

Politics and Student Pollsters

Mr. R has been teaching political science for over 20 years and is ready for a change. It has been difficult to communicate his interest in politics and community involvement to his students over the years, and he is hoping that he can leverage the multiple technologies available to his students to change this: laptops, tablets, and this year, due to a policy change at the school, even the students' own cell phones. Mr. R's biggest concern is that students use the technology only for approved purposes in the classroom. He has read several articles with tips for communicating expectations to students for technology use and has decided to use some of these strategies.

Mr. R decides to take advantage of a political issue brewing in the small community served by his school. The local government is considering a controversial new tax and the community quickly divides into factions for and against. Even in his political science class, mentioning the tax proposal triggers a lively debate, which is positively viewed by Mr. R as a sign of interest he rarely sees.

The class decides, with guidance from Mr. R, that they will build an informational Web site that includes coverage of both sides of the debate. The site will include: details of the proposal with a link to the divisional council Web site, interviews and summaries supporting the pros and cons of the tax, and periodic poll data generated by the students themselves. At the outset of the project, Mr. R does two things to communicate the expectations for appropriate use of the technology. The first is to communicate to the students the acceptable use policies already in place in the school. He has posted these policies in the front of the room and reviewed them with the students. The second is to prepare a "to-do list" with the students for each stage of the project and then to list the technologies that will be used for each of those stages. If they are at the final editing stage, for example, the technologies in use should be laptops only. Mr. R decides that to do this project justice, he will involve the language arts and math teachers as well.

The other teachers are excited by the project. The language arts teacher sees this as an opportunity to apply two styles of writing that are central to her curriculum: persuasive writing, for the position papers that the students will generate, and technical writing in support of the polling data. The math teacher is pleased at the opportunity for students to conduct polls, a process that involves math from population-sampling strategies to significant data analysis.

As part of his unit on probability and statistics, the math teacher has worked with the students on the concept of creating a representative sample. Through the Internet, students access the publicly available voter rolls and use what they have learned in math to construct a polling sample. The polling is done online, using SurveyMonkey, a free Web survey tool. Students follow up with non-respondents through phone surveys. The students identify leaders and supporters on either side of the issue and conduct interviews with using their smartphones and tablets to take photographs of the participants where permission is granted. Working in the free area of Wikispaces, teams of students write content supporting or opposing the initiative. Finally, the teams turn to their laptops to edit the content, add the photographs, and prepare their work. One team of technically-inclined students prepares the informational site in Weebly, a free Web-building tool.

Prior to the vote on the tax proposal, students conduct the survey in two different time frames to gauge any changes in opinion. Even the students who support the tax have to admit that they are delighted when the defeat of the measure happens almost exactly as predicted by their final poll. Mr. R is delighted at the new interest that the project engenders in his students.

Resources used in this scenario:

- [Online voter databases](#) *

Tools used in this scenario:

- [Wikispaces](#) *
- [Weebly](#) *
- [SurveyMonkey](#) *

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