ABSTRACT: **Purpose**: The purpose of this study was to examine students’ perceptions of benefits associated with the use of an education-based social networking site (SNS) for an undergraduate course in child language disorders. **Method**: A social networking page was created via the online platform, Ning in Education, and was used throughout the course. At the end of the semester, students rated their opinions of the use of the SNS and its contribution to their classroom experience. Fifty-nine out of 60 students responded (a 98% response rate). **Results**: The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that through the use of the class social networking page, they were able to communicate with peers and colleagues outside of the traditional classroom setting and express their thoughts more clearly and openly than in face-to-face class interaction. The majority of respondents also agreed that use of the Ning social networking page allowed them to go beyond face-to-face class time and get to know more about their classmates. Additional benefits of the social networking page that were reported included encouraging a sense of community and fostering a greater grasp of the concepts discussed in class. Drawbacks included inconvenience and discomfort in sharing information via this medium. **Conclusion**: Although both benefits and drawbacks were reported, the results of the current investigation suggest that the majority of student respondents perceived SNSs as potential tools that can assist in the educational process. Potential solutions to identified impediments are discussed. **KEY WORDS**: higher education, social networking, pedagogy
96% of the 36,950 undergraduates surveyed access SNSs. Recent research has also shown that college students not only have memberships with social networking accounts but are accessing these accounts often. In a study by Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, and Espinoza (2008), 57% of the college students with social networking accounts reported that they access these accounts daily. In another study of U.S. college students, results indicated that undergraduate students spend an average of 30 min daily actively engaged on Facebook (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). Although the studies are relatively current, the growth of social networking sites continues to rise, highlighting the possibility that these figures may be even higher if surveyed now.

Social Networking as an Educational Tool

The use of SNSs as a potential educational tool to increase student interest, engagement, and retention of material is of growing interest, particularly in light of the documented popularity of SNSs with college students. As a result, a small body of research is beginning to emerge in this area. In an online survey, Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, and Witty (2010) investigated the use of Facebook by both students and faculty across disciplines at a mid-sized, public university. Department chairs from five departments sent e-mail links via Survey Monkey, an online survey platform, to all full-time and part-time faculty members. Of the 150 potential faculty participants, 62 responded (41% return). The 120 student respondents represented a convenience sample of the university and were recruited by stationing personnel in the student union and inviting students to go to the online site to complete the survey. The survey inquired as to whether or not the respondents had a Facebook account, and, if so, how often and for what purposes they used the account. In addition, respondents were asked their views with regard to using Facebook as a potential classroom tool.

The findings of the Roblyer et al. (2010) study indicated that although the majority of both student (95%) and faculty (73%) groups reported having a Facebook account, the student group was significantly more likely to have one than the faculty group was. Interestingly, of the respondents who reported having Facebook accounts, the groups did not differ significantly with regard to how often they checked the accounts. The most frequently checked option for both groups was checking Facebook one to five times a day. Students were more likely to use their Facebook accounts to keep in touch with old friends; however, the groups did not differ significantly with regard to their use of Facebook to communicate on class projects, let others know what is happening in their lives, connect with people they have lost touch with, or for career networking. In fact, communicating on class projects was the least reported use, indicating that neither faculty nor students use Facebook frequently for instructional purposes.

With regard to the potential of using Facebook as an educational tool, students were significantly more likely than faculty members to agree to the statement “It would be convenient.” Faculty members, on the other hand, were significantly more likely to agree that “Facebook is personal/social—not for education!” Based on these findings, it appears that the students were significantly more open than faculty to the possibility of using Facebook as a potential classroom tool (Roblyer et al., 2010).

In an investigation of the effects of faculty self-disclosure through SNSs such as Facebook, Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds (2007) surveyed 133 undergraduates who were enrolled in a basic communications course. Results indicated that increased motivation and higher levels of learning were reported by students who experienced more instructor self-disclosure on Facebook rather than less. Qualitative data from the investigation, however, did indicate that students were concerned with the possibility that the faculty member would not be viewed as a professional in the event of overdisclosure. Based on this information, Mazer et al. advised proceeding with caution in regard to self-disclosure on SNSs.

Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-kane (2011) surveyed 1,920 faculty members and found that the majority of faculty (77%) engaged in social media (the broader category of information exchange under which social networking is a form) for personal/social reasons, and 60% indicated that they used social media educationally. Although this percentage is high, it should be noted that the highest percentage of these respondents (61%) indicated that they shared videos via sources such as YouTube, as opposed to the use of an SNS. In regard to SNSs specifically, only a small percentage of faculty reported using Facebook (4%) and Twitter (2%) in class. These findings suggest that although SNSs are being used by faculty members in the field of higher education for personal reasons, many of these faculty members are not engaging with students in an SNS setting (Moran et al., 2011).

