

[The Young & the Digital at Black Thought 2.0](#)

by Evelyn Howell | [The Triangle Tribune](#)

DURHAM - Advancements in new technology have allowed today's young users to connect with their friends and the outside world fast. Twitter, texting, YouTube and Facebook are all popular new media networking tools.

"Mobile is considered the gateway. It's more pronounced in their lives and is considered Grand Central Station of their lives," said S. Craig Watkins, a social scientist whose research is based on the digital lives of young people and how mobile device is used to communicate with their peers.

The author of "The Young & the Digital: What the Migration to Social Network Sites, Games and Anytime, Anywhere Media Means for our Future" was the keynote speaker last week at a two-day Duke conference titled "Black Thought 2.0: New Media and the Future of Black Studies" at the John Hope Franklin Center.

Watkins, an associate professor of radio, television and film at the University of Texas, has studied youth and media culture for 12 years and digital media for eight years. He is currently the principal investigator for a three-year study called "Connected Learning Research Network," funded by the MacArthur Foundation on Youth, Digital Media and Learning.

Watkins said black studies in terms of literacy is teaching how using "social mobile media as educational devices is not just games and videos."

"The role of the black intellectual experience is extraordinary, which includes tenure, battling for resources and gaining respect in the 'Ivory Tower,' " he said.

Watkins said the idea of closing the inequality gap used to be to get lower income kids access to computers. Now that they have this access through schools and libraries, there is a challenge ahead known as the "digital divide," where lower income kids are still disadvantaged.

"It's beyond digital access; it's about literacy skills and how to use technology," he said. "Schools can be technology rich but academic poor. It's about creating curriculums to allow them to master technology."

When looking at issues of social equality, Watkins said "Digital equality equals digital literacy." He wants students to think about the role of technology in the world today and to think critically about the stories they create.

"They should think of themselves as having a stake in their community where they live and to create a process that will allow them to have a stake in their community," he said. "Social media is a galvanizing force to stimulate folks to participate in public life."

Mark Anthony Neal, Duke African and African American Studies professor, said it's no longer about access but participation.

"I hope we can have a follow-up event down the road to further address these issues," said Neal, organizer of the conference which attracted more than 60 participants and was video streamed to 1,000 viewers.

"For me, this was about taking stock about the revolution of what's happened. I remember the floppy disc and email," said Cynthia R. Greenlee-Donnell, a doctoral candidate in Duke's department of history. "As a professor in training, because of the power of Twitter, I have to reconnect with it because my students use it all the time."