Using Current Events to Enhance Information Systems Pedagogy

James J. Pomykalski
pomykalski@susqu.edu
Sigmund Weis School of Business
Susquehanna University
Selinsgrove, PA 17870, USA

Abstract

The focus of this paper is the use of an information seeking writing assignment in which students share class-related current event stories into an IS Strategy course. The goals of this assignment are taken from Buffo (2015). The assignment is currently used an extra credit assignment but future development of this assignment is to create into an ethics focused reflective journal-based assignment.

Keywords: Current Events, Extra Credit, Active Learning, Ethics, Pedagogy

1. INTRODUCTION

One way to motivate student learning and increase the perceived relevance of course material is to tell stories (Buffo, 2015). Buffo explains that four advantages spring from the instructor telling stories in the classroom:

1. Gets the attention of the students

2. Sets stages for interactions and discussion

3. Provides a strong faculty to student connection

4. Might encourage less responsive students to engage in the discussion.

Peltsverger and Teat (2009) have successfully brought in current events to attempt to bring the same advantanges to an information assurance course. However, stories do not only have to emanate from the instructor.

William Cronon (1999) states that one of the ten qualities of a liberally educated person is that "they read and they understand" (Cronon, 1999, np). Information systems (IS) educators strive to provide students with the resources necessary for them to read and to understand about the tools, techniques and methodologies with regard to information systems. In addition, IS educators provide resources to get them to extend their learning and draw on current events to extend students' knowledge and help them develop information seeking skills (Case, 2007).

The focus of this paper is on the use of an information seeking assignment in an IS Strategy course. The assignment is a low stakes writing assignment that is used as extra credit in which the students find and share relevant stories with their peers.

The organization of this paper is as follows. Section Two is an overview of the topics covered in the course. In addition, the major course assignments are presented. Section Three highlights the use of low stake and active learning writing assignments as learning tools. The fourth section reviews the literature on the use of current events to strengthen learning in the classroom; the use of current events exists in many different business courses. In Section Five the focus is on the information seeking assignment—in its current form—and its intended use; its pedagogical impact is also addressed. The sixth section describes a potential extension for the information seeking assignment; focusing on ethical decision-making. The final section presents some of the

outcomes and benefits drawn from using this assignment.

2. OVERVIEW OF IS STRATEGY COURSE

Management Support Systems is a senior level writing intensive course that provides a conceptual framework for introducing, assimilating, using, and leveraging enterprise-level information systems in today's enterprises (Pomykalski, 2015). The course is modeled after the IS 2010.07 course, and as such, "explores the issues and approaches in managing the information systems function in organizations and how the IS function integrates/supports/enables various types of organizational capabilities. It takes a senior management perspective in exploring the acquisition, development, and implementation of plans and policies to achieve efficient and effective information systems" (Topi, et al., 2010, p. 402). In particular the course focuses on the design, development, use, and outcomes associated with enterprise technologies.

Through the use of multiple case studies the course focuses on the changes and impacts within organizations that need to be accounted for in strategic planning and organizational decision-making (Pomykalski, 2015). The course prepares students to participate in enterprise information systems development discussions as a member of a professional team.

Each of the case studies have two focused writing assignments; a pre-case and post case assignment. A pre-case assignment requires the identification and listing the "instances" (direct references) of each of the nine elements of the Work System Framework (WSF) that are found in the case; see Pomykalski (2015) for more details on these pre-case assignments using the Work System Framework

The post case assignment consists of "a series of integrative questions are used to elicit the understanding of the students about the case particulars. Starting with the second case, integration, in the form of compare-and-contrast questions are used to show the relationships between the previous cases with the current case" (Pomykalski, 2015, p. 83).

The final major writing assistant is a technology fit paper. The focus of this two person team research effort is the discussion of issues associated with the implementation and use of a particular "emerging" technology within an organization. The research effort involves the investigation of articles discussing the impacts (on work system framework elements (Pomykalski, 2015)) of technology implementation on an enterprise.

The information seeking assignment, at present, is a low stakes, extra credit assignment. The next section discusses the origin and use of low stakes writing assignments as active learning exercises.

3. LOW STAKES WRITING AS ACTIVE LEARNING ASSIGNMENTS

Active learning has best been defined as "involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing" (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Bonwell and Eison emphasize that students must engage in activities that involve reading, writing, discussing, or problem solving. In other words, students "must engage in such higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation" (Renkl, Atkinson, Maier, & Staley, 2002)

Low stakes writing assignments were first discussed by Peter Elbow (Elbow, 1993). "The goal of low stakes assignments is not so much to produce excellent pieces of writing as to get students to think, learn, and understand more of the course material" (Elbow, 1997, p. 5). In other words, to enhance their ability "to read and to understand" (Cronon, 1999); to make them active learners.

Low stakes, or informal, writing assignmets are also encouraged by Nilson (2010), who states that informal writing assignments have three significant outcomes:

1. It helps students learn better and retain the material longer

2. It makes students think actively about the material

3. It expands the student notion of audience, beyond the instructor

The information seeking, low stakes writing assignment in this course asks students to find course-related current events to share in class as a means to contextualize the course content. As part of the assignment the student must state how they believe the "current event" fits into the course.

