**Yammer – Use Cases and Best Practices**

**Use Cases**

How is Yammer being used in the classroom now?

Public External Network

* This allows students to access the network outside of the larger university-wide space. There is less room for error such as posting in the wrong group or to "All Network". Anyone can join, but only students in the course are invited, so at the beginning of the semester or if a student drops or adds the course, the instructor/instructional designer does not have to manually add members, as they would have to do for a Private group. Can set up multiple groups for team collaboration (open to all members of the course, or a small group for team collaboration or peer assessments). Can link to specific groups within course content and take students directly to the discussion space quickly.
* External Network for students in an online program. This has not been set up yet but is in the works. The idea is for students to have a place to connect with other students in their major. We are working out the details and I can post them as they are known.

Private External Network

* External network for courses where there is group work. This is a private space. In this course students complete a semester long project involving research in their classroom. They work in smaller groups with teachers who are in their same subject area.
* Large classes for TA-to-student and student-to-faculty interaction (n=750-1500 students)
* Flipped classroom communication, file-sharing, and student-TA-faculty-student-support-liaison collaboration
* Global project with entrepreneurs across the world working on business plans for emerging sustainability businesses in developing nations
* Learning design and course development planning, communication, project management, and continual improvement
* Fully online courses for:
  + team/group projects,
  + communication/course announcements,
  + discussion about current events related to the course
  + discussion related to course topics and objectives
  + sharing files
  + sharing online resources and sites
  + sharing videos created by students
  + students who are geographically dispersed all over the globe

Private Group

* A library studies course has students answer questions. Instructors asked for something to replace the clunky ANGEL discussion forums, so Yammer was decided on for conducting discussions.
* In an upper level accounting course, students are encouraged to ask the instructor and each other questions. Again this was an instructor request to get out of the ANGEL discussion forums.
* Adding current event content pieces to the course. This is accomplished by having the instructor tag her posts by unit topic. Then the feed embed code is used to pull each tag's feeds into the Evo pages. Students can then post/reply from within the course space.
* Yammer is being used in an assignment where students are asked to create an information poster that would be provided to hospital staff to reflect the following things - basic educational offering for a location of their choice (example, ER, physician's office, labor and delivery unit, etc.); the poster should explain presentations for persons experiencing relationship and domestic violence (gender-neutral event); all possible patient presentations (specific to the unit the student chooses to focus on), evidence that may be found on the patient, how to preserve the evidence, and documentation standards should all be included on the poster; needs to be professional and thoughtful and something that could be posted in a healthcare facility; and all material should be cited. The Yammer group is used to collect the posters and for the students to share feedback for this assignment.
* Using topics and notes to help keep things organized (See also Best Practices). For each assignment that students are to complete in Yammer the instructor creates a note. Students then are asked to reply to the note and use a predetermined topic as well as descriptive topics of their own choosing.

**Best Practices, Strategies, and Caveats**

General

* Why Yammer? Yammer seems to foster more student-student and student-instructor interaction in courses (often by a very significant amount), which increases learning, and given the right prompts from instructors, can promote higher order thinking. Yammer has a free app for iOS and Android devices, which is much more conducive to the use of mobile devices to access coursework. The Yammer feed can be embedded into the LMS so students can easily reach it when logged in and see recent activity without having to enter the network.
* While Yammer resembles social networking platforms many faculty members and students are familiar with, the use of Yammer does require some skills and an understanding of technology. Also, the use of another tool outside of the LMS can be seen as a frustration for some.
* For small classes or larger classes that do not grade, or that view discussion activities as a "lower stakes" portion of coursework, Yammer is a better option (than, say, LMS discussion forums). There is less "clicking around" to see all contributions to particular topics. Conversations are neatly organized into threads and can be "tagged" with descriptive tags such as a subject or name of an assignment.
* Instructors should be encouraged to employ the help of their instructional designer to help organize the network and develop tutorials for navigating their course Yammer space.
* Provide Yammer tutorials for students with clear instructions.
* Create and/or link to screencasts on topics like “how to join,” “how to navigate yammer,” “how to set up your profile,” and “how to set preferences.”
* Have faculty communicate expectations of how Yammer will/will not be used for the course
* Encourage faculty/TA/someone to plan for an “on-call”schedule for the first week/weekend of using Yammer where someone is checking on it every couple of hours or communicating virtual online hours ahead of time. Students tend to have a lot of questions at first, and they seem to appreciate knowing that someone is there to respond.
* Communicate to students that they should expect an invitation to join in their email inbox (for private external networks and groups).
* Use the “Announcement” feature (admins only) to post to Yammer and in participant email inboxes.

Groups vs. External Networks

* There are two possibilities for setting up Yammer space - creating a private class group within the PSU Yammer space, or creating an external network that is connected to the PSU Yammer space.. Each has advantages and disadvantages. A private group allows students to interact with their classes right from the main news feed of Yammer - along with any social or professional activity they might be involved with. An external network is more walled off, and acts almost as its own complete network with its own groups, though it is still associated with the PSU network and uses WebAccess for login. Students will have to log in or move to the external network separately and they will not be able to interact with it from their main PSU feed. On the other hand, classes that plan on conducting group or team work in Yammer (while still having a cohesive space for general class communications) will need to use an external network since groups cannot be divided into subgroups.
* One advantage of using an external network is that it allows students who are using Yammer in their current occupation to use their corporate email address and switch between their work network and their course network(s).
* Use bulk upload feature in external networks to add students.
* In an external network, having multiple groups is great, but there is no way to organize groups other than by recent activity.
* When using Groups, expect students to post to "all network” accidentally and determine how/if you will respond/redirect

Assessment

**Analytics.** There are no analytics available on the platform, requiring instructors to carefully review contributions in order to assess their quality/quantity (though there may be strategies to improve workflow for this task). LMS discussion forums can therefore work better where analytics are important to faculty or departments.

**Topics (also referred to as tags).** The use of topics by instructors and students is an excellent way to keep posts, comments, and notes organized so that assessment is easier.

**Rubrics.** If discussions in Yammer groups are going to be graded, instructors need to:

* have a rubric and provide detailed instructions to students
* assess students' contributions to group discussions
* go to the LMS to record grades

Taking these steps can slow down the grading process, but having a rubric available simplifies things for both the instructor (for grading contributions) and students (for understanding what’s expected of them). Also, don’t worry so much about number of posts and replies, but about quality of contributions and posts.

**Polling.** Use the Yammer polling feature for formative assessment.

\**Thanks to Catherine Murphy, Derek Gittler, Julie Lang, Rebecca Joiner, Patty Gruneberg, and Renee Ford for the contributions that helped to shape this document.*

**Supplement: Decision Tool for Course Designers**

