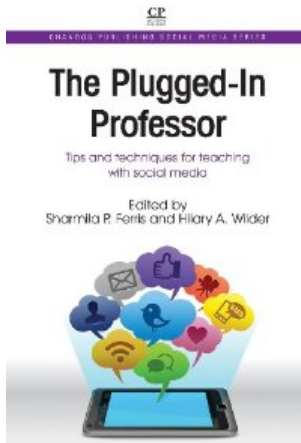




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For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



The Plugged-In Professor: Tips and Techniques For Teaching With Social Media

Ferris, Sharmila; and Wilder, Hilary, eds.
Chandos Publishing/Woodhead Publishing, 2013

Book Review

Tags: critical reflection | instructional design | social media
| teaching methods

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This volume is designed more like a handbook than a piece of prose. Aside from the preface that details how the volume is arranged and how each successive chapter is outlined, each chapter (twenty-five in total) represents a stand-alone essay that describes how an instructor can integrate a piece of social media into her or his curriculum and assignment portfolio. The essays are divided into four parts. The essays in Part 1, "Research, Writing and Information Fluency," focus on applications of social media that challenge students to develop effective research and writing skills. The essays on "sharing" sites are of note because they offer instructors insight on how to use social media sites that students are already using to share research through bookmarking cultural artifacts.

Part 2, "Communication and Collaboration," is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on instructional communication through social media. Each social media outlet examined in this section is a communicative tool (for example, Wimba or YouTube) that can be re-allocated for educational purposes. The second section of Part 2 concerns issues of collaboration in terms of students working together on educational projects through social media tools such as Google Docs, study blogs, and group-designed wikis.

Part 3, "Critical Thinking and Creativity," is also divided into two sections. The first section considers how students can demonstrate critical (and, I might add, culturally perceptive) thinking through social media outlets such as Tumblr and Facebook. Students are challenged in these sections to examine social trends and personal expressions offered by users of these social media outlets to ascertain how persons learn and demonstrate social ethics or personal and professional development. The second section focuses on creative final course projects

such as digital storytelling or video streaming presentations.

Part 4, which concludes the volume, focuses on integrative learning, on integrating research, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity into one social media project. The final essay is of note here because it describes how students conducted a “social media campaign” through Twitter (xxvii). The students researched a client, communicated with opinion leaders in the client’s field, and promoted the client’s cause through critical reflection and creative engagement.

The Plugged-In Professor clearly articulates that learning can be promoted in a host of ways through the use of social media. Therefore this is a valuable resource. The social media savvy instructor will be able to wade through the technical language with ease and find projects that he or she can use in class. However, the digital immigrant or digital alien may be overwhelmed at first. This volume can be read straight through, but one is likely to get bogged down in the various approaches and creative projects. It may be more helpful to read this volume like a tasting menu, sampling this Twitter-based exercise or that exercise for Google Docs. Perhaps it could be seen in a similar light as the *Teaching Theology & Religion* “Teaching Tactics.” Regardless of how one reads the material, the instructor should be careful to assess each project’s usefulness before implementing a social media project. The only real limitation to this volume is that the field of religious studies and theology was not represented, but religion and theology faculty can adapt these projects for their courses. For example, I was challenged by some of the essays in Part 1 to develop a wiki group project for my Pentateuch course. That said, it would be have useful and encouraging to see at least one sample of how social media has been used in a religious studies or theology course.

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