

Colleges struggle to communicate with students

By Courtney Rubin, New York Times

As a professor who favors pop quizzes, Cedrick May is used to grimaces from students caught unprepared. But a couple of years ago, in his class on early American literature at the University of Texas at Arlington, he said he noticed “horrible, pained looks” from the whole class when they saw the questions.

He soon learned that the students did not know he had changed the reading assignment because they did not check their e-mail regularly, if at all. To the students, e-mail was as antiquated as the spellings “chuse” and “musick” in the works by Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards that they read on their electronic books.

“Some of them didn’t even seem to know they had a college email account,” May said. Nor were these wide-eyed freshmen. “This is considered a junior-level class, so they’d been around,” he said.

That is when he added to his course syllabuses: “Students must check email daily.” May said the university now recommends similar wording.

So students prefer social media. So far, so 2005. But some professors do not want to “friend” students on Facebook (“I don’t want to learn things about them I can’t unlearn,” said Thomas Tierney, an associate professor of sociology at the College of Wooster in Ohio) or do not think it is their job to explore every possible medium a student might prefer to use at 2am to find out about a test later that day.

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