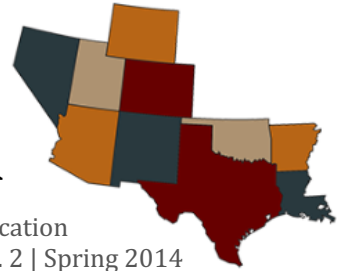


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## Online Engagement Through Facebook Groups in Face-to-Face Undergraduate Communication Courses: A Case Study

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More than 500 posts from undergraduate student enrolled in three communication courses' Facebook groups were analyzed for themes to expand on the literature of instructor implementation of social media usage in college courses and investigate online engagement. Three researchers reviewed one semester of Facebook postings, which were part of a course assignment for three classes: media writing, promotional writing, and news and magazine editing. The dominant themes clustered into three areas: evidence of formal learning, resource sharing and seeking, and promotion and self-promotion. Based on observations, considerations for similar projects and ideas for future study are presented.

*Keywords: social media, Facebook, informal learning, computer-mediated communication, social networking sites*

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Undergraduate Communication Courses: A Case Study

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## Abstract

More than 500 posts from undergraduate student enrolled in three communication courses' Facebook groups were analyzed for themes to expand on the literature of instructor implementation of social media usage in college courses and investigate online engagement. Three researchers reviewed one semester of Facebook postings, which were part of a course assignment for three classes: media writing, promotional writing, and news and magazine editing. The dominant themes clustered into three areas: evidence of formal learning, resource sharing and seeking, and promotion and self-promotion. Based on observations, considerations for similar projects and ideas for future study are presented.

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Online Engagement Through Facebook Groups  
in Face-to-Face Undergraduate Communication Courses: A Case Study

Instructors are using Facebook as a way to engage students further with their content area, with other students, and real-world examples. It makes sense with 90 percent of students on Facebook, and 58 percent using it several times a day (Dahlstrom, de Boor, Grunwald, & Vockley, 2011). Students find time for Facebook (or social media) no matter how busy they are, giving it 24/7 potential for learning (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). Almost half use it to discuss education (Salaway, 2008) and 85 percent are communicating with classmates (Ophus & Abbitt, 2009). Professors are also in Facebook for similar amounts of time each day (Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010; Towner & Munoz, 2011).

The sheer volume of people already using Facebook makes the online software an easy integration to a class — students and teachers are familiar with its features, protocols and power. While on the site for non-academic purposes, students also receive class messages and materials. This is unlike systems such as Blackboard, where participants log in for the explicit purpose of finding course materials. The course content management system, Blackboard, requires students and faculty to log on the system each time the individuals desires to discover if new material is available (i.e. - a new assignment, messages, etc.). Currently, Blackboard does not have any notification features that are external to the website, other than forcing announcements to student emails.

Facebook (in conjunction with the content management system) enables faculty and students to interact in a social, yet academic manner. Professors usually create course groups and invite their students to join for study purposes, to share information, and to enable the students to interact with one another. Facebook notifies users on their computer or digital device when new content is posted to the system.

Using content analysis to understand what students are posting can help instructors better use social media platforms to accomplish learning objectives and enhance class interactions. This paper explores one semester-long required Facebook assignment, including multiple journalism and public relations courses at a university in the Southwest. The purpose is to study undergraduate student messages in a multi-section Facebook project. Using posts made to classroom Facebook groups, researchers analyzed undergraduate student communication and possible learning and interactions in the social media platform.

### Literature Review

In an effort to further engage undergraduate students in their classrooms, higher education faculty educators use social networking sites (SNS) to impact their students (Barczyk & Duncan, 2013; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011). Showing YouTube videos, tweeting resources and reminders, pinning examples in Pinterest, “Vine-ing” a demonstration, or meeting with a student virtually through a Google Hangout are all ways instructors are using SNS. The tools are geared for content, conversation, community and collaboration — all keys to a dynamic learning environment (Dittmer, 2010; Wang & Hsu, 2009; Wang, 2011). An Internet-based classroom can become a “virtual learning space” (Arbaugh, 2000), and Facebook is one way to create a virtual extension of a face-to-face course.

