

Using Social Media for Public Engagement

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1. Title Slide

If you would like to download a copy of today's slides, including bonus material and links to further information, please visit the pinned tweet on my Twitter profile @InnesAlison for a link.

2. Opportunities

Social media offers us the opportunity to do the work of scholarship in new and unique ways.

It is legitimate academic work, but it need not be one more additional task to do. Social media can be integrated into every step of the research life cycle from inspiration to impact (Mollett et al, 2017). It is a powerful way to source suggestions, connect ideas, find collaborators, keep your research community informed, and make your work visible to the media, in addition to finally promoting the completed work (Carrigan 2017).

Public engagement itself can become a part of the research project, offering opportunities to deepen connections with different people and perspectives while enhancing the “metabolization” of the thinking and learning process (Cohen 2018).

With social media, however, scholarship is being performed in the public eye, which can seem daunting. We are trained to produce highly-polished, peer-reviewed work; sharing ideas-in-progress and thinking aloud can feel risky, but, as I hope you will see today, there are also important benefits to doing so.

Today I want to show you what scholarship on social media can look like and possibly share some new ideas. My examples come from my own work for Brock's Faculty of Humanities, from scholars within our Faculty, and academics from a variety of other disciplines and affiliations whose social media work has come to my attention.

3. Promotion vs Engagement

There is a difference between using social media for promotion and using it for engagement. Promotion suggests one-way communication, like an advertisement. Engagement, on the other hand, suggests conversation and an exchange of ideas for mutual benefit. (eg Čulík-Baird 2017).

Success in social media is a long game. It takes an investment of time and effort to provide the consistent quality content required to build an engaged community. It requires a willingness to be authentic with people and to listen as much as to broadcast (Čulík-Baird 2017).

Social media is about participatory content creation. Sharing the work of others is key to building your own visibility and online identity (Stewart 2016). You become a part of an online community by sharing and engaging in day-to-day conversations and thoughts (Stewart 2016)—not just the erudite lofty ideas, but the more mundane thoughts and

activities as well. The benefits of participation in a networked community like Twitter increase with the development of engaged relationships (Stewart 2016).

4. Thinking About How to Engage (Strategy)

There are a lot of things to consider when developing your social media strategy. I don't have time to discuss them all here, but I encourage you to think through these different aspects whether you're new to social media or a long-time user.

One aspect I do want to highlight is audience accessibility. To engage a diverse audience requires an awareness of accessibility on several fronts. There are physical considerations, such as incorporating image descriptions, closed captioning for videos and transcripts for podcasts.

Accessibility also requires consideration of language that will be easily understood by your audience but still communicate ideas accurately— this can be a particular challenge with the limited space of Twitter.

5. Platforms: Where to find people to engage

Where do you find people to engage with? Part of finding your audience is thinking about what platform you want to use. What are you comfortable with? Who do you want to reach and what platforms can they be found on? Information on a platform's demographics can usually be found online quite easily.

Consider as well what kind of content you want to share—images, videos, text? Longer form writing, like blog posts, or short and quick microblogging like Twitter or Instagram?

Do you want to produce audio that people can listen to on the go? Podcasting continues to experience steady growth and has the great advantage of being media that can be consumed while doing something else.

Don't try to be everywhere at once. Focus on one or two platforms you enjoy and where you feel comfortable being authentic. It takes time to find and develop your online identity, so watch, listen, and learn. Share consistent quality content—your own and others— and with time you will find yourself connecting with your audience.

So, what does an academic talk about on social media to encourage engagement?

6. Engaging with popular culture

The ancient world has a certain grip on the popular imagination and social media is where classicists can connect with an already-interested public.

Popular culture can be a mine field when it comes to separating out fact and fiction for people. How does a scholar counter TV like Ancient Aliens? Social media platforms designed for instant communication let you engage in the conversation while it is happening—quite literally, while the show is airing.

Jeff Wright, a professional story teller, tells the story of the Trojan War in his “Trojan War Podcast”. With the “Fall of Troy” coming to Netflix, Jeff has released a new podcast “Watching Troy Fall,” where he provides commentary and critique of the show based on his expertise.

Live coverage on platforms like Twitter, Instagram, or SnapChat isn't just for TV and movies, but also art gallery and museum exhibitions. Historian **Tina Adcock's** visit to the "Death in the Ice" exhibition in 2017 is one such example. Using images and text, she shared highlights of the show and offered commentary, inviting conversation while sharing her experience.

