

Special Section Introduction: Multimedia in Nonprofit Education

Jimmy A. Young, PhD, Guest Editor
California State University San Marcos

Scholars, educators, and practitioners have all been influenced by the use of digital technologies and the rapid development of social media. Research is generally mixed on the benefits and challenges of these new technologies as they apply to many aspects of life and throughout various sectors. The reality is that digital and social technologies are not going away, and students and practitioners need to become aware and adept at using these technologies. Educators are on the frontline in this new technologically rich education system and have the opportunity to help prepare and transform their students for this new world.

The articles in this special section were solicited from a special call in the beginning of 2017 and highlight issues of importance in addition to providing suggestions for educating students and preparing them for an ever increasing digitally mediated career. Themes from the articles suggest educators give special attention to digital literacies, student-centered approaches, and recognizing the need for specific policies and infrastructure when utilizing online or hybrid teaching approaches.

The first article, “Equipping Future Nonprofit Professionals With Digital Literacies for the 21st Century,” provides a quantitative account of a course that sought to enhance students’ digital literacies by infusing the conceptual framework of New Media literacies and Participatory Culture into a general nonprofit studies course on communication, marketing, and digital activism. Consistent with the concept of new media literacies and participatory culture, digital literacies require people to have the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate information in many forms as well as to have the requisite social and cultural competencies to participate in and understand the digital world. The course was taught using traditional face-to-face and online approaches over four semesters and utilized social media as well as concepts embedded in the new media literacies framework to help students learn, participate, and critically evaluate social media. Results suggested students in both mediums saw an increase in their overall literacies and that there was no significant difference between face-to-face and online courses.

The second article on digital literacies, “Digital Literacy in Social Work Education: A Case Study Incorporating Technology and Social Media Within the Social Work Curriculum,” uses a case study approach to demonstrate the integration of learning materials into a course focused on communication, writing, and digital literacy. The

authors share valuable information on assignments and activities that can help enhance education. They specifically point to the use of social media, namely Twitter, and how social-media-based assignments can add exciting and innovative ways for students to interact with a broader learning network. The authors finish with excellent suggestions for classroom instruction, for example, building upon the knowledge students bring to the learning experience with thoughtful intentions about what instructors are requiring students to accomplish. Students bring a wealth of information and knowledge with them to the classroom, and that needs to be recognized and leveraged to ensure they are learning and prepared to enter the professional world.

Building upon a student-centered approach is the article “Multimodal Instruction, the New Hybrid: A Student-Centered Approach to Blended Learning.” This case study demonstrates a unique and innovative method to hybrid learning in which students choose the method of instruction on a weekly basis, whether it be the traditional face-to-face format in the classroom, asynchronous online learning, or synchronously online via video conference. The article highlights several trends in higher education that stem in part from the infusion of technology in learning and posits that multimodal learning may be an answer to some of the challenges educators and educational institutions face in the changing landscape of digitally mediated education. The author acknowledges the substantial pedagogical, technological, and instructional work that is required but also suggests that multimodal instruction is a means of empowering students and simultaneously affording institutions the ability to train the next generation of nonprofit leaders effectively and efficiently.

The final article, “Faculty Perspectives About Distance Teaching in the Virtual Classroom,” takes a different turn to incorporate faculty voices and experiences in online teaching. Specifically, the authors focus on distance teaching and not distance learning. Utilizing survey data, the authors explore the challenges and advantages of instructors teaching online and hybrid courses in nonprofit management. The authors provide much needed research on the faculty perspective that many in higher education may welcome as concrete data to support the notion that developing online courses and programs needs to be done critically and carefully. The authors conclude with several relevant suggestions, with the most common suggestion centering around time management for faculty teaching online.

In conclusion, the articles included in this special section make significant contributions to the literature on teaching with digital technologies in nonprofit education. Clearly more research is needed on these topics. However, the most promising development of this section is the idea that education is changing due to technology and other influences, and it needs to change to keep pace with the expectations of a unique professional world that awaits eager, enthusiastic, and knowledgeable students. All of the articles conclude to some degree that educators have the incredible opportunity to further enhance student knowledge, experiences, and capabilities so that they will be able to engage, innovate, and transform the nonprofit sector in positive and meaningful ways. I hope you will read through the articles and feel inspired to take a step further, try something new, and revitalize nonprofit education.