### *Facebook in the Classroom*

The social networking site Facebook originated on college campuses before opening to the general public. Participants can manage their profile, post messages to followers, chat or direct message friends and share photos, likes, hobbies and other information. In 2009, Selwyn said one of the major educational uses for students was the ability to interact and enter new networks for learning.

Thirteen percent of faculty surveyed in one study used Facebook as an instructional tool (Towner & Munoz, 2011). The majority of respondents (67 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that “Facebook encourages my students to participate more in outside discussion or debates.”

A Facebook group gives learners and instructors a central place to share thoughts and information. One way to view the group is as a “community of inquiry,” using three elements: cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 1999). The cognitive presence is how meaning is constructed through communication and is vital for critical thinking. Social presence is the ability to project individuals as real people, even in computer-mediated communication. Teaching presence is the design of the learning environment with active facilitation by an instructor. While this study looks at an online extension of a face-to-face course, these elements can exist in a Facebook page.

As mentioned earlier, many students and faculty are already familiar with Facebook. The learning curve to a new system is unnecessary and the participants simply have a new group on their dashboard. Using Google+ would require an extra layer of helping students obtain GooglePlus accounts and showing them how to manage the Communities feature, similar to Facebook groups. Perceived ease of use and usefulness can enhance student attitudes in online education and “further engage them in the learning process” (Arbaugh, 2000, p. 13). Kabilan, Ahmad and Abidin (2010) said instructors using Facebook as a teaching tool should use the outlet for a socialization aspect and a learning platform, which leads to the discussion of formal and informal learning. The socialization aspect refers to conversations and the communicative power of social networking sites.

Formal instruction in social networking sites is one of the least-common uses of the sites. Robyler et al. (2010) found this to be true in a survey of 120 students and 62 faculty/staff at one

institution, and neither group seemed “warm” to the idea of using Facebook for class purposes. Students were actually more open to the idea of using Facebook for instruction than professors. Forty-three percent of students surveyed in Madge, Meek, Wellens and Hooley’s 2009 study said Facebook was not for academic work, but 53 percent said Facebook could be used for formal instruction. Likewise, Baran’s 2010 study suggested that not all students were ready to use Facebook for formal learning. The project in this study was a formal exercise meant to facilitate informally-styled learning, in essence a Facebook integration into the course with predetermined objectives (as suggested by Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010).

Informal learning occurs both inside and outside of the classroom, is typically less structured than formal learning, and the learner is the driver (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). It is intentional. Madge et al. (2009) said Facebook provides informal learning space for some university students (p. 152) and Jenkins (1992) offered a similar assessment of MySpace. Greenhow and Robelia (2009) found that high school students they interviewed used social networking sites as support for school tasks in a larger category they termed social learning. They suggested that students played multiple roles, that of actors, authors, producers, fans and critics. In a Facebook group project, asking students to adopt these roles might help them see the various ways they can interact with the content and one another.

A Facebook group gives students an authentic audience. Social pedagogies (Bass & Elmendorf, n.d.; Bruff, 2011) are defined as teaching and learning approaches where students engage with an authentic audience. The authentic audience is one that is for a larger audience than just one instructor for a grade. Bruff suggests that fellow students serve an authentic audience, making Facebook a social pedagogy. An audience can also strengthen the product

students present; Light (n.d.) asserted that students who knew their colleagues would be viewing their work approached projects with a different level of seriousness and commitment.

In the learning environment, Facebook can be used to facilitate student-student communication, student-instructor interaction and student-content engagement. This models Moore and Kearsley's 1996 types of communication in online courses: learner to learner, learner to instructor and learner to content (Conway, Easton, & Schmidt, 2005).

#### *Student-student Communication*

Social networking sites allow for communication outside of the classroom and complements face-to-face interaction (Kujath, 2011). This might be to create study groups, informally discuss coursework (Madge et al., 2009) or other collaborative activities (Lampe et al., 2011). In one study, 75 percent of students reported "friending" people from their classes and 52 percent used Facebook for informal academic purpose (Towner & Munoz, 2011). The informal purposes would include talking about class with a peer, securing missed notes or obtaining a peer's contact information. Baran (2010) suggested that the student-student dimension could be more important than student-content and student-instructor.

