eTools: Using Aurasma in the Classroom

Nigel Haarstad, University of Kentucky

Introduction

Today, instead of textbooks, we have e-books; instead of VHS, we have YouTube; and instead of a mailbox full of essays, we use learning management systems to receive electronic documents. Each of these technologies replaces a specific technology that came before it. A new technology--Aurasma--goes beyond simply updating an old method by providing a truly interactive, multimodal experience for students. By merging course content with objects students may encounter outside of the classroom, instructors have the potential to engage students in a truly unique way.

What is "Aurasma"?

Aurasma is an app that allows users to create or view an augmented reality experience, which is simply digital information that is layered over the physical world. To create an aura, users must first choose their triggering object or image, then choose or create their overlay. By pointing a mobile device at a "trigger" (i.e., a photo or object) that has an "aura" (i.e., interactive experience featuring an animation, video, or image) attached to it, users create an augmented reality experience. For example, an instructor can add an aura to a flyer pinned on the wall inside a classroom. When students open the app and point at the flyer, they will see additional interactive content (e.g., text overlay, image overlay, a video, or even a quiz) appear on their screen.

1

This tool provides a unique opportunity to engage students outside the classroom by augmenting their environment. Auras can be added to most images and objects, whether they appear on a computer screen or in the physical realm. The inverse is also true in that students can create auras with artifacts they encounter outside of the classroom and share them using hashtags with their instructors and classmates. Either way, the process of creating or viewing an aura prompts students to apply course concepts outside of an abstract classroom discussion.

How can I get Aurasma for use in the classroom?

Go to www.aurasma.com, click on the "Auras" tab, and select "Apply Now." This free account gives you the ability to use the online content creation tool, utilize mobile apps, and create an unlimited number of auras. Students would follow this same process to create an account, and they can also "follow" your account to view the content you have created. Aurasma does charge for premium commercial services, which are geared toward supporting marketing campaigns, and includes features such as analytics, campaign management tools, and certain technical integrations. Those premium features, however, usually will not be relevant to communication courses.

How can I use Aurasma in the classroom?

For traditional face-to-face courses, instructors can use Aurasma to add course content to the physical environment. Students can add this content to share with their instructors or peers, and instructors can add content to be consumed by students for a

particular assignment. More specifically, Aurasma can be used for:

1. *sharing reactions to course materials.* Even in online courses where students are geographically dispersed, students are likely reading the same course materials. Photos, diagrams, and, in certain cases, text can all be used as "triggers." As students are reading and have a question or reaction to share with the class, they can create an aura for other students to view and respond. To take a more formal approach, instructors can assign a particular concept or term to students and ask them to create an aura as a way to provide an example or application of that concept or term.

2. *flipped instruction.* Many flipped classrooms use video to replace lectures. With flipped instruction, students are expected to complete all reading assignments, view a recorded lecture, and then complete an activity before coming to class for further instruction. Aurasma enables instructors to blend these three modes of instruction by embedding the lecture directly into the assigned reading. This blending also helps to clarify the connection between specific concepts in the assigned reading and the instructor's explanation in the recorded lecture.

3. *micro-learning.* Microlearning refers to teaching and delivering content in small, but specific bursts. For students, this means viewing short videos that do not require a large time investment. For instructors, micro-learning makes it much easier to update content each semester as particular components of the lecture become obsolete or outdated. For instance, instead of re-recording a 10-minute video lecture due to a

new development in your discipline, you may only need to replace a 45 second micro-lesson.

4. *assignment instructions.* Instructors often find that there are certain assignments that always generate student questions. An aura allows instructors to provide additional explanation without having to incorporate volumes of text. Instructors can simply use Aurasma to attach a short video, diagram, or other digital content to various portions of the assignment instructions to provide this additional explanation.

5. *a scavenger hunt.* You may ask students to find particular locations or services on campus, and view the content you have tagged to that location or service. For students learning to conduct research at the library, for example, instructors can record instructions or tips for success that then appear as students approach the reference desk, a workstation, or some other feature of your institution's library. This use is one way that students can access your course content outside of the classroom in the physical space where they are completing their work.

6. *as a presentation tool.* Students can use Aurasma to deliver a multimodal presentation centered on an object or image. For instance, if a student is presenting a rhetorical analysis of a piece of visual communication, he or she could include an aura that details specific elements of that artifact such as a video explanation that complements the image, a visual overlay, or a link to resources. In this way, Aurasma

4

would take the place of a presentational tool such as Microsoft PowerPoint, allowing for the provision of a more interactive experience. This use can work particularly well in online courses by serving as an alternative to discussion boards or video presentations.

Conclusion

Aurasma can be a useful tool for fostering greater student engagement, considering the novelty of the experience and the level of interactivity required. Both students and instructors will find it easy to quickly generate and share content. For online courses especially, Aurasma offers a fresh alternative to the well-worn methods of video lectures and discussion board posts.