

# Assessment 2: Educational Online Community Analysis

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## Introduction

Online communities, increasingly leveraging the internet, focus on shared interests and practices to foster participatory engagement and collaboratively achieve set objectives. The Special Interest Group for University and College Computing Support (SIGUCCS) is an association of experts in managing and supporting the various aspects of IT services at universities. Higher education institutions can use the current technology available to them to promote learning and discovery.

SIGUCCS is a professional association that brings together IT managers and support personnel at all levels, from help desk operators to chief information officers. This platform is for members to work together to explore new ways to use emerging technology to improve education and research in universities. As one of 37 Special Interest Groups within the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), the world's largest educational and scientific computing society, SIGUCCS contributes to ACM's mission of serving the computing field through leading publications, conferences, and career development resources. ACM upholds principles of diversity, inclusion, and equal respect, as outlined in its Code of Professional Ethics and through the efforts of its Diversity and Inclusion Council. Collective information and themes were gathered from SIGUCCS Chair and Vice Chair Lisa Brown and Eric Handler, respectively.

Facebook groups, connecting users through common identities, hobbies, or causes, leverage the platform's reach and technology to enable asynchronous communication. These groups facilitate dialogue, information sharing, relationship building, and teamwork, mirroring conventional community participation. Members of the group can plan events, share resources, create material, leave comments on each other's postings, and strengthen relationships amongst them. With Facebook's tools for managing member responsibilities, privacy settings, and

notifications, group members can create customized areas with various levels of accessibility. Collected data and themes were gathered from Carrie Boing, who is an administrator of a popular Facebook group.

## **What is the organization seeking to accomplish through their online community?**

The organization's online community endeavors to foster a multifaceted network for knowledge exchange, professional development, and expansive collaboration. Through the lens of Carrie Boing's initiatives, we see a deliberate effort to create spaces that bridge the physical gaps between individuals and provide a nurturing ground for sharing insights, challenges, and solutions across various professional landscapes. Boing's efforts highlight the importance of building interactive, supportive, and engaging platforms where members can connect, share, and grow together.

Simultaneously, the insights from Brown's experiences underline the community's role as a beacon for professional development. The emphasis on sharing resources, strategies, and educational content is more than just a repository of information; it is a dynamic system designed to foster continuous learning and growth. Brown's narrative sheds light on how the community acts as a crucial conduit for professional enrichment, enabling members to access a wealth of knowledge and expertise to catalyze their career trajectories and enhance their professional capabilities.

Furthermore, Handler's contributions to the conversation bring to the surface the pivotal role of networking within the community's framework. Creating a platform that facilitates connections and meaningful collaborations among peers, mentors, and industry leaders speaks

volumes about the organization's commitment to supporting individual growth and knitting a vibrant network of professionals. This strategic approach to community building emphasizes the value of mentorship, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas, thereby fostering a culture of innovation and mutual support.

The findings by Yoon et al. (2020) highlight the critical role of social capital in facilitating meaningful interactions within online professional communities. This underscores the notion that thoughtfully designed online platforms can become vibrant, collaborative learning and professional enrichment spaces. Similarly, O'Dowd and Dooly (2021) illustrate how virtual exchange projects can promote professional development, particularly in foreign language education. Their work points to the potential of online communities to foster skills development and innovative pedagogical collaborations across borders.

Combining these perspectives reveals a coherent strategy to leverage the online community for more than a gathering space. It is about cultivating an environment where knowledge is freely exchanged, professional growth is actively encouraged, and networking transcends traditional boundaries, paving the way for collaborative opportunities and career advancement. This narrative aligns with research that underscores the critical role of online communities in facilitating professional development, knowledge sharing, and the building of professional networks.

The organization's online community stands as a testament to the power of digital platforms in bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds and expertise, fostering a culture of learning, sharing, and collaborative growth. Through the concerted efforts of community leaders like Carrie Boing, Brown, and Handler, the community is poised to achieve its objectives of enriching professional development, facilitating robust knowledge exchange,

and expanding networking opportunities, embodying the principles of a truly transformative online ecosystem.

## **What actions have they taken towards accomplishing these goals?**

The organizations have implemented various strategies to achieve their goals within their online communities, as revealed through the interviews with Carrie Boing, Lisa Brown, and Eric Handler. Their approaches reflect a blend of innovation, engagement, and leadership tailored to foster vibrant and supportive online environments.