#### *Student-instructor Interaction*

Students expect a personal connection to their professors and connecting through technology is one strategy (Hanson, Drumheller, Mallard, McKee, & Schlegel, 2011). Nurturing the student-teacher relationship is another way Facebook can facilitate learning. Facebook can create a positive experience for both parties, according to Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds (2007). Schwartz (2009) views Facebook as part of the "larger commons, a space in which we stay connected" and where she keeps an office door open (as cited in Robyler et al., 2010). Princeton University professor Jeff Nunokawa posted daily essays on Facebook for his students as a way



“to disseminate knowledge” (Rae, 2011). Facebook opens another line of communication between students and professors, which results in better learning environments and more student engagement, according to Sturgeon and Walker (2009). Some literature points to the negative aspects of these relationships in social media, like the blurring lines of privacy (Lin, Hoffman, & Borengasser, 2013) and perceived nonacademic purpose of social media (Veletsianos, 2011). Only 12 percent of the students in one study used Facebook to connect with faculty and staff (Towner & Munoz, 2011).

### *Student-content Engagement*

In Facebook, students can further engage with content by showcasing modern examples of concepts from class discussions and readings, which could occur at different levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. They could share knowledge acquired, apply their understanding of the content to today’s society, create a new example for their peers, or propose a solution. Informal learning that occurs in participatory media offers “significant opportunities for increased student engagement in formal learning settings” (Bull et al., 2008). The authors were talking about participatory media, of which Facebook would be an example. Lampe et al. (2011) found that students who collaborated through Facebook were more likely to engage in multiple types of uses of the tool to seek information about their course. Forty-six percent of students used Facebook for getting or giving help on a class project, collaboration, and asking questions about exams, etc., which is a mix of the three relationships (Towner & Munoz, 2011).

Based on the existing research, three research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What themes emerge in undergraduate student Facebook posts in a classroom Facebook “group”?

RQ2: What themes of student-student, student-teacher and student-content interaction emerge?

RQ3: What levels of interaction were observed in the Facebook group?

### Methods

At the beginning of the 2012 spring semester, students from five course sections were informed about their class Facebook groups and were asked to join. Three sections of a media writing course, one section of promotional writing course and one magazine and newspaper editing course, all from the same department, were included. The media writing students shared a group, the promotional writing students had a group and the editing students had their own. The instructor had created the closed Facebook groups in a previous semester and asked students to find their group during a class meeting and submit a request to join the group through Facebook. Students received assignment sheets explaining their posting responsibilities, which are listed in the appendix. The university does not have a universal social media policy or policies on using social media in the classroom.

### *The Assignment*

Students received assignment sheets and an in-class explanation about the Facebook project early in the semester. In the promotional writing course, students were asked to post a total of 12 times in the semester, with at least one post in each of these categories: industry news, content creation (where they had to create original content), errors (finding grammatical or Associated Press Style errors), design inspiration, writing inspiration, and conversation inspiration. Similarly, those in the editing course were asked to share 12 posts with one from each of the following categories: errors (catching grammatical or AP Style errors), design inspiration, writing/editing inspiration, or InDesign/Photoshop how to's. In the media writing class, the requirements were less structured and less rigorous; eight posts were required and students could post from any category. Their instruction sheet explained acceptable posts: errors,

discoveries in the AP Stylebook, what reporters are saying in social media, industry news, story ideas, and writing inspiration. With each post, students were asked to include a short sentence or two about the particular post to give it context. At the end of the semester, students turned in one sheet with screen shots of all of their posts. Students who did not have Facebook or were uncomfortable sharing online were permitted to turn in what they would have posted directly to the instructor.

Institutional review board approval was obtained and informed consent forms were distributed to students early in the semester. The forms were sealed in a folder until the end of the semester. After final semester grades were submitted to the university, the posts of the students who agreed to be a part of the study were marked and distributed to the three researchers for coding. Thirty-nine students and 506 posts were recorded from the three Facebook groups.

