

Professors Assign Students to Post to BuzzFeed. You'll Never Believe What Happens Next.

By Gabriel Sandoval AUGUST 02, 2016

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hen Alice E. Marwick, an assistant professor of media studies at Fordham

University, assigned her social-media class to create a post on BuzzFeed, the instructions were simple: Go viral.

Several students nailed the assignment, collecting more than 50,000 hits on their listicles and quizzes — BuzzFeed's bread-and-butter articles. One student devised a [quiz](#) on *She's the Man*, a quirky romantic comedy from 2006, that surpassed 250,000 page views in mere days, surprising the student and leaving her professor and classmates in awe.

Ms. Marwick is one of several professors using BuzzFeed's free publishing platform in its community section for class assignments. The section is open to anybody who wants to create a post, and instructors are using it to teach a variety of subjects, including marketing, creative writing, human development, and even the work of the ancient Roman poet Ovid.

Scott Cowley, an assistant professor of marketing at Western Michigan University, first used a BuzzFeed assignment in his marketing class in early 2015, when he was working at Arizona State University. Before making the assignment, Mr. Cowley says he experimented with other platforms, such as LinkedIn and Medium, but none of them could compete with BuzzFeed's appeal. As a test, he first compiled his own BuzzFeed post, "[15 Funny Lines That Somehow Slipped Into a Scientific Journal.](#)" In a week, it collected 75,000 page views.

"That was one of the big eye-opening moments for me," he says.

Mr. Cowley, whose project won him the Marketing Management Association's Teaching Innovation Competition last year, said one of his students received a job offer after posting the assignment online. Since then, professors in at least 20 universities have adopted the approach for their marketing departments, he says.

Sarai E. Coba, a doctoral candidate in human development and family studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, saw one of her colleagues using the BuzzFeed assignment in a class and decided to try it out. In Ms. Coba's course, on the stages of development from infancy through early childhood, she asked students to synthesize one class topic and create a list combination of 10 animated gifs and memes showing that they understood the material.

"It's a fun way to learn," she says. "If you're talking to your neighbor, or you're talking to somebody who does not have as much education, this is just another way to still provide that information, but just in a different way — and also in a quick way."

One of Ms. Coba's students, Taylor Jansen, chose the topic of family planning for her post, illustrated mostly with memes and gifs from the television show *The Office*. Above one paragraph explaining the high cost of raising a child, a gif of Steve Carell's character is shown, saying "I declare BANKRUPTCY!"

From Ovid to Taylor Swift

Brett S. Vergara, associate community strategist for BuzzFeed, realized the posts were assignments only when students kept contacting him for technical support.

He says he really can't distinguish the posts of students from nonstudents, although he welcomes them.

In one notable instance, he says, a high-school teacher who was giving a lesson on Ovid tried to make the case to students that the poet had a style similar to that of the pop singer Taylor Swift. He made the case in a BuzzFeed [quiz](#), and it was featured on BuzzFeed's home page.

"It got 300,000 views," Mr. Vergara says.