

# Beyond the Book: Designing Assignments That Bridge the Academic-Industry Divide

Jennie Donohue, M.B.A.  
Senior Lecturer & Director of the PR Concentration  
University of Massachusetts Amherst



@jenniedonohue

“Tell me and I’ll forget.  
Show me and I may remember.  
Involve me and I’ll understand.”

Chinese proverb



# Session Overview

Explore three digital communication-related experiential activities that go “beyond the book” to help students **learn course content & develop relevant skills** while **fostering industry collaborations**.

## 1. Design

- Use “reactions” like thumbs up to indicate agreement

## 2. Benefits

- Use “chat” to share insights, ask questions

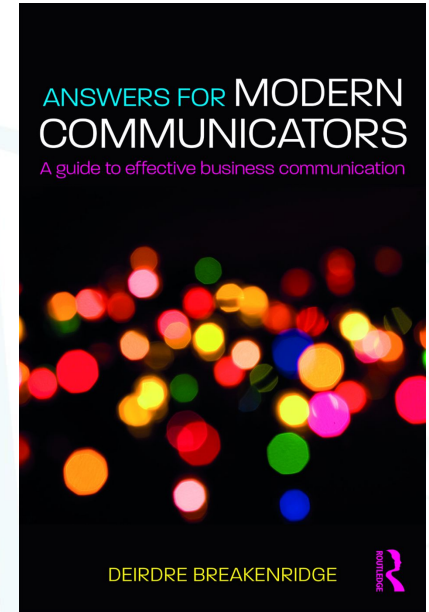
## 3. Final Thoughts

# Activity 1 Design

## Industry-oriented, Multimedia Book Content

- Read business book
- Identify insights & connect to class
- Chat with author
- Create infographic/video
- Add “bonus opportunity” for self-directed learning
- Share top students’ work
  - “Winner” featured online, social channels

Jennie Donohue  
@jenniedonohue



# Activity 1 Benefits

- Demonstrates knowledge, understanding & ability to apply insights
- Supports different learning styles/multimodal learning
- Builds industry-relevant skills & portfolio material
- Offers value-add for industry partner



**Wei Cai**

Marketing Communication Specialist  
Recent UMass Amherst grad

Jennie Donohue  
@jenniedonohue

"I appreciated having a class experience in which students were able to **network and produce real work for industry professionals.**

Such opportunities allowed me to leverage and **develop skills needed to succeed far beyond the classroom."**

Check out his video

<https://www.deirdrebreakenridge.com/the-1st-winner-of-the-pr-expanded-student-video-contest-is/>





**Deirdre Breakenridge**  
PR/Marketing pro and influencer,  
author, speaker, adjunct professor

Jennie Donohue  
@jenniedonohue

"I've been blogging for over ten years. The blog posts created by students who publish on my PR Expanded blog are amongst the most popular. Collaborating with professors, such as Jennie Donohue, and her classes at UMass Amherst is **an opportunity for industry professionals to hear from students who offer a fresh perspective** on how they visualize public relations and the communications field.

Whether it's a video or infographic contest, the publishing process **prepares students to communicate in the professional world**. At the same time, their creativity and views **help us to understand the student mindset and what the future of the industry needs** from their seasoned mentors. When you have a collaboration between professionals and students, **the benefit is learning by all."**



# Let's Chat

Use the “chat” feature in Zoom to share:

- A business book/non-traditional text you've used in one of your classes,
- A business book/non-traditional text you've heard about and/or would like to use in a future class, or
- A question?

# Activity 2 Design

## Industry-oriented, Live Twitter Chat

- Identify topic & write Qs
- Read & discuss relevant content
- Review & test tools
- Create multimedia content
- Add “bonus opportunity” for self-directed learning
- Participate in “trial” & conduct debrief
- Encourage/require participation in industry chat

# Activity 2 Benefits

- Makes learning fun
- Builds industry-relevant, hard & soft skills
  - Content creation, creative & strategic thinking, adaptability
  - Subject matter knowledge, use of new tools & platforms
  - Personal branding
- Increases student participation & engagement
- Serves as networking tool



**Hannah Goldstein**

UMass Amherst Student  
Double Major: Journalism (with PR  
concentration) and Communication

Jennie Donohue  
@jenniedonohue

“...thankful for the skills I learned with my peers and [@jenniedonohue](#) while preparing for this chat and I am **excited to use these skills when participating in future chats.** [#DonohuePRCases](#)”

@HannahUG\_UMASS





**Hannah Goldstein**

UMass Amherst Student  
Double Major: Journalism (with PR  
concentration) and Communication

Jennie Donohue  
@jenniedonohue

“...utilizing Twitter as a professional platform, I have been able to **jump out of my comfort zone and connect with others**. Because of this, I am way **more confident** when it comes to **speaking with industry professionals/my peers** offline and online.

I never thought about using Twitter in this way until I took Jennie’s (PR & Integrated Communication Cases) course. I love **how easy it is to build connections**. No matter if I am connecting through a live twitter chat/replying or retweeting a tweet, I am **able to learn and engage in conversation with others.**”



# Let's Chat

Use the “chat” feature in Zoom to share:

- An industry-oriented Twitter chat you'd recommend to your students, or
- A question?

# Activity 3 Design

## Industry Issues & Trends Discussion

- Research current industry news
- Summarize content & identify Qs to spur convo
- Reconfigure room, e.g., industry mixer
- Set time limit to “work the room” & engage with others
  - Goal/s = most connections, knowledge of industry
- Link learning back to other assignments

# Activity 3 Benefits

- Demonstrates understanding of industry issues & trends
- Enhances comprehension & communication abilities
- Encourages active, peer-on-peer learning
- Prepares students for professionally oriented situations

# Final Thoughts

- Three insights for designing digital communication assignments that bridge the academic-industry divide:
  1. Start at the end
  2. Embrace continuous learning
  3. Create the connection

Thanks!  
Let's Continue to Connect.

Jennie Donohue, M.B.A.  
Senior Lecturer  
Director, PR Concentration  
UMass Amherst  
[jldonohue@umass.edu](mailto:jldonohue@umass.edu)  
[@jenniedonohue](https://twitter.com/jenniedonohue)