7. Pulling back the curtain

One way of demystifying academics and contributing to scholarly conversations at the same time is by live-tweeting or blogging about one's research.

Researchers do a lot of reading. **Dr. Raul Pacheco-Vega** demonstrates how we can use Twitter to show both what and how we read for research. His tweets offer a summary of key notes along with commentary and "thinking out loud." Raul goes further and live-tweets not just what he reads, but *how* he reads it to help students develop skills engaging with literature in their field.

Emily Wilson, whose recent translation of *The Odyssey* you have no doubt heard about, has been using Twitter to share the intricacies of translation. In her Twitter threads, she explores specific lines and words, discussing how others have translated them, the nuances of meaning, and why she chose to handle them in the way she did. Her Twitter feed is an excellent example of talking about philology on social media.

Social media can be used to document the research process. Brock History Professor **Daniel Samson** (@ruralcolonialNS), for example, regularly tweets passages from the 19th century diary of James Barry, a Nova Scotian farmer. The tweets, he has told me, are a

way for him to keep regular contact with his research material, even when he's busy with other things. The responses from readers also means he gets opportunities to think through new ideas, almost like being at a mini-conference. And his ideas travel: Danny, a historian in Ontario writing about a guy from Nova Scotia, was recommended to an editor in Arizona by a prof in Pennsylvania - all facilitated through Twitter. (You can find a link to the article he wrote in the bonus slides.)

Social media lets us take people with us on our research trips, whether it's to archives or excavations, and show the process of research, as you can see with Brock History professor **Jessica Clark's** tweet. "Behind the scenes" photos are popular with audiences and a way to share the wonder and enthusiasm we have for our disciplines.

For longer form exploration of 'behind the scenes' we have the example of **Scott Lepisto's** podcast *Itinera*, where he has in-depth conversations with classicists about what they do and why they do it.

8. Expanding the audience

One use of social media which you may be familiar with is live-tweeting— which is, essentially, real-time note taking. Live tweeting takes the conversation beyond the people in the room to a much broader audience, and can be done for lectures, talks, and conferences. It can go beyond just textual information and can include links, images and even live streaming video on a variety of platforms.

In the case of conferences, social media encourages networking and invites participation by those who cannot be present for whatever reason. Personally, I have had excellent

experiences participating in SCS and CAMWS conferences through Twitter by following the conference hashtags. I have also seen several instances where an entire conference has been conducted online using Twitter.

My two examples here are from recent events hosted by Brock's Faculty of Humanities and show how it works even for small scale events.

Brock Talks is a regular public lecture series held in conjunction with our local public library. I live tweet each of these talks with the same hashtag, #BrockTalks, so they can be easily followed by anyone, either in real time or after the fact.

The second tweet here is from our **Humanities Research Institute** symposium, hashtag #BrockHRI. Visual arts professor Keri Cronin was speaking on sheep in visual culture and referenced the recent viral tweet of The MERL's "absolute unit of a ram." By tagging MERL, I brought their attention to our discussion; they quote tweeted my tweet, and within a few hours my original tweet had been served up 408 times and engaged with 81 times, and TheMERL had struck up conversation with the professor. The audience physically in the room was 50 (?).

Live coverage takes practice and sensitivity to do well but can be quickly learned and is an easy way to expand the audience for existing events.

9. Learning beyond the classroom

Teaching is part of scholarship (Stewart 2016) and taking advantage of the pedagogical opportunities social media offers is another aspect of public engagement.

The majority of our students are already engaged in social media to some degree, whether as passive consumers or active producers of content. The humanities, as we know, offers students the opportunity to develop strong communication skills; incorporating social media-type assignments into their coursework challenges them to communicate scholarly ideas in a more informal medium and to a wider audience than the traditional academic essay. At the same time, sharing students' work contributes to awareness of our discipline.

My first experience with social media in the classroom was live tweeting mythology lectures with fellow Brock TA **Darrin Sunstrum**. Using the course number as a hashtag, we tweeted the main ideas from lecture and provided bonus contextual material relating to popular culture and art. A twitter feed in the course website (LMS) and a publicly searchable hashtag meant all students had access to our synopsis of lecture for review, whether or not they personally used Twitter.

Hannah Čulík-Baird has been doing something similar this past semester at Boston, although she does the "live tweet" herself after lecture is over with the hashtag #WorldOfRome. Pre-scheduling Tweets may also be an option for those wanting to tweet their own lectures.

