered them into an Excel file for analysis.

In December 2017, I decided to interview Scanlon to get more detailed information about the path she had taken in using *Twitter* to teach her class, especially because she had to make up for time lost because of the hurricane closure. When I returned to college in January 2018, I applied for an addendum to my IRB protocol to get permission to interview the professor. I sent the IRB a separate consent form for Scanlon (see Appendix D), and a list of questions that I would use to interview her (see Appendix E).

I wanted to meet with Scanlon because I required more detailed information for my research. I needed to find out her purpose for using *Twitter*, and to get a better idea of what assignments the students had been given. I also wanted to find out if Scanlon had made tweeting mandatory, and if she had given the students any guidance on how and when to use *Twitter*—keeping in mind prior scholarship about the importance of scaffolding (Lin et al.; West et al.). In addition, since the students failed to elaborate on open-ended questions on survey 2 that asked about their perceptions of using social media in the class, I asked Scanlon what kind of feedback she got from the students about using *Twitter*. And, to better understand *Twitter*'s effectiveness from a professor's perspective, I wanted to include her firsthand account of using *Twitter* as a pedagogical resource to teach writing in college as part of this thesis.

I received exemption from the IRB on Thursday, January 11, 2018, which allowed me to conduct a face-to-face interview with Scanlon. I made an appointment and interviewed her on Wednesday, January 24, 2018. I met the professor in her office at 6 p.m. and queried her using my list of 12 open-ended questions. I recorded the entire interview. I played the recording back several times that same night, transcribing her answers into the notebook that I had used as a backup during the interview. The notes are stored in a locked file cabinet, along with paper copies of all the consent forms and surveys that were filled out for this study.

### *Limitations*

There were three major limitations to my research. First, my study was restricted because of the small sample size of a single course with 10 students during one semester. This small sample size was a limitation because it was not an adequate representation of the general population of writing students at NSU, or of first-year writing classes that use *Twitter*. Because of this, the results are not generalizable. Second, by using surveys, respondents may not have been totally honest or accurate and interpretations of the questions may have been different from what the researcher intended. In addition, some of the survey questions (like the amount of time someone spends on special media) may be hard for participants to accurately guess. Additionally, there were a few differences between the wording of questions in survey 1 and 2, which could have affected the ways that participants responded. Beyond the limitations of the survey design, participants' responses to open-ended survey questions were minimal. Third, the students tweeted less than I had initially anticipated. Because there were fewer tweets, they were difficult to

analyze. A couple of factors—tweeting was not mandatory or structured and a sentence-level tweeting assignment was cancelled—contributed to the students' lack of tweets.

## CHAPTER 4: THE RESULTS

In answering my research questions, “How can using *Twitter* as a pedagogical resource to teach writing benefit both students and professors?” and “In what ways can integrating *Twitter* into the classroom help students to improve their writing?,” my use of surveys, analysis of the students’ tweets, and the instructor interview revealed three major findings, which will be discussed in detail. First, although students are already using social media a great deal, just bringing social media into their classrooms does not automatically result in increased student engagement or effective writing. The participants reported spending a considerable amount of time on social media sites, and paying attention to writing conventions in their survey responses, yet their individual (ungraded) use of tweets did not reveal the same level of attention. Without a grade associated with the tweets, students were not using *Twitter* to the degree I hypothesized. Second, students in Scanlon’s class used various rhetorical strategies (like multimedia, hashtags, tweeting groups like sororities, and their word choice) in different ways depending on their audience. The changing rhetorical conventions students employed between tweeting individually with Scanlon, and as a group with a broader audience, showcased a sophisticated audience awareness. Finally, because students were granted freedom of topic choice (even in collaborative groups), they were able to use *Twitter* in creative ways that appealed to not only their interests, but to a broader public. Taken together, my data suggests that integrating *Twitter* into the classroom with scaffolding and specific parameters will give teachers a worthwhile tool that can make students’ use of *Twitter* beneficial to learning and improving writing in first-year composition.

### *Use of Social Media*

In total, there were 10 students who completed survey 1 and 9 students who completed survey 2. One student was between the ages of 22–25, while the other 9 were in the 18–21 category. As indicated in both survey 1 and 2, all 10 participants primarily use social media for personal use. Out of the 10 students, 2 also use it for work, while 8 use it for school. On a daily basis, the students report on survey 1 that they average more than 3 hours a day on social networking sites (see table 1 for the specific breakdown).

Table 1

Hours spent on social media

<b>Name</b>	<b>Survey 1 question:</b> <i>In a typical day, about how many hours do you spend on social networking websites?</i>	<b>Survey 2 question:</b> <i>During the period you were using Twitter for Comp 1500, how many hours did you spend on other social media sites on a typical day?</i>
Amy*	2	2
Cara	5	2
Dawn	6	4
Hank	< 1	2
Kelly	4	1
Lisa	6	4
Mike	5	4
Olga	4	1
Tom	7	[No response] <sup>a</sup>
Vicki	“I’m not sure since I am on and off all the time”	“I’m not sure a lot”

\*All names are pseudonyms.

a. Tom did not complete Survey 2.

As table 1 demonstrates, students reported spending less time on other social networking sites during the period they used *Twitter* for class. While 2 participants’ reported usage remained the same, and 1 student indicated going from less than an hour in survey 1 to 2

hours in survey 2, all the other students reported spending less time on social media platforms while engaging with *Twitter* for Comp 1500.

Comparing results from survey 1 and 2 to the question, “In a typical day, how often do you engage (comment, like, or share) with other social media users’ activities (posts, photos, etc.)?” (see table 2), revealed that the frequency either stayed the same (2 respondents) or decreased (6 respondents). The frequency of engaging with others on social media only increased for 1 participant.

Table 2

Frequency of engaging with others online

	<i>In a typical day, how often do you engage (comment, like, or share) with other social media users’ activities (posts, photos, etc.)?</i>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Survey1</b>	<b>Survey2</b>
Amy	6-10	11-15
Cara	16-20	16-20
Dawn	16-20	6-10
Hank	1-5	“Not often”
Kelly	16-20	11-15
Lisa	“Too many to count”	16-20
Mike	1-5	1-5
Olga	16-20	“I usually just lurked”
Tom	11-15	[No response]
Vicki	16-20	1-5

In choosing from a list of social media applications they frequent daily for survey 1, *Snapchat* was the most popular app used with all 10 listing it. *Instagram* was the second-most used app by 9 users, *YouTube* with 8, and *Facebook* and *Twitter* tied with 7 users. *LinkedIn* and *Pinterest* were only used by 2 students, *Reddit* and *Google+* by 1



student each, and none of the students reported using *Tumblr* or *Flickr*. When asked in an open-ended question to list the top 3 platforms they visit most often, *Snapchat* was listed 9 times, *Instagram* was listed 7 times, *Twitter* was listed 5 times, *Facebook* was listed 3 times, *YouTube* was listed 2 times, and *Pinterest* was listed 1 time. In survey 2, *Snapchat* and *Instagram* remained the leaders listed as the top sites that students visit. The top sites for participants changed between survey 1 and 2 for three participants: *Instagram* replaced *Pinterest* on one participant's list. *YouTube* was replaced by *Facebook* on one list and by *Twitter* on another list.

When asked in survey 1 “which of the following groups are you comfortable sharing content and/or comments with online” (where participants could choose all that apply), all 10 indicated that they were comfortable sharing with friends, 8 indicated that they were comfortable sharing with family, 4 indicated that they were comfortable sharing with co-workers or professional networks, and 3 indicated that they were comfortable sharing with strangers. None of the participants selected that they were uncomfortable sharing content and/or comments online.

However, when asked in an open-ended question “Why are or why aren't you comfortable sharing?,” five expressed being comfortable sharing online because of a comfort level with their own identity or because they don't have anything to hide, stating things like, “I am comfortable sharing stuff online because I like to let people know where what is going on in my life<sup>1</sup>,” or “I am comfortable sharing my social medias because it allows people to see who I am and what I'm 'about' without actually meeting/talking to me.” One participant indicated that “I don't mind sharing. I just don't

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from the surveys were copied verbatim.

feel like I have anything to share.” Among the open-ended responses that indicated participants were not comfortable sharing online, the students wrote that they didn’t want to overshare or share with too many people. Some didn’t want to say something that may offend someone, and one participant believed personal information should be kept private.

### *Use and Perceptions of Twitter*

In survey 1, 5 participants indicated that they used *Twitter* 1-5 times in a typical day, 3 used it 16-20 times, one responded 6-10 times, and one user didn’t use it at all. Responding to a similar question in survey 2 that asked, “In a typical week, how much time did you spend using *Twitter* for your Comp 1500 class?” 7 students chose “1-2 hours” and 2 students picked “less than an hour,” 1 student did not respond to survey 2.

In survey 1, when asked, “In a typical day how do you use *Twitter*?,” the primary response was “for social interaction.” Respondents could pick all that applied, so 5 also selected “for school,” 1 for “work,” and 1 for “personal use.” In survey 1, when asked for their perceptions of how *Twitter* is used and given a list (where participants could select all that apply), 6 students each chose all of the following categories: news, politics, sports, and a platform for pop culture information and following celebrities. Three selected that *Twitter* was a place to post personal achievements and fun stuff; one student picked that it was used “to check the weather.” Two students wrote in answers under the “other” category. One wrote “that people use [*Twitter*] to vent typically,” the other said, “to look at cute animals.”