Specific to the field of communication disorders, Plumb (2013) surveyed 262 faculty members to investigate their social networking practices and perspectives with regard to the use of SNSs as a potential tool to assist in the learning process. Results indicated that the majority of respondents had accounts with at least one SNS, with Facebook being
the most common; however, the majority of respondents did not use an SNS as an educational tool. When queried as to the reason(s) they would not be interested in using an SNS as an educational tool, respondents noted legitimate privacy concerns and the potential to disclose personal information that could detract from the student’s view of the faculty member as a professional.

A small but growing body of evidence exists that suggests the educational benefit of SNSs in the higher education classroom. With regard to the academic value of Twitter (a microblogging SNS), Junco, Heibergert, and Loken (2011) used this SNS within a first-year seminar course for prehealth profession majors and measured its impact on students’ grades and engagement. Four sections of the course were randomly assigned to the experimental group in which Twitter was used in the course, and three sections were randomly assigned to the control group in which a Twitter component was not included in the course. None of the participants had used Twitter before participating in the study. Of the 132 students in the seven sections, 125 participated in the study. No significant differences were noted in participation rate, with 95% participation in both the experimental (N = 70) and control group (N = 55).

All groups in the Junco et al. (2011) study received a pretest and a posttest as a student engagement measure. Following the pretest, the experimental group received an hour-long training session on how to use Twitter. Twitter was then used throughout the semester with the experimental group for educationally relevant purposes, such as continuing class discussions, class reminders, campus event reminders, and organizing study groups. Posttest measures revealed that the experimental group demonstrated a significantly greater increase in engagement versus the control group. In addition, after ruling out a significant difference in pre-existing grade point averages (GPAs), the experimental group demonstrated higher GPAs at the end of the semester than the control group. These findings are encouraging and highlight the potential of this SNS as a pedagogical tool that can be used to engage students and supplement the traditional face-to-face classroom experience.

In an effort to address concerns with regard to privacy and safety, an additional social networking option has been the creation of educationally focused SNSs, such as Ning in Education and Elgg. These education-based SNSs have been gaining popularity as they provide educators with the ability to benefit from many of the desired features of Facebook, such as the ability to post videos and discussions, without some of the privacy and safety concerns associated with commercial SNSs. As with traditional SNSs, students and faculty create accounts, have access to course information, and are able to interactively communicate information related to the topics being covered in the course.

Evidence is beginning to emerge that highlights the potential pedagogical benefits associated with the use of education-based SNSs. Brady, Holcomb, and Smith (2010) surveyed graduate students enrolled in distance education courses using Ning in Education. The majority of participants reported experiencing deeper reflection of course material as well as increased communication and collaboration with other students. These findings highlight the potential for the use of education-based SNSs as an academic tool in higher education.

Although the findings of Brady et al. (2010) support the effectiveness of an education-based SNS in distance education, evidence that supports its potential as a supplementary tool for a face-to-face class is also increasing. Hung and Yuen (2010) used Ning to supplement four face-to-face classes at two public universities in Hong Kong. Their findings indicate that the majority of respondents developed increased levels of social connection and expressed positive feelings regarding the experience.

**Purpose**

A growing body of evidence exists related to the widespread popularity of SNSs among university students and faculty. In response to this documented popularity, researchers in higher education are beginning to investigate the application of social networking as a pedagogical tool in the college classroom; however, very little has been explored within the field of communication disorders. The purpose of the current investigation was to examine the potential of social networking as a supplement to classroom instruction in an undergraduate course in the field of communication disorders. An educationally based social networking page was created specifically for an undergraduate course in child language disorders and was used throughout the duration of the course. Following semester-long use of the page, students were surveyed with regard to their current social networking practices and their perspectives regarding the use of the class social networking page as an educational supplement to face-to-face instruction.

**Method**

**Procedure**

A social networking page was created for an undergraduate course in child language disorders at Auburn
University via the online platform, Ning in Education. During the first week of class, an invitation was sent to all students in the course, with a link to join the site. It was explained to the students that participation on the Ning site was not mandatory, and that the purpose of the page was to create a deeper understanding of the material being covered as well as to create a greater sense of community among class members. All 60 students in the class accepted the invitation and joined the social networking page for the course.

