Book Reviews

Cheal, C., Coughlin, J., & Moore, S. (2012). Transformation in Teaching: Social Media Strategies in Higher Education. Santa Rosa, California: Informing Science Press. 499 pp. ISBN: 1-932886-49-4.

Review by Robert Placido, University of North Texas

College completion is a critical topic for universities, governmental officials, parents and students and the key to improving completion is student engagement. One of the most difficult elements of engaging students is that students are engaged by and through different means. There may be hope. A solution to engagement may be found in social networking. Incredibility, "95% of students under age 25 use a social networking site"(p. 133). Transformation in Teaching: Social Media Strategies in Higher Education, a volume edited by Cheal, Coughlin and Moore provides a window into the vast topic of social networking technology in higher education. Social networks are important to higher education because of their potential to improve. Activities that students enjoy, find entertaining and are done in environments that students are socially engaged in, improves learning outcomes. The volume provides a full view of the topic, by offering history, supported theories and a rich collection of inspirational case studies from which educators may glean ideas.

Social networking is defined as "a virtual community in which participants are able to interact around particular content and identify salient opportunities to engage" (p. 118). The first three chapters set a foundation for the social networking topic. First, the authors provide a history of network analysis. Then they discuss the theories that support and explain the importance of social networks. The theories are broken into three different types: determinism, instrumentalism, and post-modernism. The first three chapters are an ideal starting place for students and faculty to gain an understanding of social networks.

The remaining sixteen chapters are a collection of sixteen sepa-

rate research studies that use the full spectrum of social network technology to improve learning outcomes in a higher education setting. The number and types of social networking technologies are vast. The authors thoughtfully chose a range of research that includes the social network technologies that are most pertinent to impacting learning outcomes in higher education. While the sixteen research chapters provide a broad perspective, all the findings are not generalizable to broad populations because of small sample sizes, problematic selection methods and/or because the studies were completed within a single university scope.

The cases represent social networking types along a spectrum of static/asynchronous to dynamic/synchronous. An example of static and asynchronous social networking is the use of Flickr. Flickr is a photo-sharing site that allows users to post comments about pictures which have been uploaded by millions of Flickr users. The authors, in chapter four, incorporated Flickr in a photography class alongside online comments from both students and teachers. The dialog allowed for non-threatening feedback and heightened engagement. The study found that student satisfaction was higher for photo courses using Flickr as compared to courses without Flickr.

Chapters seven through ten illustrated dynamic and synchronous communication in a 3D virtual world using a technology called Second Life. Second Life was created based on a gaming platform. Students create a 3d representation of themselves. The student's character is called an Avatar. Second Life has the potential to improve learning outcomes in many different ways. The authors illustrated the potential by including research on Second Life that attempted to reduce public speaking apprehension, improve learning though immersive roleplay, and to give students experience working at virtual jobs.

Higher education faculty from different disciplines adopt technology with various levels of vigor. In fact, faculty from certain fields (e.g., humanities) have resisted technology as a whole. The authors attempt to encourage fields not normally associated with technology to explore the possibilities. One of the case studies was conducted by a humanities professor. The author's example of applying social networks illustrated two ideas: the power of groups and the application of social networking in the study of literature. In this study, students were asked to map the travels of the two characters in James Joyce's book Ulysses using Google's online mapping system. The work

would have taken one person many months, but the group project was completed in a few weeks. Ulysses has been studied for nearly one hundred years, making the discovery of anything new difficult. Using Social Networking, the researchers discovered that during one point in the travels of one of the main characters; the character's path took the form of a question mark when viewed on the map (p. 377). What makes the question mark image interesting is that the character was also engaged in deep contemplation of the meaning of self during that part of his travels. The discovery was only possible because the technology allow many users to collect, share and illustrate data in a new way.

The authors are clearly championing the use of social networking in higher education; however, they also fully represent the negatives. The authors agree that the technology still has to be deployed using solid pedagogical approaches. Additionally, teachers should expect more up front time to deal with overcoming technology and setting clear examples for their students to effectively use it (i.e., what constitutes good posting on a blog). Students need introductory preparation with the tools and help setting up new technology on their equipment. The more technically difficult the technology is, the more time is needed. Follow up is also recommended to work through technical issues. Faculty should expect to spend a great deal of time experimenting with social networking to determine what works best for their learning objectives.

Assessment is another challenge when implementing social networking. The very dynamic nature of the exercises makes assessment difficult. Overly incorporated assessment can interfere with the flow of the exercise. On the other hand, some of the social networking technologies provide built in analytics for measuring learning outcomes.

Additionally, social networks create new problems controlling student behavior and protecting individual privacy. There are still many issues to work out using social network technologies that are not managed at the university. For example, should a student's conduct be monitored or corrected if the social networking site is for the student's personal use? A repeated finding presented in this book was that most students don't want to mix their social sites with professional/learning sites.

Applying social networks in higher education has the potential

to deepen our understanding and enrich our learning. This volume serves as a primer in understanding and attempts to inspire faculty to use social networking in their teaching and research.

Jarvis, J. (2011). Public Parts: How Sharing in the Digital Age Improves the Way we Work and Live. New York: Simon & Schuster. 263 pp. ISBN: 9781451636000.

Review by Andrew Battista, University of Montevallo

In the weeks before Facebook's initial public offering on May 18, 2012, some Wall Street pundits guessed that the company could be worth as much as $104 billion. Perhaps the only thing more remarkable than the speculative value of Facebook is the fact that all of its actual value is generated by people who voluntarily reveal information about themselves. Not only do people post links, pictures, videos, and messages to a public audience, but they also share things—thoughts, opinions, pictures from dinners or dates—that as recently as ten years ago would have been considered too private to escape the walls of one's own home. Now, many Facebook users contribute almost every facet of their lives—including political leanings, relationship status, music preferences, travels, and favorite foods—to an ongoing public record. Why do people share such personal things, and what does this pattern of free disclosure say about how today's digital age students think, learn, and acquire information?

The answers to these questions form the thesis of Jeff Jarvis's Public Parts: How Sharing in the Digital Age Improves the Way we Work and Live. Jarvis makes a radical intervention in discussions about social media and privacy. He suggests that we stand to gain much more than we can lose by making information about ourselves public. According to Jarvis, publicness and privacy are interdependent categories that businesses, schools, and colleges need to think about more deeply. He warns that "if we become too obsessed with privacy, we could lose opportunities to make connections in this age of links" (p. 5). Jarvis does admit that public and private are choices we make on a daily basis, and both are accompanied by respective benefits and hazards. Public Parts, then, is a sustained meditation on how we ne-