Emerging Information Needs:
Social Media Technologies in Undergraduate Disciplines

Introduction
Information professionals and educators are continually faced with a range of emergent technologies, including social media, and the related information and help-seeking needs of their users and learners. This mixed methods study investigates why and how undergraduate learners from different disciplines choose (or, choose not) to use social media technologies (SMTs) in their university learning. Addressing a need to research "specific social media technologies within particular academic disciplines" (Delello, McWhorter, & Camp, 2015, p. 178), this paper presentation examines the specific social media technologies that students choose to use for their own learning and information needs in different disciplinary contexts.

Methodology
This study uses a social constructivist research framework, emphasizing multiple and varied meanings (Creswell, 2014), thereby focusing on participants' meanings, views, and perspectives. Using an exploratory mixed methods research (MMR) methodology, this study involved a first phase qualitative component (semi-structured interviews, $N = 30$), with a second phase quantitative component (cross-sectional online survey, $N = 679$). The qualitative sample was purposeful, including 30 undergraduate students enrolled full-time at a large research-intensive university, with ten students from 1) social sciences and humanities, 2) health sciences, and 3) natural sciences and engineering. The second phase quantitative component utilized a convenient sample across disciplines.

Results
Findings show important relationships between specific SMTs and discipline, giving much-needed context to undergraduates' perceptions and uses of social media. While analysis of *general social media use* showed no notable differences according to discipline, disciplinary differences were found for *specific* SMT use (see Table 1A and Table 2A in the appendix). Qualitative results show important disciplinary differences for social media perceptions and uses, with students from professionalized and cohort-based programs (at this institution, primarily in the health sciences) articulating important ways that they use SMTs to create student communities related to their disciplinary identities and information needs. Survey results also show important differences between disciplines regarding student perceptions of social media as being important and as having useful characteristics, including several notable disciplinary differences for creating media to share online (e.g., pictures, videos, music), posting/re-posting media or information found online (e.g., re-tweeting, sharing links), commenting on media or information found online, and collaborating to create documents online (e.g., Google docs). The full paper presentation will outline results and implications in further detail.

Conclusion
Connecting theory and practice, this study's findings illustrate key implications for the disciplinary contexts surrounding learners' *specific* SMTs needs and uses, including the reasons why students choose to use or not use particular social media technologies. The author will discuss ways to bridge such research findings to practice by highlighting important considerations for information researchers and professionals around how best to understand and

support undergraduate use of new and emerging information technologies, such as SMTs.

References

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Delello, J. A., McWhorter, R. R., & Camp, K. M. (2015). Using social media as a tool for learning: A multi-disciplinary study. *International Journal on E-Learning, 14*(2), 163-180. Retrieved from EBSCOHost.

Appendix A: Supporting Results for Social Media Technologies

Table 1A

Q13: In your own university learning, do you use any of the following?

Variables (highest to lowest frequency)	Yes *n* (%)	No *n* (%)
Specific SMTs		
Google Apps (e.g., Google Calendar, Google Docs)	351 (51.7)	328 (48.3)
Social networking (e.g., Facebook, Google+)	336 (49.5)	343 (50.5)
File sharing (e.g., Dropbox, Google Drive, BitTorrent)	308 (45.4)	371 (54.6)
Video sharing (e.g., YouTube, Vine)	293 (43.2)	386 (56.8)
Wikis (e.g., Wikimedia)	274 (40.4)	405 (59.6)
VOIP and Instant messaging (e.g., Skype, Google Talk/Chat, WhatsApp)	171 (25.2)	508 (74.8)
Image sharing (e.g., Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest)	121 (17.8)	558 (82.2)
Blogs (e.g., Blogger, WordPress)	120 (17.7)	559 (82.3)
Microblogs (e.g., Twitter)	97 (14.3)	582 (85.7)
Location-based applications (e.g., Foursquare, Google Maps)	88 (13.0)	591 (87.0)
Social news sites (e.g., Reddit)	68 (10.0)	611 (90.0)
Social bookmarking (e.g., Delicious)	15 (2.2)	664 (97.8)
Do-it-yourself networks (e.g., Ning)	13 (1.9)	666 (98.1)

Table 2A

General Social Media Use by Discipline

			Discipline			
			Health Sciences	Natural Sciences & Engineering	Humanities & Social Sciences	Total
Do you use social media in your own university learning?	Yes	Count	58	220	164	442
		% within Discipline	79.5%	71.7%	71.0%	72.3%
	No	Count	15	87	67	169
		% within Discipline	20.5%	28.3%	29.0%	27.7%
Total		Count	73	307	231	611
		% within Discipline	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%