For those who have never asked a student how they choose their instructor, RateMyProfessor.com is a self-report website where students rate their experiences with their instructors. They assign ratings based on level of difficulty, helpfulness, clarity, rater interest, and even "hotness." Students are provided the opportunity to give any advice about their former instructors and the opportunity to research valid and accurate information about potential instructors. After all, opinions based on individual experience should be taken very seriously, right?

RateMyProfessor.com presently has more than 6.6 million ratings on more than 900,000 college professors, and it is visited by more than 10 million college students according to MTV Networks (O'Malley, 2007). It’s been rated by CNET.com (Pearlman, 2006) as the 11th best site for students, and employers may even be sneaking a peek for a little more information on faculty applicants (Epstein, 2006). Many students at SCC participate, and they make crucial academic decisions based on the viewpoints demonstrated on the site. How does this direct their education?

Since students naturally prefer easy instructors, and since easiness is given a distinct rating category, students generally rate easy instructors higher than difficult instructors. However, many of the best learning experiences have been rooted in courses that challenged and inspired us. One SCC student said, "He doesn't lecture; it's just expressing your own knowledge on the topics that are discussed. Within the class, we tend to help and advise one another . . . After this class, I learned ways to living a good life.” This student had a positive learning experience because of/ despite the fact he/she was challenged to learn and apply concepts to his/her life.

Negative comments also flourish throughout the site, but it is difficult to tell the true cause of the negative reaction. Did the student work hard all semester, only to be disappointed by the quality of the instruction provided, or was this a student who showed up for one day, then went home and logged onto the site to register an opinion? Some opinions are irrelevant, or the context is too unclear to draw conclusions. One other SCC student’s opinion about an instructor is, “She's nice, but that doesn’t cover up for her weirdness.”

Now for the questionable category: "hotness." This is rated by students, and "hot" instructors are given a chili pepper next to their name. According to a study done at Central Michigan University for nearly 7,000 faculty members from 370 institutions rated on Rate My Professor, nothing predicts a quality instructor like "hotness." Being "easy" doesn’t even trump being "hot" when it comes to the quality ranking. (Epstein, 2006). Although the definition of "hotness" varies from appearance to the dynamics of personality and energy,

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Measuring Quality by the Chili Pepper

(Continued from page 1)

one of our "hot" SCC professors has students making comments such as this: “Ok...I think he is 'hot.' He is brilliant and just knows this stuff soooo well. He has the sexiest smile, and he is the most helpful teacher I have ever had.”

One criticism of the site is that anyone can post comments about anyone; you don’t even need to be a student. There have been reports desperate instructors login as students and give themselves positive ratings. While it would be impossible to determine which of the positive ratings are self reported or student reported, it would really be quite easy to determine which postings were not made by instructors. Some negative comments about SCC instructors such as “___ is by far the worst teacher I have ever had,” and “She talks about her family the ENTIRE semester” is not likely to be self reported.

While there may be some validity to comments where there is an overall theme running, there could be little truth to any of it. Anybody can post anything for any reason they want. Let’s fight the urge to take any of it too seriously.

RESOURCES:


Odette Borrey

Hackers have found a new target with 2.6 billion subscribers: our cell phones! The organization, which monitors computer viruses worldwide, recently added threats to mobile phones to the list of what it tracks.

Worms and other nasty viruses have gone wireless and could infect our cell phones. They might still function, but the bugs can spike the bill and clog the network. Mobile malwares install themselves in handsets, then spread via internet downloads, MMS (multimedia messaging service) attachments, and Bluetooth transfers.

A cell phone virus is, like a computer virus, an unwanted executable file that infects a device and then copies itself to other devices. The infected files are disguised as applications like games, security patches, add-on functionalities, and text messages. Sometimes they steal the subject line from a message you’ve received from a friend, which increases the likelihood of you opening it. If it encounters a vulnerable phone, it will automatically install itself to that phone and set itself running/spreading to other devices.

This new plague will open a new market for anti-virus software for mobile phones. So far, no stand-alone anti-virus software is available to consumers, but the phone companies and service providers are starting to implant virus protection directly in handsets. In the meantime, the most important virus protection for your mobile phone remains caution:

Do not open odd-looking messages!!!

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Web 2.0
A Multiple-Part Series
Scott James

Have you ever heard of Web 2.0? If not, I assure you that you have used it.

Web 2.0 is not a software package; rather, Web 2.0 is a term to describe collaborative interaction on the internet. Web page interaction is the next generation of a once static web. This trend has opened up some new opportunities in education; and over the next several technology newsletters, I will introduce some tools I believe are the most useful for our educational environment.

