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# Social Justify Your Lesson Plan: How to Use Social Media to Make Pop Culture Scholarly

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CHAPTER 26\*

# Social Justify Your Lesson Plan

## How to Use Social Media to Make Pop Culture Scholarly

*Lydia Willoughby and Kelly Blanchat*

### Introduction

In her influential article, “What is Feminist Pedagogy?” Carolyn M. Shrewsbury defined the personal politics of teaching and learning:

Feminist pedagogy is engaged teaching/learning—engaged with self in a continuing reflective process; engaged actively with the material being studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism and classism and homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge; engaged with the community, with traditional organizations, and with movements for social change.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, we describe a lesson plan rooted in feminist pedagogy—a teaching/learning that actively engages with the material being studied by embracing social media as a viable platform for scholarship. This lesson plan hon-

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ors that the personal is political and correlates structural and systemic inequity to student experiences of oppression.

We use social media to empower students with the ability to critically analyze, reflect, and actively engage with community-based research content. At the start of this lesson, we begin by instructing students to explore trending social topics on the open Web using the social media operator, the hashtag (#). Because hashtags connect like concepts in the same way as controlled vocabularies, the hashtags allow students to explore topics in a social environment while learning key research techniques that can be later applied to library resources. Student learning is focused on the task of identifying and following key concepts, people, and discussions, which is the common component of all scholarly research, regardless of whether the platform is on social media or in a library catalog or databases. Before synthesis of research can happen, students must first identify and follow concepts, people, and discussions recurrent throughout scholarly research; this activity utilizes social media as yet another platform in which scholarly conversations occur.

When we were developing this lesson in late 2014, Twitter had become an active platform for both local and global social justice movements.<sup>2</sup> Hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter, #SayHerName, and #GamerGate exploded with activity and became sources of up-to-date information, so much so that news outlets covering these movements began quoting Twitter users as sources for stories. Having students use social media and identify hashtags on #Ferguson or #BlackLivesMatter is asking them to follow the news citation back to its Twitter source. This lesson plan participates in a conversation that is simultaneously public and scholarly; the lesson plan is “geared precisely toward the lives and experiences of oppressed students.”<sup>3</sup> This structure addresses issues relating to authority and checks for understanding by having students create hashtags to describe what they understand. In the open Web, hashtags link disparate discussions to a narrative conversation; as students search new hashtags, they are further introduced to the concept of research as a conversation. Students are also subtly introduced to the controlled vocabularies they will need to navigate in construction of search strategies in library resources, but without the academic jargon—they can use the language of social media.

The next sections will describe how to employ this lesson plan using Twitter in an information literacy instruction session. The concepts here can be modified to other social media platforms or other online tools that allow for open and collaborative research. This lesson plan is composed of two major parts: first, initial exploration on the open Web (Twitter); and second, mirrored exploration in library resources (library catalog, databases).

## Learning Outcomes

- Determine the nature and extent of available information
- Create a concept map that integrates popular culture with scholarly research by building a taxonomic relationship among controlled vocabularies
- Identify broader and narrower scholarly concepts or keywords based on current events
- Critique online resources
- Actively participate in conversation, either online or between classmates

## Materials

The instructor will need a computer with access to the Internet and a projector; each student (or group of students) will also need a computer with access to the Internet. If using a platform other than Twitter, the set of online resources will change accordingly. When using Twitter, online resources will specifically include

- *A Twitter account.* Create a Twitter account for yourself, the instructor. Having an instructor or general account can help to address privacy concerns for students, as it will allow them to research and participate through an anonymized username.

Examples: @Lib200Platts and @KellyBLibrarian.

For examples of previous lessons in action, look up either of these Twitter accounts and read through the archive.

- *Course hashtag (optional).* Students have the option to interact with each other as part of this assignment, either actively in class or as part of a homework assignment, by using a course hashtag as a single communication chain for the class. The hashtag should be unique to avoid crossing conversations, so do a test search on Twitter before class, and if the hashtag you had in mind already exists, try another.