Table 1  
*Posts from Facebook groups*

Course	No. of posts	No. of students participating (male/female)
Media Writing	125 posts	15 (3/12)
Promotional Writing	170 posts	12 (0/12)
Editing	211 posts	12 (2/10)
Total	506 posts	39 (5/24)

Posts and comments were counted for the number of posts. “Likes” were not included.

Researchers reflected on their assumptions and existing beliefs about social media in the classroom before coding (Schram, 2003). Two researchers were instructors for the courses and one outside researcher was used. A grounded theory approach was adopted, allowing researchers to review the texts and themes to emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1968). We incorporated grounded theory in our research because it enabled us to "position, relate, and ultimately understand the abstractly inferred content from higher level processing of the text and interaction that is not directly revealed by counting or categorizing of the content" (Anderson & Kanuka, 2003, p. 176). After looking for themes individually, the researchers compared observations and re-investigated themes not mentioned by all three.

### Results

Most comments were positive and reflected content the students liked as opposed to posting content they disliked. This is consistent with previous research that comments are general positive and civil in social networking sites, even on political sites (Ancu & Cozma, 2009; Fernandes, Giurcanu, Bowers & Neely, 2010; Postelnicu & Cozma, 2007; Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008). The dominant themes from analyzing the undergraduate student posts in the classroom Facebook groups clustered into three areas: evidence of formal learning, resource sharing and seeking, and promotion and self-promotion.

#### *Evidence of Formal Learning*

Students began using the vocabulary of their industry. For example, the editing students were studying elements of good design and were able to use those terms to illustrate why a certain design sample appealed to them. "My favorite use of whitespace thus far" accompanied a picture of a magazine spread. When talking about serif and sans serif fonts, "sans" was defined for the students. On the Facebook page, one student posted a picture of muffins at the grocery

store, where the package said “Sans Gluten Free.” The student asked “So is it with or without gluten?” Media writing students would categorize their news stories by the kind of newsworthiness it most displayed, a lesson from the course, with comments like “qualifies as unusual” and “I feel like the only quality of newsworthiness here is Prominence/Celebrity.”

After a class discussion about strategic messages complementing an organization’s mission and values one public relations student posted a Super Bowl commercial with this question “Bahaha...what values does Doritos have?” Another student revisited her stance on the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Protect IP Act (PIPA), after thinking about how it might affect her intended career in communication. One post challenged the word of “press release” on an industry site and referenced her textbook’s analysis of “press release” versus “news release.”

#### *Resource Sharing and Seeking*

Students made referrals to resources their colleagues should check out and suggested helpful outlets for more information. They posted “how to’s” and offered help and clarifications to one another. In some instances, they admitted not knowing how to do something. One student asked her colleagues for a quick reminder on how to capture a screen shot. They circulated artifacts that were already prevalent on the Web, like the Kony 2012 video, “social media as donuts” graphic, and SOPA activism messages.

The public relations students shared resources from AdAge, PRDaily and Ragan Communication, which are geared toward their industry. One found a news release from Red Bull about a campus event to post and others found information directly on PR firms’ websites. Some resource seeking was about class details such as confirming information about the textbook, where to find something on Blackboard, a deadline or a change in the class location.

#### *Promotion and Self-promotion*

Students used the page to share successes for themselves and others. The self-promotion, “Excited that they used my headline! : ),” garnered a colleague comment: “Congrats, <<student name>>!” Another student posted: “Yea for learning things we use in the real world! Just got a call from my previous boss asking me to do a media list and news release!” They gave kudos to one another and the group as a whole when the mission statement it crafted for a client was approved by its board: “Ahh way to go group! That’s awesome.”

They also used the platform to promote for their other endeavors. For example, one student posted a plea for her colleagues to attend a conference she was planning. Another posted a sales pitch for tickets to her sorority’s philanthropy event. Both were public relations students using their network to promote their “clients.”

A kind of grammar elitism was demonstrated by the editing students, where they would make fun of errors they were finding in the world. In their sentence about the find, they would use words like “Really, really?” questioning the idiocy of the grammar violator. In a way, the editing students were promoting their editing prowess.