### **Innovation and Engagement**

Carrie Boing's innovative initiatives, such as creating inclusive events and platforms, have broadened participation by addressing gaps in social offerings, thus enhancing member satisfaction and loyalty in her community (Zheng, Li, & Hou, 2021). Similarly, Lisa Brown's focus on leveraging social media for community engagement and promoting a culture of sharing and support aligns with research emphasizing the importance of dynamic content and interactive opportunities in sustaining user interest and participation (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006).

### **Leadership by Example**

The actions of Eric Handler in actively participating in discussions and embodying the community's values are pivotal. His leadership, by example, serves as a beacon for community norms and expectations, which research has found crucial for cultivating a sense of belonging and commitment among members (Kozinets, 2014). This approach encourages active

participation and helps establish a model for constructive and positive interactions within the community.

### **Strategic Implementation and Support**

Interviews revealed a common theme: the strategic implementation of discussions, creation of incentives, and providing support to boost participation. Active facilitation and a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are key to enhancing engagement and community vibrancy. (Wenger, Trayner, & de Laat, 2011). Moreover, as highlighted by all three interviewees, the focus on providing a supportive environment resonates with findings emphasizing the importance of emotional and informational support in fostering a sense of community and enhancing user experience (Blanchard & Markus, 2004).

The strategies employed by these leaders underscore a comprehensive approach to community building that is reflective and responsive to the needs and interests of their members. By combining innovative engagement tactics with strong leadership and strategic support mechanisms, they are actively working towards creating online communities that are vibrant and inclusive but also supportive and empowering.

### **What metrics do they employ to understand their progress towards these goals?**

Exploring metrics to gauge progress in innovation, engagement, leadership, and strategic support unveils a multi-dimensional approach to fostering a vibrant educational technology community. Through leveraging digital platforms for enhanced interaction, cultivating leadership from within, and strategically implementing support initiatives the discussed organizations seek to

navigate the evolving landscape of educational technology. This approach underscores the significance of continuous evaluation and adaptation to meet the community's dynamic needs, ensuring that innovation, leadership, and strategic support remain at the core of their endeavors.

Innovation and engagement are central themes in these discussions with a focus on embracing modern technologies and methodologies to foster a dynamic community environment. This has involved leveraging digital platforms and tools to facilitate meaningful interactions and collaborative projects among community members. Metrics in this area have included measuring engagement levels on the platforms themselves, the diversity and frequency of collaborative initiatives, and the overall impact on community growth and engagement. Additionally, the transition towards more interactive and participant-driven formats, such as affinity groups for SIGGUS, highlights a strategic shift designed to enhance community engagement, which was brought up in conversations at one of their in-person conferences. This continuous evaluation helps in refining strategies to meet the ever-evolving needs of the community, ensuring that innovation remains at the forefront of their engagement efforts.

Leadership by Example has been emphasized through demonstrating commitment and active participation in community initiatives. The leadership approach has involved setting a precedent for engagement, where leaders actively contribute to discussions, share knowledge, and encourage a culture of collaboration. This initiative-taking stance by leaders helps foster a sense of community and sets a positive tone for participating among all members. Additionally, the development and nurturing of future leaders from within the community itself are crucial aspects of this goal. By providing mentorship, sharing experiences, and offering opportunities for leadership roles, existing leaders cultivate a new generation of influencers. Metrics for assessing this include regular review and promotion of mentorship programs, participation in leadership



development activities and affinity groups, and the engagement levels of newly emerging leaders from within the community. These indicators help evaluate the effectiveness of leadership strategies in building a robust and dynamic community of practice.

Strategic implementation and support revolve around executing well-defined plans and providing continuous backing to initiatives that align with organizational goals. The first aspect of this strategy involves planning and executing initiatives that foster innovation and engagement within the community. This entails implementing and, where necessary, developing digital tools and platforms to facilitate communication, collaboration, and learning. Metrics for success, here, include the extent of adoption of these services, the volume of interactions on the platforms (such as Slack Channels), and feedback on the user experience which, for SIGUCCS, typically happens during the annual in-person conference. These metrics help in indicating the effectiveness of these tools in support the communities need. The other aspect emphasizes the importance of providing ongoing support to ensure the stability of these initiatives. This support manifests itself in the form of training sessions, sharing best practices, and feedback mechanisms to continually refine and improve strategies based on community input. Metrics on this front focus on the participation rates in affinity groups and frequency/quality of interactions in forums along with the responsiveness of others in and out of leadership. These indicators help assess the effectiveness of support provided to, and by, the community and the broader educational technology landscape.

