Amanda Kraft and Aleck F. Williams Jr.

#Shelfies are encouraged

Simple, engaging library instruction with hashtags

The ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* acknowledges that scholarship is a conversation,[1] and, arguably, the best way to communicate with your student patrons outside of the classroom is also one of the most popular outlets for professional, academic discussion in the library world: social media.

Because we have finally reached a point where social networking sites pervade every aspect of our personal and professional lives (and vice versa), the "hashtag" is a near perfect metaphor for the organization, and the sometimes very inconvenient disorganization, of information.

While many librarians may already depend on social media to enhance existing information literacy (IL) activities—and, perhaps, better utilize the instructional technologies in their classrooms—not everyone is onboard. In fact, for some librarians, the idea of incorporating the social media prowess of college students into instruction sounds pretty nightmarish. This is unfortunate, because in addition to spicing up IL instruction, the digital content

The hashtag hunt encourages use of print titles purchased with #eng101 students in mind (i.e., books in controversial issues series).
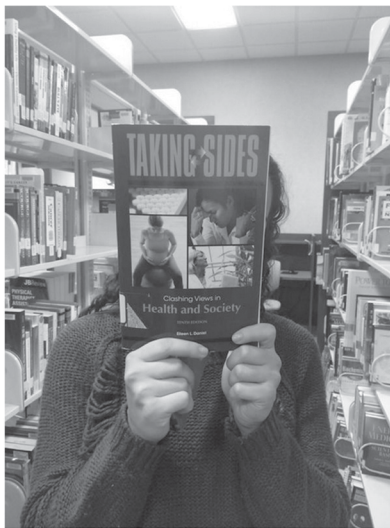
(textual posts, photos, etc.) produced by students connecting and interacting with official library social media accounts can be used as assessment artifacts and, in some cases, as promotional materials in marketing and outreach efforts. Using social media in the classroom is far less complicated than it sounds and requires fewer resources and less tech savvy than one might expect.

As reference and instruction librarians at two community colleges in South Carolina—Horry Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) and Midlands Technical College—we have made plenty attempts to engage and even entertain our students with social media inside and outside of the classroom, but so far, nothing has been as successful as the Twitter-based scavenger hunt activity.

Amanda Kraft is electronic resources librarian at Horry Georgetown Technical College, email: amanda.kraft@hgtc.edu, and Aleck F. Williams Jr. is reference librarian at Midlands Technical College Library, email: williamsaf@midlandstech.edu

Why use social media in library instruction?

Social media is fun. Social media is popular. Recent studies have shown that 24 percent of teens (13 to 17 year olds) are online "almost constantly" due to three-quarters of them having access to the Internet via smartphones.[2] Because current and incoming students are usually already familiar with its charms, social media naturally engages students in the research process. Group assignments and activities that include social media also effectively support differentiated learning.

For students with less web and technology experience, it introduces them to a powerful medium for communication and collaboration (and from a scholarly perspective). For students with ample experience, using social media for classroom allows them to become experts. Specifically, the use of hashtags connects IL concepts to students' daily lives and encourages students to think about status updates and pictures as information that is searchable and, therefore, researchable like articles in a database.

While many of us can agree that asking students to sit quietly and listen to a lecture is not an effective way to teach and in no way ensures that students are learning and engaged, it is also important that we recognize students' experiences outside the classroom and meet them in "their personal, civic, and informal learning contexts."[3] By completing a scavenger hunt – a very common IL instruction activity – that requires thoughtful and strategic use of hashtags, students are exposed to seamless experiential learning by means of a tool with which they are already familiar and in an activity they might even enjoy.

In the following activity, the librarian and the students will be able to have a conversation about subject headings and how they are used to describe and index details of an article or chapter in the same way tags or hashtags are used to describe and index a social media post. Instructors can also use hashtags as a way to connect with the learning objectives or outcomes for the library instruction session (e.g., #mythesisstatement).

Making the connection: Hashtags and subject headings

The "hashtag hunt," or Twitter-based scavenger hunt, is an activity that any librarian can complete with his or her students. Though it was originally created to help English 101 students practice finding recommended books for research assignments concerning controversial or moral issues and with the OPAC, it also allows students to explore the library as a place. The handout students receive is structured like all of the traditional library scavenger hunts of day's past, but students are asked to take photos of the items they find and post them on Twitter with hashtags of the librarian's choosing, usually hashtags that distinguish the library and the class (e.g., #hgtclibrary and #eng101). Students may also be awarded bonus points for #shelfie posts, which are explained to be posts of themselves in stacks, using the one of the collaborative learning units and/or print stations, or standing in a study room. Tell them that creativity counts. This usually inspires fun photos full of smiling faces. It is important to note that the parameters of this activity can be modified to fit any library, librarian, group of students, and assignment.

Step 1: Provide some kind of instruction. This is the easy (and kind of boring) part. Demonstrate a few searches in your OPAC and/or databases. Show them tips and tricks for getting decent results and narrowing down or expanding their search. Be sure to show them everything needed to complete the individual "hashtag hunts" you created, including how to determine if a book is already checked out. Sometimes, especially when you have more than one section of the same course scheduled that day, the print resources you asked them to find will have already gone home with a student. Asking students to post a photo of a comparable book will introduce them to the basics of LOC classification system and test their critical thinking skills.

Students respond better to library instruction that is succinct, easy to understand, and interactive, and students are more engaged when the librarian uses examples of current issues in which students can relate or direct feedback from their classmates. Consequently, librarians are working on ways to make classes more student interactive by incorporating technology such as response clickers, student's cell phones, and other web-based polling/quizzing tools. The #shelfie hashtag hunt is an effective instructional activity to engage your students in learning about library resources and getting them familiar with the physical spaces of the library collection without burdening them with a long lecture. Assuming that time is limited—as is often the case in one-shot sessions—this instruction really ought to take less than 15 minutes.

