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CREATING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS USING NING.COM

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Abstract:

The educational role of the worldwide web has been cast in a new light by the emergence of so-called 'web 2.0' technologies and, in particular, 'social software' where users are connected to and collaborate with each other in a variety of group interactions (Shirky 2003). Current research indicates that social networking has the potential to bring individuals together into new relationships and friendships, into new communicative flows, and even perhaps into communities of their choosing. Can social networking tools, integrated into the requirements and learning objectives of a course, offer some benefits towards meeting the needs of students? The average Indiana University Purdue University-Indianapolis student experience can vary greatly when compared to campus life at a traditional, four-year residency college or university because the student body is comprised of an assorted group of learners: commuting students, older adult students, online students, on-campus students, and first-generation college students. These students come from a range of diverse backgrounds. Using N100: Introduction to Digital Media Principles as my primary case study, I assess the implementation and development of social media tools, specifically the use of a closed Ning network, in this diverse college classroom environment. This paper evaluates the use of social networking tools to enhance student learning and improve student engagement as well as comparing social networking software to other types of learning managements systems such as Indiana University's Oncourse CL.

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