### *Primary Interactions*

Of the three interactions in RQ2, student-content interactions were more prevalent than student-teacher and student-student. Most posts were to accomplish the assignment, an engagement with the content. The majority of the posts garnered no reaction from fellow students. Some student-student interactions occurred, but comments were very short. The “Like” button was used sparingly as well. Instructor posts were largely to announce an opportunity for students (conference, internship or job posting). The instructor made a conscious effort to minimize posts, and let the students drive the conversations, which was evident in the limited

number of student-teacher interactions. When students directed questions to the professor, there were responses.

### *Levels of Interaction*

To answer RQ3, researchers looked at the levels of interaction among the students in the group. The most common interaction was the upload of the required number of posts. Comments and likes were less frequent, especially toward the project's deadline. Some students used the group pages to solicit feedback for a new e-portfolio page or asking colleagues for sources ideas for a news story. In the media writing course, an agriculture-related story prompted a lively debate between two students interested in agricultural communication, but this was the exception. Most content was push rather than pull, a one-way communication model. At the time of the study, Facebook had not yet implemented the feature where group members can see who has read a message and when. Commenting and liking were the only measures to show another had consumed a post.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The Facebook group assignments essentially created digital scrapbooks for the semester's experience. More photos and text-based messages were used as opposed to video-driven posts. Themes emerging from the Facebook group analysis were consistent with existing research. Evidence of formal learning, resource sharing and seeking, and promotion and self-promotion, align with Greenhow and Robelia's (2009) three ways that MySpace supported student learning: validation and appreciation, peer-alumni support and school-task related support. Even though the primary objective of the assignment was student-content interaction, the lack of "conversation" created was surprising. The instructor behind the assignment thought the page would also become an outlet for student-student interactions, as Baran (2010) wrote. For public

relations students, stimulating conversation and creating communities in social media will be a component of their future careers. Reporters, too, are building relationships with readers through social media, and two-way conversation is essential. The project succeeded in linking students and their content, but more emphasis could be placed on tactics for building relationships and creating conversation in social media. That being said, students did come to the aid of their colleagues who asked for specific help. Students were quick to respond (within five minutes) to a colleague asking a specific question.

Students infused opinions and reactions with their posts for the assignment. They were judging the content (on the higher end of Bloom's Taxonomy). For media writing students, some used quips like "interesting," "cool," "wow," and "uhhh ohhh!" Other qualified reactions to stories with feelings like "very sad story" and "so precious and sweet." The promotional writing and editing students posted in a similar fashion. An editing student said, "Something mass produced should have better spellcheck."

Extra observations by the researcher most closely involved in the project included humor. Selwyn (2009) found similar occurrences, and collected them in a category he called "banter." The other coders did not report evidence of humor, so the face-to-face interactions might have informed the coder's perceptions of humor on the computer-mediated communication.

Other observations include a level of procrastination and taking the easy route. Sharing "easy" finds, or the memes having circled the Web once, did not fulfill the project's intent. Another phenomenon was the all-at-once effort, where a student posted all of his or her posts in quick succession, or on the last day of the semester. Students complained about their Facebook news feeds "blowing up" because people were hurrying to finish the assignment. Students were asked to post a sentence or intro to give their post context. "This is pretty informative" and other



uninspiring lead-ins were used. For future reporters and public relations professionals, this is an area they will need to improve in order to have their messages consumed from the mass of available content. Occasional laziness in their own writing and editing occurred, with misspelled words (its vs. it's) and typos. Some of this might be attributed to posting on mobile devices. A little prompting was needed to remind students that they could share and post. If students shared something orally in the classroom or individually with one professor, she would remind them that it would make a good Facebook post for the group.

Differences were observed between the groups. The editing students may have been more comfortable with the assignment because many of the students had another class with the same professor and were accustomed to the posting ritual. They shared during their daily course of life, at the park, the grocery store, etc., which seems to be more of an integration of their studies than the other groups. The public relations class did not use as much industry vocabulary as the editing course, but they really dove into industry and trade publications, exposing them to public relations as a field. The media writing students tended to post stories that interested them, not stretching too far into journalism as an industry with news of its own.