These low stakes writing assignments enhance traditional lectures and allow students to become more engaged and invested in the formal learning process. In addition, low stakes/active learning assignments help students to complete "successfully" the course

and hopefully "carry the course contents throughout their lifetimes and career goals" (Leong 2005, pg. 129).

The next section discusses the incorporation of current events in other courses, namely economics and general business courses, and the impact on the student's interest and motivation.

4. USING CURRENT EVENTS

Allen Kelley (1983) was the first to propose using the newspaper to enhance the teaching of economics to undergraduate students. Kelley had students gather numerous articles on a weekly basis. As part of the assignment, the students were to underline the key economic concepts and then write questions that their fellow students should be able to answer based on their reading of the article. The articles and their questions were made into a publically available book so that students could review them. The articles were used in weekly discussion sections led by graduate students. Periodically, Kelley held in class quizzes over the newspaper articles collected and discussed in the course.

Peltsverger and Teat (2009) compared the use of current events in both economics courses and other social sciences courses. They state that economics courses focus on using current events to have students understand and evaluate how economic news coverage is presented. On the other hand, social science courses use current events to understand the background of contemporary social issues.

Finally, Edwards and Ballard (2011) discuss an active method for using the Walll Street Journal and other business peridoicals to "bridge the gap between the 'real world' and the classroom" (p. 1) for students in Orgainzational Behavior and Marketing classes.

5. INFORMATION SEEKING ASSIGNMENT

The information seeking (low stakes/active learning) assignment in this course involves students finding stories in the current news that are related to topics included in the course; namely stories about data use, storage, security, retrieval, and analysis. The students are required to share the stories that they find in the popular press. There are two parts to this assignment.

First, the student completes (see Appendix 1) a short form that gives (1) the citation description

of the article, (2) a brief summary of the article, and (3) their interpretation of the relationship of the article to the topics covered in the course.

Second, the student presents their articles in class (briefly) and attempts to engage their fellow students in a dialogue as to the relationship to specific course concepts.

Currently, the articles can come from any related topic in the course. However, as a possible future extension the focus of this assignment will be to find articles that have an ethics related content in regard to data use, storage, security, retrieval, and analysis.

6. ASSIGNMENT EXTENSION

Currently, the articles can come from any related topic in the course. However, as a means for not just finding interesting stories but to have students engage in more critical thinking, the focus of this assignment will be ethics.

Ethics related decisions are made daily in regard to data use, storage, security, retrieval, and analysis. Stories related to issues of privacy and security, the buying and selling of personal information, and the Internet of Things (IoT) and other technologies abound.

A possible future extension of this assignment is to mimic the "Contemporary Issues Journal" explained by both Bean (2011) and Barkley (2009). The contemporary issues journal "deepens student undertainding of course-related ideas and concepts and helps them to appreciate the value of what they are learning in the classroom by making it easier for them to see its relevalence to the real world" (Barkley, 2009, p. 276).

The contemporary issues journal will consist of a complilation of stories that the student has found; keeping similar information to the current assignment. However, the student will add a number of other items to the story.

First, the student will need to explain how the story relates both to data issues and has an ethical twist. Second, the student will be required to add at least two questions that can be used as part of a discussion (or possible quiz) this was suggested by Kelley (1983). Lastly, this assignment will be made mandatory as a journal writing assignment and will be an active part of the course.

Barkley mentions many other extensions to this journal writing assignment (p.276-279). In

order to gain the maximum benfiet from this assignment the student journal entries will be posted to the course learning management system (LMS).

One additional extension will entail writing a reflective assignment, at the end of the course, that focuses on the student learning from their stories and the stories of their classmates. The students will be required to utilize their prior knowledge of ethical theories (gathered through a University required course) to examine the nature of the ethical decision making. This type of work helps students understand situational decision making and reflect on the nature of the decision that led to the questionable ethical behavior.

7. OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS

This information seeking assignment has had many positive benefits for both the students and the instructor.

First this assignment has allowed students to draw connections between course topics and events in the current business environment. Second, the assignment has helped to motivate the learning of course topics by providing a grounding for the topics. Finally, the assignment has begun to accomplish the four goals stated by Buffo (2015) in bringing stories into the classroom.

The information seeking assignment has also had positive benefits for the instructor as well. By having the students find stories that interest them, the instructor has now built a small library of interesting applications that can be drawn upon in future courses as examples of the topics in a business environment. The hope is that by shifting the focus to ethics related topics that instructor can build enough material to help develop a data/information ethics course that might serve all students in the business school as well as fulfill a University wide curricular requirement.

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APPENDIX 1: Data Stories Submission Template

INFS 472: Management Support Systems
Spring 2015 – Dr. Pomykalski

Name: _____   **Story #:** _____/6

Presentation (in class) Date: _____   **Submission (written) Date:** _____

Article Title:

Article Source:

Article Date:

Summary:

Relationship to Data+Enterprise Systems-Strategies: