Collectively, social media are media for social interaction. The term itself refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue.¹ Social media, in regards to online learning, are typically tools used for collaboration that allow for the co-creation of meaningful content. Tools for social media fall under several categories including, but not limited to, communication, collaboration and multimedia.

Social media can come in the form of Facebook and Twitter, however, tools like blogs, wikis, and discussion forums are more relevant to the ANGEL Learning Management System.

Below are a few social media applications built into ANGEL for using in teaching and learning.

- **Blogs**²

  A blog (short for Web log) is a web page with content posted by its owner that may offer the opportunity for visitors to comment on the posting. It is different from a wiki in the sense that only the blog’s owner can edit the text of the blog while a wiki allows anyone to edit the content.

  Blogs (like wikis) help build engaging online learning environments and are used with discussions and wikis to foster collaborative learning and greater peer-to-peer and student-to-faculty communication. A short sample of online educational activities well suited to blog technology could include:

  - **Instructor professional practice blogs.**
    These blogs can provide information about leaders in their respective fields and provides a forum to discuss information pertaining to professional practice.
  
  - **Instructional tips for students.**
    A simple, public way of communicating with your students.
  
  - **Sense of community for students.**
    Blogs can be used for single students to reflect on lessons, or by groups of students to share knowledge, reflection and debate.
  
  - **Course announcements and readings.**
    Instructor commentary about announcements or reading assignments.
  
  - **Annotated links.**
    A collection of annotated research links.

Blogs allow instructors the ability to find new ways to evaluate, recommend and refer student work. The autonomy created by blogs allows students and instructors to find new ways to interact. They are personal and less collaborative in nature, more static than wikis, and they capture changes in thinking with the links to the outside being secondary.
 Wikis

What is a wiki? Wikipedia describes a wiki as "...a type of web site that allows the visitors themselves to easily add, remove, and otherwise edit and change some available content, sometimes without the need for registration. This ease of interaction and operation makes a wiki an effective tool for collaborative authoring."

The wiki provides an asynchronous collaborative tool for students and instructors to foster collaborative learning and greater peer-to-peer and student-to-faculty communication. The wiki’s simple interface makes it a perfect tool to introduce students to the online environment and process of interacting with other students. Wikis can be used as online icebreakers to help students get to know each other and to accelerate the collaborative learning process to produce better learning results.

As technology and interaction becomes a more important component of engaging online learning environments, wikis continue to grow and become increasingly popular and useful tools to facilitate this process. Wiki’s give students more direct access to their content without using a threaded discussion. The progression of learning can be seen through entries and comment entries. Additionally, wikis can be used for each student as an e-portfolio for collection of student work and allowing students to customize their space to show their work. The ANGEL wiki is based on the TiddlyWiki (http://www.tiddlywiki.com) model.

The powerful group-edit nature of a wiki makes it an especially attractive tool for team activities and collaborative learning exercises. Wikis can be used for collaborative research, peer review, and review commentary by external experts. They can also be used to discuss and mange documents. It is a personal forum for expression but open to collaboration, where students and instructors can express ideas. Wikis are a great way to express ideas and create relationships to pages in and outside of the course environment via hyperlinks and tags.
Discussion Forums

Discussion forums are a place for students and faculty to hold conversations in the form of posted messages. A forum is hierarchical or tree-like in structure and can contain a number of sub-forums. Within a forum’s topic, each new discussion started is called a thread.4

What are the benefits of using discussion forums within an online course?

- **Builds connections and class community** by promoting discussion on course topics and more informal discussion
- **Contributes to the development of cognitive, critical thinking, and writing skills**
- **Allows time for thoughtful, in-depth reflection on course topics.** Much like traditional writing exercises, students have more time to think about, research, and compose their thoughts before contributing to the discussion.
- **Facilitates exploratory learning** by allowing students to review and respond to the work of others and approach learning in diverse ways
- **Empowers students to express themselves.** For students with different learning styles, an online discussion board can be a venue where they feel more comfortable contributing to group discussions. With positive reinforcement from interactions on the discussion board, an increase in in-class participation may also occur.5
References