

Getting an urgent email from a student imploring that I mediate over a social media matter between her another student is an uncommon experience for me as an adjunct instructor of English. For one, I do not think it is my concern what my composition students do and write on their various social media platforms. I consider monitoring their conversations interactions in such spaces private.

As a millennial, I can think back to when I was a first-year college student at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Myspace gradually faded as Facebook became ascendant among my peers. I worked on a couple of group projects with classmates, but we never used social media to collaborate with each other. Exchange of phone numbers and email addresses was something I did a lot with classmates working on a group project. And in graduate school, this was the modus operandi with many of my peers.

Teaching an asynchronous composition course in the fall of 2020, during the height of the pandemic, I assigned a group project assignment to my composition students believing my instructions were clear enough to help them plan a group response to the deliverable. I had offered them practical ways as I knew on how to they go about collaborating with each other—exchange of email addresses, phone numbers, the use of discussion board forum, specifically, the space I had created for every group, and the use of Google Workspace. But I was naïve.

Now I believe if we educators are truly interested in introducing creative ways to promote collaboration and connectedness amongst students, especially in our asynchronous courses, we should encourage them to use a social media tool they are very much familiar with and which many of them are probably using to collaborate with each other when we assign group projects to them: Snapchat.

I would like to offer three reasons why educators should encourage their students to use Snapchat for group projects assigned in asynchronous courses.

In no order, here are the reasons:

1. **It is lit** Snapchat is extremely popular among many Gen Zs today. Many Gen Zs in your class are more likely on Snapchat than on Facebook. Many Gen Zs would prefer to connect on Snapchat over Facebook. According to a [2021 survey by Statista](#), 35 percent of teenagers in the United States identified Snapchat as their “most important social network.” The fast-growing social video app, Tik Tok, came in second at 30 percent, and Instagram third at 22 percent. All other social media apps also used by teens in the same year, Twitter, Discord, and Facebook, paled in comparison with Snapchat’s dominance in Gen Zs lives. In the [fourth quarter of 2020](#), over 90 percent of Gen Z watched shows and publisher content on Snapchat. In 2021, [per Pew Research Center](#), 75 percent of 18 to 24 years old reported using Snapchat.
2. **It is more student-student focused than the typical discussion board forum on many learning management systems:** Snapchat offers students more freedom to connect and interact with their peers without the due supervision of an authority figure monitoring

their conversations or posts. Online discussion forums offer many advantages to the instructor. It is easy to track and regulate a student's activities and participation in class discussions. These forums are repositories of whole class discussions, students get to read each other's posts and offer comments and responses to their peers. I get that. But many students are less likely going to be willing to communicate beyond the parameters of the discussion forum prompt, for example, engage in icebreakers, socialize with each other in such a restricted space where they are required to respond to a prompt within a time constraint, keenly aware that their comments are being read and might be graded according to a rubric. According to [Alfred Rovi \(2002\)](#), asynchronous online learners who develop a stronger sense of belonging and connectedness "feel less isolated and have greater satisfaction with their academic programs." Compared to other social media apps, Snapchat ranks remarkably high in its appeal to teenagers. Therefore, it is worth exploring how students connect with it in the classroom.

3. **It is *the* preferred mode of communication for some students:** Gen Zers make up most [college students today](#). Snapchat is many Gen Zs preferred communication tool, not email, not text messages, [not phone calls, and, as surprising and shocking as this may sound to those of us skilled in communications, not face-to-face communication](#). I believe Jean Twenge was onto something when she wrote in a [Time](#) piece the following: "The way teenagers spend their time outside of school has shifted fundamentally. Being a teen always has meant hanging out with friends, but that increasingly happens virtually rather than face-to-face." She goes on to note that one the major problems faced by many teenagers today who belong to the "Smartphone Age" is that they are "verbally incommunicado." She writes: "It is not just leisure time. In schools that allow phones during the school day, fewer students talk to each other face-to-face during lunch period or other free times, leaving some feeling left out." While I do agree with Twenge's observation, that more face-to-face communication is needed among teens, I do think the focus on the "Unhealthy State of the Smartphone Age" can be a distraction when discussing the benefits of smartphones to students, especially Gen Zs. Notwithstanding, Twenge's clincher makes it clear what Gen Zs attitude towards smartphones should be: "...we can be more mindful about how we use technology. iGen students need to hear it from us: The smartphone should be a tool you use, not a tool that uses you." For a group project, Snapchat can be *that tool students use*.
4. **It is very convenient and accessible.** Students access Snapchat from the convenience of their smartphones. If students are using Snapchat to communicate as they work on group projects in an asynchronous class (I do believe this happens a lot with Gen Z students), this offers them the opportunity to connect and interact other when the in-person option is not there. Snap photos and videos can extend communications and interactions and put to live conversations that would otherwise be impersonal on say, Blackboard or D2L discussion forum. The pandemic is not over, even though lots of restrictions that once prohibited in person learning and face to face class have now been lifted across states. The pandemic has had a negative impact on many teenagers' mental health. [According to](#)