Upon creating the Ning page, several steps were taken to engage students and maintain their involvement throughout the semester. The faculty member initially posted pictures relating to the department, including photos of undergraduate and graduate students in the university speech and hearing clinic and photos of previous events with the Auburn University Chapter of the National Student Speech-Language-Hearing Association (NSSLHA). Humorous cartoons and quotes relating to speech-language pathology were also posted, such as “Speech-language pathologists have a way with words.” To encourage initial interaction on the page, the faculty member posted a discussion question related to a video clip that had been seen in class. Discussion questions were also posted by the faculty member at various points throughout the semester to encourage deeper thinking with regard to the class material.

In addition to the faculty member posting material throughout the semester, the students were also encouraged to actively participate on the Ning page. Suggestions included sharing video links and articles related to class material. Several students also shared personal photos and experiences related to the content of the course. For example, one student shared photos of herself and her sibling with Down syndrome, and another posted a comment about her experiences with her sibling with autism and how that led her to the field of speech-language pathology. All posts by students were responded to by the faculty member with at least one comment. In many instances, students responded to their classmates’ postings with comments or by indicating “like.”

**Survey**

A paper-based, eight-item survey (see Appendix) was created to obtain information about the respondents and to address questions in three main areas: (a) current social networking practices, (b) feedback regarding their experience with the class social networking page, and (c) the benefits and drawbacks of using Ning in Education for the class social networking page. The survey was modeled in part after that of Brady et al. (2010), though it was adapted to obtain the desired information for course improvement for this particular course. Before administration, Brady et al. addressed the content validity of the survey through the systematic review and evaluation of the survey by two outside evaluators. Throughout that process, the survey was amended to reflect feedback and increase the instrument’s validity.

Questions with regard to the students’ current social networking practices (Part I), which were identical to those of Brady et al. (2010), were designed to acquire information with regard to whether the students belonged to any SNSs and if they had ever been in a class that used an SNS as an educational tool. Questions in Part II were designed to investigate the students’ feelings regarding the use of the Ning social networking page specifically in their child language disorders class.

Out of Brady et al.’s (2010) 14 Likert scale items, six were selected for the current survey to provide the desired feedback for course improvement. In addition, one item was added to obtain further information with regard to whether the class social networking page encouraged an increased sense of community: “Ning allowed me to get to know more about classmates that I may not have in the face-to-face class.” Questions in Part III were designed to give the students an open-ended opportunity to explain what they liked about the social networking page and what could be improved for future courses. Three of Brady et al.’s open-ended questions were selected for administration to address the core areas of interest: benefits, drawbacks, and suggestions for improvement. In addition, for course improvement, students were asked if they would prefer to use an alternative social networking site (e.g., Facebook, MySpace) as a tool for the course.

**Participants**

A total of 59 undergraduate students who were enrolled in the child language disorders course completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 98%. In an effort to receive feedback for continued course improvement, the students were given the survey on the last day of class. The survey was not mandatory, and grades were not assigned based on its completion; however, two extra credit points were offered as an incentive to complete the survey.

**RESULTS**

**Current Social Networking Practices**

A large majority of respondents (95%; n = 56) indicated that they belonged to an SNS. The
students who reported membership with an SNS were then asked to identify the specific SNS with which they had an account. As shown in Figure 1, all of these respondents \( (n = 56) \) reported that they had a Facebook account. The majority also held accounts with Twitter \( (71\%; \; n = 40) \), and smaller percentages reported accounts with MySpace \( (2\%; \; n = 1) \) and “other” \( (7\%; \; n = 4) \). Specific SNS sites reported under other were Instagram and Pinterest. The students were then asked if they had ever used an SNS for educational purposes. Of the 59 respondents, 24 reported that they had \( (41\%) \), and 35 \( (59\%) \) reported that they had not.

**Student Feedback**

For the Likert scale items, student responses for *strongly agree* and *agree* were collapsed into one response group; the same was done for *strongly disagree* and *disagree*. Collapsing these categories allowed illustration of positive, negative, or neutral perceptions. The percentages of student responses to the Likert items are provided in Table 1. The majority of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the Ning social networking page allowed them to communicate with their instructor and peers in their course outside of the traditional setting \( (86\%; \; n = 51) \), whereas 14% \( (n = 8) \) were neutral. When asked if Ning allowed them to express their thoughts more clearly and openly than in face-to-face class interaction, 69% \( (n = 41) \) of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed, 17% were neutral \( (n = 10) \), and 14% \( (n = 8) \) either strongly disagreed or disagreed.