The metrics employed across these areas serve not only as indicators of current success but also guides for future strategies. By measuring engagement, leadership development, and the effectiveness of support mechanisms, the leaders of these organizations demonstrate a commitment to advancing their goals within the educational technology sector. This

comprehensive strategy highlights the importance of a nuanced approach to community building and leadership, ensuring that the initiatives remain relevant to, and impactful in, fostering an environment of collaboration and innovation.

## **Conclusion**

This study shows how educational technology's online communities dynamically foster professional development, knowledge exchange, and extensive networking. Through strategic innovation, leadership, and support these groups have demonstrated the potential of digital spaces to bridge physical gaps and create vibrant inclusive communities. The employed metrics for gaging progress underscores a commitment to continuous improvement and adaptation, ensuring these communities remain at the forefront of fostering an environment which supports learning, sharing, and collaborative growth. These conversations not only highlight the critical role of online communities in professional and educational advancement but also serve as a blueprint for leveraging technology to cultivate engaging, supportive, and empowering ecosystems.

## Collaboration Inventory

Team Member	Contributions/Responsibilities
Jeffrey Kontio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interviewed the chair and vice chair of SIGGUCS</li> <li>● Created the template for the final document</li> <li>● Actively participated in group discussions via WhatsApp and proposed timeline for completion of tasks</li> <li>● Answered the last of the three main questions and wrote conclusion</li> <li>● Edited final draft to ensure consistent voice</li> <li>● Submitted final paper</li> </ul>
Ojas Ray	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Actively participated in WhatsApp group discussions and virtual meetings, ensuring consistent communication and collaboration among team members.</li> <li>● Summarized all three interviews comprehensively, identifying at least four overarching themes for each interview, which provided a solid foundation for paper's analysis.</li> <li>● Answered two of the three main questions in this final paper, incorporating relevant references to support the arguments and insights provided, contributing significantly to the depth and rigor of the paper.</li> </ul>
Melissa Welz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interviewed chair of SIGGUCS alongside Jeffrey Kontio.</li> <li>● Interviewed Facebook Group Administrator Carrie Boing</li> <li>● Wrote the Introduction in the final paper.</li> <li>● Started and opened our Assessment Group 2 WhatsApp group discussion to start and collaborate meetings and communication.</li> <li>● Created Appendices using teammate's theme summaries</li> </ul>

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A - Interview Questions**

1. What is the organization seeking to accomplish through their online community?
  - a. Can you describe the primary objectives you aim to achieve through your educational online community?
  - b. How do these objectives align with the broader mission and values of your organization?
  - c. What unique opportunities does the online format provide for achieving these educational goals?
2. Actions Towards Accomplishing Goals
  - a. What specific strategies and initiatives have you implemented to support and grow the online community?
  - b. How do you facilitate engagement and interaction among community members?
  - c. Can you share examples of how you have adapted or evolved your strategy in response to community feedback or changing needs?
3. Metrics for Progress
  - a. What key performance indicators do you use to measure the success of your online community?
  - b. How do you track and analyze member engagement and satisfaction within the community?
  - c. Could you discuss a time when your metrics indicated a need for change, and how you responded to that?

## Appendix B - Bios of Interviewees and Key Themes

### Carrie Boing

Carrie Boing is a pediatric nurse that moved to New Jersey the summer of 2020. She has been admin of FB groups for almost ten years now. When Carrie moved to New Jersey, she made herself join singles groups for socialization, and to meet friends since she did not know anybody. Carrie then started creating more groups and planning her own events and then eventually multiple groups in the New Jersey areas.

#### Overarching Themes:

**Community Building and Engagement:** Carrie discusses her initiative in creating and managing multiple online communities, emphasizing the significance of fostering interaction, support, and socializing among members. Her work illustrates how digital platforms can bridge gaps, offering spaces for people to connect, share interests, and support each other, especially in contexts like moving to a new place or seeking social connections outside of traditional settings.

**Adaptation and Innovation:** The interview displays Carrie's adaptability and innovative approach to community management. She identifies gaps in existing social groups (e.g., the lack of inclusive events for people regardless of their dating status) and creates new spaces that cater to broader interests and needs. This highlights the importance of innovation in community engagement, reflecting on how leaders can pivot and create inclusive environments for diverse participants.

