

**F**ACULTY **F**OCUS

# Special Report

## Twitter in Higher Education: Usage Habits and Trends of Today's College Faculty

September 2009

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# Executive Summary

It happened seemingly overnight, but suddenly the education community is all a-Twitter. Or is it? That's what *Faculty Focus* set out to learn when it launched in July 2009 a survey on the role of Twitter in higher education. The survey asked college and university faculty about their familiarity and use of the micro-blogging service, if any, as well as whether they expect their Twitter use to increase or decrease in the future.

The *Faculty Focus* survey of nearly 2,000 higher education professionals found that almost a third (30.7 percent) of the 1,958 respondents who completed the survey are using Twitter in some capacity. More than half (56.4 percent) say they've never used Twitter. The remaining 12.9 percent of respondents say they tried it, but no longer use it.

Interestingly, although the majority of faculty do not currently use Twitter, their reasons are varied. While many questioned its educational relevance and expressed concerns that it creates poor writing skills, for others the reasons seemed to boil down to the simple fact that they either don't know how to use Twitter, or don't have time to use.

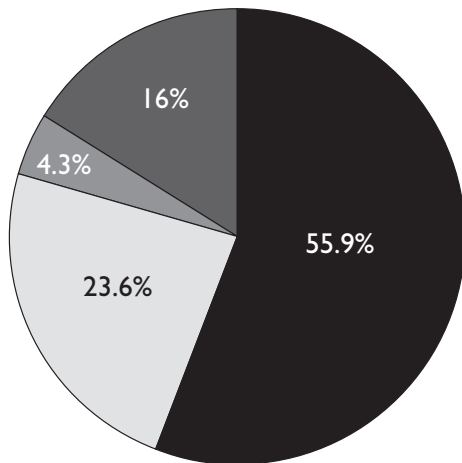
Of those who currently use Twitter nearly three-fourths (71.8 percent) say they expect to increase their use during the coming academic year. Only 3.2 percent say their Twitter use will likely decrease, and 25.0 percent say it will stay about the same.

In terms of how higher education professionals are using Twitter, the most common activities include staying current on news/trends and networking with colleagues (even those they've never met in person). There also are educators who have experimented with different ways to use Twitter in the classroom, or have plans to do so for the first time this coming semester.

What follows is a breakdown of the survey results by question, including comments provided by survey respondents when available.

## WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

The majority of people who took the survey, 55.9 percent, are professors or instructors, with another 4.3 percent who designated themselves as online instructors specifically. Nearly one-fourth (23.6 percent) are academic leaders such as department chairs, deans, and provosts. Sixteen percent selected their role as “Other” and these included individuals in faculty development, academic advisement, instructional design, marketing, admissions, assessment, and library services, as well as educators who teach both traditional and online courses.



What is your role in higher education?  
Please select the most appropriate title:

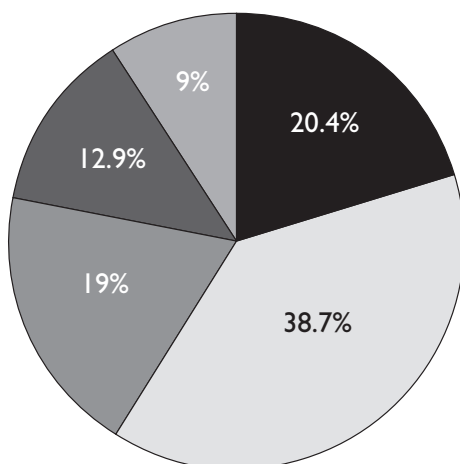
professor or instructor – 55.9%  
academic leader – 23.6%  
online instructor – 4.3%  
other – 16.0%

(Total who answered this question: 1,945)

## HOW FAMILIAR ARE YOU WITH TWITTER?

By now almost everyone has heard of Twitter, even if they don't exactly know what it is or how to use it. In a nutshell, Twitter is a free micro-blogging service that allows people to send and receive messages of 140 characters or less. These messages are known as Tweets. The company has been around since 2006, but experienced explosive growth and media attention this year. In fact, according to social media analytics company Sysomos Inc., 72.5 percent of all Twitter users joined during the first five months of 2009.

In our survey, we asked respondents to gauge how familiar they are with Twitter. The top response with 38.7 percent was “somewhat familiar,” followed by 20.4 percent who say “not at all” familiar, and 19.0 percent who are “familiar.” The remaining 21.9 percent could be considered the “power users” with 12.9 percent saying they are “very familiar,” and 9 percent who are “extremely familiar” with Twitter.



How familiar are you with Twitter?

Not at all – 20.4%  
Somewhat familiar – 38.7%  
Familiar – 19.0%  
Very familiar – 12.9%  
Extremely familiar – 9.0%

(Total who answered this question: 1,962)

## DO YOU USE TWITTER?

There's no doubt that Twitter is today's hot technology. You can hardly go 24 hours without seeing or hearing some reference to Twitter, whether it's from a news report or your colleague down the hall. But what will it take for Twitter to move from a passing fad to a legitimate communication and networking tool? Or has it already?