In survey 2, when given the same list of options to choose from as in survey 1 (news, politics, sports, a platform for pop culture information and following celebrities,

etc.) and asked, “After taking this class what is your perception of *Twitter*,” students’ selections were almost identical to survey 1. Except, one student in survey 2 marked that he uses *Twitter* for checking “traffic updates.” Replying to the open-ended question “How has your perception of *Twitter* changed since taking this class?” one student said, “It hasn’t.” Among the reasons given by the others was that *Twitter* can be used to express thoughts, has an educational use, groups things together, and for more than posting funny videos. “It is used for everything” declared one participant, and “I actually have an account now,” added another.

When asked in survey 2 if they had ever used *Twitter* as part of a course, 6 students answered “yes” and 3 said “no.” Replying to the question “Was it difficult adapting *Twitter* for class tasks, 7 of the 9 students checked “no,” and 2 chose “maybe.” In answering the open-ended question, “Why was it difficult or easy to adapt your use of *Twitter* for Comp 1500?” the 7 students who did not indicate having problems adapting *Twitter* for class tasks said they were either accustomed to using *Twitter*, “it was easy,” or “it seemed to make sense.” Of the two who selected “no,” one said she “didn’t really use *Twitter* beforehand,” and the other said, “sometimes tweeting felt useful and other times it felt like busy work.”

### *Student Writing*

While students viewed *Twitter* as a resource for everything from news to politics to a place for traffic updates, when it came to their writing, whether or not students paid attention to sentence-level concerns showed variability. When asked in survey 1, “How much attention do you pay to content, grammar, spelling, and punctuation when you post on social media,” 4 participants chose “a lot,” 3 chose “some,” 1 person said he paid “a

little” attention when posting, and 2 chose “none at all.” When asked to explain their answers to the aforementioned question, one student who responded that “some” attention is given said, “I think grammar and spelling is important on all form of media.” Of the 4 participants who indicated that they pay “a lot” of attention, 2 demonstrated concern of how others would perceive them online, writing things like: “. . . I don’t want to sound stupid when I put myself out there on the internet” or “If I come across as illiterate online that is highly embarrassing.” The other 2 who indicated paying “a lot” of attention wrote that they “always include correct punctuation,” and “Grammar and spelling have always been important to me but I tend to not focus on punctuation as much.” The 2 participants who said, “none at all” simply stated, “I don’t look at it,” and “idk.”

In survey 2, when calculating the number of students who indicated that they paid a lot of attention to content, grammar, spelling, and punctuation when posting on social media, the numbers were similar to survey 1, with 4 saying that they pay “a lot” of attention. Two participants chose “some,” and 2 chose “a little.” The “not at all” category only received 1 reply. The 2 who chose “some” wrote (in an open-ended response to the question “Please explain your answer to the prior question”), “My personal *Twitter* is more for close friends, I doubt they care about my grammar, spelling and punctuation;” and “I try to make my posts as coherent and clear as possible to avoid confusion.” The 2 students who picked “little” indicated: “I used to think writing was not on social media,” and, “I see it but I don’t comment on it.” The one student who chose “not at all” explained that *Twitter* is limiting because of the number of characters used.

### *Writing and Learning Expectations*

When asked in survey 1, “Where do you think you fall in terms of writing ability?” 6 of 10 participants indicated that they need help with their writing. Only 3 responded confidently about their writing ability indicating, “I write well.” Specifically, 5 of the students selected “I need some help to make my writing better,” and 1 selected “I need a lot of help to make my writing better.” One participant chose “I hate writing.”

The open-ended question, “What do you expect to learn about writing in your Comp 1500 class?” in survey 1 elicited answers from the participants that stated they expected to learn more about writing and to improve their writing. Among the replies, the participants indicated that they expected to learn more about grammar, to write in a practical way, and to learn writing that they could use for the rest of their lives. When asked the question, “Do you think that using social media in this class can help you improve your writing? Why or why not?” 8 students said “yes.” Citing several factors, the students who affirmatively replied said *Twitter* would help because it would force them to write more concisely, social media would make writing more fun and offer a modern way to learn, it would teach different ways of writing, and “it’s changing lives every day.” Of the two participants who did not think social media would help improve their writing, one said social media was meant only for a more laid-back audience, and the other said he expected his writing to stay the same.

In survey 2, participants were asked “How did the use of social media in the class help, or not help, improve your writing?” Overall, the participants responded favorably to the idea that *Twitter* had a positive effect on their writing. Among the 8 responses, the students wrote, “I enjoyed it,” and that the use of *Twitter* helped “me stay up with current

events.” Beyond the responses about the platform itself, 5 students reported about the effects of *Twitter* on their writing, stating things like “It challenged me to squeeze all the information into 140 words.” Of those 5 students, 3 students indicated that *Twitter* provided real-world writing contexts that go beyond the 5-paragraph essay. One participant had mixed responses to the use of *Twitter*, writing “Some activities helped me understand things like logos, ethos, and pathos. Some felt like busy work or just tweeting to get the grade.” One student indicated that “It didn’t help.”

In response to “Did this writing class meet your learning expectations?” 5 chose “yes,” 3 students selected “it exceeded my expectations,” and another selected “maybe.” When asked to explain their answers, the students’ comments were very positive. “I learned a lot,” was stated by 2 students, and another said that COMP 1500 brought everyday life into class and was “not just some outdated version of learning.” Another student pointed out, “I expected it to be crappy.” “My teacher went above and beyond,” wrote another. One stated that “it was nice to learn how to write in different formats,” one simply wrote that “It was great,” while another gave the class a very favorable review by stating that because of it, “I was able to actually grow as a writer.”

In answer to the question “Do you think that using social media was beneficial to your learning experience?” in survey 2, 7 out of 9 participants selected “yes” that it was beneficial, one student picked “no” it was not beneficial, while another said “maybe” it was beneficial. When elaborating in an open-ended follow up to explain their response, one student said that social media was beneficial because jobs want to know that students can work with social media. Another, an avid user of social networking sites, said, “It made me more eager to do the work on time instead of procrastinating.” One student

indicated indifference. One student stated that “It was a new way to learn and in a familiar setting,” while two students pointed out that “Social media is part of daily life, and it was beneficial to learn how to use it as a source of writing,” and “I think it opened a new experience.”

Two students lauded *Twitter*’s effect on writing. “It made me realize that there is writing everywhere,” wrote one, and “It showed me that we use writing even when we don’t realize it,” stated the other. Results about whether or not social media was instrumental for engagement in class showed 6 out of 9 participants chose “Yes.” One student explained her answer with: “I didn’t wait until the last minute to do the assignments because I was using a platform I was familiar with.” While another pointed out, “I used social media to write an essay.” Another student gave *Twitter* some credit, stating, “I wouldn’t say instrumental but it helped a lot.” But, 3 students said “Maybe” *Twitter* was helpful for engagement in class. They explained their responses simply with: “IDK,” “We had to use it so I guess,” and, “I used social media to communicate and share my ideas and assignments.”

### *Tweeting*

The students in the Comp 1500 class used *Twitter* for approximately 12 weeks. I collected 63 tweets—41 student tweets, 21 group tweets, and 1 tweet from the professor—by searching the class hashtag, Scanlon’s handle, the students’ individual handles that were used for the class (which were provided to me on the surveys), and the group handles (given to me by the professor during our interview). I cross-referenced them and removed duplicates. During September and October 2017, the 10 participants in this research study tweeted 41 times individually (see table 3).

Table 3

Number of students' tweets

Name	Created tweet	Replied to tweet	Included professor's handle	Sent hashtag topic to professor	Included #1500DAF	Total
Amy	0	1	1	1	0	1
Cara	4 <sup>b</sup>	0	4	1	4	4
Dawn	0	9	9	1	6	9
Hank	3	0	3	0	3	3
Kelly	0	1	1	1	0	1
Lisa	2	9 <sup>b</sup>	9	1	11	11
Mike	1	6	7	1	5	7
Olga	0	1	1	1	0	1
Tom	1 <sup>c</sup>	1	2	1	1	2
Vicki	1 <sup>c</sup>	1	1	1	1	2
<b>Totals</b>	12	29	38	9	31	41

b. Created 2 tweet threads

c. Created 1 tweet thread

All, but one student, sent the professor a tweet with the chosen hashtag they would follow and write about for one of their assignments. Lisa created 2 tweets and replied to 9, generating 11 tweets, the most in the class. Dawn did not create an original tweet, but replied to 9 to have the second highest number of tweets generated. Only 4 students produced tweets that used threads (connecting multiple tweets together on the same topic), and 3 students simply replied to the professor with their hashtag topics, to each generate only 1 tweet. While the #1500DAF was used 31 out of 41 times, the professor's handle was included on 38 out of 41 of the students' tweets.

Thirty-nine of the 41 tweets were generated on a Tuesday or Thursday—the days the Comp 1500 class was held. Two separate tweets, from Amy and Olga, were sent to



the professor on a Monday informing Scanlon of the hashtags the students would be following for their project. Although Scanlon reported that the participants used *Twitter* to observe hashtags as they learned about them—and to choose topics they would follow and write about—the students actually only tweeted in class on three occasions. They tweeted on Tuesday, September 19; Thursday, September 21; and Tuesday, October 17<sup>th</sup>.