Part One - Social Bookmarking
Please excuse my informality, but social bookmarking is really cool!

Most of us keep track of the websites we like by creating local bookmarks; i.e., the Favorites folder in Internet Explorer. Social bookmarking offers another way to store bookmarks with several added benefits.

Social bookmarking is not much different than local bookmarking. Normally, the process starts with finding a web page that you would like to remember for future use, clicking on your Favorites folder, and adding the bookmark to your web browser’s list of other valuable resources.

The problem with local bookmarking is you can easily lose all of your bookmarks when your hard drive crashes or when you upgrade to another computer and forget to transfer your bookmarks. They are also unavailable if you use a computer other than your own. Even if your bookmarks are available, they are often time consuming and confusing because bookmarks are saved and arranged by their titles, rather than by their content.

Social bookmarking solves all these issues. One great social bookmarking service is actually a free website called del.icio.us (http://del.icio.us). This site uses something called “tags” to add depth to your bookmarks. Once you have started an account, you can download a del.icio.us toolbar that includes a tag button for marking your favorite sites. When you press the tag button, a popup window appears that contains textboxes for entering a name for your bookmark, the web address, and “tags” (keywords), which will allow you to search through your bookmarks the way Google searches the web. Your tagged bookmarks are then saved to your personal del.icio.us web page for access anywhere at any time and from any computer. Further, you can choose which bookmarks will be private or public and share them with your friends, or, dare I suggest, students. Del.icio.us also allows you to organize your bookmarks into folders; e.g., a folder for each of your classes.

The social aspect of bookmarking is what makes del.icio.us so useful. Del.icio.us organizes the top-tagged pages of the day, which helps you filter through all of the riffraff we normally find on the internet. Here is a tip: search for a fellow educator on del.icio.us. Once you have found someone who shares your interests, you have discovered a goldmine of valuable resources.

Some other social bookmarking resources worth checking out are Furl (www.furl.net) and Diigo, pronounced dee’go, located at (www.diigo.com).

Happy bookmarking!

Scott James
SCC Library
ePortfolios

Joe Yorba

The internet is a very valuable tool for measuring multiple intelligences. Abstract knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, the core of Bloom's Taxonomy, are integral parts of our digital experiences. Students can engage in the learning process by accessing textual, visual, musical, social, and kinesthetic protocols; i.e., learners have the opportunity to watch, navigate, test, discover, and judge as they progress through curriculum.

The growing influence of the internet has facilitated the emergence of the ePortfolio, a useful tool for demonstrating a person's knowledge and his/her accomplishments. Teachers, students, and artists are common users of this showcase tool.

Social sites such as MySpace and Facebook have proved to be popular mediums for young people to develop personal profiles and to interact digitally. The transition to ePortfolios as a means of establishing an interactive personal learning history is very natural. Students may post entries to update accomplishments and acquired knowledge, peers may access portions of the ePortfolio for reference and/or cross communication, while teachers may make periodic assessments of progress and competencies.

The individual portfolios may contain background information, resumes, awards and certificates, published articles and essays, personal blogs, pictures, videos, completed courses, or any other types of information that can be stored and displayed digitally. Since it is a dynamic record, the author may use it for reflection, as well as a demonstration of competency. The user may easily transfer their works to another college or university, or they may even transfer their works from academic to career applications after graduation.

The implementation of ePortfolios as an academic authentic assessment tool is occurring on many campuses, too. Once again, technology has provided an improved medium for an established concept.

RESOURCES:


A Computer Tip for Computer Users

Cindy Swift

Have you ever seen the “Prnt Scrn” or "PRTSC" button on your keyboard? Have you ever wondered what it does? Pushing this button is like taking a picture of your computer screen; a snapshot of the current screen image is sent to the computer clipboard. Just like “copy,” once something is on your clipboard you can “paste” it into a document. If you press and hold the “Alt” key while you press “Prnt Scrn,” it will take a screen shot of the currently active window instead of the whole screen.

Print Screen allows you to share the information you see on your computer screen with others. Saving or printing an image of your computer screen might just come in handy some day; e.g., while you are working on your computer, an error message might pop up on your screen. “Print Scrn” will allow you to record that message. Also, you might use “Prnt Scrn” when creating a handout for your students.

Print Screen is an invaluable tool for online instructors. When a student has a question about what is on their computer screen, they can simply press the Print Screen button, paste the image of the screen into an email, and send the information to an instructor. Now, the instructor and the student can be “on the same page” in their future communications. This is one of those little tools that once tried, you will wonder how you lived without it.

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