Although Twitter has its share of celebrities and athletes who Tweet, once you get beyond the high-profile users you'll notice there are a lot of different types of people using Twitter in a lot of different ways. And while it's true that some people use it as a way to post updates on the minutiae of everyday life, others have found more productive ways to use it.

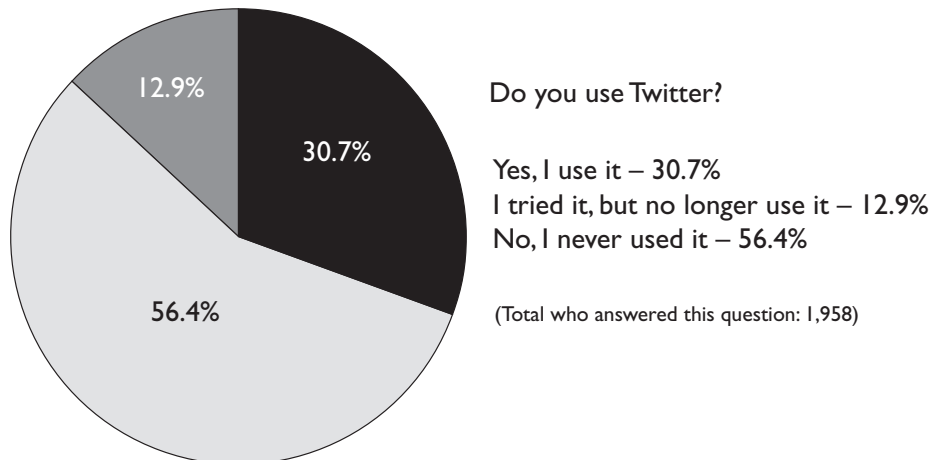
In higher education, many of the first adopters were professionals involved in marketing, admissions and alumni relations. Today a growing number of professors are using Twitter to connect with colleagues from around the country (or world) as well as in the classroom as a way of keeping students engaged.

Yet despite this growing cadre of active higher education Twitterers, the survey showed that there is also a large group of educators who have yet to set up a Twitter account. Many say they plan to test the waters for the first time when the new school year begins this fall, and a few more say they are willing to give it a try, but aren't sure where to start or are taking a "wait and see" before adding Twitter to their growing arsenal of teaching tools.

Also, it's important to note that despite Twitter's tremendous growth, there is a large percentage of faculty who believe, very strongly in some instances, that Twitter has no place in higher education.

In the *Faculty Focus* survey, more than half of the respondents (56.4 percent) say they have never used Twitter. Nearly one third (30.7 percent) are currently using Twitter, and 12.9 percent say they've tried it, but stopped using it for one reason or another. [The reasons are outlined on page 17]

Depending how they answered this pivotal question — "Do you use Twitter?" — respondents were asked a unique set of follow-up questions.



## MAJORITY OF FACULTY NOT USING TWITTER

As mentioned, more than half of the 1,958 respondents (56.4 percent) who took the survey say they have never used Twitter. Their reasons include a whole combination of factors including:

- Don't know how to use it,
- Don't have time to use it,
- Question its educational relevance, and
- Unsure of whether students use it.

A breakdown of their responses is in the following chart:

**What are your reasons for NOT using Twitter?**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Don't know how to use it	9.6%	15%	24.6%	27.2%	23.5%
Don't have time to use it	4.0%	8.6%	23.4%	35.9%	28.2%
Question its educational value	3.3%	6.1%	28.6%	30.6%	31.4%
Unsure whether students use it	16.9%	29.3%	30.6%	17.4%	5.8%

(Total who answered this question: 1,068)

Of the 1,068 survey participants who answered the question “What are your reasons for NOT using Twitter?” more than 161 added comments to further explain their position. Often the comments served to clarify or expand upon the response options in the survey question, but in some cases new trends emerged as possible issues. Typically, the comments, some of which are included below, fell into one of five categories:

- No interest in or time to use it
- Concern it creates poor writing skills/has little education value
- Privacy/security issues
- Haven't used it yet but willing to experiment
- Think it's a fad that will pass

**No interest in or time to use it**

- *It seems to be a stupid time-eating worthless pursuit*
- *Lack of time and no immediate need to use it.*
- *I know how to use it, I've seen it demoed several times, but I don't have the neither the time nor the need for it. It could be useful if used in moderation, but most people don't know how to do that.*
- *I am already hooked on Facebook. If I added Twitter, I am not sure I would ever get any real work done!*
- *I don't have any interest in using Twitter*
- *I don't find it particularly helpful*
- *I think it's mostly a waste of time and energy*
- *I have enough other ways to waste time, none of which are as silly as this one*
- *I prefer to talk to people*
- *It's beneath my dignity*