The tweeting began on September 19<sup>th</sup> with the professor’s first and only tweet: “How has the # symbol evolved over time? #hashtag #1500DAF.” Throughout the period students were tweeting individually, four students created threads, because they had more to say than the 140-character limitation would allow. For example, in responding to Scanlon, Cara tweeted:

@Cara replying to @profmscanlon. “Hashtags are used to organize and to express/elaborate emotion. People use # to start movements such as campaigns  
1/3 #1500DAF”

@Cara replying to @profmscanlon. “Hashtags are used in text messages, social media posts, spoken English, marketing, and even in education. 2/3 #1500DAF”

@Cara replying to @profmscanlon. “Hashtags are used as a form of emphasis to get your point across quicker and more effectively. 3/3 #1500DAF”

In the other three instances where students created threads, they were seemingly in response to the professor and prompts they were getting from what was being discussed in class.

Other than on October 17<sup>th</sup>, the students mostly replied to Scanlon in their tweets. Unlike their response to Scanlon only on September 19, on October 17, when the topic of the tweets was rhetoric, the students engaged in more of a dialogue with each other. Lisa,

Dawn, and Mike held a conversation about rhetoric and included Scanlon's handle in their tweets. The three students were replying to each other and among the tweets shared were:

@Mike replying to @Lisa @profmscanlon. "Actually... rhetoric can help us in educational ways, such as showing us what is right from wrong and become effective communicators #1500DAF"

@Lisa replying to @Mike @profmscanlon. "Actually... rhetoric #exposes innocent minds to ambiguous moral messages that they should be protected from. #micdrop #1500DAF"

@Lisa replying to @Mike @profmscanlon. "of course it can be both written and spoken, but the way one uses it determines the underlying message #1500DAF"

@Mike replying to @Lisa @profmscanlon. "Rhetoric can be used in many different forms. Not only has it been used in writing, but also plays in theaters #1500DAF"

@Dawn replying to @Lisa @Mike @profmscanlon. "But it can also be unwritten and unspoken... #1500DAF"

@Dawn replying to @Lisa @Mike @profmscanlon. "But also thought processes used before speaking and writing plays. #1500DAF"

@Lisa replying to @Mike @profmscanlon. "writing allows people to pretend to be someone they're not. therefore, rhetoric is FAKE NEWS #1500DAF"

@Mike replying to @Lisa @profmscanlon. "Relaxxxxx, that only happens when people are liars (emoticon) #1500DAF"

During this particular class period, Mike, Dawn, and Lisa were engaging in a conversation about rhetoric as a topic. The conversation on October 19 was one of few instances where students individually responded to one another using the platform.

For their third assignment in the course, Scanlon placed students in four teams. Each group had to identify a local community need and raise awareness about an issue. They could go beyond just raising awareness by taking further steps to raise money or take a direct action. (For example, three of the four groups crafted letters to members of the NSU administration as part of their class assignment.) Each group had to choose how to dispense the argument to their intended audience, and they had to tweet about the process they would be using for their campaign.

There were four students each in the @haccessibility and @NSUCommunicates groups, and three each in the @NSU\_Food and @NSUNeedsWheels teams. According to Scanlon, the students were required to tweet about the process they were using to promote their causes. They did not have to use *Twitter* to actually promote their causes. However, each group chose *Twitter* to spread the word about their undertaking, beyond just reporting on their process. The 4 groups, combined, sent out 21 tweets. Those tweets were usually to inform their audience about their cause, to provide a link to a survey, or to report the findings from the survey. There was no other interaction on the *Twitter* pages that were created for the group projects.

When tweeting as a group @haccessibility sent 4 tweets and used the class hashtag on 3 of their tweets, @NSUCommunicates sent 7 and used the class hashtag on 6, @NSU\_Food sent 8 tweets and used the class hashtag on 7, and @NSUNeedsWheels sent 3 tweets and never used the class hashtag. Beyond tweeting about their process, each

group reached out and tagged other student groups to bring attention to their plights. The use of communicating to broader audiences, even without using the hashtag, is different from how the students were using *Twitter* as individuals tweeting in class. With the individual tweets, students would only respond to each other or Scanlon. With the group tweets, the teams called out others' on campus and used hashtags going beyond the one required for class.

Of the four groups, I will be focusing on two specific examples that represent how the groups used their rhetorical skills and their audience awareness to showcase and get their audience's attention. Within these examples, the group @NSUCommunicates posted a survey on *Twitter* to address how to make communication on campus better. The team sent out an initial tweet on November 16 (see figure 1). This first tweet explained their cause (“to achieve a significant change in the area of communication”) while informing the audience that they would be following up by approaching school administrators to seek change.



Figure 1. Screenshot of NSU Communication November 16 tweet. @NSUCommunicates. “In attempt to achieve . . .” *Twitter*, 16 Nov. 2017, 11:08 a.m., [twitter.com/NSUCommunicates/status/931237555080777728](https://twitter.com/NSUCommunicates/status/931237555080777728).

In total, the group sent out 7 tweets. Besides the initial tweet, others included one with the link to its survey, another promising to post the results of the survey, and a third that gave students “another way to voice concerns” (see figure 2). In the figure 2 tweet,

the group connected its audience to the NSU Undergraduate Student Government Association (NSU USGA). Students were encouraged by the NSU USGA to participate in their “What to Fix” (WTF) campaign and provide suggestions for ways to improve the university (see figure 2).

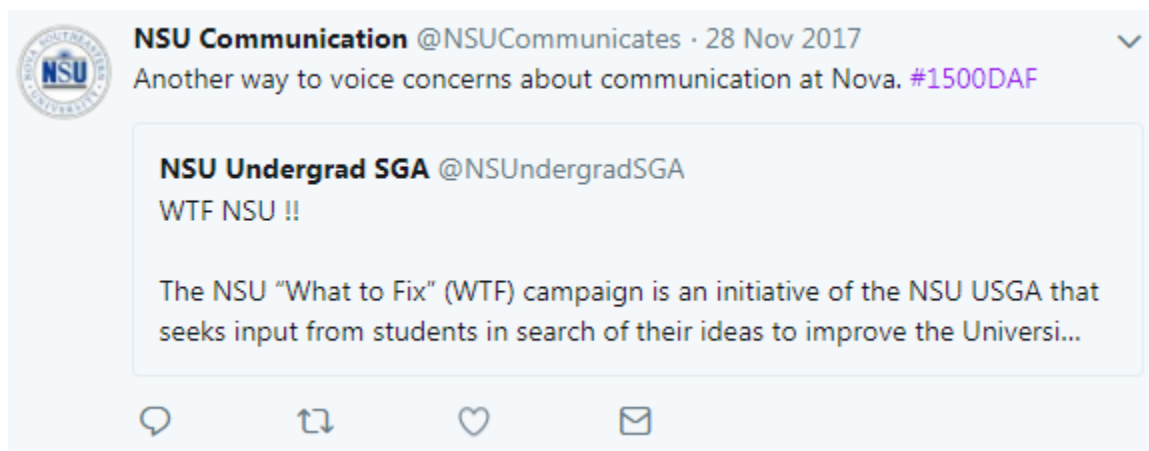


Figure 2. Screenshot of NSU Communication November 28 tweet. @NSUCommunicates. “Another way to voice concern about communication at Nova.” *Twitter*, 28 Nov. 2107, 10:57 a.m., [twitter.com/NSUCommunicates/status/935583521065889793](https://twitter.com/NSUCommunicates/status/935583521065889793)

In addition to the tweets updating readers of their process, the group, according to Scanlon, created *Instagram* and *Facebook* accounts, trying to reach as many NSU undergraduates as possible. And, in a final tweet (figure 3), the group sent the results of the survey to its audience.



Figure 3. Screenshot of NSU Communication tweet with results. @NSUCommunicates. “Here are the final results for the survey! . . .” *Twitter*, 28 Nov. 2017, 1:05 p.m., [twitter.com/NSUCommunicates/status/935615691675316225](https://twitter.com/NSUCommunicates/status/935615691675316225)

The @NSUCommunicates group used *Twitter* to report back on their process, engage the broader NSU Community, and share findings. They also used the platform as a way to highlight and showcase other avenues to voice concerns (e.g., figure 2).

Alternatively, @NSU\_Food went beyond tweeting about their process and utilized *Twitter*’s conventions even more fully in reaching their particular audience. Initial tweets spoke directly to the group’s intended audience and included survey links for students to fill out (see figure 4). Beyond just calling attention to the cause, the group invited readers to participate in the survey and share their voices. The body of the tweets aimed to incite readers to take action and participate in the group’s research.



Figure 4. NSUFOOD survey tweets. @NSU\_Food. “Good evening fellow vegans and vegetarians. . . .” *Twitter*, 28 Nov. 2017, twitter.com/NSU\_Food/status/935584030015270915, 935584228917612545, 935585951509827584.

Beyond including the survey in their tweets @NSU\_Food was also purposeful in the ways that it spoke to its intended audience. For example, in the figure 4 tweets, the group called out NSU vegan and vegetarian students specifically (“Good evening fellow vegans and vegetarians”) and referred to their audience directly throughout the tweets. Beyond just reporting on their process, @NSU\_Food drew their audience into the cause by pointing out common issues vegetarians and vegans might face (e.g., “. . . you must know how much we struggle in eating good food”). In these tweets, the group is continuously addressing its audience, calling attention to problems they might all share, and pointing them to the survey they want the group to complete.

Recognizing the reach of their complaints, the @NSU\_Food group went beyond just addressing vegetarians and vegans on campus. The group appealed to the broader NSU community, pointing towards complaints that many might experience (see figure 5). By calling attention to things like “FAKE eggs, half RAW waffles, and BURNT

pancakes,” and using #NSU, the group moves past targeting just vegetarians and vegans on campus by outlining complaints that go beyond that group. In the figure 5 tweet, the group makes no mention to vegetarians or vegans, instead using upper case words to draw reader’s attention to the content of the tweet.