[2021 report by the CDC](#), forty-four percentage of teenagers reported “persistently” feeling hopeless or say in 2020, and cites “school connectedness”, which “it describes as a sense of being cared for, supported, and belonging at school” has been essential to “provide critical protection for students during covid-19.” I believe Snapchat, like many social media apps, can enhance school connectedness just as in person learning can. No doubt, there may be some risks involved in promoting Snapchat in our classroom, but the benefits trump the cost. There are four practical recommendations I suggest we can proactively adopt to manage conflicts that might stem from promoting its usage in a group assignment in an asynchronous class.

In no order, here are my recommendations:

1. Develop group assignments that will require student planning and collaboration beyond learning management system’s online discussion forums. This is not suggesting that we totally abandon discussions forums on LMS, but that we supplement them with other technology tools that are more appealing and at the fingertips of our students when they work on tasks. This is where Snapchat comes in. Ever since I started teaching asynchronous courses, ones in which I always establish group projects, I have had students tell me they are connecting with each other on Snapchat to collaborate on projects. There are of course other Gen Z students who communicate using group texts, Google Workspace, or a phone call between their group members. Since I first mediated in a Snapchat related conflict between two students, I now encourage students to use Snapchat when collaborating on group assignments but in the context of also suggesting other collaborative tools. I do this in addition to providing them information on all the other tools of collaborations I used as a college student, which many other students that are Gen Z or non-Gen Zs also use: email communication, phone calls, Zoom, SMS messages, Google Workspace, and even discussion board forums. No matter how creative I have designed group forums or Wiki pages to enable student to collaborate better in a group assignment, I have found that students barely use them other than to provide their email addresses, phone numbers, or share their completed deliverable with the class.
2. Check in with individual groups especially when group communication and interaction is still in its infancy among students. Snapchat group chat is not exempt from problems that occur in group mediated spaces created for solving projects. Not all students, especially adult students, know what Snapchat is. I have always learned more about and gotten creative about mediating to solve group problems when I check in with students working on a group project. A simple call, a short text message, or a check in email message, are all methods I have used in my asynchronous and face to face classes.
3. Share experiences (If you have any) of previous students who have used Snapchat to collaborate successfully. Whenever I have asked students (the ones who disclosed to me that they used Snapchat to collaborate for a group project I assign) their

experience of using it, they speak enthusiastically about it, echoing the convenience such social media offers them to communicate and follow up with each other. Now not all students gravitate immediately towards using Snapchat to collaborate for a college project. Keenly aware that academia is a professional environment, some focus on LMS discussion forum, emails, group text, or Google workspace. When I share other students' experience using Snapchat, it is to encourage them to not shy away from using it if they want to for the class project.

Promoting Snapchat in college group assignments is not a guarantee that it will solve the poor communication that exists among some students participating in projects. Neither is it the ultimate solution to college retention; it will not ensure that students will stay motivated throughout the semester and pass a course. But if Snapchat is the likely communication preference app/tool of many students that make up the 21<sup>st</sup> century composition class today, then I believe we educator have a responsibility to promote Snapchat as a tool students can use to further communication amongst themselves, challenging them to think beyond the convenience and entertainment value the app has provided to their generation.