**Concern it creates poor writing skills/has little education value**

- *My students don't need another reason to distract themselves*
- *From what I know of Twitter and heard about the types of comments on it, I do not see it as a valuable tool for higher education.*

- *Logical arguments cannot well be delivered in short bursts; students must be able to follow arguments in paragraphs.*
- *Perpetuates poor written and oral communication skills*
- *Don't understand value and how it could possibly fit with outcomes and decision making*
- *Most of the discussion is worthless and unrelated to the academic enterprise.*
- *I think it could be a convenient thing to use for announcements, but question its "overall efficiency" at promoting student learning.*
- *It is DISTRACTING to education*
- *I am sick of student writing that is unprofessional. I am also tired of receiving written work that has incomplete sentences, fragments, subject-verb agreement mistakes, point of view mistakes, tense mistakes. Students need to learn how to write on at least a 13th grade level and on-line discussions, twitter, texting, etc. does not help them. NO! I will not use this in my classes!*
- *Find it to be more technological clutter in the classroom.*
- *I'm trying to help students write and communicate in depth and with complexity.*

#### **Privacy/security issues**

- *Unsure of its security*
- *Twitter can be hacked*
- *I have heard it is open to outsider interference*
- *Boundary and privacy issues for student and faculty.*
- *Would need institutional approval*
- *Security/privacy concerns*
- *Our school blocks Twitter*

#### **Haven't used it yet but willing to experiment**

- *I plan to make a study of this technological tool. Whether, and what role, it has relevant to teaching and learning remains an open question to me.*
- *I personally have not taken the time to get familiar with the usage of Twitter in an educational setting. I am very open to its use if it actually benefits the student.*
- *When I have a minute I want to check it out - I tried using MySpace for teaching purposes and half of my students couldn't figure it out.*
- *I think it can be useful in a creative way, but need to explore it further or investigate its application by people who have used it in education.*
- *Haven't quite figured out how to incorporate it into on-line courses yet.*
- *I plan to use it, but have not had time up to now. Plan to use it for Fall semester.*
- *Haven't had a good resource to teach me. I don't have time to teach myself...want someone who knows what they are doing to show me.*
- *I think it could be very useful for someone teaching online.*
- *I intend to experiment with Twitter in 2 of my science courses for Fall'09 to use as a tool for students to reflect upon recent assignments, lectures, homework, etc.*

#### **Think it's a fad that will pass**

- *I see this as something that is here today, gone tomorrow. NOT a good means of communication for college. How about 1 on 1 conversations???*
- *Seems like yet another flash-in-the-pan tool that will be obsolete in three years. Why bother learning to use it if it has such a short shelf life?*
- *Seems like a fad, and I question the value of what can be accomplished in 140 characters.*
- *It is likely another fad in the area of education.*

- *There are so many "new" forms of technology it seems foolhardy to even attempt to be "current" since mastering any of these takes time, effort and practice.*
- *My impression of Twitter is that it is a fad and that not everyone uses it. Furthermore, I already use other technology formats and feel it is unnecessary to cater simply to the latest fad.*

There also were multiple comments from faculty who noted that more of their students use Facebook than Twitter. Indeed, most research reports say the majority of Twitter users worldwide are 35 or older. According to market-research firm Nielsen Company, based on its NetRatings panel of 250,000 U.S.-based Internet users, people under 25 make up “nearly one quarter of the active U.S. Internet universe,” but account for just 16 percent of users on Twitter.com.

Finally, there were a handful of comments from people under the impression that Twitter is only available via cell phones. While Twitter is accessible via mobile devices, you can Tweet from your computer. So if you are interested in giving Twitter a try, don’t let concerns about cell plan minutes or the fact that you don’t have a “smart phone” hold you back.

## IF NOT NOW, WHEN? HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO USE TWITTER IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS?

The next question to non-Twitter users asked them how likely in the next two years are they to use Twitter for professional purposes. In hindsight, two years was much too large period of time to predict technology use, particularly one as new as Twitter, and a few respondents called us on it.

*“Twitter may not even be around in two years”*

*“Two years is too far to forecast ... I will never say never, but using it in the next year is unlikely.”*

Based on the majority of responses, there is still a fair number of people on the fence, with approximately 20 percent of non-Twitter users saying it’s a “50/50 chance” that they will use Twitter to collaborate with colleagues, communicate with students, or use as a learning tool in the classroom during the next two years. However “not likely at all” was the most popular response to each of those activities.