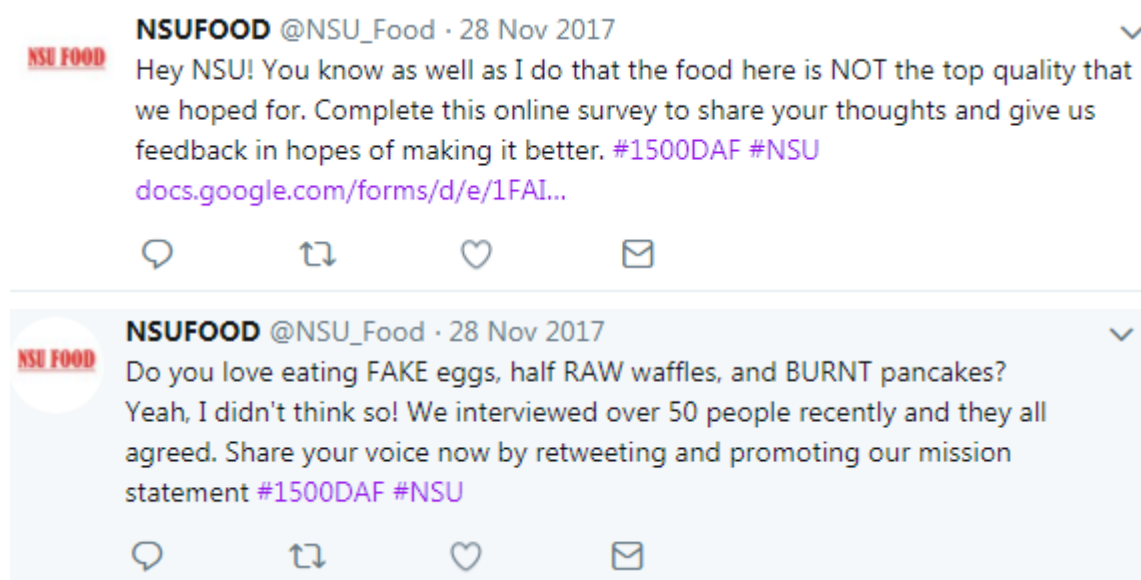


Figure 5. NSUFOOD share your voice tweet. @NSU\_Food et al. “Hey NSU! . . .” *Twitter*, 28 Nov. 2017, twitter.com/NSU\_Food/status/935584030015270915, 935584228917612545, 935585951509827584.

Like @NSU Communicates, @NSU\_Food shared the results from its survey on *Twitter* (see figure 6). Both @NSUCommunicates and @NSU\_Food included a graph of their results. Instead of just relying on a textual summary, both groups included some sort of data visualization. The visuals reinforced the messages that the groups were aiming to articulate throughout their data collection process. While both groups used the class hashtag in their tweets, @NSU\_Food also included hashtags that reached out to the larger NSU community—like #NSU and #WorldMarket (figure 6).



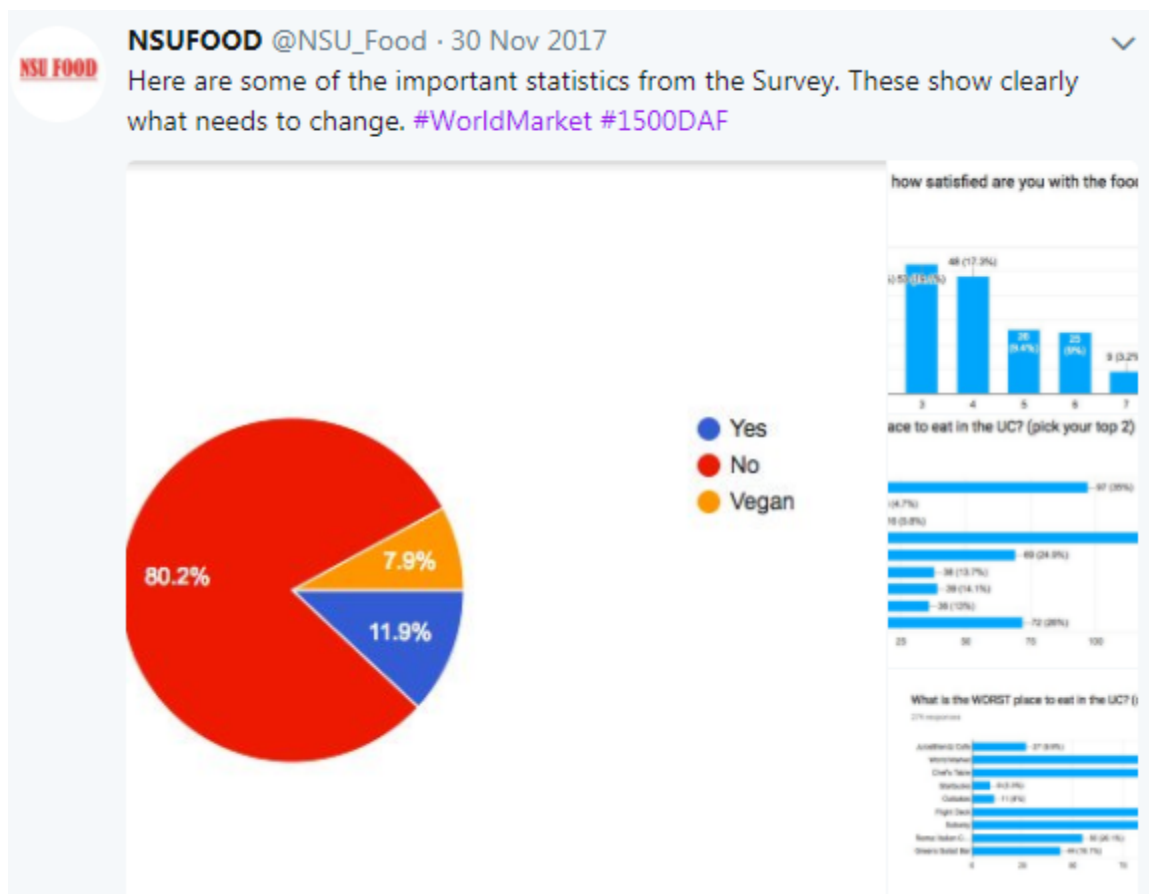


Figure 6. NSUFOOD tweet that shows results. @NSU\_Food. “Here are some important statistics from the Survey. . . .” *Twitter*, 29 Nov. 2017, 11:19 p.m., [twitter.com/NSU\\_Food/status/936132570319937536](https://twitter.com/NSU_Food/status/936132570319937536).

Since the initial @NSU\_Food tweets were sent out on November 28<sup>th</sup>, and only two days later results were posted, I was a bit puzzled at the fast results and sent Scanlon an email with an inquiry about the dates. In a follow-up email, the instructor clarified that most of the students used their personal *Twitter* accounts to reach out to schoolmates. Scanlon reported that they used their personal accounts to elicit the survey responses because the group account did not have any ethos attached to it, and they didn’t want people seeing the tweets and thinking that they were being spammed.

### *Teacher Interview*

The interview with Scanlon helped me better understand how the class was structured and how the different assignments were framed. The first thing Scanlon did was provide scaffolding. She spent a class session with the students going over the basics of *Twitter* and helped them to create accounts for the class. She said that even though most of the students had accounts and had tweeted before, about 70% of the class really didn't know some of the basics of tweeting—like how to thread tweets. The class had three assignments that centered on *Twitter*. For assignments 1 and 2 students had to choose and observe a hashtag, then write about it. That early use of *Twitter* was meant to teach them the conventions and help prepare them for the work they did in assignment 3 (the aforementioned group projects).

In responding to the question, “Did the students fulfill your expectation of using *Twitter*?” Scanlon said that they had; and in addition, she was “surprised” at their savviness when they had to execute the group project. She said that she had not expected them to use *Twitter* as a platform to engage with their audience about their causes (they were only required to tweet about the process they would be using), nor did she expect them to incorporate other social media sites to get their audience to respond to their surveys. In addition, she pointed out, students also used *Twitter* to share the results from their surveys, putting the information back into the public sphere and keeping their audience informed (see figures 3 and 6).

In questioning Scanlon about her purpose for using social media in her writing class, the professor said she decided to use social media because it was a way to give her students a chance to do more authentic writing, like what they may have to do in the real

world. When asked why she chose *Twitter*, Scanlon explained, “I thought if I could teach writing in the context of the public sphere—in a democratic society like this, where we believe information and informed opinions are what make good citizens—that would be a really cool way to make writing less intimidating to them.” She believed that *Twitter* would provide a prominent, authentic public space where her students could learn about important issues without being fearful.

She also expected that *Twitter*’s formula of small chunks and the ease in which one can follow a conversation would make it efficient and simple for students to grasp as they digested many perspectives on an issue. “Having real-life discussions that model what happens on *Twitter* also taught the students to think before being reactionary. It broadened their understanding of writing and how to approach it. They gained more confidence and liked writing about something that interested them, because it made the process more interesting,” Scanlon declared.

When asked, “In what ways did students respond to the use of *Twitter*?” Scanlon replied, “I didn’t hear any complaints. I didn’t get any resistance. There was no posturing, if they didn’t know it, they said so.” And, they told her, in their course reflections, how much they enjoyed using *Twitter*. According to Scanlon, one student was so thrilled with the paper she wrote that she sent it home for her parents to read. Another celebrated being able to choose her own topic, after years of writing classes where she was given topics. Scanlon related a story about the first time the students tweeted to summarize readings from a textbook. Scanlon tagged one of the authors in the student’s tweet, and the author clicked “like.” According to the professor, “The student was in awe, and it made the author more real. They all suddenly seemed to realize how *Twitter* can bring them into

contact with influential people.” According to Scanlon, the students’ contact with the author they read in the course made them realize that *Twitter* wasn’t just for socializing, they could actually reach out and touch an authoritative figure and network in cyberspace.