But you don't necessarily need your own accounts to take advantage of the opportunities social media offers. I have done two social media assignments with professors in Brock's Department of Classics as 'take overs' of the Faculty's accounts. Neither students nor instructors required their own personal accounts to participate.

The takeover I did with **Allison Glazebrook's** study tour of Greece demonstrates how multiple social media platforms can work together. Students were required to email me photos each day, along with a brief caption, to share on our Faculty Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook accounts. Allison had students write about their experiences on a course blog, and I was able to share some of these posts through social media as well. In addition, I arranged for two students to take over the university's SnapChat account for 24 hours each. This multi-faceted approach showcased the students' experiences on study tour to a diverse audience including friends and family, the Brock community, and future students.

But how to show student experiences in a less photogenic lecture course? Last fall I worked with **Nadine Brundrett** to design an Instagram assignment for a course on women in the ancient world. For their assignment, students had to find and properly cite an image relating to women's experiences in the ancient world. They then wrote up a brief discussion of the artifact or artwork, aimed at a general audience. From the top assignments, we chose a dozen to feature on the Faculty Instagram account over two weeks.

Podcasting with students is also a possibility worth exploring. **Camille Rutherford**, a professor in Brock's Faculty of Education, uses social media and podcasting extensively

with her graduate students. She conducts interviews with her students before they graduate, and also uses podcasting as a way to debrief with students and record new ideas after conferences.

Brock visual arts professor **Keri Cronin** has also used podcasting with her undergraduate students in art history. Over the course of the semester, students worked in small groups to research, write, and record 5-minute audio presentations every few weeks. These were then put together to create one episode for each of the course's thematic units. This approach gave students an active way to engage with the course material and promoted discussion.

10. Expanding the conversation

Podcasting works well for exploring longer form content in an easily accessible way. Getting started in podcasting is not as daunting as it may seem at first—all it really requires is a microphone, some open-source recording software, and a place to host it online. (Although, fair warning, the longer you do it the more addicted you will become and you will want to upgrade!)

There is no one right way to podcast. You can go it alone, like **Ryan Stitt** does with *History of Ancient Greece*, and do the research, writing, and production yourself. You can work with a co-host, as **Aven** and I both do for our respective podcasts. Or, you can assemble a team of podcasters, dividing up the work and rotating hosting duties as is done by the *Footnoting History* podcast.

The show itself can take on whatever vibe you feel is right, as long as it's authentic and friendly. You may be most comfortable with a carefully scripted show or a formal interview. Or, a friendly conversation over cocktails might be the approach that most suits your style.

Podcasting is a tool for both learning and research and a public extension of academic work. It can be used as a way of documenting information through interviews and reflection, discussing subjects in more depth and exploring new ideas, or as an opportunity to explore transdisciplinary connections.

12. Write yourself into the world

In closing, I want to share this tweet from Hannah Čulík-Baird:

“Always remember, what we have from the ancient world we have because someone inscribed it into some material. The internet is where we inscribe ourselves now. Write yourself into the world.”

Hannah Culik-Baird (@opetasanimi)

Our notion of scholarship doesn't have to be defined by past models (Čulík-Baird 2017). We can use the new tools of social media in innovative and creative ways to share our scholarship, develop meaningful relationships, and extend our work beyond the university.

13. Selected Sources

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Philip Cohen. 2018. "How I engaged my way to excellent research success and you can too." Family Inequality. Blog.

Amy Mollett et al. 2017. Communicating Your Research with Social Media. Sage. Print.

Camille Rutherford. 2010. "Why Twitter Matters: Twitter Uses for Professors." University World News. Online.

Bonnie E. Stewart. 2015. "In Abundance: Networked Participatory Practices as Scholarship." IRRODL 16.3. Online.

Bonus: Find out More

Daniel Samson, Associate Professor, Department of History, Brock dsamson@brocku.ca

Twitter: @RuralColonialNS

Read more about #JamesBarryDiary online at

<http://niche-canada.org/2018/04/04/weather-and-emotion-in-james-barrys-diary-1849-1906/>

Jessica Clark, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Brock jclark3@brocku.ca

Twitter: @JessicaPClark

Allison Glazebrook, Professor, Department of Classics, Brock aglazebrook@brocku.ca

Visit the “Brock Odyssey 2017” student blog at <http://www.brocku.ca/blogs/brock-odyssey-2017/>

Nadine Brundrett, Instructor, Department of Classics, Brock nbrundrett@brocku.ca

View the student Instagram takeover #clas2p61 at

<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/clas2p61/>

Keri Cronin, Associate Professor, Department of Visual Arts, Brock

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