More than half of the respondents indicated that the class social networking page allowed them to comment and discuss ideas with peers and colleagues more efficiently as compared to a face-to-face class \( (64\%; \; n = 38) \); 22% were neutral \( (n = 13) \), and 14% either strongly disagreed or disagreed \( (n = 8) \). When asked if they felt more comfortable sharing and discussing their ideas on Ning than in a traditional face-to-face class, the largest number of students indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed \( (71\%; \; n = 42) \); 29% were neutral \( (n = 17) \). The majority of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that use of the Ning social networking page allowed them to get to know more about their classmates that they may not have in their face-to-face class \( (73\%; \; n = 43) \), whereas 14% were neutral \( (n = 8) \) and 14% \( (n = 8) \) either strongly disagreed or disagreed.

When asked if Ning allowed them more time to effectively reflect on others’ comments as compared to traditional face-to-face classes, 75% \( (n = 44) \) of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed, 19% \( (n = 11) \) were neutral, and 7% \( (n = 4) \) either strongly disagreed or disagreed. With regard to whether Ning facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of the topics covered and/or addressed in the traditional classroom, the majority of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed or agreed \( (78\%; \; n = 46) \); 22% were neutral \( (n = 13) \).

**Figure 1.** Number of students with social networking accounts by site.
Perceived Benefits and Drawbacks

The four open-ended questions were examined for themes regarding the benefits, drawbacks, and limitations of using Ning in an educational setting. The open-ended questions were analyzed by two independent raters who read all of the responses and noted any themes present. Categories were derived after reviewing the themes, and the responses were then reexamined for the presence of these categories. The two themes that emerged regarding the benefits of using Ning as an educational tool were (a) encouraging a sense of community and (b) fostering a greater grasp of the concepts discussed in class.

An example of a student comment with regard to the sense of community encouraged by the experience was “I was able to learn the names and faces of several classmates, and we are now becoming good friends.” Other students reported that the experience “allowed better communication with classmates” and that through the Ning page, students were able “to get to interact with (their) teacher on a more personal level.” Among student comments related to the further development of concepts discussed in class, one student commented, “It allows for integration of classroom material outside classroom meeting time. It helps us relate things learned in class to more real issues.” Other related comments included that use of the Ning page “enabled students to watch videos demonstrating the techniques discussed in class” and that it “really helped grasp the concepts.”

The themes that emerged in reference to the drawbacks of using Ning for teaching and learning were “inconvenience” and “discomfort sharing information in this medium.” With regard to inconvenience, several students noted that they would “forget” to check the class social networking page as it was not an SNS they typically frequented, such as Facebook. One student specifically commented that “It’s an added website that I have to remember to log onto and remember the login info to. It’s not a site I necessarily want to go to everyday such as Facebook or Twitter.” Another related comment was, “Unless you are familiar with the Ning network already, it takes a little getting used to. It is not a website I am used to checking and so I forgot about going to it to see what others had posted.” In reference to discomfort sharing information in this medium, student concerns included that some students felt “uncomfortable posting” and that they felt “judged” communicating in this format and were therefore unlikely to participate.

The investigator then analyzed the responses of the students who perceived drawbacks with regard to either of these themes to determine their level of social networking experience. Of the 21 students who reported a drawback related to inconvenience, all currently belonged to an online social network, but only 33% (n = 7) had used an online social networking website for educational purposes in the past. Similarly, all of the students who reported a drawback related to inconvenience currently belonged to an online social network, but only 33% (n = 7) had used an online social networking website for educational purposes in the past. Similarly, all of the students who reported a drawback related to discomfort sharing information through an SNS (n = 8) reported that they currently had social networking accounts; however, only 25% of these students had used a social networking site educationally in the past (n = 2), whereas 75% had not (n = 6).