### How likely are you to use Twitter professionally within the next two years?

	Not at all likely	Somewhat likely	50/50 chance	Very likely	Extremely likely
To collaborate with colleagues	53.2%	17.6%	22.0%	5.4%	1.8%
To communicate with students	46.1%	23.8%	20.2 %	7.2%	2.6%
As a learning tool in the classroom	52.9%	18.8%	20.6%	5.3%	2.3%

(Total who answered this question: 1,057)

## NON-TWITTER USERS EXPLAIN WHY THEY DON'T TWEET

The final question to non-Twitter users was an optional, open-ended question that asked for additional comments or anecdotes about the role of Twitter in higher education. Here are some of the 279 comments we received:

*Students will lead us in this direction if they want to use the technology for learning.*

*Because of the brevity of Twitter comments, I have not deemed it to be beneficial for meaningful communication.*

*It clearly has positive potential as seen in the recent events in Iran, but it also has the potential for distraction ... the key is finding an appropriate balance.*

*Twitter might be a way to remind students about deadlines and other important and immediate academic information. It doesn't, however, lend itself well to teaching or to in-depth analysis and response on the part of student or higher ed official.*

*I'm not sure how it would apply very well in my classes.*

*I really see no place in education for it other than a possible communication tool.*

*The only role Twitter would have in education would be to further dumb down the curriculum and the student body. Working in a technical field, we need equations, figures, graphs, and other quantitative expressions, not just "Tweets".*

*Education, thus learning, requires reflection on content. Twitter encourages comment without thought, reflection on content - antithesis of learning.*

*Just because students like to read skywriting messages from airplanes in the sky doesn't mean we have to shift our classroom instruction to the skywriting format. (I'm trying to draw an analogy here just in case you think I am so ignorant that I don't know that "twitter" is not skywriting.)*

*Put it in the colossal waste of time category. Just because students are attracted to new technology, that does not mean we need to use it for education.*

*It smells of a fad. By the time I might implement it, it will fall out of favor.*

*Twitter does not have a role in higher education.*

*It seems like another Web 2.0 technology that people are adopting simply because of its buzz factor and not a true ability to support teaching and learning.*

*We need to use whatever tools that are available to teach/transmit knowledge. If we don't use what the students use, they probably won't see the relevance of what we are trying to teach to them.*

*Until I understand the relevance of Twitter, I don't see the need to jump on the bandwagon.*

*I believe that Twitter is and should remain a tool for social networking, not education.*

*Technology in the academic classroom is more of a distraction than a benefit.*

## MORE THAN 30 PERCENT OF FACULTY AND STAFF USING TWITTER

If you know how many “followers” you have or have seen the “Fail Whale,” then you’re a Twitter user. In the *Faculty Focus* survey, 30.7 percent of the 1,958 higher education professionals who completed the survey say they use Twitter.

While significantly less than the 56.4 percent who say they’ve never used Twitter, consider this: Twitter’s footprint reached 10.7 percent of all active Internet users as of June 2009 according to market-research firm Nielsen Company, so it would appear that higher education professionals are adopting Twitter at a faster rate than the average Internet user.

Now that we know faculty are using Twitter, let’s explore *how* they are using it. The survey found that “collaborating with colleagues” is one of the most popular activities with 37.4 percent saying they use Twitter for this activity “occasionally” or “frequently.”

A complete breakdown of their responses is in the following chart:

### How frequently do you use Twitter for the following academic activities?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Occasionally	Frequently
To collaborate with colleagues	24.6%	17.9%	20.0%	15.6%	21.8%
To communicate with students	42.4%	17.7%	14.0%	12.5%	13.4%
As a learning tool in the classroom	59.3%	13.2%	11.0%	9.4%	7.2%

(Total who answered this question: 579)

Of the 579 who answered the question “How frequently do you use Twitter for the following academic activities?” more than 130 added comments to further explain their position. Typically, the comments, some of which are included below, fell into one of three categories:

- Stay current on news/trends
- Network with colleagues
- Participate in conference backchannel

#### Stay current on news/trends

- *To keep up with latest issues in libraries and education for blogging purposes. Also to get more traffic to my blog from twitter followers.*
- *I use it most as a professional development tool for myself. It is a major part of my own PLE/PLN*
- *Keep current on news in higher education*
- *To monitor headlines of New York Times, mashable posts, and other sources of interest*
- *Updates on current events, both local and international.*
- *To stay current on trends in higher ed and the music industry*

### **Network with colleagues**

- To model strategies for teachers to use it in the field
- Frequently: As a source of useful information and resources that I can share with faculty.
- Just staying in touch with colleagues at-a-distance
- To network with colleagues (frequently)
- Publicize faculty development events and news of interest to faculty
- Professional development (connecting with other people with same interests as me in other units/institutions)

