

# **Let's Chat! Using Social Messaging Apps to Encourage Student Engagement in Higher Education**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Apps have been replacing browsers and email and become the most used channel for acquiring information and social activities in our modern society. WhatsApp, WeChat, Allo from Google, and similar apps have made instant multi-media messaging a part of our regular life. College students in particular are more used to the chat culture. The authors as university professors have been piloting using several messaging apps to facilitate peer learning in higher education.

After carefully studying available technology, the authors have selected two traditional online classroom management systems and three public messaging apps. The two classroom management systems we use are Google Classroom and Blackboard. For both we use the discussion forums for students to post questions and help their classmates. Three social messaging apps we have selected are WhatsApp, WeChat, and Allo from Google. WhatsApp is the most popular messaging app in the United States. WeChat is appraised for its strong functionality. Finally, Allo from Google is a smart chat with built in Google search and text prediction support.

At the beginning of the course, students are offered a small incentive to sign up for the class group chat on their smart devices. The communication rules and expectations have to be made clear for peer chatting. Then a rewarding scheme is announced to encourage students to provide help to fellow classmates. Instructors may help answer some questions and set up examples of answers in the group chat.

At the end of the term, students that have provided positive and consistent help in the class chat will be recognized. A survey about peer class messaging experience will be administrated to students that have participated in this project. Chat history will be collected and student identity will be removed from the chat history. Text analysis techniques will be used to examine the communication stream.

The impacts of peer learning through social messaging will be examined in the proposed research. The lessons learned in implementation will be shared. Different messaging and technology tested will be compared. An ideal messaging system should allow easy sharing of screenshots, text, locations, pictures, calendar, and other media content. In addition, the professors may prefer to have a messaging app that is easy to manage the membership, delete inappropriate content, and adding comments.