<p style="text-align:center;">**Lesson Plan: Twitter and Academic Research**</p>

Brief Assignment Overview

This assignment takes contemporary digital communication practices and transforms them into academic practices to help students with their research interests. The lesson illustrates how students can mine social media such as Twitter for quotes and citable sources for use in academic research papers.

Type of Assignment: Interactive In-Class Exercise
Assignment Length: As short as 10 minutes, as long as 45
Pedagogical Goals: Introduce Twitter as a viable academic resource/Familiarize students with academic uses of the hashtag function/ find appropraite research material for academic papers.
Evaluation: Credit/No Credit, or Participation
Media Requirements: computer, tablet, or phone; Twitter account; internet access; podcast, which can be found **here** (https://soundcloud.com/joseph-brentlinger/twitter-activism-and-research)

Full Assignment Description

This lesson is divided into three specific stages, with goals that are easy to achieve in each. Not all stages must be completed with the instructor's supervision; but stages 2 and 3 seem best fit for the classroom if the instructor wishes to gauge students' sense of self-efficacy. The stages are simple, and labeled below as *Preparation*, *Execution*, and *Review* respectively.

Stage I: Preparation

In the first stage of this lesson, instructors should familiarize themselves with (and prime their students to think about) Twitter, spend some time searching the site like they believe students will in the classroom, and have some idea which hashtags they will introduce to the students as when they implement stage 2.

An easy way to familiarize oneself with Twitter and the hashtag function is to listen to **this short podcast** produced for the DWRL. The podcast is 5:07 in length, and can be easily assigned to students to listen to on their own outside of class, or even played during class so that the instructor can know all their students have engaged with it. However, the instructor should review it before assigning it to students so as to know what to expect. The podcast is self-explanatory, and gives useful information regarding how the hashtag function relates to searching Twitter and what students might garner from searching the social media app to map current controversies.

Regardless how the instructor chooses to introduce the pod, after listening to it the next step is to begin searching Twitter by using the hashtag function. This should be done on the instructor's own time, and should incorporate some or all of the tips offered in the pod. Try to

use hashtags that will be sure to garner search results. Using contemporary hashtags that are in the news is best, but look to stage 2 for two specific hashtags that seem to generate traffic on Twitter regardless of the time.

After listening to the pod and searching Twitter the way students will in the classroom, the last part of the preparation process is to get a feel for the different kinds of messages that people connect to the hashtag being searched. Quite often instructors will be able to classify the messages into categories such as *emotional responses to a controversy*, *propaganda messages* that comment on a controversy for their own purposes, *news articles that cover a controversy*, etc. Understanding how to categorize these messages allow the instructor to control the flow of the discussion that will come about in stages 2 and 3.

Stage II: Presentation

The presentation stage is meant to be conducted in the classroom. It can be conducted after a lecture, after using the pod as a primer in the classroom, or for a classroom lesson on its own. The time that the execution phase takes is up to the instructor, and can take a little as 10 minutes, or even much of a class period. Regardless, there are two steps to Stage II: students will search Twitter via the two hashtags below, before searching for hashtags related to their own controversy.

Before moving on to hashtags relevant to their own controversy, students will likely want a reliable example of a hashtag that generates a lot of feedback when searched. Two rather reliable hashtags surrounding continuing controversies come to mind, and they allow the instructor to illustrate how to search Twitter via hashtags, and what might be gained by engaging in the exercise.

Step I: #BLackLivesMatter and #GunControl

The first hashtag is in step i, of course, **#BlackLivesMatter**. This hashtag will garner a lot of results right now, regardless of what is in the news, and will most likely offer many different types of messages that can be categorized effectively so students know what to expect when searching for their own hashtags. But it also has the added benefit of being bundled with many other hashtags at present, i.e., students will find other hashtags connected to it. This exercise is meant to illustrate to students the myriad types of messages that are attached to a hashtag. Instructors should warn the students that they will not like every message that they find connected to this hashtag, as some of them will contain words that are offensive, such as racial and political epitaphs.

The second hashtag that can be used is **#GunControl**. This hashtag is politically motivated, and one that produces a lot of discourse on Twitter, too. But at present it isn't quite as active as #BlackLivesMatter. There is a caveat to this assertion, however: if there has been a gun crime that has garnered national or international attention recently, it will be *as active* as #BlackLivesMatter. Regardless, #GunControl has some differences to #BlackLivesMatter, which

is an additional it can be so easily used in conjunction with it. The instructor can explain the ways in which race, politics, and culture seem to converge with regard to contemporary controversial issues. Whereas #BlackLivesMatter is a hashtag that is meant to accentuate race, with political and cultural emphases that cannot be denied, #GunControl is a political hashtag that carries with it racial and cultural emphases that cannot be ignored.

Optional Exercise: TweetDeck

If time allows, the instructor can also introduce students to **TweetDeck**. TweetDeck is an app/website connected to Twitter that allows one to track one's own Twitter feed while also allowing one to track #hashtags through the search function. It does so by allowing different feeds to be searched automatically at once. A TweetDeck user can generate multiple feeds that scroll as new information comes in, in 30 second increments or even in real time. Follow the instructions and create new search feeds using #BLackLivesMatter and #GunControl to see how TweetDeck funnels information into separate feeds.

Step II: Students' Preferred Controversies

Step I of Stage II is meant to give students a feel for how to use the #hashtag function to search Twitter, and to give them a feel for the kinds of messages that they can expect to find with regard to their own controversies. Step ii is meant to allow students to search for their own controversies and raise their self-efficacy.

In step ii, allow students to form small groups and talk about their controversies with one another. Invite them to talk about the controversy, how they came to know about it, and what interests them regarding it. Then encourage them to search for hashtags that they know of or that might go along with their particular controversy, to see what useful information they can generate by searching Twitter. Allow students enough time to talk about their topic, to search it, and then to talk about what they have found by searching Twitter. Once the talk has died down the second time, it is time to review.

Stage III: Review

The final stage of the lesson is meant to gauge students' self-efficacy with regard to searching social media for their preferred paper topics. Get the students' attention and ask them what they found. Allow students to talk about exciting examples that they found and how they found them. This should help even those students who didn't find much think about how they might be able to get information in new and different ways encourage students to talk about *how* they found what information they did, and make it generalizable for students. This allows students to help teach each other about innovative ways of searching social media that this lesson plan does not cover, and offers the instructor useful information for teaching an enhanced version of this lesson plan in later classes.

Notes for Instructors

The point of the assignment is to get students to think about how social media can be a useful resource for academic research. The podcast can be used to prime students to think about searching Twitter for academic papers, but they will need some time to apply this practically in the classroom. Success of the lesson can be gauged by understanding students' sense of self-efficacy during the review stage of the lesson.

Steps Students Take in the Lesson

1) Listen to the podcast, 2) search hashtags given by the instructor, 3) search for individual controversies, 4) share findings, 5) review findings with colleagues and discuss self-efficacy.