**Challenges and Solutions in Digital Community Management:** The discussion touches on several challenges Carrie faces, such as the limitations of platform algorithms affecting visibility and engagement, and how she navigates these issues. It underscores the ongoing challenges of digital community management, including engagement strategies, content visibility, and the balancing act between fostering open participation and maintaining positive, drama-free spaces.

**Impact of Online Communities:** Through examples like her daughter's Broadway opportunity facilitated by a community member, Carrie illustrates the tangible impacts of online communities. These stories highlight how digital platforms can serve as vital resources for support, opportunities, and networking, extending beyond virtual interactions to have real-world implications.

**Personal Growth and Leadership:** Carrie's journey from participating in existing groups to leading her own illustrates personal growth through leadership in online communities. It highlights how managing such communities can be a rewarding yet challenging experience, requiring a balance of enthusiasm, dedication, and resilience.

## **Lisa Brown**

Lisa Brown is currently serving as Chair for the Association for Computing Machinery Special Interest Group for University and College Computing Support (ACM SIGUCCS). She is also the assistant Director for University Information Technology at the University of Rochester in Rochester, NY.



### **Overarching Themes from Interview:**

**Community Building and Engagement:** The conversation highlights SIGUCCS' efforts in creating a vibrant educational community. By facilitating a platform for university professionals to share successes, strategies, and challenges, the transcript highlights the power of digital communities in enhancing collaboration and support among educators. This initiative illustrates how targeted online platforms can serve as bridges for knowledge exchange, fostering a sense of belonging and collective progress within the educational technology sector.

**Adaptation and Innovation:** The dialogue underscores the innovative strategies employed by SIGUCCS to address familiar challenges in education and technology use. By focusing on the exchange of best practices and solutions, the participants demonstrate an adaptive approach to enhancing educational experiences. This theme reflects the importance of continuous innovation and adaptation in creating inclusive and effective learning environments that cater to the evolving needs of faculty and students.

**Challenges and Solutions in Digital Community Management:** Throughout the discussion, the challenges of building and maintaining an engaged educational community are addressed. The conversation delves into strategies for overcoming these obstacles, such as setting clear objectives, measuring accomplishments through KPIs, and fostering a collaborative spirit among competitors. This theme emphasizes the complexities of digital community management and the creative solutions required to sustain engagement and participation.

**Impact of Educational Communities:** The transcript provides insights into the tangible benefits of a well-managed educational community, such as improved technology use in education and enhanced collaboration across institutions. By sharing information and resources, SIGUCCS aims to have a significant impact on the quality of education, demonstrating how digital platforms can extend beyond mere discussion to effect real change in educational practices and outcomes.

**Personal Growth and Leadership:** The roles of Jeffrey Kontio, Melissa Welz, and Lisa Brown reflect a journey of leadership within the context of educational community building. Their discussion reveals a commitment to enhancing the educational landscape through technology and collaboration. This theme highlights the personal growth that comes from leading such initiatives, highlighting the challenges, rewards, and resilience required to foster a successful online community.

## **Eric Handler**

Eric Handler serves as the Vice Chair, and Conference Committee Chair, for SIGUCCS. He is also the Senior Academic Information Associate – Science Division for Macalester College in Saint Paul, MN.

### **Overarching Themes:**

**Innovative Educational Strategies and Community Engagement:** This theme could encapsulate Handler's approach to leveraging the online community for sharing innovative educational strategies. It would highlight the importance of community engagement in

disseminating best practices, fostering professional development, and enhancing teaching and learning experiences through technology.

**Professional Networking and Collaboration:** Reflecting on Handler's efforts to encourage networking and collaboration among educational professionals, this theme underscores the significance of online communities as platforms for building professional connections, sharing resources, and collaborating on projects that advance educational technology and pedagogy.

**Navigating Challenges in Educational Technology Integration:** This could cover the specific challenges Handler and the community face in integrating technology into education, including resistance to change, technical barriers, and the need for training and support. It would also explore the solutions and strategies developed within the community to overcome these obstacles, emphasizing the role of collective wisdom and support.

**Leadership in Educational Technology Advocacy:** Highlighting Handler's role as a leader in advocating for the effective use of technology in education, this theme would illustrate the impact of leadership in online communities dedicated to educational technology. It would discuss how such leadership can inspire change, drive innovation, and contribute to the broader goals of enhancing education through technology.