Examples: Alter the class hashtag depending on the primary theme or class name. For English 110 at Queens College (CUNY), the course hashtag became #QCLibrary110, and for library instruction at SUNY Plattsburgh, the hashtag became #LIB200A10 and #LIB200A8.

Course-specific hashtags may not be immediately indexed by Twitter, but students will still be able to follow along with the account in real time.

- *Shared, online document (optional).* This lesson plan includes two sections of reflection. If this reflection becomes a formal part of the

assignment, students will need a place to write. To continue with the concept of open communication, use an online program such as Google Docs, Padlet, TitanPad, or PiratePad.

## Preparation

This structure of this lesson plan requires set-up ahead of class in order to run smoothly.

- Online materials are set up and ready to go.
  - Instructor Twitter account
  - Unique class hashtag (optional)
  - Shared, online document (optional)
- *Draft a set of instructional Tweets (optional)*. If you are using this lesson as a homework assignment, these drafts will be prompts for students to complete distinct portions of the lesson. Drafts can be saved directly in Twitter or saved to a local computer to copy and paste into Twitter when needed.
- *Communicate with faculty*. It is important to communicate with faculty about the structure, nature, and purpose of the assignment, as it involves students interacting on a public site. You may want to address student privacy in relation to social media in the classroom and how you are resolving it. One option is always to have the students search Twitter from the class account as there is no direct need for students to use a personal account.

## Session Instructions

1. Use a class hashtag to organize a class conversation thread:
  - @KellyBLibrarian—Jan 30 2015
  - ATTN Students of Professor Moriah, Spring 2015—this is your hashtag #ENG110celebs—Feel free to contact me in advance of class, if you need!
2. Direct students to the Twitter platform and have them locate the class hashtag using the basic search function. The hashtag will also become an archive of the class discussion, so consider including links to important sites and documents.
  - @KellyBLibrarian—Nov 19 2014
  - Purdue OWL is an excellent resource to learn how to cite anything from a book to a tweet to a website: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/#lib4eng110>
3. Once students can demonstrate the ability to follow a predetermined Twitter conversation through a basic search and browse, direct them to

the Twitter Advanced Search (<https://twitter.com/search-advanced>), where they will be introduced to a form structure that closely resembles library resources.

4. Next, have students use the Twitter Advanced Search to identify a topic of their choice.
5. Have students create a concept map of the hashtags, usernames, or companies that appeared in their search results (Tweets).
 

@KellyBLibrarian—Nov 19 2014  
Library research tip #3: Think of #keywords and #subjects as #hashtags. Think of authors as your friends (@). #lib4eng110
6. If a class hashtag has been established, have students to use the hashtag to share interesting Tweets (search results) for the class to see.
7. Using the concept map as a guide, have students translate the hashtag terminology into scholarly concepts, or keywords.
8. Navigate students to a general library database and show the platform elements that are similar to Twitter: basic search, advanced search, and keyword linking.
 

@Lib200Platts—Feb 3 2015  
Team 3: 3rd Step, use hashtags you've collected to conduct an advanced search in "Find Articles" from: plattsburgh.edu/library #LIB200A10
9. Have students search concepts and keywords in a database search.
10. Using a new concept map, have students collect new keywords, authors, or citations.
11. Have students to reflect for a second time on the new information they found in the library resources, either formally with a short writing assignment, or informally as a think/pair/share activity.
12. If a class hashtag has been established, ask students to share their findings by Tweeting citations for the class to see.

## Assessment

Students can reflect on the new information they found in the library resources, either formally with a short writing assignment, or informally as a think/pair/share activity. You can engage in dialogue with students about their keywords and how accurately they feel that their search results describe the conversations that they followed on Twitter. Guide the students through the creation of a concept map to collecting citations, and as a class, you can create a rubric based on the citations in the form of a bibliography or an annotated bibliography that is prioritized in order of importance according to the students.

