



GradeGuru: Digitizing Student Learning Through Collaborative Networking

Offerings from the GradeGuru Student Innovations Lab

GradeGuru.com - Sharing Notes, Spreading Knowledge

GradeGuru is a free study network where college students can share and find class-specific study notes, learn collaboratively and build their academic reputations to earn rewards, internships and career opportunities.

Students can:

- Find relevant notes from by their classmates
- Share their study notes to help their peers
- Earn rewards and recognition as other students use and give feedback on their notes

New features in the pipeline:

- Find and connect with classmates real time
- See all activity in your class
- Join a study group

Introduce GradeGuru to Your Classroom

GradeGuru can help

- Foster a culture of peer-support
- Increase student confidence with their coursework
- Achieve deeper student engagement

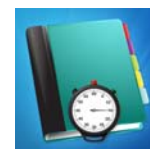
Different ways to get started

- Sign up for a 15 minute one-on-one webinar demo – theteam@gradeGuru.com
- Simply share the link with your students – www.GradeGuru.com
- Possibly work GradeGuru into your syllabus or offer extra credit for participation

GradeGuru Tools - Tools that make students' and instructors' lives easier

1. Study Tracker

Study tracker helps students track their effort at school and achieve their grade goals. They can monitor their performance in each of their classes to see where they need to invest their time.



2. Citation Manager

Citation Manager helps students cite their work correctly by automatically capturing references as they do their online research. Highlight information in any online source and Citation Manager will automatically capture the right data and produce a bibliography.



3. Link List

With Link List you can create and annotate a whole list of URLs and get back a simple, short destination URL to share with others. Instructors can easily create annotated reading lists.



Check out how it works @ www.GradeGuru.com/Tools

Presentation Abstract:

As E-learning becomes mainstream in higher education, the need for intuitive and impactful digital tools to support these learning practices increases. Hear how [GradeGuru](#), a knowledge sharing network where college students can share their study materials, collaborate, access peer-feedback, build their academic reputation and earn rewards, is applying web 2.0 and social media concepts to education to improve student learning outcomes.

Developed based on extensive ethnographic research into student study behaviors, GradeGuru helps foster a sense of class-community and increases student engagement in an online environment. This paper will describe how this knowledge management system is impacting students' confidence levels, driving students to engage in deeper reflection about their study methods and, in the long-run, improving student performance. It will demonstrate a model for how instructors and students alike can leverage emerging technologies to increase student success.

**Digitizing Student Learning Through Collaborative Networking**

In the face of enormous challenges, low graduation rates and concern over student retention, higher education is striving to find ways to motivate students to engage more deeply and effectively with course concepts. This paper presents a thesis that students, given the right tools, can be empowered to help themselves and each other. Social media, open web 2.0 platforms and collaboration collectively have the potential to transform the way we educate and influence student behavioral patterns.

Recognizing the opportunity for digital tools to be transformative in an educational context, we both surveyed current student habits and methods as a starting point for understanding how those might be improved, and looked to other industries and consumer uses of technology to seek inspiration.

We conducted extensive ethnographic research into student study habits and the methods they currently employ as they prepare for their coursework and assessments. This initial qualitative research involved hundreds of students across a breadth of institutions, majors and demographics. Students videotaped themselves studying and “thinking aloud” about what they were doing and why, they kept journals, participated in focus groups and allowed us to observe them in their “natural habitat” on campus to explore student sentiments about their goals, their methods and beliefs as to what matters, what works and why when it comes to college. This work resulted in many insights and observations, some highlights of which included students commonly exhibiting the following:

- “Anxiety over unclear rules of engagement”: perceived lack of clarity/ understanding of what is expected of them in the classroom in order to succeed that left students feeling stressed and lacking confidence.
- “Conferring with my peers to know I am not alone”: Students turning to their peers to share their stress, when they are struggling with a particular concept, or for “moral support”.

- “Climbing the steep learning curve”: many freshman students struggled in the transition for high school to college – unsure how to make the leap to tertiary-level academics without the guidance and teacher contact they experienced in high school
- When we started this research in 2007, students were using their technology largely for social, pleasure-related and commercial purposes – texting and emailing, sharing photos, playing games. Google and Wikipedia were used as a “place to start”, blackboard was often referenced for the syllabus and notices, but beyond that we came across little in the way of sophisticated uses of technology by students for their studies.
- Desire for feedback and recognition: students expressed a feeling of lack of support and recognition for their efforts. When they did poorly they often did not understand why, when they did well they often felt they were not being acknowledged.

In the social context, tools like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter were becoming mainstream, leading students to feel Monster DLP comfortable with ideas of sharing comments, opinions and feedback. In the consumer space, sites like eBay introduced paradigms for trust in online communities – ratings and status for the members of the community. In education amongst academics and institutions, the Open Access Movement, kick-started by MIT, was being to take hold.

These salient student issues, including the need for support, feedback and desire to relieve stress by clarifying expectations, coupled with the pervasive presence of web 2.0 tools in students’ social lives led us to GradeGuru, the student knowledge sharing network. This free collaborative tool takes students’ skills from social media (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and the like) and translates them into constructive behaviors in an educational context providing students and academics an intuitive resource to collaborate and build classroom communities. GradeGuru serves as an extension to the classroom, allowing students to share and review study materials and access peer-feedback to encourage reflection.

