



Episode 20: Live with Debbie Fetter: Implementing Social Media and Virtual Study Halls

SPEAKERS

Tierney King, Debbie Fetter

Tierney King 00:01

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast sponsored by the Teaching Professor. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. Today, we have Debbie Fetter with us who is an assistant professor of teaching nutrition at UC Davis. So you've actually implemented some pretty unique ideas pertaining to social media and study hall office hours, and that's what we're going to be talking about today. And we'll kind of dive right into it, so you can start by explaining why you started using social media in your class and how you use it.

Debbie Fetter 00:43

Of course. So at UC Davis, I've been involved with an introductory nutrition class called Nutrition 10: Discoveries and Concepts in Nutrition, and when I was an undergraduate student at UC Davis, I took that class during my first year. And when I was doing my PhD at UC Davis, it was my dream to be a teaching assistant for that class. And I'm happy to say, I was able to be a TA for Nutrition 10. And so while I was teaching for nutrition 10 back in 2015, when Instagram was the primary social media platform for many of our students, we all decided to start a Nutrition 10 Instagram. And when we started it, we honestly had no idea what we were doing. If you look back into our archives, you'll see that the very first picture is a picture of a piece of apple pie next to an orange with no real content there. And so I kind of took the Instagram under my wing, and I worked with the professor at the time to start doing these health campaigns each quarter as a way to connect with the students and inspire people to share things that they were doing related to health and encourage each other. And so in spring 2015, we did our very first health social media campaign that we call Nut10 Moves during the month of May, which is Bike Month, as an effort to inspire any type of movement. And we'll do weekly challenges, and students can submit via social media, either photos or videos, or if a student was not on social media or didn't want to post anything, they would email me their submission. And we would vote on a weekly winner and they would get some type of nutrition related prize like a Trader Joe's gift card or a cookbook or a water bottle. And so we were doing that all throughout. And then when I started this teaching physician in summer 2018, I began to think more strategically about how to use social media in my class. And so I set aside some time to develop a clear mission of what I wanted the account to be focused on. And I came up with the mission to provide clear and useful nutrition content to help viewers make informed nutrition and health decisions based on sound scientific research. And so what I started doing was I now have a consistent three grid posting style designed to enhance the class. So

everything that we post goes along with what's happening in the class that week. And so on Mondays, we do some type of cartoon related to the class content. So if we're doing heart disease that week, we'll have something related to heart disease. Then on Thursdays we do nutrition mythbusting where I select a frequently asked question about the topic or some hot topic in nutrition. So if we're doing heart disease, maybe we might be talking about saturated fat or dietary cholesterol. And then on Fridays, we do some type of foodie Friday and more recently, we've been doing more cultural food Fridays, to showcase traditional recipes from various cultures and backgrounds. And to help me out with all this, I recruited a handful of amazing undergrad students who helped me with developing the content and more recently, we moved over to TikTok, which is now past Instagram as the most popular social media platform among our students, and we've been doing a lot of video focus there, specifically on the mythbusting and the recipes. And I also do want to add that one of the great features about Instagram for inspiring interaction with the community is they have Instastory features where you can put up content that disappears after 24 hours, but in that you can put up polls or questions and so we also do a very popular feature called nutrition trivia Tuesdays where I'll ask a trivia question related to the content, and that gets a lot of engagement. And it's also a nice way to connect the students with what's happening in the class that week, and also give them some type of idea about types of questions that might come up on their assignments or quizzes.

Tierney King 05:22

And you said for the undergrad students who help you out, does that change each quarter? Are they in the class that help you out or is it just a certain number of students? Kind of how do you pick those people?

Debbie Fetter 05:31

Definitely. So funny story, actually, when I first started trying to think more strategically about social media, I also have my own personal nutrition-focused social media presence. And on there, I had connected with a student who was going to be a first year at the time at Davis, who had their own nutrition-focused Instagram account. And I actually just direct messaged them and said, "Hey, would you potentially be interested in a social media internship." And I did the same thing with another student, who was an upper division nutrition student at UC Davis, who had a pretty large following on their nutrition-focused account as well. And so I direct messaged both of these students, and they enthusiastically accepted and we became a team and I worked with the upper division student until they graduated. And the first year student, now they're entering their last year at UC Davis, and so I worked with them for about three years, and then they were taking on additional responsibilities and everything. So they didn't want to leave, but they knew they didn't have the time. So they passed the torch on to more people. And since the initial two, I've recruited some other students. The best way that I found students was looking at those who previously participated in some of our health campaigns, seeing their enthusiasm, the types of content they were doing, and so I've had a lot of really great students work with me just by because they were putting themselves out there on social media. And last spring, I did a formal recruitment for the first time where I send out to our undergraduate listserv for our nutrition students, I send out a flyer for the internship and had people send in a quick application. And then myself and one of my teaching assistants, who I've designated as one of the TAs in charge of social media to help me out with this endeavor, we selected six students to interview and they were all so fantastic, I could not pick and so everyone came on and now works together. And then those that are

able to continue on for fall are going to still be working with us. And so my strategy is I really tried to put a lot of effort into recruiting students, because my hope is that they'd be able to continue to work with me and have an enjoyable experience. And on their end, I hope that the skills that they learn are valuable and useful. And I've also written almost everyone some type of letter of recommendation as well.

