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Michael Simonson

Nova Southeastern University, simsmich@nova.edu

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SOCIAL NETWORKING FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

Where is the Research?

Michael Simonson
Co-Editor

Recently, there has been a groundswell of interest in the use and impact of something now widely called Web 2.0, or more generally, social networking. According to Boyd and Ellison (2007) social networks are Web-based services that allow persons to construct a public or semipublic profile within a system, to articulate a list of other users with whom they share connections, and view and move through a list of links made by themselves and others.

Most often these locations are called “social networking sites.” Social network sites such as MySpace and Facebook have attracted millions of participants who blog, share messages, post photos and videos, and list their friends, all in personally constructed profiles (Simonson, 2008).

The phenomenon of Web 2.0 is interesting, and potentially important. Thus, it is imperative that distance education researchers investigate this concept. Simonson (2008) has proposed a taxonomy for study of, and research about, social networks:

- Level 1: Learning about social networks: definitions, history, background, and examples.
- Level 2: Designing for social networks: profiling, blogging, wiki-ing, and friend-ing.

- Level 3: Studying social networks: ethics, uses, misuses, policing, supporting.
- Level 4: Learning from and with social networks: social networks for teaching and learning, science, research, and theory building.

This taxonomy should be studied, and research dealing with the impact of social networks on the teaching and learning process should be conducted and reported. Case studies would seem to be a logical first-step for researchers interested in this trend. Ultimately, experimental studies are needed. The editors of the *Quarterly Review of Distance Education* would welcome papers dealing with social networks.

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