Step 2: Get them to volunteer. Ask the students, "Who has a Twitter account already set up on their phone?" (and try not to be too surprised by all of the hands that fly up). Because not every student will come to class with a "smart," or web-enabled, device or a Twitter account that he or she is willing to use for library-related classwork, creating at least four anonymous, or "dummy," accounts for students to use—accounts with simple handles and easy-to-remember passwords that can be change for each class—is a good idea. This is done in anticipation that at least four students will have devices with Twitter already downloaded on them. Adjusting the number of groups is also an option if fewer students have devices than expected. The students volunteering their devices add their group's account to their existing app. Login information to these accounts should be provided on the top of each group's handout, but having a screenshot or some other kind of visual aid ready for display via the classroom projector will be helpful in demonstrating how to add an additional account to their Twitter app. These Twitter accounts can also be added to any library-owned mobile devices reserved for instruction.

Step 3: Set them loose. Be available in case the students need help, and tell them that you will be monitoring their live "feed" while they work. Projecting a search for the hashtag you asked them to use and even showing them posts from other classes will, again, encourage creativity.

Each group has a slightly different hunt designed to familiarize them with finding books, ebooks, and various other resources in the library (e.g., the printers, copiers, scanners, collaborative technologies, and study rooms), but each should be designed to allow discoverability of library resources that are useful and/or appropriate for the research paper or project assigned in the course. If the professor can provide their students' chosen topics in advance, the hunts can be tailored towards them. If no potential research topics are supplied beforehand, changing each hunt to reflect whatever controversial topics are getting a lot of news coverage will emphasize the concept of currency and highlight the usefulness of the collection.

Step 4: Talk about it. After they complete their hunts, the students can regroup in the classroom to discuss their experiences. Did they find anything interesting? Did they learn something new about the library? Refresh and scroll through the already projected Twitter feeds to show everyone what their classmates were up to while they were working. Sometimes, students are concerned when one of their group's post is missing from the feed. This is usually because they used the wrong hashtag or mistyped it, which presents an opportunity to discuss how inaccurate or nondescriptive hashtags can make content that may very well be considered "good" by the user undiscoverable. Ask students to compare this problem to the subject headings in the OPAC and databases. This will reiterate and reinforce instruction about searching the catalog. Students will probably have a good time looking at their shelfies, and you may also encourage them at this time to collaborate by asking each other where certain resources were found. Any one of the students may be doing his or

her research on a topic covered in another group's hunt and, therefore, may be very interested in their findings.

Assessment

While no specific, formal assessment has been implemented to gauge student opinions or the effectiveness of the hashtag hunt activity so far, the photos are worth a thousand words. Students are smiling, laughing, and when we recap each group's experience via the live feed, they are more animated than they ever allow themselves to be in the classroom. Many times, books students are asked to find disappear in between sessions—presumably because students checked them out immediately after their class—and therefore, as mentioned above, it becomes necessary to ask students to find comparable books on the shelves later in the day. Due to its informal approach, this activity encourages students to feel comfortable in the library, and if you are so lucky as to have multiple sessions with the same class, starting out with the hashtag hunt leads more productive class discussion and participation in the future by allowing students to feel at home in *their* library. The small- to mid-sized community college environment (at HGTC, especially) makes it easy to observe these students throughout the semester, and by and large, those who participate in this activity display a sense of self-efficacy in the weeks following class.

Conclusion

While it is not especially innovative to use a popular social networking site such as Twitter in IL instruction, the steadily increasing membership of social networking sites among many demographics means more students are likely to use and contribute to social media as part of their daily lives, and they are doing it all from their phones. Directly compared to the aforementioned study on teens and social media, it should be no surprise that 18 to 29 year olds lead the population in mobile Internet access, but research has shown that a growing population of low-income and minority populations use mobile phones exclusively for Internet access.[4] Librarians should seize the opportunity to connect with students who are already ensconced in these online spaces inside and outside of the classroom. As the traditional IL instruction is reimagined and retooled, it is imperative that librarians consider using social media to engage students in research, and using activities like the hashtag hunt to promote technology-rich, collaborative library spaces, the collection, and other library services is an added bonus.

We have discovered that this type of activity is most appropriate for an entry-level or freshman library orientation (e.g., English 101 or composition) session as opposed to an advanced research class and hope to survey students' experiences with this activity in the future. However, based on initial observation, we believe that introducing the library as a place and online services in this way may increase the likelihood that students will return —and maybe take a #shelfie or two.

Notes

1. *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education,* ACRL Board, February 2, 2015, www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework.

2. Sheila Stoeckel and Caroline Sinkinson, "Social Media," Tips and Trends (ACRL Instruction Section Instructional Technologies Committee), Summer 2013, www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/aboutacrl/directoryofleadership/sections/is/iswebsite/projpubs/tipsandtrends/2013summer.pdf.

3. Amanda Lenhart et al., "Teens, Social Media and Technology Overview 2015," Pew Internet and American Life Project, April 9, 2015, www.pewinternet.org/files/2015/04/PI_TeensandTech_Update2015_0409151.pdf.

4. Aaron Smith, "Mobile Access 2010," Pew Internet and American Life Project, July 7, 2010, www.pewinternet.org/~/media//Files/Reports/2010/PIP_Mobile_Access_2010.pdf. ⌇