

2012-2013 Grant Proposals

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"Exploring the reasons that may motivate Stonehill students to use Facebook as an educational tool"
SOTL Research Grant

Project description:

Our students can be described as digital natives; they were born in the digital age and have been interacting with digital technology from an early age.

Several studies have showed how social network tools can improve the learning experience by enabling interaction, collaboration, active participation, information & resource sharing, and critical thinking (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008; Selwyn, 2009).

To maximize the potential benefits of social network tools for educational purposes, it is necessary to reach a high level of adoption; that is the reason why analyzing the factors that may lead students to adopt them as an educational tool becomes an important issue.

The objective of this research project is to identify the factors that may motivate students from Stonehill College to adopt and use social network tools, specifically Facebook, for educational purposes.

To reach our goal, we will apply the structural model developed by Mazman & Usluel (2010) to a sample of Stonehill students. This research model is based on the main theories historically used to explain the diffusion, acceptance and adoption of technological innovations and considers both the technological and social dimensions of social network applications.

To perform our research we will administer the survey developed by Mazman & Usluel (2010) to a sample of business students, from different courses and different majors. The variety of students included in our sample will allow us to carry out additional analysis and check whether the perceptions of Facebook as an educational tool are different depending on the age of the students or the major they chose.

This project proposal is inspired by a research I am currently doing with a professor from the University of Huelva (Spain) and another professor from Cardiff (U.K.) We are analyzing the motivations that may lead students from the University of Huelva to use Facebook as an educational tool. We are using the same structural model that will be used in this project so we are pretty familiar with the proposed methodology.

We already performed an extensive literature review and collected our data through a survey administered to business students from the University of Huelva. Right now, we are analyzing the results and we think that it is worthwhile to study this topic in a different environment. That is the reason why we want to replicate the study for Stonehill students.

Conclusions of this research will help us to understand and improve our use of social network tools in educational contexts. Our final goal is to adapt our teaching strategies to the educational needs of our students.

This project proposal would be the starting point of further investigations. Once we analyze the results from Stonehill students, we plan to do a cross-cultural comparison with Spanish students. We believe that a cross-national perspective would help us to establish correlations between factors and better understand the process of adoption of Facebook for educational purposes.

Community outreach:

- Stonehill Community: I am willing to collaborate with the Center for Teaching and Learning to present the findings of my research at a Teaching Roundtable, or a discussion at Academic Development Day.

- Larger Academic Community: I plan to submit the paper for publication to an academic journal with a high impact factor such as Computers & Education, Computers in Human Behavior, or Internet and Higher Education.

Benefits:

- Student learning: Thanks to this project, we will reach a better understanding of the reasons that may lead our students to use Facebook as a learning tool and we will be able to adapt our teaching strategies to their specific needs.

- Department of Business Administration: This project is consistent with the department mission because it seeks to increase the degree of faculty-student interaction through a better understanding of the use of Facebook for educational purposes. I will share my experience with the rest of professors from the Business Department. We will discuss the implications of this research for the improvement of our program and teaching strategies.

- Stonehill Community: The outcome of this project is consistent with the student-centered climate promoted by Stonehill College.

Budget (detail how you will use the funds requested)

- \$1,000 faculty stipend.

- \$1,500 travel expenses. This project will be developed with professors from Spain and England and, although we will use IT technologies to perform our research, our work would greatly benefit from personal meetings.

The price of the last round trip airline ticket I got from Boston to Seville (Spain) was \$1,657.07. So the rest of the budget will be used to purchase a round trip ticket to fly to Spain to meet my coauthors.