## Reflections

At Queens College, CUNY, this lesson plan began with a first-year English class that was conducting a semester-long research assignment on celebrity culture. Scholarly search results for present-day celebrities were not immediately available in library databases, especially when search limiters for “peer-reviewed” and “scholarly” were applied. Using Twitter helped to demonstrate the difference between scholarly and popular resources, as well as aided students in understanding the process of translating ideas between sources and formats.

At SUNY Plattsburgh, a student found the hashtag #FTP on Twitter in a #Ferguson conversation. The student found no results for #FTP in a library database. After inquiring about what went wrong, the class discussed the current meaning of #FTP (“fuck the police”) within its context of #BlackLivesMatter. Students were then able to identify the feeling that #FTP describes in social movements: anger toward police for violence. By translating the concept to a scholarly context, students then searched library databases for “police brutality,” where they found articles that connected to concepts on Twitter.

A comparison of social media platforms is a foundation to begin a discussion about the valuable differences among Google and library resources. For instance, if a friend is a user of Instagram but not Facebook, searching for that friend on Facebook will be unsuccessful; the same situation applies for databases that are out of scope for a particular topic. For one-shot library instruction, such analogies can be meaningful take-aways for students as they relate library research techniques to concrete examples from everyday life.

Further, social media can be used to demonstrate an unsuccessful and successful search query, a problem that many students encounter and one that can be greatly discouraging for a new researcher. For instance, while a search for #BeyonceFeminism will retrieve plentiful content on Twitter, a similar search for #RihannaFeminism will retrieve barely any. Such an example can be used to discuss the need to identify concepts or modify a thesis and how seemingly similar content is not necessarily connected or relevant.

While some librarians may be wary of overtly integrating political activism into learning outcomes for a lesson plan, we feel that it is our goal as educators to find meaningful and relevant ways to engage students that connect with their everyday lives. Feminist pedagogy is about the whole self with both teacher and student engaged in learning, and critical pedagogy incorporates critical race theory that posits that white privilege is both pervasive and structural. We ask, as practitioners of feminist and critical pedagogy, how can we *not* engage activism in the classroom? Students at SUNY Plattsburgh held a march for diversity in fall 2015 in response to a racist cartoon in the student newspaper, demonstrating that there is a critical need for pedagogy that supports oppressed students.<sup>4</sup> According to a public radio report by Pat Bradley,

“One student of color told the faculty that if minority students could be brave enough to leave their homes to study at the college, they too could be brave enough to open a dialogue on race.”<sup>5</sup> A library lesson plan on social justice will not change the college racial climate, but it can powerfully foster space for students to gain strategic research skills while learning about themselves and society.

## Final Questions

Is asking students to research social justice the same as students being liberated? What is attainable if we make systemic oppression more visible? Holding that information literacy is a practice of full citizenship for ourselves and our students, what is the role of the academic librarian in promoting access to full citizenship and in resisting institutional systems that contribute to social inequity in the current racial climate on college campuses?

## Notes

1. Carolyn M. Shrewsbury, “What Is Feminist Pedagogy?” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 3/4 (October 1, 1993): 8.
2. Maeve Duggan, Nicole B. Ellison, Cliff Lampe, Amanda Lenhart, and Mary Madden, *Social Media Update 2014* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, January 2015), <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/09/social-media-update-2014>.
3. Sarah Galloway, “Reconsidering Emancipatory Education: Staging a Conversation between Freire and Jacques Rancière,” *Educational Theory* 62, no. 2 (2012): 174.
4. Felice León, “College Paper Prints the Most Racist Front Page in America,” *Daily Beast*, October 27, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/10/27/college-paper-prints-the-most-racist-front-page-in-america.html>.
5. Pat Bradley, “SUNY Plattsburgh Faculty Discuss Offensive Cartoon,” WAMC Northeast Public Radio, November 9, 2015, <http://wamc.org/post/suny-plattsburgh-faculty-discuss-offensive-cartoon>.

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