TEACHx

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Course: Medill IMC Certificate Program undergrad course (40 students), Kellogg Media Management graduate course (50 students), & others to follow

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Yellowdig Visualization Tool

Context

One of the exciting opportunities that has emerged from Dan Gruber's 2015-2016 Digital/Online Project, "Integrating Social Media to Elevate Engagement: A Pilot of the Yellowdig Platform," has been thinking about the vast amount of data that is generated on Yellowdig and how to make sense of it both for teaching and for learning. We set out to explore the possibility of using the data to create a visualization tool that would complement the front-end interface of Yellowdig and implement an approach to learning analytics.

Project

The innovation is a dynamic visualization tool that was developed as a collaboration with Northwestern faculty, Northwestern Information Technology, and Yellowdig. A data pipeline was created to regularly update the visualization tool with new information from the Yellowdig boards in Northwestern classes. We have been iterating on the design and functionality of the tool for several months, and we had a very generative in-class session with undergraduate students in Dan Gruber's Strategic Communications course at The Garage to have them test the tool and offer feedback on the features they would like to see implemented.

Objectives & Outcomes

This project is still very much in motion and will be at another level of implementation and adoption shortly.

Our plan is to have the Yellowdig Visualization Tool used in several classes in the spring quarter and beyond. The hope is that students will find the tool enhances their mastery of the course theories and frameworks and the examples shared on Yellowdig. Additionally, it will provide another way for students to engage with the course material and each other. Early indications showed that giving the students access to this Northwestern-designed visualization tool is something they were both excited about and curious to explore.

Results

Overall, this has been a rewarding collaboration and the results have exceeded initial expectations. Given that the learning analytics area is so new, it is greatly beneficial to have several different perspectives on a team like ours to balance the pedagogy and technology.

We anticipate that we will ask survey questions on the course evaluations for the classes in which the visualization tool is being used to gauge its effectiveness. Furthermore, we expect that faculty who are using Yellowdig, which has been a fast-growing population, will be interested in using the tool to help students learn and to analyze the data being generated on the platform.

Lessons Learned

Regular meetings and manageable deadlines were helpful for us to make steady progress on the development of the tool. It can take some time to get access to data from various providers. We worked well as a team and were able to get ourselves unstuck when necessary. Additionally, it was helpful to be part of the Experimental Teaching & Learning Analytics at Northwestern group and to have the opportunity to share our work with them and get feedback along the way.

In terms of improvement, I would spend extra time up front making sure that everybody is on the same page to ensure generative collaborations and understanding from the start.