### **Participate in conference backchannel**

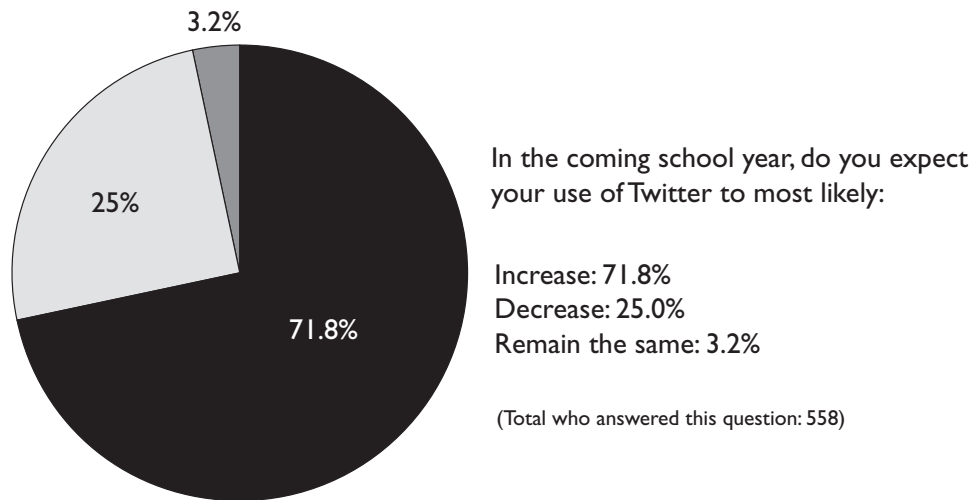
- *To follow academic conferences that I can't attend in person.*
- *To keep up with conference proceedings as they happen.*
- *I use it in and during conferences to collaborate and share with other attendees.*
- *To share information about a program I am attending, like sharing notes about the speaker and his/her ideas during the program.*

### **Other assorted responses**

- *I am learning Twitter in order to use it in the classroom. So, my plan is to use it a means to let students know when I am available in my virtual office.*
- *I do not find Twitter useful to communicate with colleagues or students for the most part. I found myspace to be more useful.*
- *Communicating with parents of current students.*
- *Using it to learn how to use it ... for possible use during library instruction....also we are using it at the Reference Desk as a form of outreach to students, faculty, and staff.*
- *Using as an institutional communication device for campus and community at large.*
- *As a learning tool to continue the learning process with students after they have finished the class.*
- *I use it for social purposes only; it is never used in connection with the classroom.*
- *To use for announcements in our campus honors program, to maintain a list of links to current articles for my students to look at.*
- *Mostly, I keep up with students who have graduated and with colleagues off campus. I do follow some current students and some institutional tweets.*
- *Planning to introduce as learning tool*
- *I introduced my students to Twitter last spring. I intend to make Twitter part of my curriculum in the fall for communication and for writing instruction.*
- *Promote awareness of our department, services, and health issues relevant to college students*

## TWITTER USE EXPECTED TO RISE

The next question to current Twitter users asked if they expect their use of the micro-blogging service to increase, decrease or remain the same during this coming academic year (Fall 2009). Nearly three-fourths (71.8 percent) anticipate their Twitter use will increase. Only 3.2 percent think they will use Twitter less and 25 percent say it will remain the same.



The final question to Twitter users was an optional, open-ended question that asked for additional comments or anecdotes about the role of Twitter in higher education. It is clear that those educators who've had a good experience with Twitter are eager to share their stories with others, as well as stretch their imagination to find new applications for using the tool to engage students inside and outside of the classroom. It's no wonder that some believe, as *New York Times* technology columnist David Pogue concluded during his keynote presentation at EduComm 2009, "Twitter is whatever you make of it."

Here are just some of the 223 comments provided by survey respondents. If you're looking for ideas on how you can use Twitter for things other than telling people what you had for breakfast, this might be a good place to start.

### Active Tweeters comment on current and future uses

*Currently, we have a Russian instructor using it to tweet on every day activities. His students respond in Russian. It gives him a chance to correct mistakes and it gives the students daily practice in writing and understanding the language. Students from other universities have joined in to make it a very dynamic learning tool.*

*Another instructor is using it to post reminders and extra credit assignments. Since she started using Twitter, she has seen a 50% increase of students taking advantage of extra credit opportunities.*

*I currently find it most useful when people share links to interesting articles in fields that interest me.*

*Turned a traditional assignment into a Twitter assignment. Received more quality and quantity of student input using Twitter.*

*I use it only for work (not personal) and the folks I follow do the same on our shared topic/discipline. Receiving these bite sized pieces of information is great. I have gotten information (timely too) that I might not ever have gotten. I'm hooked and can't imagine how our research group could collaborate or disseminate without it!*

*Twitter = Valuable tool--challenges is to harness its power and regularize its usage for maximum effect.*

*I may explore using twitter in the classroom to get immediate feedback from students.*

*I use it like you would instant messaging. I limit "followers" to my student class list and instructors. If I get an emailed question from a student, I respond on Twitter for all to see. (There's usually someone else with the same question.) The students use it to communicate to each other to set up group meeting times. It's much easier than trying to set up an email group. I love it. The hardest part is limiting to 140 characters in a response.*

*I have found Twitter to be very useful in communicating with my students*

*Students learning language communicate with native speakers of language in different geographical locations. Also use to as a PLN.*

*I am also coordinator for academic technology on my campus, and many faculty have asked about how they might use Twitter in course curriculum. I myself explore any and all ways to better engage the millenium generation. Faculty are behind the power curve it seems....*

