A social media blackout

By Adam J. Copeland
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Last week, students at Harrisburg University of Science and Technology in Pennsylvania gave up instant messaging, Facebook and Twitter—not by choice but by Provost Eric Darr's order. "Often there are behaviors, habits, ways we use technology," said Darr, ways "that we may ourselves not even be able to articulate because we're not aware of them." Provost Darr is a smart man.

Not often, at 27, do I feel like an old-timer. But I can remember the days before wireless university classrooms. I was attending seminary when our campus got its first one. All of a sudden, students in the back of the room had the best view—of Web surfing habits, that is. Unaccustomed to Internet access in class, many of us were on laptops Googling an idea the professor mentioned, updating our Facebook accounts, even checking up on fantasy football leagues.

Eventually the school had a more intentional conversation about appropriate use of technology in the classroom. But wireless Internet took some getting used to—professors didn't use technology to their greatest advantage, and students just used it because we could.

One HU student had this to say last week: "I feel obligated to check my Facebook. I feel obligated to check my Twitter. [During the ban] I don't. I can just solely focus."

Thank goodness students and faculty are discussing the so-called obligations imposed by ubiquitous Web access. Perhaps temporarily closing the Internet can lead to lasting open dialogue about its effects.