### *Instructor Role and Perspective*

From an instructional perspective, instructors can identify chronic writing problems for an individual or the group as a whole. Misplaced apostrophes littered the pages and some texting language was used. Creative or interesting posts were used at times to start an in-class discussion. One example was a story a student posted about an article in a Tennessee publication about an alumnus from our university. The student posted “They kind of make us look bad...” and the in-class discussion was about fairness and balance in reporting, as well as objectivity. A

review of the posts after the semester's end can show an instructor missed teachable moments that could be improved in future semesters.

### *Future Study*

The sample size of mostly female participation, predominantly students from one instructor's classes at one university over one semester make generalizations to other populations unwise. The study provides a glimpse into what students are saying in a course Facebook group and draws attention to areas professors could bolster to improve social media communication in communication classes. Expanding the study to multiple institutions or social media platforms could provide more generalizable results.

Measuring student learning would be an ideal next step. Is this kind of exercise helping the students to connect with the course content? Is it truly an extension of the classroom? What evidence of student learning emerges? Researchers could measure where along Bloom's Taxonomy most of the student learning in Facebook occurs — the application level of their learning (finding examples) or synthesis (creating their own unique content) (Krathwohl, 2002). How much extra time were students engaged in the course's conversations compared to classes without social media? Graham and Scarborough (2001) suggest a direct correlation between increased interaction and increased learning; research could look for an ideal number of interactions or if "forced" interactions like this assignment have the same impact as more authentic interactions. Researching the learning community formed (or not) is another potential avenue for future study, with focus groups asking students what the community meant to them.

The news shared by the media writing students was largely from Yahoo's front page, which leads to further investigation of students' preferred sources, and potential biases. Some former students and graduates lurked in the courses after the end of the semester. What are the

benefits to them and the current students when the alumni remain engaged in a class Facebook group? Are there disadvantages? This study focused on student themes, but action research or self-appraisal of the professor's ability to engage students. How do the instructor's posts (and modeling) influence the students using the group page?

From one semester of data, the emergent themes point to some value of using social networks as a part of a face-to-face course. Using the language of an intended career field, reading industry publications and searching for class-related information after the face-to-face session ends illustrate small successes in five communication classes, even if the student-student and student-teacher interactions were less prominent.

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## Appendix A The Assignment Sheets

### **Idea Book – aka [Name of Facebook Group] – for a beginning media writing course**

Our Idea Book is meant to help you look for communication inspiration in your everyday life and to see the industry side of communication. It's like a social media scrapbook and a way for you to network with your fellow journalism students.

You'll collect at least 8 entries for our book. Each entry needs a one- or two-sentence explanation from you (using good writing and editing) about why it's going into our idea book. Take time to also provide thoughtful comments about posts from your peers.

[Name of Facebook Group] is a closed group on Facebook so you will be communicating with fellow students in your section of media writing, plus students in other media writing sections and broadcast courses. If you do not have Facebook access, or have concerns about privacy, please see your professor for an alternative.

Ideas of things you might find to post:

**WRITING INSPIRATION:** Find a story told in an interesting way? Find a clever headline or outline? Find an article where the copy sings? This would count.

**ERRORS:** Catch an error in an edited piece you find in a news outlet. Please refrain from using the student news outlets. These outlets are used for student-learning laboratories. Find the errors yourself – avoid using sites like #epicfail to find them for you.

**AP:** Maybe you make a discovery about AP style. Share it.

**FROM THE MOUTHS OF REPORTERS/EDITORS:** What are other journalists saying in social media? Share what you find interesting or inspiring. Credit them or link to them.

**NEWS INDUSTRY NEWS:** What's trending in the media business? You might follow SPJ, ASME or Editor & Publisher. Or the New York Times (look up newspaper names in AP) has a section about the media biz. An example tidbit would be that the Dallas Morning News is laying off more staff.

**STORY IDEAS:** Test out possible story ideas on your peers. Try to find interesting angles and not just topics. A topic is parking. An angle is that more students are purchasing SMART cars so they can share one parking spot with another SMART car (I made this up). Begin with "story idea" so we know that you'd like our feedback.

