

eTools: Using Edmodo in the Classroom

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Introduction

Social networking websites provide many positive classroom benefits: they allow for collaborative learning, facilitate networking, and promote the sharing of knowledge. However, the more I ask students whether they would like to integrate Facebook into their courses, the more they respond, "no thanks." In fact, during a recent discussion I had with my Communication Theory students, almost all of them were opposed to using Facebook in their courses. The primary reason behind their opposition: They wanted to keep their academic and their social lives separate. One social networking site that allows instructors to do this is Edmodo.

What is Edmodo?

Edmodo is a basic social networking website that contains several features similar Facebook: a scrollable "wall" or "timeline" to which you can view posts ordered by date, an individualized profile page, push notifications to show what is new, easy access to sharing links, and an ability to send messages to groups or individuals. The primary difference is that Edmodo was created with students and instructors mind by merging familiar social networking features with features typically associated with classroom management systems. As an instructor, you can create assignments, build quizzes, poll audiences, manage small groups, grade activities, and even award badges all within a

self-contained space that enables students and instructors to maintain a degree of separation between their academic and social worlds. With Edmodo, students and instructors can network in an environment that keeps the focus solely on teaching and learning without the risk of inadvertently glimpsing into each other's private lives.

How can I get Edmodo for use in the classroom?

To create a free Edmodo network account, go to www.edmodo.com and click the "I'm a Teacher" button. After creating an account, you can create a profile, add a picture, create courses, manage notifications, and send group "add" codes so your students can join your course. (Student instructions for joining Edmodo are slightly different: After creating an account, they need only enter a group "add" code to join the course. Instructors should encourage students to select how they want to send and receive e-mail and text messages as well as to upload a profile picture.) Though Edmodo has an initial learning curve in navigating the website, most of the features are fairly intuitive.

How can I use Edmodo in the classroom?

Edmodo has many useful features designed to complement different types of courses. In particular, it is especially advantageous for:

1. *information sharing*. Edmodo enables students to easily communicate with their classmates and instructors. When communicating with classmates, Edmodo allows students to ask each other questions as well as view and respond to each other's

questions; they also can share and view information. In my experience, students are quick to respond to one another, which reduces the amount of e-mail messages and saves valuable time. For more difficult questions, instructors can choose to respond directly on Edmodo, which allows all students to view and benefit from these messages. This information sharing ability is also useful for courses in which students need to share links with one another: for example, students enrolled in a research methods course may share survey links from Google Forms or students taking a public speaking course may share links to video presentations hosted on YouTube.

2. *group work*. Edmodo allows for the easy creation of small student work groups. Each group has the ability to create a team name and work within an individualized space where they can share ideas, articles, news, and resources with each other. This feature is especially relevant in courses with group projects such as a research methods course in which students may need to share empirical articles, post measures, talk about stimuli, or coordinate group face-to-face meetings.

3. *mobile notifications*. When creating their accounts, students have the ability to select whether they want to send or receive mobile notifications from their instructors in the form of either an e-mail message or a text message. For example, instructors can use this feature in the case of having to cancel class; students can use this feature to notify an instructor that they are running late for an office visit.

4. *assignments and grading*. Adding assignments on Edmodo is simple. Although

these assignments appear similar to a typical post on a social networking site, the post also includes an area for students to upload any assignment materials. Grading can be handled directly on Edmodo through an easy-to-complete touchscreen device, and students can view their grades immediately on the site. In this instance, Edmodo can be used in lieu of a classroom management system and enables students to manage their classroom information on one site instead of two sites.

5. *control and visibility.* Instructors can maintain a degree of supervision and management by maintaining access of conversations on the website. You can determine if your students are sharing information, if they are uploading materials to share with one another, and if they are responding to each other's posts. Similarly, you can delete inappropriate posts as needed and monitor website in the event that issues arise.

Conclusion

Although students recognize the value in using social networks in academia, they want to avoid blurring their scholastic and social lives. With Edmodo, instructors can provide students access to an academic social network without forcing them to merge their private and academic worlds. Edmodo fuses classroom management tools with the affordances of a modern social networking website to provide an enhanced educational networking experience.