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Teachers <3 Remind101 and Students Do 2: Using Remind101 as a Classroom Communication Tool

Introduction

Effective student-teacher communication is critical for success in any class (Dobransky & Frymier, 2004). Far too often, students and instructors communicate at a minimal level, and that can create major problems. One important element within a student-teacher relationship is out-of-class communication, and when levels of out-of-class communication increase, so will student learning (Dobransky & Frymier, 2004).

Today's students are digitally literate (Roberts, Newman & Schwartzstein, 2012). Many students carry multiple electronic devices and use various communication methods to make sure they are always connected to friends, events and information (Papp & Matulich, 2012). In fact, 99.8% of college students reportedly own one or more mobile phones (Truong, 2010). Furthermore, 97% of students report they use SMS as their main form of communication (Truong, 2010). Because students rely on using text messages as their primary communication tool and are moving away from e-mail in their personal lives (Lenhart, Campbell & Purcell, 2011), instructors may need to rethink the most reliable ways to stay in touch with their students (Kolowich, 2011).

While it is possible to manually send text messages to students, the process is cumbersome and involves the students giving the instructor their mobile phone number, which can lead to privacy issues (Nielson & Webb, 2011). An alternative approach is to select a group texting tool, which students can choose to opt-in if they wish to receive messages from the faculty member via SMS. This type of service can build the bridge between teacher to student communication, and allows them to stay connected no matter which devices(s) they are using. Remind101 is exactly that type of service: "A safe way for teachers to text message students and stay in touch with parents" (remind101, 2012). This idea can assist agricultural educators in developing "meaningful, engaged learning in all environments" (Doerfert, 2011, p. 21).

Procedure

Instructors can register for a free account at www.remind101.com (remind101, 2012). Each instructor is assigned a phone number, to which a student will text to subscribe. After registering a class, instructors are given a PDF with instructions they can print out or post on course websites. This makes for quick and easy sign up for both students and teachers. This is an opt-in service, which means that students have to enter a confirmation code to state that they do want to be contacted through remind101. It's obvious that students are using mobile phones to communicate, but privacy concerns become an issue when instructors and professors are involved. Remind101 keeps phone numbers hidden so that the parties cannot see other's numbers (remind101, 2012). Once subscribed, remind101 will ask for the students' name via text so the instructor can identify them by name only. Students may choose to receive messages via email if they prefer.

Remind101 also allows for pre-planned communication to occur. Instructors can go online to create messages and schedule them to go out at a later date/time (remind101, 2012). The message history shows when and to whom a message was sent. The available iPhone/Android app makes remind101 even more versatile since instructors can use any smart phone to send reminders on the go when a computer isn't available.

Assessment

Remind101 was implemented in two agricultural communications courses and one student organization at Texas Tech University and Oklahoma State University. Registering for the remind101 list was optional and Table 1 describes the level of participation in each of the student groups.

Table 1. Student Participation in Remind101 Class Lists

Group	Total Student	Remind101 Students	%
Upper-level design course	26	20	76.9
Upper-level writing course	30	25	83.3
Student organization	25	23	92.0

The class instructors and organization adviser used remind101 to send messages to students with reminders and announcements. Below are a few example messages sent to the students:

Instructor 1: Flyer 2 peer review during class today. Bring your first draft (as complete as possible) to class and be ready to give and receive feedback.

Instructor 2: Remember: No class. Career Fair today. 12:30-4:30 GIA. Take copies of your amazing new résumé. Research the cos. before you talk to them

Organization: Hey guys- Don't forget to wear your polos to training today for pictures.

In an evaluation survey, students (N = 39) indicated their agreement with statements about remind101 on a Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Participants said they agreed they prefer using remind101 to communicate ($M = 4.49$, SD = .72) and they wished more instructors used the service ($M = 4.62$, SD = 63). When talking about remind101, one student said "It was easy to use, fast, and helped keep me on track. So far I haven't forgot about an assignment b/c of it!" Another student said "It's a nice reminder through my phone, which I have *all* the time." One student who did not opt-in to the service said, "I fear this program takes away part of the responsibility aspect of college."

Advice for Others

The following tips may help instructors who wish to use remind101:

- Instructors should post remind101 messages in other places (such as class websites) since all students may not have a phone or may choose not to opt-in to remind101.
- Instructors and students should be aware that remind101 messages are part of a one-way conversation. Students would like to respond to text messages, but cannot via remind101.
- Instructors are unable to send remind101 messages directly from the SMS application on a cell phone. Rather, an instructor must log into the remind101 website or use the iPhone/Android application.
- Instructors must keep their messages brief and stay under 140 characters, which is the message limit for non-iPhone users.

This service is not only for homework updates or reminders. Instructors should get fun with it; try trivia contests, motivation, school spirit, or "fast facts" before tests/quizzes.

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