*Like any new technology people are just beginning to see how it can be used. I don't think we've fully realized it's potential yet, and it's likely that in a year or two it will have evolved into something that bears only a passing resemblance to today's Twitter.*

*I find it extremely useful in keeping up with conferences that I am unable to attend.*

*I use Twitter to encourage students to participate in class. It can be a good tool as long as the professor uses some structure in the discussion - such as posting questions about a reading for the students to answer. Frustratingly, our class account gets crammed full of spam that I cannot block. Also, comments do not always appear on line from every student. You need a TA to refresh the screen every 30 seconds to 1 minute as well when you are projecting the account up on the board.*

*Good way to keep tabs on the job market by following various job posting services. Also a great way to keep track of what institutions around ours are doing on a daily basis.*

*We use twitter to post our latest news, to announce campus events, and to talk about our community.*

*Teachers are telling me "I do the same thing with email a tool I'm already familiar with. Why should I change?" I tell them it not about your comfort level It's about communicating and reaching student at their comfort level. Do you want them to learn the material? Take it to where they live.*

*I really think that all the Social Networking avenues should be implemented into teaching and learning because that is what could excite our students of today. The traditional teaching and learning activities are gradually becoming disinteresting to the students of today -- trust me. And, if you want to keep students in your school, you better make teaching and learning interesting in terms of implementing some social networking activities -- if not, students will gradually tune off or move on to those who can make learning more interesting, period. It sounds like a sad fact, but, we are dealing with the 21st Century learning.*

*I have learned so much from those I follow on Twitter. It is wonderful for PD!*

*I have used Twitter to capture real-time feedback from students on course design and assignments. Additionally my students use it to stay abreast of current issues in our field (distance education) and to bring those topics to the classroom for further discussion. The students have given positive feedback on that use of twitter - they like the feeling of not having all their information filtered through me and it encourages them to challenge my point of view.*

*Great way for me to get info from knowledgeable people. The experts tell me what is important and what to read.*

*Just been using it for a month, I put links to my teaching outlines there, and try to keep abreast of what my professional colleagues are doing. I want to learn more ways to use it*

*I'd like to try to use it in the classroom - projecting the hash-tagged stream on the wall during instruction.*

*6 months ago, I told a colleague that I couldn't see any possible useful application of twitter. Now I follow and I tweet!*

*Most of the Twitter-ites that I follow include links to pertinent websites, articles, blogs, or video in their tweets. I've become aware of so many cutting-edge developments this way--I'd never find time to seek this stuff out on my own. I am careful about who I follow though--vet them first.*

*I believe that many of the Web 2.0 tools (e.g Twitter or Facebook) prepare today's college students for the critical role of citizen journalist. . . with contraction across the board in traditional journalism and with the powerful potential of reaching a world audience (see the recent use of Twitter in the context of the Iran election controversy)--we in academia have the duty to challenge these budding citizen journalists to use the Web 2.0 tools critically, effectively, and honestly.*

*I find Twitter to be a fascinating and useful tool for communicating with colleagues. It is also helpful for conducting research and remaining abreast of current events.*

*love the ability to create community with other faculty members across the country. I can also reach students on another level. Hopefully they are reading something I put out there :)*

*I am in administration, so the questions do not apply to me. Having been an instructor for nearly 20 years, and having taught online for 7 years, I can see a GREAT potential of using twitter in teaching. It would be a fantastic way to remind students of impending deadlines; it would be a great way for students to meet and "follow" one another. What always surprised me when using technology in a face to face classroom, was that it equalized the discussion platform. While some students are conversationally dominant in the classroom, others lead the way in discussions online. Fascinating and great potential!*

*Our entire department uses one Twitter account to communicate to our students, staff, faculty, and other community members.*

*we are using Twitter in the Library and very dynamically in our Writing Center*

*Interestingly, I have learned more about personal issues that some of my students are facing (they post everything online). I'm also going to lecture my students in the fall about responsible communication (for some, their x-rated language is inappropriate, and I do not think they are aware that on public view, every future employer and graduate program can see what they post).*

*Twitter, if used right, is like having a world of research assistants at your ready. Its potential is mind-blowing!*

*As a university we use Moodle, I rely heavily on twitter to alert to me to what others are writing about Moodle and what issues are being addressed at other institutions.*

*I think that it's great, and I plan to use it again. When I tried it the first time, I think that it was (surprisingly) ahead of the curve, even for my students. I only had about six of them (out of a class of > 60) buy into it. If I use it again, I suspect that more will already be native users of it, and I will also tie it to a class mark to improve uptake. I think that it could be a very useful tool...*

*I love Twitter!!! I use it to keep attendance and ask questions and start discussions.*

*Twitter is the ultimate personal networking tool. I have been in touch with so many more thought leaders in educational technologies since I started using it. It keeps me up to date in my field of expertise.*