Students using GradeGuru are:

- Exploring other students’ study methods and materials from peers whose learning style works for them, from amongst their classmates and/ or other students in similar courses across the country. Students are getting ideas for improving their study methods, finding new ways of preparing for lessons and assessments, seeking inspiration and determining what’s expected in their classes to build their confidence.
- Sharing their own study guides and materials to help others, giving their perspective on how the course concepts hang together, what they think is important and their methods for absorbing and applying the concepts.
- Receiving constructive feedback from their peers on how to improve or how else they might approach a concept.
- Building their academic status and confidence through peer-recognition. The more students contribute materials and ideas, the more feedback they receive and the better their chances of becoming a peer-recognized “Guru.” As Gurus and recognized thought leaders in their study methods, these students are offered career opportunities through the site and its corporate partners, including internships and full-time positions.
- Making correct academic citations a part of their ongoing everyday practice using our Citation Manager tool which automatically helps them capture and structure their sources.

Collaborative networking offered through GradeGuru helps build a sense of connection and community for students across their classes and offers alternative perspectives, increasing

students' time spent with learning concepts and materials. GradeGuru increases their engagement, their concentration and pride in creating their own learning materials. Giving peer-feedback gets students reflecting on the concepts and methods and viewing receiving feedback helps students assess and review.

Additionally, the incentive based model built into the GradeGuru tool rewards students for productive study habits reinforcing positive collaboration and gives them the acknowledgement they crave - students helping each other to improve overall learning outcomes.

Having now launched GradeGuru and completed one full academic year of student use at over 300 colleges across the country, we are presently reviewing the data we have been collecting on student usage and impacts. This work is ongoing, but the early signs are very positive.

Early Findings from Our Member Research Survey*

(*Please contact theteam@gradeguru.com for research details including, methodology and data.)

Our early findings show directional support our hypotheses on the value GradeGuru will add for students. Wheeler in 2002 established that "Students feel they gain more out of collaborative discussions via electronic communication as it is faster and more efficient than current methods." Our findings support this claim and more specifically begin to indicate the effect GradeGuru is having on student outcomes, including:

- **Increased levels of student engagement with course concepts:** Our hypothesis was that students may be more engaged in preparing and creating their study materials and thus more engaged with course concepts when they know other students will be reviewing their work. In our survey 79% of regular GradeGuru contributors** and 66% of students who had ever contributed materials to the site** agreed** or strongly agreed** that "Because I share my notes, I am more careful when putting my notes together." 77% of regular users of the site** and 66% of students who had used materials on the site at least once respectively agreed or strongly agrees that "Looking at other students' notes on GradeGuru gives me new ideas for my classes."
- **Greater student confidence with their coursework:** For many years educational researchers have been studying the implications of student collaboration and its potential to improve student self-perceptions. (Wheeler 2002). 70% and 59% of regular contributors and students who have contributed at least once respectively agreed or strongly agreed that "Knowing other people are looking at my notes makes me feel proud." 57% of regular users agree or strong agree that "Knowing I can refer to notes on GradeGuru makes me less anxious about my classes."
- **Increased peer-support:** 99% of regular users of the site and 61% of students who have ever used the site agree or strongly agree that "Seeing the feedback and ratings on notes other students have posted to GradeGuru has been helpful for studying purposes", strongly suggesting that students are reflecting on how their classmates are approaching their studying and on how their peers perceive those methods. It is interesting that students look at feedback on others' work has been even more helpful than direct feedback – 56% of regular contributors and 50% of those who ever contributed agreed or strongly agreed that "Getting feedback and ratings on notes I've uploaded to GradeGuru has been helpful for studying purposes." This offers early directional support for our assertion about the importance of open feedback and access to all peer-review of all materials, not just one-to-one review approaches.

- Improved student performance: 68% of regular and occasional users agreed or strongly agreed that “When I look at other students’ notes I get ideas for improving my study methods.” 79% of regular users agreed or strongly agreed that “GradeGuru is helpful when I don’t understand something.” 68% of regular GradeGuru users and 58% who had used the site once or more agreed or strongly agreed that “Looking at other students’ notes on GradeGuru helps me work out what is important in the course.” 76% and 67% respectively strongly agreed or agreed that “GradeGuru is helpful when I don’t know where to start.”

** Regular users of GradeGuru are those students who visit monthly, weekly or daily. Regular contributors to GradeGuru are those students who contribute materials to the site monthly, weekly or daily. “Agree” and “strongly agree” were options 1 and 2 on a 5 point scale.

GradeGuru and the academic social web is enhancing learning both in and out of the classroom, encouraging peer-support and collaboration and thus encouraging and empowering students to help themselves and each other.

Key Takeaways:

- The academic social web is influencing student study habits and behavioral learning patterns
- Applying web 2.0 technologies and concepts to student learning has the power to enhance student confidence and performance
- Encouraging peer-support and student collaboration can result in increased engagement levels

What professors are saying about GradeGuru[☆]



"Note sharing creates critical bonds between students and allows them to build on each other's strengths in ways that raise the performance level of the entire class"

-Dr. Noelle Stout, New York University

"For student collaboration to be effective, the method must be intuitive, user-friendly and designed with students in mind. The enhanced GradeGuru site hits all these notes and makes it easy for students to connect and learn from one another"

-Dr. David Parry, University of Texas

"With online learning and new technologies, you might think that regular study groups have disappeared. But, no, it has just evolved with social networking"

-Ray Schroeder, University of Illinois at Springfield

Over 500 professors have signed up to introduce GradeGuru to their classroom this fall. Please take a business card and ask us how you can do the same.

Prime Coverage



[Fox News](#)



eCAMPUS NEWS
Technology News for Today's Higher-Ed Leader



[Channel 8 News](#)

Campus Newspapers



[UPenn Front Page Feature](#)



[Indiana U. – Multiple Stories](#)



[Georgetown University](#)



[University of Pittsburgh](#)

Major Blog Coverage



To learn more email: theteam@grade guru.com