Scanlon admitted that she was somewhat afraid of using social media in her classroom, when she was asked “What did you learn about using social media, *Twitter* in particular, in your writing class?” She said, “I was afraid of *Twitter* and the culture of hate on the Internet. I didn’t want to expose my students to that. But, we created our own community with our hashtag and it kept us insulated.”

Scanlon expressed her delight with the results from using *Twitter* in her writing class. When asked “Would you use social media in your classroom again? If so, what would you do the same and what would you do differently?” she claimed that “Yes, I would absolutely use it again!” She elaborated on how she would still use the same assignments and in the same way. But, next time, she would hope to have time to use *Twitter* to teach summary and thesis statements and provide sentence-level writing help for the students as well as include it as part of the revision process of writing. Scanlon reported that some students had expressed that they wanted more resources on quality writing on the sentence level.

She also explained that she did not engage with the students on *Twitter* because she wanted them to talk to each other and use her as a base. But, Scanlon admitted that her engagement with them on *Twitter* is something she would change next time. “In online teaching the only way to get students to authentically engage is if you are responding to them. I should have done that more,” she acknowledged. “Next time, I

would have a much more intentional weekly tweeting activity . . . maybe a conversation that looks at what is on *Twitter* and talk about it in real time. Maybe something to tweet over the weekend and I respond to them. I would tweet back to them a lot more,” Scanlon said.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

As I discussed in the results section, my surveys, tweet analysis, and instructor interview focused broadly on (1) students' social media use and how that changes when placed into educational contexts, (2) the ways the rhetorical conventions they employ on *Twitter* change along with their audience, and (3) how students' freedom of choice can help enhance their creativity in the classroom. In the discussion section, I will further examine how my findings compare to the research previously conducted on *Twitter* use in higher education, focusing on these three themes.

These findings allow me to make the following conclusions in response to my research questions. Scaffolding is very important for the effective use of *Twitter* in the classrooms. In addition, although students indicated in their surveys that they saw *Twitter* as a place mainly for social interaction, they reported that their perceptions changed after using it in the composition class. Despite their positive responses to *Twitter* use in the surveys, the students tweeted very little for their COMP 1500 class. This suggested that although they are plugged into social media and report using it on average more than 3 hours daily, because it was not part of an assignment, they were minimally using it for class.

### *Scaffolding and Privacy*

To successfully use *Twitter* as a teaching tool, instructors need to provide scaffolding and be vigilant about protecting students' privacy. The use of *Twitter* for this college writing class aligned with existing scholarship demonstrating the importance of scaffolding (Lin et al.; West et al.). As Lin et al.'s research indicate, scaffolding prevents students from struggling (44). And, the West et al. research showed that inadequate

instruction can cause the absence of student engagement on *Twitter*. In both these studies, a detailed lesson on how to use *Twitter* was eliminated and may have contributed to the lack of student engagement. In this case, Scanlon's lesson instructed students on the lesser known *Twitter* conventions that would help them be more successful later on in the course. Even though all students, but one, had indicated on survey 1 that they used *Twitter*, according to Scanlon, most were not versed on its ins and outs.

Teachers cannot presume that because most students spend a lot of time on social media that they know how to navigate each platform (Lin et al. 43; West et al. 162). By helping students recognize those conventions early on, Scanlon tried to avoid specific challenges (like students struggling with how to use *Twitter*) classrooms can face with a lack of scaffolding. Scanlon also helped her students to create an account just for class (instead of using a personal one), furnishing a measure that gave her students some personal privacy (Lin et al. 44). Even with this option available to them, three students chose to use their personal *Twitter* handles for the course. Because of scaffolding, when students had more to say than the 140-character limit would allow, they utilized threads, something Scanlon had taught them.

#### *Social Media Use and Tweeting*

In addition to providing scaffolding and being mindful of students' privacy, Scanlon created a class hashtag so the class' interactions could be easily collected and searched. The participants learned about the history of hashtags in class and used hashtags to search for their research topics. When it came to applying the class hashtag in their own tweets, an appraisal of their tweets showed that 3 out of 10 students never used the #1500DAF. West et al. suggest that inexperience and intimidation can discourage

students from using *Twitter*. The less comfortable students are with the platform, the more likely they are to shy away from it (162). And, the 3 students who never used the class hashtag in this study were also the ones who only tweeted once each during the entire semester (Amy, Kelly, and Olga), to send the professor the topic they would be following. In survey 1, Olga indicated that she did not use *Twitter* on a daily basis, and both Amy and Kelly checked “1–5 times” for how often they used *Twitter* on a typical day. Because one of these students was not on *Twitter* beforehand, and because it wasn’t clear how the other two used *Twitter* outside of class, the results suggested that the students who were less familiar with *Twitter* were less likely to use it. Within the broader scholarship, Lin et al.’s research also indicates the importance of student familiarity with a platform to increase their success in the course. Instructors need to be aware that if their students are not on a specific platform already, asking them to use it for class adds another layer of complexity to their tasks (Lin et al 43).

Even if some students were inexperienced and less comfortable with using *Twitter*, feedback from Scanlon indicated that generally, the students enjoyed using the social media platform for choosing their own topics and following timely subjects. And, students’ perceptions about *Twitter* as a writing resource changed after using it for their Comp 1500 class. Seven out of 9 participants answered affirmatively on survey 2 when asked “Do you think that social media was beneficial to your learning experience?” One participant said it made her more eager to do the work. Others stated that it was a new, beneficial experience to learn how to use it as a source of writing. One said, “it is a new way to learn in a familiar setting.” The responses from survey 2 indicated that the majority of participants had positive perceptions of *Twitter* after using it in the class and



that the class met or exceeded the students' expectations. Like the students in the Davis and Yin study, these participants had primarily only used *Twitter* for personal communication. But, after utilizing it in class, they were enlightened to its many possibilities. The Davis and Yin students described using *Twitter* in class as "empowering, powerful, and revolutionary" (48).

While the students may have indicated positive responses for *Twitter* use overall, it's important for instructors bringing it into the classroom to be aware of students who may be stepping outside of their comfort zone when asked to use social media (West et al. 162). For example, one of the students indicated that she did not find the use of social media in the course beneficial. She also did not list *Twitter* as one of her favorite social media platforms (choosing *Snapchat*, *Facebook*, and *Instagram* as her top three), reported spending a minimal amount of time on social media (2 hours) compared to her classmates, and indicated that she was not comfortable sharing online. The combination of decreased time on social media and apprehension to sharing materials can suggest that students' personal social media use and expectations can impact their perceptions of it in the classroom. As the student indicated, she was uncomfortable sharing ("I don't want to say something that would offend someone") and it showed her reluctance to participating in class could have been because of her personal views of sharing on social media and being put into a context where she was asked to share. However, as prior research shows (Lin et al. 43), by creating accounts just for the use of *Twitter* in class (therefore separating the personal from the educational handles), students are offered some protection of privacy. Often, as in this case study, the sharing is being done with classmates or schoolmates and their instructor and not with strangers.

While sharing on social media can make some students uncomfortable, students in this study did interact with their instructor without apparent discomfort. Even though Scanlon only interacted with the students once on *Twitter*, the participants included her handle in almost 89% of their tweets. In 38 out of the 41 tweets, the students included the teacher's handle, often replying to her original tweet with ideas and comments generated from class discussion. They kept a constant connection with the teacher. A few studies (Dunlap and Lowenthal; Junco et al.) show that the social link between student and teacher on social networks is critical and has to be nurtured. When students and instructors interact online, Dunlap and Lowenthal maintain that it stirs student motivation and that the students report that the connection, whether formal or informal, "helps them get through the rough times and keep on working" (130). Since Scanlon's students' tweeting was used more for practice and was not an integral part of the students' assignments, their tweeting was an extension of that in-class connection. If an instructor was to bring in *Twitter* more extensively in their course, it would be important for them to be active in modeling the kinds of interaction they expect their students to have.

The results from both surveys clearly indicate that most of the students report that they are comfortable using social media and do so on a daily basis. A majority of the participants indicated in their survey responses to engaging on social media more than 16 times a day, which aligns with Manuel and Schunke's notion that social media is where most college students can be found, so teachers can create lessons to try to connect with their students online (112). As the survey results also indicated, all 10 participants used social media for personal use. But, when it came to tweeting for class, the students only tweeted on three specific days during the semester. Just as in the Lin et al. study, it was

not compulsory for the students to tweet, so they did very little tweeting. And, in this research, as with Lin et al.'s, despite the lack of tweeting, the students indicated a strong affinity in their survey responses to using social media for class. They enjoyed utilizing it as a resource for finding authentic topics for their writing.

#### *Mechanics and Audience Awareness with Individual Tweets*

Seven out of 10 participants responding to survey 1 and 2 indicate that they pay “a lot” or “some” attention to content, grammar, spelling, and punctuation when they post on social media. But, the tweets displayed that the students actually paid less attention than they indicated. While the content of most of the individual tweets was clear (@Vicki: “Writing will always be relevant. It is constantly being reused and revised”), more than 75% of them were missing proper punctuation, some were not complete sentences, and a few showed incorrect verb tense agreements (@Mike: “That is where ethos, pathos, and logos comes into place, showing the students which rhetors have the most credibility”). Since the tweets were not part of graded assignment, the students’ focus appeared to be solely on the content. Even so, when the participants had to tweet for the group project, more care was taken with their prose (including grammar and punctuation).