Students were also asked what they would change with regard to the use of Ning as an educational tool within the course. The major theme that emerged here was “more direct tie-in with the face-to-face course.” Students suggested that it would also be

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Table 1. Student perceptions of Ning in the classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey question</th>
<th>Strongly agree or agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly disagree or disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ning allows me to communicate with my instructor and my peers in my course outside of the traditional classroom setting.</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ning allows me to express my thoughts more clearly and openly than in the face-to-face class interaction.</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ning allows me to comment and discuss ideas with my peers and colleagues more efficiently as opposed to the face-to-face class.</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more comfortable sharing and discussing my ideas on Ning than I do in a traditional face-to-face classroom.</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ning allowed me to get to know more about classmates that I may not have in the face-to-face class.</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ning allows me more time to effectively reflect on others’ comments as compared to traditional face-to-face classes.</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My use of Ning facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the topics covered and/or addressed in the traditional classroom setting.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
helpful to take more time in class to “discuss some of the posts and responses to discussion questions” and to “have class discussions on videos, articles, etc.” Finally, when asked whether they would prefer using an alternative social networking site (e.g., Facebook, MySpace), 51% (n = 30) responded that they would prefer an alternative site. Thirteen of these respondents noted Facebook, specifically. The reasons reported included that it was “easier” and that “Facebook is a site (they) all visit daily.” A slightly smaller number of respondents (49%; n = 29) indicated that they would prefer to use Ning in Education, with the primary reason reported being privacy. Specific comments included the desire to “keep school separate from (their) social lives” and that Ning seemed more “scholarly” and “professional.”

**DISCUSSION**

Findings from the current investigation support those of previous studies on the frequent use of SNSs by undergraduate students, as well as those investigating the potential benefits of using SNSs within educational settings. The majority of participants (95%; n = 56) reported that they had an account with an SNS, supporting the previous finding of Smith and Caruso (2010), who reported that 96% of undergraduates surveyed across disciplines had an account with an SNS. The similarity between these findings suggests that the social networking habits of students in communication disorders are similar to those of students in other fields of study. In addition, all of the respondents who reported having accounts with SNSs indicated that they have accounts with Facebook. This is understandable in light of Facebook’s current position as the largest SNS in the world, with >1 billion users.

Although the majority of respondents in the current investigation reported that they had never used an SNS for an educational purpose (59%; n = 35), the percentage who had (41%; n = 24) is still higher than recent estimates of students across fields of study (Roblyer et al., 2010). This finding highlights the possibility that undergraduate students in the field of communication disorders are exposed to SNSs educationally more often than students in other disciplines; however, it is important to note that the current survey did not query as to whether the classes in which SNSs were used were in the field of communication disorders. It is conceivable that the courses that used social networking did not occur within the major. In addition, as social networking was not specifically defined within the survey, the possibility exists that students may have been referring to the use of sites considered under the broader domain of social media (e.g., YouTube, Wikipedia), as opposed to SNSs, specifically.

The results of the current investigation also provide support to the small but growing body of evidence demonstrating the educational value of using an educationally based SNS in the field of higher education (Brady et al., 2010; Hung & Yuen, 2010). The majority of participants in this study agreed that there are numerous benefits to adopting SNSs in educational settings, including the formation of relationships with classmates, an increased reflection on the topics covered, and a more comprehensive understanding of the material. Although the majority of findings were positive, some students did see “inconvenience” and “discomfort in sharing information in this medium” as weaknesses, with specific issues reported such as forgetting to log on, difficulty navigating the page, and being uncomfortable posting. Interestingly, all of the students who reported these drawbacks currently had accounts with other SNSs; however, the majority had not previously used an SNS for educational purposes. Therefore, it is possible that inexperience with the educational application of this newer technology contributed to the students’ negative perceptions. And, with continued use of social networking as a supplement to the face-to-face class, such perceptions could be reduced.

It should be noted that although the Ning website was referred to and accessed in class during the semester, a formal tutorial was not held. As it is a medium that is not as frequently used as Facebook and was new to most of the students, the possibility exists that unfamiliarity played a role in some students’ views of the social networking page as inconvenient. A formal introduction to all of the social networking page’s uses and benefits may have helped to increase the students’ comfort levels with it, thereby improving their experience. In addition, when asked what they would change about the experience, a number of students specifically commented that they would have liked more time in class devoted to discussion of the posts by their classmates. Accessing the Ning page more frequently in the face-to-face class may have encouraged more buy-in outside of class.

Although the majority of students perceived learning benefits associated with the adoption of a social networking page through Ning in Education, slightly more than half of the students indicated that they would still prefer to use a traditional SNS, with 22% (n = 13) specifically naming Facebook. In this era of immediate gratification, it is conceivable that students would prefer a site that they already access daily; however, it is possible that the nature of that question in the survey was somewhat leading. By
asking the students if they would prefer another SNS and then providing Facebook as a specific example, the students may have logically selected the familiar option. It is also important to consider that only a slightly smaller percentage of respondents indicated that they would prefer to use an educationally based SNS, as opposed to a traditional SNS. Their reported reasons included those that have been reported by faculty in previous literature, such as privacy and safety issues, as well as the need to keep professional and personal lives separate (Plumb, 2013). The students in the current investigation also reported the importance of maintaining a sense of professionalism, which was also cited by Mazer et al. (2007) in their survey of undergraduate students enrolled in a basic communication course.

