

Using Weebly to Teach Policy Analysis in Today's Classroom

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Policy professionals increasingly use the internet and social media in order to conduct daily business. While popular blogging has discussed policy issues from launch, today even Brookings scholars' blog about their research and RAND may be "liked" on Facebook. Because of this new reliance on online communication, think tanks, government agencies and community based organizations want professionals who are tech savvy. An online course is an opportunity to meet those needs and deliver web ready professionals.

In order to be more accessible to working students across a large metropolitan region, Wayne State University School of Social Work offers many of its courses online, including social policy. Some sections are fully online, some are classroom only and others are a combination of classroom and online instruction. Online instruction at Wayne State is "asynchronous." In other words, there is no set online meeting time. The instructor coaches students one on one and requires students to interact with each other online by reading and responding to others' work. The university subscribes to the proprietary online classroom management system, Blackboard, to manage assignments but this system does not have an intuitive web development feature needed to train future blog and social media savvy professionals.

We have found Weebly.com to be an effective tool for project-based learning that promotes online interaction with other students. Weebly.com is an online "web creation tool" that provides an opportunity for project-based learning that will integrate your curriculum with 21st century skills. Project-base learning is the primary framework in this course in which students learn policy analysis skills. It is not merely an extension of the curriculum. Projects form the core of the curriculum. Faculty can use Weebly as tool to teach policy analysis, deliver lessons and integrate lectures. This new learning can be used immediately in the development of original projects that students can create and sustain.

Weebly provides professors an opportunity to teach students to complete thorough and responsible research and to post information online while remaining compliant with relevant copyright laws. It also provides an opportunity for students to network with other students, but also to have students share work with the greater audience of the World Wide Web (WWW).

The first section of the presentation will review the policy competencies required for social work education. Next, we will share lessons learned using different technologies in the classroom. Finally, we will demonstrate how we engage students to use Weebly to build their own website for the class and use it to deliver assignments. In the workshop we will pay particular attention to how interactive technology can promote critical thinking, enhance the research experience, and ensure professional standards and ethics in web publishing.

Learning Objectives (BTOTC, SWBAT):

- Name three ways Weebly technology can enhance teaching
- Participants will be able to describe/explore a situation where they can have their students build a website that would allow students to participate as an internet citizen in a safe and ethical way
- Discuss the use of 21st century social media tools in the curriculum
- Utilize project-based learning for responsible research and policy analysis