When the students did tweet throughout the semester, they showed a heightened rhetorical and audience awareness—especially with tweets directed at their teacher and sent out for the group projects. For example, in their interactions with Scanlon, the students’ tweets were formal and summarized material that was discussed in class. Furthermore, when talking with one another in the individual tweets, while the students were still discussing class material, their tone was more casual (@Mike replying to

@Lisa “Relaxxxxxx, that only happens when people are liars [emoticon] #1500DAF”). However, in all the individual tweets, the topics were strictly focused on class material and never strayed (@Mike replying to @Lisa @profmscanlon “Actually... rhetoric can help us in educational ways, such as showing us what is right from wrong and become effective communicators #1500DAF”). Whether using a formal or casual tone, along with their use of the class hashtag, the tweets illustrate that the participants were very aware of their role as students within the context of a class.

As Amber Buck indicates in her study, students adapt their personas to match their audiences—as her participant did in catering to his wider audience on *Facebook* and his close friends on *Twitter* (“Examining” 18). While the students in Scanlon’s class may not have been tweeting beyond the required conversations during particular days of the course, like Amber Buck’s participant, they catered their tweets to the recipients. As an outsider reading the tweets, without the context of the course, those individual tweets were often difficult to understand. Because the students were speaking to one another as part of a class-based conversation, their tweets demonstrated an awareness of that specific audience and purpose. Alternatively, and as will be discussed further, when tweeting in groups as part of their final projects, the students’ tweets showed a recognition that their audience went beyond their instructor and those in the class and they thus used more sophisticated means of interacting with that audience through their language, use of hashtags and media, and content of the tweets.

Instead of focusing on grammatical elements in their tweets, the students’ individual tweets were often in response to course content and the emphasis was on continuing classroom discussion. The use of the individual tweets in the classroom

unfolded more like a conversation than a structured response (for e.g., @Lisa replying to @Mike @profmscanlon: “Actually... rhetoric #exposes innocent minds to ambiguous moral messages that they should be protected from. #micdrop #1500DAF;” Mike replying to @Lisa @profmscanlon: “Actually... rhetoric can help us in educational ways, such as showing us what is right from wrong and become effective communicators #1500DAF.”). In this exchange, the students’ conversation was based on a class discussion, but they were responding to each other’s ideas with their own interpretations of the topic. The conversational aspects of *Twitter* helps facilitate this kind of exchange that can mirror the exchanges taking place in the classroom (Dunlap and Lowenthal; Junco et al.). According to Dunlap and Lowenthal’s research, it is those conversational elements that are of the most beneficial in courses using *Twitter* (131).

Further indicating that the exchange was taking place as part of a course was the content that students were tweeting about. While some of the participants only tweeted to send Scanlon the hashtag they would be following (@Vicki “I will be studying #Irma”), other students aimed to demonstrate their mastery of course material to Scanlon. The students delivered the messages in a format that was appropriate for the teacher—even though they weren’t being graded or monitored. Attempting to subvert *Twitter*’s character limitations, some students utilized threads rather than condensing their responses. Cara’s thread about hashtags, for example, was formal and informational, as if answering an essay question: (“Hashtags are used to organize and to express/elaborate emotion. People use # to start movements such as campaigns 1/3; Hashtags are used in text messages, social media posts, spoken English, marketing, and even in education. 2/3; Hashtags are used as a form of emphasis to get your point across quicker and more effectively. 3/3”).

She was sure to include as much information as possible while still ensuring that each tweet was coherent and readable on its own. Rather than limiting herself to the character limit, Cara utilized the conventions Scanlon outlined to get her point across. She wanted to make her teacher aware that she knew the class material.

When tweeting individually, even the various topics (e.g., hashtags, rhetoric, genres, and writing) appeared to have been generated by likely course subjects. Because the focus of *Twitter* seemed to be generating conversation between students and around a topic (particularly on September 19 and 21, and October 17), rather than just reporting back to Scanlon or something more formal, the students' use of conventions mirrored what was appropriate for a more conversational exchange—similar to the connection shared in the West et al. study where *Twitter* was used to connect undergraduates in and out of the classroom. In West et al.'s study, being able to share increased class participation, student engagement, and enthusiasm.

#### *Rhetorical and Audience Awareness in Group Tweets*

When the students tweeted as a group for their final project, rhetorical and audience awareness were front and center. Unlike when the students were tweeting individually in response to content or questions from class, students' group tweets were meant to appeal to a broader audience. Because the students were tasked with bringing awareness to an issue on campus, the assignment already positioned them to think beyond the limited teacher/student audience. And, according to Darling, a real-world audience beyond classmates and instructor encourages student confidence. The increased audience awareness called for in the assignment's design, meant that the participants had to find a way to reach their audience and get their feedback about their cause with some sense of

immediacy. While the students utilized different mediums as part of their assignment, their tweets point to an enhanced attempt to reach their audience beyond those in the class.

One of the constraints that students faced with the assignment was that their group accounts didn't have the same followings as their individual accounts. The four groups only had from 2 to 8 followers. Because the students did not have time throughout the semester to build a following, group members, like those in @NSU\_Food, used their personal *Twitter* accounts to reach out to their intended audience. According to Scanlon, the students wanted to be sure that their tweets would not be considered spam and that the receivers would recognize the senders' handles and respond. To document their process, as the class assignment required, the students then shared their personal tweets on the group page. Using their personal handles was a rhetorical choice to overcome a lack of following within the groups. The students knew their audience and targeted them accordingly.

The groups also used rhetorical awareness to see their audience as not just receivers of their message, but as recomposers who could help get their plight out to more people and bring in additional responses (Sheridan et al. 78). Rhetorical velocity is defined by Sheridan et al. as "rapidity at which information is crafted, delivered, distributed, recomposed, redelivered, redistributed, etc., across physical and virtual networks and spaces" (78). Rhetorical velocity is the speed that a text travels as it goes from creation to redistribution across cyberspace. When composers craft with rhetorical velocity in mind, they are hoping for remix and reuse of their material. In Scanlon's class, by targeting other NSU undergraduates, vegetarians and vegans, and the #NSU

community through hashtags and the content of their tweets, the students in @NSU\_Food anticipated the need for their work to get shared. The students had to give some thought to making their messages easy to be retweeted and be redistributed across the social media platforms. Rather than limit themselves to people they knew, the students tried to reach out to the entire NSU undergraduate population by targeting sororities, the undergraduate student government association, and by using other social media platforms to make sure their message reached undergraduates who were not *Twitter* users.

Along with composing with rhetorical velocity in mind, the students took advantage of kairos in how they maintained their audience's attention. As Sheridan et al. explain, kairos deals with "'the right moment' or the 'opportune'" (6). Not only must the timing be right, but the aim of the message must be precise to produce specific results. In Scanlon's class, in doing their projects, the groups took advantage of the attention they got from their audience to immediately link them to a survey and to ask them to retweet and promote the mission. As a result, @NSU\_Food received almost 300 responses to its survey. Although students in Scanlon's class may not have been familiar with terms like rhetorical velocity or kairos, their group tweets indicated that students implicitly knew how to share their messages so they could reach the broadest possible audience.

Beyond their appeal to different groups and use of personal accounts, the groups used hashtags and other multimedia elements to appeal to their intended audience, other NSU undergraduates, in order to get feedback on their causes (communication, transportation, health care accessibility, and campus food offerings). The style of writing the students employed in the group tweets, acknowledgment of common concerns, and use of upper case words, attempted to connect to other students beyond the class and



draw their attention to the problem. For example, in figure 4, @NSU\_Food reached out with, “Good evening fellow vegans and vegetarians, if your anything like me then you must know how much we struggle in eating good food. We are more than just salads and fruit! Take our survey to make a change! #1500DAF #NSU.” The group connected explicitly with vegetarians who would have a difficult time finding healthy food choices on campus. By connecting the message of the tweet with the survey, the groups made it easy for the audience to participate in their plight.

By using bar graphs and pie charts, the groups shared results with their audience utilizing visual rhetoric to grab their reader’s attention and disseminate the results (figures 3 and 6). Visual rhetoric, according to Sonja K. Foss, is “the purposive production or arrangement of colors, forms, and other elements to communicate with an audience” (143). It is not just the images and artifacts that make something visual rhetoric, but how we create and present them for audience interpretation. While tweets consist mainly of words, images can be added and typography can be adjusted through the use of upper case words to make words jump out at readers. In this case, the colorful pie charts from @NSUCommunicates highlighted the overall positive and negative responses and the grade-level of the respondents (figure 3). The bar graph presented the main ways in which students communicated with faculty members and administration. Like @NSUCommunicates, @NSU\_Food also used visual rhetoric by using eye-catching, clear graphics to display their results (figure 6). Immediately one can tell that 80.2% of the survey respondents were not vegetarian, while 11.9% were, and 7.9% were vegan. The visual elements were used to appeal and communicate to the audience (Foss 144).

*Creativity, Connections, Choices*

In addition to promoting rhetorical and audience awareness, this study showed that using *Twitter* encourages students to be creative, as they were with the group projects. Besides the expressive language used in some of the @NSU\_Food tweets already mentioned, the groups used hashtags to get more attention. The students were creative in targeting their audience, reaching out beyond the obvious, to groups like sororities. The groups also went farther than just using *Twitter*, as they turned to other sites to contact undergraduates. They knew that *Twitter* was not a popular platform for their schoolmates, according to Scanlon, so they employed the use of more popular social media networks to reach their audience and get responses to their surveys.