Tierney King 08:19

Very cool. And you focus primarily on Instagram and TikTok, you know, have you ever branched into Twitter or Facebook or you just stay directly for Instagram? Kind of explain that, you know, process of why you choose certain platforms?

Debbie Fetter 08:33

Yes. So the most important thing that I've learned from social media trainings that I've attended and participated in is to put the content out where your audiences and most of our college aged students are primarily using Instagram and TikTok. And they are on Snapchat, but I felt like focusing on Instagram and Tiktok, with more having the ability to keep content standing out there for longer than Snapchat since it disappears. And it's very fast and rapid, so it was going to be more fruitful for us to display our content and to build a community. And in terms of academia and this especially science communication, Twitter would be where most people are and where really insightful discussions and connections are being formed.

Tierney King 09:25

Perfect, and kind of for other instructors who have thought about using social media, whether in their class projects or specific assignments or just their overall class, any tips for them if they're thinking about that and just kind of starting out?

Debbie Fetter 09:42

What I've realized is that social media has become our main form of communication. Social media is how people are getting their news, interacting with their peers or friends, forming connections, and also a place for entertainment. So incorporating social media in any type of way into the class, I feel would be really valuable, especially any class that uses some type of written assignment. Maybe having students sort of do a summary statement in a social media style with a key takeaway for how do you want to consolidate your message and attract viewers, since social media also, it's very fickle, you have to move really fast. And really you're competing for just a few seconds of someone's attention and developing that skill set through the use of visuals. And the message that you're writing, I think will be really valuable for people moving forward in their careers, since more and more, we're finding employment in the realm of social media. And then also, if you have a class and want to create some type of virtual community for your students, such as, essentially, that's what I do with with my account is creating a place for my students to go if they have questions about nutrition and want to connect with their peers and see what the content is, then I definitely think starting off with the one platform where your students are going to be at and coming up with a structure for what kind of content will you be putting out and also how are you going to be interacting with other people's content as well, and providing some sort of incentive for students to participate, such as, like a low stakes prize, or maybe a

couple extra credit points if someone creates a post related to some type of class assignment, so that I think there's many creative and valuable ways to incorporate social media into education.

Tierney King 11:39

And you kind of addressed it before for you know, some of the students who don't have social media where they can send in a post, but for kind of the interactive posts where you know, you have your trivia ones, and where it's just a story and it's up for 24 hours, what do you do for those students who don't have social media? And then lastly, what's the feedback from students, about you using social media in your class so strongly and so much?

Debbie Fetter 12:07

The great thing about Instagram is that you can still access it from a website. So even if you don't have an account, you can still view the page as well and participate and see the story. I just don't think that you can participate in the poll but you can see what the poll is. Most of our students, because I've surveyed our students, pretty much everyone has access to internet, and is on some type of social media platform. So luckily that hasn't been much of a challenge for our student population. I think the main issue is that people these days put a lot of thought and strategy into their own social media presence. And so if one of our students has a particular focused Instagram, maybe it's maybe it's more fashion-focused, then they don't really want to be posting something related to nutrition out of the blue. So that's more of the issue that we've seen with the private submissions that we've gotten. But participation in the polls is great, because it's low stakes, and essentially anonymous where the student's followers don't see that they participated in a particular poll. And so that's gotten a fair amount of engagement. So usually, each week, we get at least a few 100 people participating in our polls.

Tierney King 13:30

Perfect. And we're going to switch gears here and kind of talk about something that you call, and you started, study hall office hours, kind of from the pandemic. So explain that concept to me why you thought it was important to implement for students.