*It can be useful for some faculty, but it isn't for everyone. There are also some wonderful twibes that can be useful for academia.*

## **The jury is still out for these educators**

*I would like more information about how to handle concerns of student privacy, and how not to have to read ALL of their tweets, only those related to the class, if I 'follow' them.*

*Although I generally use Twitter to tweet mini-reviews of CD's, etc., I haven't yet come up with an idea of how to use it in a classroom/educational setting. I am interested in that prospect, however.*

*So far I haven't had students that are familiar or interested in using this medium. I keep posting tweets in the hopes someone will get on board and check them out. I think this could be a valuable tool to remain connected to students in online courses.*

*I've read many case studies for the use of twitter in the classroom, but I'm still wary of its benefits or if offers any improvements beyond existing ICTs.*

*Twitter is an excellent way of gathering new insights on current news stories. It seems to me that there should be valuable ways of engaging students in class as well through the software, but those applications have remained elusive.*

*I've seen it used in an online workshop I participated in and, while the conversation that occurred was useful, Twitter did not provide a unique niche for that conversation - it merely duplicated other methods. Interestingly, the very same conversation was occurring in three different synchronous/asynchronous venues associated with the workshop. That alone may be sufficient reason to use Twitter, but I would still like to know if there is a unique niche for it, or will it become ANOTHER communication forum that I as faculty have to monitor to meet student's needs?*

*I find that it fits the attention span of my students. Everything is reduced to sound-bites. I'm tired of fighting it, so I've incorporated it into my course.*

## **Where Twitter falls short**

*I have always been an early adopter of technology and generally have had positive experiences. Twitter in my opinion is a virtual waste of time. I would much prefer my students and colleagues use other more effective social media.*

*It's not so clear cut as to using it. Seems simple, but it has its difficulties when first learning...no place really available to learn how to use it other than just using it.*

*Faculty are very hesitant about getting on Twitter. Not even creating and account, just investigating what is going on there. I want them to lurk for a bit and struggle to get them to even do that. We need more examples of successful Twitter use in, and out of, the higher ed classroom (and in fully online classes.)*

*Not really enough room for explaining complicated concepts.*

*Twitter has not been a useful academic tool for me.*

*I don't "get" the popularity; my students don't seem to be using it at all. They don't "get" it either.*

*Until it provides instant, easy and complete granularity (the ability to control who sees which tweet, which response, etc.) twitter will remain archaic and of limited use.*

*concerned about viruses and spam spread via Twitter*

*While it's a cool tool, my gut feeling about it is that it's almost "too much information, all the time"...and much of the information is of the "who cares" variety...*

*I don't see how Twitter would be appropriate to classroom use, as I already use Blackboard to communicate timely information regarding a class.*

*Students following professors can be odd.*

*In my experience, Facebook is the dominant social networking tool at my university. Even among my colleagues and peers across the country, FB dominates. Twitter is more for sharing links with like-minded Twitterers.*

*I do not believe Twitter can be used as an effective educational tool. Twitter is almost the same as any social networking site, and as with other social networking sites, there are the issues of how far can you go with your students, problems of inappropriate comments, too much familiarity etc.*

## TWITTER QUITTERS – FACULTY WHO HAVE STOPPED USING TWITTER

With all the glowing media attention surrounding Twitter, there’s one stat you may not be aware of and it has to do with retention rates. In an April 28, 2009 post titled “Twitter Quitters Post Roadblock to Long-Term Growth,” David Martin, Vice President, Primary Research, Nielsen Online, wrote: Currently, more than 60 percent of U.S. Twitter users fail to return the following month, or in other words, Twitter’s audience retention rate, or the percentage of a given month’s users who come back the following month, is currently about 40 percent.

In the *Faculty Focus* survey, 12.9 percent of the 1,986 higher education professionals who completed the survey say they tried Twitter but stopped using it. The most common reasons for stopping are “It took too much time” and “Did not find it valuable.”

This table shows a breakdown of their responses.

### Why did you STOP using Twitter?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
It took too much time	5.5%	13.3%	32.1%	38.5%	10.6%
Not enough students use it	4.9%	9.3%	52.9%	24.0%	8.8%
Not enough colleagues use it	3.3%	5.2%	38.7%	36.3%	16.5%
Unsure whether students use it	3.2%	4.5%	17.2%	34.4%	40.7%

(Total who answered this question: 229)

Thirty-eight of the 252 people who no longer use Twitter provided additional comments to further explain their position. These comments include:

*Yet another time drain....*

*Difficult to follow very many people. Information is generally too shallow to be of interest*

*Too many messages coming about nothing at all. Not interested nor do I have time to be concerned about when colleagues are going for coffee, what television program they watch etc. It may become more useful once the novelty wears off.*

*I used it because one of my ed-tech students wanted to investigate its usefulness with nursing students on practicum placements. More "traditional" wikis worked better.*

*Too complicated*

*I think it's just one more tech thing that has limited use for the classroom.*

*Distracts me from task-oriented activities. No work-related value in the communication.*

*It is too ephemeral. It lacks depth and substance. It has worked best when keeping students up to date on issues such as the passage of legislative bills or budgets. Items that can be quickly communicated.*

*The short format of Twitter was too limiting for my uses: online discussion/exchange, writing peer response sessions, etc.*

*Not a secure environment, and no record exists for the school of this type of interaction. No safety for the instructor if there were student complaints.*

*The way it looks is kind of confusing. Too complicated.*

*It seems to encourage the worst type of conversation--mostly meaningless, mostly for one's ego rather than to communicate in any real way.*

*It's not a good way to facilitate sustained inquiry.*

## **Former Users Found Little Academic Utility**

**I**n reviewing how former Twitter users had used Twitter, it appears very few used it for academic purposes. Many respondents say they tried it out with friends or family, or just to see what all the fuss was about, but have since abandoned their account.

Some of their comments include:

*I looked at it, but decided that it was not a useful tool in my area. I also decided that it communicated 24/7 availability to my students, when I did not want that to be true.*

*Communicated with son (once)*

*Simply to see what the interest was and whether it might be useful. Found it of limited utility, but am open to possibilities*

*I just played with it ... no serious use*

A complete breakdown of their responses is in the following chart:

**When you were using Twitter, how often did you use it for the following academic activities?**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Occasionally	Frequently
To collaborate with colleagues	65.0%	16.5%	13.9%	4.6%	0.0%
To communicate with students	78.2%	14.1%	4.7%	2.1%	0.9%
As a learning tool in the classroom	82.4%	6.9%	7.7%	1.7%	1.3%

(Total who answered this question: 238)

As mentioned, this kind of attrition is common with Twitter. In some regards, the buzz surrounding Twitter caused everyone, even those who aren't interested in social media, to feel that they need to at least check it out. They came. They Tweeted. They left. Clearly, Twitter is not for everyone. And yet, the more ardent Twitterers argue that to realize the benefits of Twitter you need to build a strong network of at least 30-50 to people to follow, and that takes time.

Interestingly, a handful of respondents commented that they stopped using Twitter because none of their colleagues use it. Fans of Twitter would argue that's the point ... Twitter allows you to expand your network beyond those you see and talk to every day so you're exposed to new ideas and fresh perspectives.

The final survey question for people who stopped using Twitter was an optional, open-ended question that asked for any additional comments or anecdotes about their experiences with Twitter. Eighty-one respondents provided comments, some of which as listed below.

*Twitter is not as easy as Facebook*

*I never understood the purpose of Twitter. Is it just to let people know what you're doing, what you're thinking. If so, then great. If it's supposed to be a tool to respond, then not great. It's very difficult to follow trains of thought. It seems to be a tool so you can be self-absorbed, not connected.*

*I found it hard to figure out and then even more difficult to understand why someone would use it.*

*I do not have enough time to learn all the ins and outs of the program...I used it a little but did not really understand what I was getting back and I did not know who was seeing what I was doing or cared...I do not have a base of people who would be interested in knowing what I am doing.*

*I am struggling as an academician with the use of this "technology" in higher education. My reservations stem from the intermingle of the personal, casual, play worlds with the seriousness of higher education. I also spend a great deal of time stressing to my students the necessity to evaluate the credibility of their sources when considering the use of information--Tools such as Twitter are fairly useless because of that requirement alone.*

*A toy for people with way too much time on their hands who must think the mundane activities of their lives must be recorded and shared with all. Too much time sorting through the drivel to find the gems, and not much content coming from the organizations/groups I chose to follow.*

*Most of my students stated that it was just one more place to have to look at for information. I can't see the purpose. Seems useless to me.*

*While Twitter is certainly relevant and can offer an immediacy that is productive, I did not find it to be an especially effective teaching tool (any more than the existing online chat rooms, discussion boards, instant messaging, etc. that are available to my students and myself).*

*This is social, not educational*

*I found that it doesn't allow for depth of discussion. I don't see that it is more useful than class chat rooms and discussion boards. It is a little too "Wild West" for academic inquiry. I'll probably use it once in a while to keep the student interested in a topic. I would attend a session on it because I'll admit I may not understand the full possibilities.*

*I found that very few people with whom I'd communicate regularly actually used Twitter. If you have to sit down at a computer, login in to a website, then you might as well just check your email.*

*So much technology I'm just trying to keep up. I use Facebook and have used it for class. Twitter was more difficult for me to make sense of so I let it go. I only add people to follow me when they request it - but there is nothing to follow - since I rarely even look at it.*

## **SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

This survey was conducted in July - August, 2009. An email invitation to participate in the online survey was distributed to *Faculty Focus* subscribers, as well as to select in-house lists of Magna Publications. *Faculty Focus* also notified its Twitter followers of the survey via <http://twitter.com/facultyfocus>.

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