

Carnegie Mellon uses social networking to tap collective intelligence of online study groups

May 3 2011

Taking their cue from social media, educators at Carnegie Mellon University have developed a social networking application called Classroom Salon that engages students in online learning communities that effectively tap the collective intelligence of groups.

Thousands of high school and university students used Classroom Salon (CLS), <http://www.classroomsalon.org/>, this past academic year to share their ideas about texts, news articles and other reading materials or their critiques of each others' writings. With the support of the Next Generation Learning Challenges initiative, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, CLS will be used in an innovative experiment at the University of Baltimore to see if it can help students who are in danger of failing introductory courses or otherwise dropping out of college.

"Sites such as Facebook and Twitter have captured the attention of young people in a way that blogs and online discussion forums have not," said Ananda Gunawardena, associate teaching professor in the Computer Science Department, who developed CLS with David S. Kaufer, professor of English. "With Classroom Salon, we've tried to capture the sense of connectedness that makes social media sites so appealing, but within a framework that that allows groups to explore texts deeply. So it's not just [social networking](#) for the sake of socializing but enhancing the student experience as readers and writers."

In CLS, class members can read assigned texts and then annotate them with online editing tools. These observations can then be shared with the group using CLS's novel interactive tools, which can highlight "hot spots" that spark discussion within a document, cluster similar comments and identify which comments are most influential.

"Studies show that people working in teams are able to arrive at better and more creative solutions than people working alone, and this is particularly true in reading and writing tasks. However, that collective effort is difficult to achieve in formal education settings," Kaufer said. "Class time is limited and most online course management systems tend to be driven by the instructor's questions. Classroom Salon, by contrast, makes possible more genuinely student-centered collaborative work."

Carnegie Mellon students discuss how they use CLS in this video:

All students can benefit from the kind of [collective intelligence](#) CLS makes possible, but Kaufer and Gunawardena suggest that at-risk students may benefit the most because CLS also can easily be used to personalize instruction for specific individuals and groups.

That idea will be tested in a new program, funded by a \$250,000 grant through the Next Generation Learning Challenges initiative. Nancy Kaplan, professor and executive director of the School of Information Arts and Technologies at the University of Baltimore, working with collaborators at Carnegie Mellon, will combine CLS and materials developed for Carnegie Mellon's Open Learning Initiative, <http://oli.web.cmu.edu/openlearning/>, with traditional face-to-face instruction to create a sustainable social learning model.

The researchers will see if this new approach will help students at the University of Baltimore, an urban, open-admission institution where about half of the incoming students fail to graduate within eight years.

Many are first-generation college students who attend part-time, come from low-income families, and require remedial math and writing courses.

Gunawardena and Kaufer also are exploring the commercial potential of CLS through Carnegie Mellon's Project Olympus, a program that bridges the gap between research and the marketplace by providing faculty and [students](#) with start-up advice, incubator space and business connections. The National Science Foundation, Innovation Works and the Heinz Endowments have supported the development of CLS.

Provided by Carnegie Mellon University

Citation: Carnegie Mellon uses social networking to tap collective intelligence of online study groups (2011, May 3) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-05-carnegie-mellon-social-networking-intelligence.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.