Implications and Conclusions

Educationally based SNSs, such as Ning in Education, have the potential to provide great benefits as a supplement to the traditional face-to-face class in higher education. In addition to the educational benefits they can provide, educationally based SNSs also alleviate many of the privacy and safety concerns associated with traditional SNSs. Slightly more than half of the students would have preferred to use an SNS with which they were already familiar. However, repeated use of educationally based SNSs may minimize this preference, as the more a student logs on, the more familiar he or she will become with the page setup and site navigation. This familiarity could also help students feel more comfortable and motivated to participate.

As educationally based SNSs grow, it is likely they will become familiar to a greater number of students. For those students who are unfamiliar with educationally based SNSs, it is important for the instructor to formally orient the students to the site and refer to the class page consistently throughout the semester. For example, posted video clips that are related to course material can be shown in the face-to-face class, or a discussion initiated on the social networking page can be continued in person. This may help to illustrate the tie-in between the social networking page and the class itself. The more the instructor refers to the SNS during class, the less likely it is to be forgotten.

Faculty members may also choose to adopt a commercial SNS with which students are already familiar; however, should a faculty member choose to adopt a traditional SNS, such as Facebook, caution must be taken to protect against the privacy and safety concerns associated with its use. This caution is particularly important in light of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), which prohibits the release of personal information such as grades and social security numbers. Although social networking tools do not typically collect information that threatens FERPA, the onus is on the faculty member to maintain student privacy when using an SNS for educational purposes. For example, faculty members should not use an SNS as a forum to post grades, and it should clearly be explained to the students that the information they share will be viewed by others. When incorporating a social networking component into a course, it is recommended that the faculty member consult his or her college or university’s FERPA policy guidelines to ensure compliance.

Summary

Students in the field of communication disorders appear as likely as students across disciplines to frequent SNSs. With the widespread popularity of SNSs among university students, it is becoming increasingly important to consider the potential learning benefits that may be associated with the use of social networking within higher education. Results of the current investigation indicate that the majority of students perceived numerous benefits related to the use of the class social networking page. These benefits included the ability to communicate with peers and colleagues outside of the traditional classroom setting, the opportunity to get to know more about their classmates, and development of a deeper understanding of the material. A drawback of the use of the educationally based SNS was reported by some as inconvenience, with slightly more than half of the students noting that they would prefer to use a traditional SNS with which they already have an account, such as Facebook.

As an educationally based SNS will most likely be a less familiar technology to many students, it is important for the instructor to orient the students to its uses and benefits, as well as to consistently take time in the face-to-face class to discuss some of the related posts, videos, and so on to encourage student buy-in. Should a faculty member decide to use a traditional SNS, such as Facebook, a concerted effort must be made to safeguard against privacy/safety concerns and to ensure that it is the valuable learning tool intended.

REFERENCES


Contact author: Allison M. Plumb, 1199 Haley Center, Auburn, AL 36849. E-mail: amp0016@auburn.edu.
APPENDIX. NING IN EDUCATION STUDENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

Part I
1. Do you currently belong to an online social network? If no, please skip to question number 3.
   a. Yes
   b. No

2. If you currently belong to a social networking site, please identify which one: (Select all that apply)
   a. Facebook
   b. Twitter
   c. MySpace
   d. Friendster
   e. Other

3. Have you used an online social networking website for educational purposes in the past?
   a. Yes
   b. No

Part II
4. Please answer each of the following questions based on your recent use of Ning for this course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
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<td>Ning allows me to communicate with my instructor and my peers in my course outside of the traditional classroom setting.</td>
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<td>My use of Ning facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the topics covered and/or addressed in the traditional classroom setting.</td>
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Part III
5. In your opinion, how does the use of Ning enhance the course you are currently enrolled in?

6. In your opinion, what are the drawbacks of using Ning for teaching and learning?

7. In your opinion, what would you change about the use of Ning as a social networking tool in this course?

8. In your opinion, would you prefer the use of an alternate social networking site (i.e., Friendster, MySpace, Facebook) as a tool for this course? If so, which site would you prefer and why?