How to turn this project in for a grade: Collect your posts as screen shots or cut-copy-paste the text into one Word document. Warning – sometimes Facebook magically erases posts. I'd copy your post into your Word doc after making it. You'll turn in one Word document at the end of the semester. I'd advise you to post throughout the semester and not all at once the day before this is due.

### **Idea Book project in Facebook – For an media editing course**

Your Idea Book is meant to help you look for communication inspiration and errors in your everyday life. It's like a scrapbook. We'll use our [Name of Facebook Group] Facebook group as a social media scrapbook.

[Name of Facebook Group] is a closed group on Facebook so you will be communicating with fellow students in your section of editing, plus former students. If you do not have Facebook access, or have concerns about privacy, please see your professor for an alternative.

You'll collect at least 12 entries for your book and you need at least one (of the entire 12) from each of the categories below. Each entry needs a one- or two-sentence explanation from you (using good writing and editing) about why it's going into the idea book.

Please post at least once a week or two weeks to the group page.

1. **ERRORS:** Catch an error in an edited piece. This could be on a banner or a sign. It could be in a newspaper or a magazine. It can be a screen shot from a video game. Please refrain from using the student news outlets These publications are used for student-learning laboratories. Refrain from using error-posting sites like epic fail.
2. **DESIGN INSPIRATION:** See a layout that is striking, different or just a smart way to handle information, snap a photo or tear it out.
3. **WRITING/EDITING INSPIRATION:** Find a clever headline or outline? This would count. Find an article where the copy sings?
4. **INDESIGN/PHOTOSHOP HOW TO:** Much of what you'll learn in pagination will be you figuring it out or following someone else's how-to. Create a how-to or share a good one with us on how to do something cool in InDesign.

What to turn in? Toward the end of the semester, you'll be asked to collect your entries as screen shots or by pasting the copy into one document. The deadline is \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Idea Book – aka [Name of Facebook Group] on Facebook – for a public relations writing course**

Your Idea Book is meant to help you look for strategic communication inspiration in your everyday life. It's also a place to practice creating strategic messages and becoming a content creator.

Think of our idea book like a scrapbook. You'll collect at least 12 entries for your book and you need at least one from each of the categories below. Each entry needs a one- or two-sentence explanation from you (using good writing and editing) about why it's going into your idea book. Take time to also provide thoughtful comments about posts from your peers.

[Name of Facebook Group] is a closed group on Facebook so you will be communicating with the fellow students (and former promotional writing students) in the sections of promotional writing. If you do not have Facebook access, or have concerns about privacy, please see your professor for an alternative.

Categories for posting

**INDUSTRY NEWS:** What’s going on in public relations, advertising, social media or other strategic communication? Ragan, Ad Age, O’Dwyer’s, IABC, or PRSA are good places to check.

**CONTENT CREATOR:** Create a message for your media kit client that could be used in social media. This could be a question, a podcast, a video, a tagline, etc. Test it with our group. Place the words “test message” before your post so we know that you want our reactions.

**CONTENT CREATOR VIDEO:** Create a short video explaining something in PR, introducing us to a trend or concept or giving your opinion on something strategic communication-related.

**ERRORS:** Catch an error in an edited piece of strategic communication. This could be on a banner or a sign. It could be in a news release or brochure. It can be a screen shot from a video game or a page on a company’s website. Find the errors yourself – avoid using sites like epicfail to find them for you.

**DESIGN INSPIRATION:** See a layout that is striking, different or just a smart way to handle information, snap a photo and post it.

**WRITING/EDITING INSPIRATION:** Find a clever headline or outline? Find a news release with a catchy hook? Find a radio ad where the copy sings? This would count.

**CONVERSATION INSPIRATION:** Tell us who (companies/groups/social causes) is doing a great job of communicating (includes listening) with clients and publics in social media. Who is keeping the conversations lively and informative? Who keeps people coming back for more? Prove it to us by showing an example.

How to turn this project in for a grade: Collect your posts as screen shots or cut-copy-paste the text into one Word document. Warning – sometimes Facebook magically erases posts. I’d copy your post into your Word doc after making it. Label which category each entry should be counted as. You’ll turn in one Word document toward the end of the semester. Check your syllabus for the date. I’d advise you to post throughout the semester and not all at once the day before this is due.