Report on Teaching Excellence Program Leadership Project

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Introduction:

In the Winter 2016 term I initiated work on a pilot program to engage faculty and other Humber staff to develop their ability to use social and traditional media tools to promote their professional activities. The project was a collaboration between myself and Humber's Communications Team led by Andrew Leopold and supported by Sara Laux and Laura Stricker. A two and a half hour training session was developed that focused on op-ed writing, social media engagement, and other public facing communication on behalf of Humber College. This program had been delivered three times to audiences from the School of Social and Community Services by June 2016, when a revised version of the training was proposed to Associate Dean Dr. Jeanine Webber as a leadership project to fulfill the requirements of the Teaching Excellence Program. The intention was to build a more refined presentation and roll out the sessions to other schools and programs beyond SSCS. Working together we developed an hour and a half long session that focused on writing and submitting opinion pieces to newspapers and how to use social media to support academic and college related activities. The plan was to conduct three sessions over the 2016-2017 academic year, though in the end we ended up delivering it on four different days for a total of six sessions.

Why Was This Project Needed?:

While academics have been known to engage with blogging, and many use social media in their personal lives, the practice of using social media to support professional activities in academic environments has not seen very high levels of uptake (Lupton, 2014). Those academics that do not use Twitter or other social media platforms often do not have a strong understanding of how such tools can be useful in things like sharing knowledge, disseminating research, developing teaching practices, engaging in social commentary, or professional networking(Fransman, 2013). The number of individuals using social media, particularly in support of their teaching practices, is increasing quickly, making it important that entrants in to

this new world of academic social media engagement understand the opportunities and the pitfalls of such practices(Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2011). Indeed it seems that the process of scholarship is now intimately tied in to the social media world, with academics needing to reconsider how they move ideas forward once they've surpassed the stage of peer-review, and what wider audiences their social media outputs may reach (Daniels, 2013). Such unrestricted ability to connect with other scholars across disciplines and oceans creates permeable boundaries in once isolated fields and possibilities for enrichment of scholarly practices not seen in any previous era (Weller, 2011). Given that the average academic journal article is read by fewer than 10 people (Biswas & Kirchherr, 2015), social media seems like an opportune way of sharing research knowledge beyond the ivory towers.

But research isn't the only reason why we should focus on promoting social media engagement at Humber College. Social media can be used in the classroom as well. Faculty who use social media in the classroom report that it allows students another pathway to communicate with each other and their faculty, provides easy connection to real life examples of issues being discussed in the classroom, and provides avenues to engage students beyond the time they spend in the classroom (Lupton, 2014). More than 40% of polled US faculty have assigned students to read or review social media, and another 20% have required students to post something to social media (Moran et al., 2011). While social media use in the classroom varies by discipline and the age of the faculty member (Manca & Ranieri, 2016), generally it has been shown that increased use of social media tools helps maintain engagement amongst students if utilized in a manner that avoids information overload and provides interesting content (Berger & Wild, 2016).

The training sessions' additional focus on op/ed writing was included to provide faculty and staff attendees with an additional, perhaps more comfortable, avenue by which they can communicate their professional knowledge to a wider audience. Writing op/ed pieces allows researchers to engage with the public in a manner that allows for, 'interpretive agency' and accessible descriptions of complicated policy and scientific concepts (Parks & Takahashi, 2016). Such communications strategies may be considered an important component of the social responsibilities of researchers, particularly when their funding comes from public sources

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(Frankel, 2015). This format of contributing to the public discourse may be important, but we should be cognizant that researchers working in areas of some controversy may find it difficult to get their op/ed pieces in to major newspapers if their work is not in line with the editorial stance of the publication (Day & Golan, 2005).

Project Outputs:

In addition to the three preliminary training sessions help in March, May, and June 2016, we held four additional training sessions. The first three sessions were led by They were as follows:

February 6, 2017: A session was held in WEL304A with approximately 12 people in attendance. These were recruited via an email announcement sent out via the Humber Communique. Attendees were primarily from the Business School, but included HRT, SSCS, and LAS as well.

February 23, 2017: This session was held as part of the Support Staff Awareness Week activities at the North Campus. Approximately 28 people were in attendance. The focus of the session was altered somewhat to accommodate the particular roles of individuals who would be attending that meeting.

April 4, 2017: A lunch time 'Power Up Session' was held at HRT, with approximately 10 people in attendance. The session was only 1:00 in length and so we had to amend the session somewhat.

May 15, 2017: Three sessions were held as part of the Technology Pro-Dev Day for SSCS faculty. This session was led by Laura Stricker as Dr. Bear was leading a session on Turnitin at the same times. A combined 12 people attended the sessions.

Project Outcomes and Future Sessions:

Respondents to the first session in February 2017 and the session with HRT faculty were offered an online feedback survey, but only three people participated. While their reviews were quite positive, this small sample size does not allow us to accurately assess respondents' reported views of the training sessions. Anecdotal reports from participants seem to indicate that they enjoyed the sessions, and learned a lot, but those that did not already engage in any social

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media activity seemed unlikely to begin doing so. Those that already were active in social media for personal use, and those who also used it for professional activities did indicate that they felt more knowledgeable about using the tools, but we are unable to assess if this level of comfortability resulted in increased use.

The sessions seem to have achieved a moderate level of success when judged by participant satisfaction. Whether the participants increased their use of social media and/or were more active in promoting Humber is not known. At this time no participant has reported back that they have submitted an op/ed piece, though several discussed ideas they wanted to pursue down that pathway. Overall the sessions seem to be well regarded. We are now in a position where we can continue to deliver these sessions as they may be requested by programs and schools. Continued refinement may include the removal of the op/ed section of the training as it did not seem to generate any new articles. No future sessions are currently planned, but we may continue to offer the sessions once a term for the foreseeable future.

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