Debbie Fetter 13:45

So I have been thinking about doing something for my online class for a while. So I started teaching my class in a fully online version as well. We launched it in winter 2018 when I was still a graduate student, and I worked on the development team, and saw it off as an associate instructor before stepping into this position as an assistant professor of teaching. And what I've noticed is that it can be really challenging to get interaction with students in an online atmosphere, and especially we've seen that during the pandemic where everyone had to move to emergency remote education. And what I've also noticed comparing between my in-person class versus my online class, office hours in-person were pretty much always full. And my virtual office hours maybe I was lucky to get a couple students a week and my teaching assistants barely got anyone unless an assignment was due. And I wanted to utilize that valuable time, because the research has shown that office hours are a great way for students to learn the material, connect with their instructional team, and see that motivation to succeed in the class. And what I started doing in spring 2020, which I felt was especially timely because that was the start of the emergency remote education, was I decided to turn one of my weekly virtual office hours, I rebranded it into Dr. Fetter's study hall. And during the study hall, I reviewed the class announcements

for the week, I opened the floor, the digital floor, for any questions that the students had about upcoming assignments or the content. And I created my own special slide set for a key. Some key topics from the week, especially those that students historically would have more challenges with such as for nutrition, fat transport, and metabolism tends to be a more difficult area. And then what I did was I created a special practice problem set that was only specific to study hall, and I didn't post it anywhere else. And we did it together as a group. And so I wasn't going through giving out all the answers or something. But moreso, encouraging everyone to interact with each other in the chat box, or unmuting themselves to help answer the practice problem set. And for anyone unable to attend, I recorded these sessions and posted that shortly after on our canvas Learning Management System page. And what I saw was that I went from having maybe a couple students each week to consistently having around 30 students coming live each week. And then for context, so my my class is a higher enrollment class so spring quarter we did have around 1200 students, so it's still a smaller portion of the entire class attending live. But in terms of students taking on an extra activity and going to an extra office hour and participating, plus the hundreds other views that we're seeing on study hall after from the recording, I felt it was still really valuable. And providing this sort of low stakes structure to the office hours, I felt, really inspired people to come drop in even if they didn't have a specific question. They can just attend, absorb the content, and participate. And what I did, because I was interested in seeing, okay, who's attending and what's going on, was on each of our exams for spring quarter, I included an exam wrapper. And on that I asked them about How many study halls did you attend or watch? And then on preliminary analysis, what I saw was that the students that more frequently attended office hours, the study hall office hours, would more frequently score above 80% on our exams. And so there's a lot that needs to be filled in, like the student characteristics and more robust analysis and everything. But it gave preliminary insight into the fact that this could be a useful resource for students, if they choose to use it.

Tierney King 18:03

That's awesome. And you said you you know, you've rebranded it? Do you think that's what kind of ignited people to come to your study hall? Because instead of an office hour, it was study hall? And that doesn't seem as intimidating or, why do you think you drove so many more students?

Debbie Fetter 18:20

I think so. I think rebranding and presenting it in that low stakes setting to the students really helped encourage students to come. Because sometimes students can find office hours to be intimidating, or they feel like if they don't have a particular great question to ask the professor, then they shouldn't even bother coming. And that's not the case. I tell students all the time, you may not have any questions, just come in, come chat with the instructor, your TAs and have a fruitful conversation about the class material. Also getting some advice about career trajectories, all this can happen during office hours, which is why I feel like having office hours is such an important part of a college class. And my hope is that students can learn how to utilize them to their own advantage.

Tierney King 19:16

And then moving forward, will you continue to implement these into your classes and any changes that you think you'll make or kind of modify for the upcoming semesters with your study halls?

Debbie Fetter 19:27

Yes, and yes! So I definitely feel like having the study hall office hours has been a great positive addition to the virtual class with giving students that structured study time and chance to interact with the instructional team as well as their fellow students. And so study groups have come out of study hall, which is really valuable with getting that student-student interaction in an online setting which has been so challenging moving forward. What I started doing was instead of just me doing the study halls, what I started doing over the summer was training my teaching assistant team to help give the study hall office hours. And so this fall quarter myself and my teaching assistants are going to be rotating through delivering study halls for the students. And that'll give the teaching assistants this valuable teaching opportunity and chance to interact with the students, and also the students the ability to see different teaching styles and get to know our instructional team and feel more connected to all of us. And that's what I'm hoping to do to create the community that way.

Tierney King 20:38

And then kind of lastly, this kind of requires a little bit more work than, you know, just office hours where students come to you. So you know, how has that time kind of been worth it to you and how has that impacted both you and your students?

Debbie Fetter 20:53

With implementing the study hall office hours, I felt much more connected to my virtual students. And I really appreciate seeing what questions come up during the study hall from the student end, because it gives me some insight into where the challenges with the material or any logistics are unclear on any of my upcoming assignments, and that helps me modify my assignments, my class structure to provide a better educational experience for my students. And having the study hall has also helped clear up any confusion about logistics about the class with having the drop in place where the students can go and they can hear someone say okay, this is what's due each week because even though I send out a weekly overview announcement every Monday morning at 9 am detailing what happened last week and what's going on this week, I feel like having someone verbally tell you this is due on this day has a much greater impact than simply reading the list. And so it kind of gives students that experience of a little bit of the in-person side of education in this online atmosphere.

Tierney King 22:06

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