Social media provided students with access to a broader audience, beyond just their classmates, for sharing information about their causes. Rutherford suggests that social media broadens and increases interactions between students (705). Scanlon confirmed the interaction. In response to the question “Did the students fulfill your expectations of using *Twitter*?” she reported that the groups collaborated with each other and other NSU students to tout their causes in person and by using other social media platforms, besides *Twitter*, to reach out.

Rutherford also indicates that the interaction that social media provides can add to students’ learning, takes them away from traditional assignments, and lets them relate to what they write (705). Scanlon agrees. When asked why she chose to use social media in her classroom, Scanlon replied, “Students are over prepackaged lessons. *Twitter* is real. Looking on *Twitter* for something that is fodder for what you want to study as a social

issue is not the same as reading an excerpt from a textbook. Learning unfolds organically.” Like Rutherford, Scanlon asserts that students are bored with institutional teaching and that by providing students with authentic topics they are kept engaged and knowledge evolves naturally. Scanlon’s use of *Twitter* also supports Rutherford’s research that touts social media as an effective learning environment that can support education (704). Having a choice of authentic contexts lets students bond with the subjects they are going to write about, Scanlon maintains. And, whether it’s something they know or a topic that has piqued their interest, Scanlon says that allowing students a choice in their topics had a positive effect on their writing.

Throughout her class, Scanlon was also doing what Micciche touted when she said that we need to teach students “to produce effective writing that has some relevancy to the world we live in. . . .” (717). In Micciche’s article, she encourages giving students topics to help them create writing that is applicable to the real world. In having students use *Twitter* as part of class to follow relevant, timely topics and write about them, Scanlon is employing a similar model to Micciche’s suggested process. The professor also was providing what Murray promoted—that students need to choose their own topics and use their own language to tell their stories. By bringing *Twitter* into the classroom as a pedagogical resource, Scanlon gave the students a familiar environment, where they spend a lot of time daily, to jump-start their writing.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

To successfully employ social media as a pedagogical tool, instructors must first have a purpose and a plan for using it in their class. They should know exactly what they want to achieve and how, by incorporating the platforms into teaching. Most importantly, they need to provide proper scaffolding. “Don’t assume that students know all the technology and are versed on all the social media platforms,” warns Scanlon. Start them out with specific instructions, she advises. Furthermore, when bringing social media into the classroom, teachers have to be ready, willing, and able. When asked, “After using social media as a pedagogical resource in your writing class, what helpful hints or advice would you give other college professors?” Scanlon reiterated that scaffolding is important. Unlike the Lin et al. study, where the students were not sure how to use *Twitter* or the class hashtag, Scanlon gave her class a thorough lesson on both.

In their survey responses about using social media in the classroom, students indicated that they were motivated, with one participant saying: “It made me more eager to do the work on time instead of procrastinating.” And, by taking that fervor into the classroom where Scanlon provided guidance and sculpting, 8 out of 9 students who responded to survey 2 indicated that *Twitter* helped their writing. In addition, Scanlon reports that the students lauded *Twitter* for offering relevant and timely issues, where they could pick ones that either interested them or had special meaning. In survey 2 the students had positive things to say about using *Twitter*. “It helped by providing examples of the new ways we use writing and how it’s changing and constantly evolving,” wrote Mike. “It helped in applying writing to the real world rather than the typical 5-paragraph essay,” declared Olga. Scanlon believes that having the students choose their topics

added strength to their writing in terms of content and clarity. And, using *Twitter* as a source for real-world topics was one method that points to how using social media as a pedagogical resource to teach composition can benefit both students and teachers. If students are motivated, they can learn more; instructors get their students into a realm of writing that intrigues them and helps improve their writing.

Whether using it alongside an LMS, a place for collaboration, or a venue to gather authentic topics, students need details and reminders of what is expected of them when using social media for class. If their use of the social networking platforms is important to the classwork, make it a part of their grade. And, the professor's presence online with the students is tantamount to student engagement and performance. If used as aforementioned, social media has the possibility to harness student enthusiasm and turn it into positive learning.

My research took a look at how one writing professor used *Twitter*, and it evaluated the work and feedback of 10 students during one semester of a first-year writing class. It may be helpful to do research with a larger number of students to increase the information gathered and gain more valuable data. In addition, it would be useful to take a look at two writing classes (maybe being taught by the same teacher), one using *Twitter* and one using traditional methods, to compare and contrast the students' engagement and writing. It could also help to evaluate more than one class using *Twitter*. In addition to using *Twitter* as a resource for students to choose topics occurring in the real world, it would be beneficial to take a look at how *Twitter* can help students with their sentence-level writing, something that my research was not able to do. In survey 1, completed midway during the semester, 5 of the students checked answers that indicated

that they needed “some help” to improve their writing, while a student selected that he needed “a lot of help,” yet another checked “I hate writing.” Seven out of the 10 students indicated that they need some assistance with their writing. The exact question was not asked on survey 2, but when asked “How did the use of social media in the class help, or not help, improve your writing?” One student wrote that, “it didn’t help,” while another reported that “It challenged me to squeeze all the information into 140 words.” Yet another stated that social media “. . . helped in applying writing to the real world rather than the typical 5-paragraph essay.” Eight out of 9 students indicated that it was beneficial to their writing.

Additionally, when the teacher was interviewed and asked “Would you use social media in your classroom again? If so, what would you do the same and what would you do differently?” as part of her response she said that in getting mid-term feedback from the students, some of them expressed interest in doing more work that focused on sentence-level writing. She said she would do more of that work next time. Viewing some of the undergraduates’ written answers on the surveys, it was clear that their knowledge of grammar and punctuation needed to be enhanced. Prior scholarship points to the use of *Twitter* as a good pedagogical tool to help students write concisely and clearly (Davis and Yin; Dunlap and Lowenthal; Kinsky and Bruce). Future research could pinpoint, in more detail, how *Twitter* can help students’ writing evolve to a higher overall level.

The students tweeted a minimal amount in this study. Tweeting was neither mandatory nor structured. However, with the tweets they did produce, the participants showed a heightened rhetorical and audience awareness by always aiming their content

specifically at their intended readers. It would be advantageous if future research also could provide a sentence-level assessment of the students' tweets, which may mean making the task of tweeting compulsory. Also, it would be good to identify what motivates students to tweet (or prevents them from tweeting).

While this study confirms that using *Twitter* in the classroom can help instructors of first-year composition, continued research needs to provide more effective strategies for utilizing social media platforms as a pedagogical resource to increase students' rhetorical awareness on social networking sites. As students spend more and more time online and negotiate social media spaces, it's important that they learn how to maneuver in those environments and manage their identities—much of which is done with their writing. Instructors wishing to incorporate social media into their writing classrooms should be aware of potential limitations (like students who are uncomfortable or unwilling to participate on social network sites), while still taking advantage of the benefits. By offering students options—like creating accounts just for the class—making social media use part of assignments, and providing scaffolding, instructors can avoid some of the limitations both students in other research (Jacquemin et al.; Junco et al.; Lin et al.), and in this study, faced. When these considerations are kept in mind, there are many potential ways instructors might use *Twitter* to engage their students and offer them a different approach to the writing process.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A—Online Survey 1

## "Using Social Media as a Pedagogical Resource to Teach Writing in College"—Survey 1

The purpose of this study is to research social media as a pedagogical resource for teaching writing in college. The surveys will ask you 20 questions about your use of social media, before and during your composition class.

\* Required

1. What is the Twitter handle that you will use for your Comp1500 class? \*

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2. How do you use social media? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- For personal use
- For work
- For school
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. In a typical day, about how many hours do you spend on social networking websites? \*

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### Use of Social Media

4. Which social media sites do you use daily? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Pinterest
- Tumblr
- Reddit
- Flickr
- Google+
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

5. List, in order of importance, the top 3 social media platforms you visit most often. \*

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6. In a typical day, how often do you engage (comment, like, or share) with other social media users' activities (posts, photos, etc.)? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- 1-5 times
- 6-10 times
- 11-15 times
- 16-20 times
- Not often
- I usually just lurk
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you take a stand on social or political issues online? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Often
- Sometimes
- Very little
- Not at all
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Which of the following groups are you comfortable sharing content and/or comments with online? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- Family
- Friends
- Co-workers or professional networks
- Strangers
- I am not comfortable sharing.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_



9. Why are or why aren't you comfortable sharing? \*

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## Use of Twitter

10. In a typical day, how often do you use Twitter? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- 16-20 times
- 11-15 times
- 6-10 times
- 1-5 times
- Not at all
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

11. In a typical day, how do you use Twitter? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- For work
- For school
- For social interaction
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

12. What is your perception of Twitter? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- It is used for news.
- It is used for politics.
- It is used for sports.
- It is a platform for pop culture information and following celebrities.
- It is a place to post personal achievements and fun stuff.
- I use it to get traffic updates.
- I use it to check the weather.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Writing Style and Learning

13. How much attention do you pay to content, grammar, spelling, and punctuation when you post on social media? \*

Mark only one oval.

- A lot
- Some
- A little
- None at all
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

14. Please explain your answer to number 13. \*

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15. What do you expect to learn about writing in your COMP 1500 class? \*

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16. Do you think that using social media in this class can help you improve your writing? Why or why not? \*

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17. Where do you think you fall in terms of writing ability? \*

Mark only one oval.

- I write well.
- I need some help to make my writing better.
- I need a lot of help to make my writing better.
- I hate writing.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Background Information

**18. Please choose your race/ethnicity. \***

*Check all that apply.*

- White
- Black
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Biracial
- Multiracial
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**19. What is your gender? \***

*Mark only one oval.*

- Female
- Male
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**20. What is your age group? \***

*Mark only one oval.*

- 18-21
- 22-25
- 26-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- Older than 60

## Appendix B—Online Survey 2

## "Using Social Media as a Pedagogical Resource to Teach Writing in College"—Survey 2

The purpose of this study is to research social media as a pedagogical resource for teaching writing in college. The surveys will ask you 20 questions about your use of social media before and during your composition class.

\* Required

1. What is the Twitter handle that you used for your Comp 1500 class? \*

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Before this class, had you ever used Twitter as part of a course? \*

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. In a typical week, how much time did you spend using Twitter for your Comp 1500 class? \*

Mark only one oval.

1-2 hours

3-4 hours

5-6 hours

Less than an hour

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### General Use of Social Media

4. During the period you were using Twitter for Comp 1500, how many hours did you spend on other social media sites on a typical day? \*

\_\_\_\_\_

5. List, in order of importance, the top 3 social media platforms you visited most often during the aforementioned period? \*

\_\_\_\_\_

6. In a typical day, how often did you engage (comment, like, or share) with other social media users' activities (posts, photos, etc.)? \*

Mark only one oval.

- 1-5 times
- 6-10 times
- 11-15 times
- 16-20 times
- Not often
- I usually just lurked
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Using Twitter for Comp 1500

7. Was it difficult adapting your use of Twitter for class tasks? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Why was it difficult or easy to adapt your use of Twitter for Comp 1500? \*

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9. Besides for your Comp 1500 class, how frequently did you take a stand online for any other social or political issues during this time frame? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Daily
- Weekly
- A few times
- Not at all
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. After taking this class, what is your perception of Twitter? \***

*Check all that apply.*

- It is used for news.
- It is used for politics.
- It is used for sports.
- It is a platform for pop culture information and following celebrities.
- It is a place to post personal achievements and fun stuff.
- I use it to get traffic updates.
- I use it to check the weather.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. How has your perception of Twitter changed since taking this class? \***

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**Writing Style and Learning****12. How much attention do you pay to content, grammar, spelling, and punctuation when you post on social media? \***

*Mark only one oval.*

- A lot
- Some
- A little
- None at all
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. Please explain your answer to the prior question. \***

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**14. Did this writing class meet your learning expectations? \****Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- It exceeded my expectations.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**15. Please explain your response to the prior question. \***

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**16. Do you think that using social media was beneficial to your learning experience? \****Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**17. Explain your answer to the prior question. \***

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**18. Was social media instrumental in your engagement in the class? \****Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

19. Explain your answer to the prior question. \*

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20. How did the use of social media in the class help, or not help, improve your writing? \*

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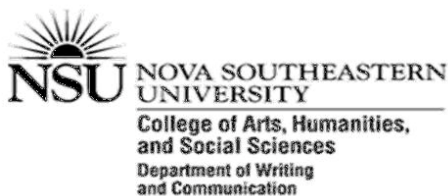
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## Appendix C—Participants’ Consent Form



**Consent form for Participation in the “Using Social Media as a Pedagogical Resource to Teach Writing in College”—This includes taking Survey 1, Survey 2, and having your class Tweets collected and evaluated.**

**Funding Source: None**

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**Initials: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Page 1 of 4**

**What is this research about?**

The purpose of this study is to research social media as a pedagogical resource to teach writing in college. It will take a look at whether or not using social media in the classroom can help first-year college writers be more engaged in the course and become better writers.

**Why are you asking me?**

You are a student in a first-year writing class that will be using Twitter to help teach writing. If you are younger than 18, you cannot participate.

**What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will first fill out an online survey that asks you 20 questions about your social media use, your expectations of your composition class, and your perceptions of social media and writing. Then, as COMP1500 nears the end of the semester, you will fill out a second online survey that will ask questions similar to the first questionnaire. But, it will ask your views after you have engaged with using Twitter for your writing tasks. Each survey should only take about 10 minutes to complete.

As part of your COMP1500 class, you're regularly posting on Twitter. I will be searching the class hashtag (#1500DAF) and collecting those tweets. If you agree to be in this study, you are agreeing to let me copy the tweets with that hashtag and use them as a part of my research. You do not have to do anything additional for this portion of the study.

This consent form is for filling out Survey 1, Survey 2, and allowing your tweets to be collected and evaluated.

**How will you keep my information private?**

To the best of my ability, your information will be kept confidential. All data is stored in a password protected electronic format. To help protect your confidentiality, the surveys will not contain information that will personally identify you other than your Twitter handle. For the purpose of this survey, your Twitter handle is only being used as an identifier to connect your responses to Survey 1 and Survey 2 and to your tweets.

**Initials:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Page 2 of 4**

In regards to your Twitter posts, each handle will be assigned a number (not your real name). For example, handle @flowergirl will become #1; @greenthumb will become #2, and so on. Any analysis or written reports from the study will only use the numeric identifiers (and not your name or Twitter handle). Only the principal investigator will have access to the real handle that corresponds to the assigned number. Your data will be stored for a minimum of 36 months from the conclusion of the study. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

**What are the dangers to me?**

There are no perceived risks of this research. If you have any questions about the research or your research rights, you can contact the researcher listed at the beginning of this consent form. You may also contact the IRB, also listed at the beginning of the form, with questions as to your research rights.

**Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?**

There are no direct benefits; however, this study will provide additional insight into ways to use social media to teach writing and perhaps make the learning of composition more engaging and fulfilling for college students.

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

There are no payments for participation, and there are no costs to you.

**Your grades will NOT be affected by your participation.**

You grade for this class will not be affected by your participation in this study. You will not get a better grade or extra credit for participating, and you will not be penalized for choosing not to participate.

**What if I do not want to participate in the study?**

You have the right to refuse to participate and leave this study at any time. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you, before the date you leave the study, will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study. But, you may request that it not be used.

**Initials: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Page 3 of 4**

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By signing below, you indicate that

- you are 18 years of age or older
- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the “Using Social Media as a Pedagogical Resource to Teach Writing in College”—Survey 1
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the “Using Social Media as a Pedagogical Resource to Teach Writing in College”—Survey 2
- you voluntarily agree to have your class tweets collected and evaluated

Student's Name (Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Person Obtaining Consent (Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Initials:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Page 4 of 4**

## Appendix D—Teacher Consent Form



**“Using Social Media as a Pedagogical Resource to Teach Writing in College”—Consent Form for an interview with the teacher who used Twitter in her Comp 1500, fall 2017 class at NSU.**

**Funding Source: None**

**IRB Protocol #:**

Principal Investigator

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For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact  
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)  
Nova Southeastern University  
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790  
[IRB@nova.edu](mailto:IRB@nova.edu)

**Initials: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Page 1 of 3**

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**What is this research about?**

The purpose of this study is to research social media as a pedagogical resource to teach writing in college. It will take a look at whether or not using social media in the classroom can help first-year college writers be more engaged in the course and become better writers.

**Why are you asking me?**

You are the teacher of the first-year writing class that used Twitter and is being assessed for this project.

**What will I be doing if I agree to be interviewed?**

Your consent means you will be agreeing to a face-to-face interview with the principal investigator. You will be asked 12 questions relating to your use of Twitter in the classroom. We would like to know specifically about the assignments you made, why you made those choices, and get your overall input about your observations of the use of Twitter in your classroom.

**How will the information be used?**

The information you provide will be used to better explain Twitter use in the NSU Comp 1500 class. It will also provide insight by adding to the research and the overall conversation in academia about using social media in the classroom. All the information you provide will be double-checked with you to ensure complete accuracy.

**What are the dangers to me?**

There are no perceived risks of this research. If you have any questions about the research or your research rights, you can contact the researcher listed at the beginning of this consent form. You may also contact the IRB, also listed at the beginning of the form, with questions as to your research rights.

**Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?**

There are no direct benefits; however, this study will provide additional insight to other teachers about ways to use social media to teach writing in the college classroom.

**Initials:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Page 2 of 3**

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**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

There are no payments for participation, and there are no costs to you.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study-related questions in the future
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree to participate in a face-to-face interview for the research project "Using Social Media as a Pedagogical Resource to Teach Writing in College"
- you agree to have the information you provide be included in the research paper

Teacher's Name (Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Person Obtaining Consent (Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Initials:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Page 3 of 3**

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Appendix E—Questions for Teacher Interview

*Using Social Media as a Pedagogical Resource to Teach Writing in College*  
by Carol Reynolds-Srot

**Questions for the professor of Comp 1500/Department of Writing  
and Communication/Fall 2017/Nova Southeastern University**

1. What was your purpose for using social media in your writing class?
  2. Why did you choose Twitter?
  3. How and why did you choose the assignments that you gave the students?
  4. How were the students prompted for each assignment?
  5. Did you give them any guidance or scaffolding to help them use Twitter?
  6. When and what were the students expected to do using Twitter?
  7. Was the use of Twitter part of their grade?
  8. Did the students fulfill your expectations of using Twitter? Why or why not?
  9. In what ways did students respond to the use of Twitter?
  10. What did you learn about using social media, Twitter in particular, in your writing class?
  11. Would you use social media in your classroom again? If so, what would you do the same and what would you do differently?
  12. After using social media as a pedagogical resource in your writing class, what helpful hints or advice would you give other college professors?
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