USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO ENGAGE STUDENTS IN CAMPUS LIFE

by

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B.S.E., Emporia State University, 2009

A REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Special Education, Counseling and Student Affairs
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2013

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2013

# Abstract

Social media is the use of online applications and websites to create and exchange user-generated content. These websites are becoming ever more popular with college aged students to connect with their peers, businesses, and areas of interest. These websites could be taken advantage of to provide new opportunities to engage students in campus life. This paper examines the concept of student engagement and the role of social media in engaging student with campus life. A brief overview of Facebook and Twitter, the two most popular social networks, is provided. This paper also reviews the limited body of research available on the impact of social media on student engagement. It is argued here that social media can be a positive influence on student engagement within the college campus and could lead to improvements in the way that higher education professional assist with student development. Due to the limited amount of academic research available, popular news sources as well as websites and blogs were examined to determine the most influential uses of social media, and this report makes recommendations for incorporating social media use into higher education. Social media allows higher education professionals to "meet students where they are" and provide for opportunities for engagement and student development. If the recommendations made in this report are implemented by student affairs professionals, they could be assessed for their impact on student engagement and development in the future.

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# Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks to all who helped and supported me during the development of this report: my major professor, Dr. Doris Carroll, and my committee members, Dr. Christy Craft and Dr. Charlie Nutt. Your advice and assistance on this project, from its conception to fruition, is greatly appreciated.

I also want to thank my family and friends who supported me throughout this process and my entire time in graduate school. A special thanks to my wife, Elissa, who has been a constant source support and has dealt with my erratic schedule and countless hours away from home. Thanks to my parents and siblings for always believing in me and providing a foundation of support.

I also want to thank Jason Bosch, who introduced me to the world of student affairs by being an outstanding Greek Advisor. I am extremely thankful to have him as a mentor who provides support and advice, whenever I need a second opinion.

# Chapter 1 - Introduction

Walking across a college campus and observing the students one sees there, one will notice an astonishing number of electronic devices. One notices computer labs and computer stations scattered throughout campus buildings. Strolling into the student union, one observes students sitting on couches and around tables working on their laptops. Students carry tablets, check their smartphones, and walk from class to class while listening to music via an iPod. Students are more connected to their technology than ever before, and with the increased access to wireless and mobile Internet, they have a nearly endless supply of information and entertainment at their fingertips. Social media is a huge part of this technology use and students are plugged into social media sites such as: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube and more throughout the course of their everyday activities.

Social media is different from more traditional forms of media, because instead of a message broadcasted in a one-to-many fashion it enables users to have peer-to-peer messages and engage and comment on the material (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore 2012). This peer to peer contact allows for a more engaging experience for the user, offers many opportunities for students to interact with information, and provides a richer experience than traditional media. By interacting with the material and commenting, reshaping, and sharing the messages presented to them over social media, students are able to invest more time and energy into that material.

In 1984, Alexander Astin introduced a theory for student development that focused on student involvement. He defined student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1984, p. 297). Astin proposed the more involved a student is with his or her academic experience, the higher his

or her chance for success. Kuh (2009) went on to expand the idea of student involvement to involve two major facets: in-class engagement and engagement out-of-class educationally purposeful activities. It is the responsibility of student affairs professionals to provide students with these out-of class activities and experiences that contribute to their overall involvement with the campus community. Social media can be a valuable tool to hook students into these educationally purposeful activities and to provide a meaningful experience.

Institutes of higher education are slowly realizing social media can be a tool for engaging students and helping with student development during their college years. Research has been conducted on the relationship between social media usage and success on a college campus (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore 2012; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken 2011; Junco 2012). There has not been enough research on the topic to be able to definitively answer whether social media has a significant, positive impact on campus engagement, but there has been evidence that shows students who are more active on social media tend to be more active with the campus community. At this point, it is not clear which is the cause and which is the effect in this relationship. It may be that social media encourages activity within the community or simply be that active people tend to engage both within the community and online. One can hope that in the future, additional research will be conducted that will further explain the relationship between social media and student engagement.

Social media can be used as a tool to enhance student engagement, and student affairs professionals should invest time and energy to strengthen the use of these media types. Social media sites offer the opportunity for students to "opt in" for additional information about campus activities, lecture series, organizations, etc. they find interesting and want more information about. These sites offer not only opportunities for students to learn more about these

organizations and activities, but also because of the interactive nature of social media, they allow them to ask questions and share content. Past the stage of gathering information about a topic, social media offers the chance to extend the conversation about a topic and the learning that happens in the real world to the virtual world. This allows for more energy to be put into the organization or activity, furthering the level of student involvement. Student affairs professionals should strive to improve the current use of social media and to take advantage of the tools that are available to interact with students on social networks.

## Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this report is to discuss student involvement and examine the current research into the impact of social media on student involvement. It will also provide a basic introduction to social media sites, focusing on Facebook and Twitter, the two most popular social media websites. The different features of these sites will be discussed and suggestions will be made for which features may be most suited for use in the student affairs world. The report will examine current uses of social media, within the division of student affairs, as well as look outside of the academic work to examine current trends in the use of social media in areas such as marketing and business. These examples will be examined in order to provide recommendations for moving student affairs professionals towards best practices of social media use.

# Chapter 2 - Student Involvement/Engagement

Student involvement and engagement refer to the amount of energy that students put into their campus experience. Alexander Astin is a leading researcher within the field of higher education; he has authored 20 books and more than 300 other publications. In 1984 he developed his student involvement theory to try and unify the research on student development. He simply defined student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1984, p. 297). A highly involved student is one who spends a considerable amount of energy on schoolwork, is involved in campus organizations, spends much time on campus, and interacts with faculty frequently. Astin focused on the behavioral component of this involvement, rather than the motivation to be involved. He speculated that what students actually did was more indicative of their level of involvement. He published his theory in the *Journal of College Student Personnel*, where he outlined his theory and identified the five basic postulates:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. The objects may be highly generalized or highly specific.

2. Involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.

3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in academic work, for instances, can be measured quantitatively and qualitatively.

4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.

5. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement.

(Astin, 1984)

Astin's theory of student involvement is accepted widely as a straightforward model for understanding student development. The original framework for the theory focused on academic engagement of the student and success in the classroom, but it evolved over time to include student involvement in campus organizations and activities. Social media could be considered one of the activities that a student engages to increase involvement. Social media has the capability to be used independently, or in conjunction with other activities, to further the learning that is taking place.

Kuh explained the concept of involvement in organizations and activities, outside of the classroom, as other educationally purposeful activities (2009). Student affairs professionals have been working, in recent years, to assess the activities available on college campuses for their relevance in furthering the academic mission of universities.  In Kuh's writing (2009), he referred to high impact practices or activities that make a claim on student energy in such a way that they deepen learning. These activities are first-year seminars, learning communities, writing intensive courses, common intellectual experiences, service learning, student-faculty research, study abroad, internships and other field placements, and senior capstone experiences. It is the role of universities to provide these experiences to the student population in addition to the classroom learning experience. Student affairs professionals have embraced this mission and are

committed to engaging students in active learning. Social media could be a component of these educationally purposeful activities and could enhance the level of engagement that takes place.

Student affairs professionals must recognize the importance of changing teaching and learning styles along with their approaches to match the culture of the student population; this will create a campus culture that is welcoming to students, faculty and staff (Kuh, 2009). This means engagement involves two-way communication, and it is the responsibility of all parties to create the conditions for engagement and take advantage of these opportunities.

Social media use fits into Kuh's model because it is a method of two-way communication. An important step in engaging students in meaningful educational activities is having some form of contact with these students. Typically, the most contact is with freshman class members, students who are highly involved in leadership, or graduating seniors; as well as, students who are in trouble academically or socially. Not nearly enough is known about the majority of students who fall in the middle of those two groups, and with whom student affairs professionals have little contact (Kuh, 2009). Social media can become the avenue in which interaction takes place with these students because it allows for a high level of contact with many individuals at once. Social media offers opportunities for a wide range of impact as well as venue for immediate feedback, challenge, and support. Using social media to create an online community can allow for electronic conversations to take place and the ability to educate students about resources available at their institution. Additional education can take place through social media to show students how to best take advantage of those resources. Social media can be a wonderful tool for increasing the amount of engagement that each student can achieve at their institution.

# Chapter 3 - Social Media as a Method to Increase Engagement

In order for social media to be a quality tool for student affairs professionals, it is necessary to have a basic understanding about the uses of social networks and the ways they can be used to increase student engagement. There are many different types of social media, but the two most popular social networking sites are Facebook and Twitter (Smith, 2013). This chapter will introduce social media as well as the limited amount of research conducted on social media and student engagement. It will also describe specific examples for use of social media in higher education, as well as tips for creating an authentic experience for students.

## Introduction to Social Media

Having a basic understanding of the features available on the most popular social media sites is an important first step for student affairs professionals to take advantage of social media as a tool for student engagement. This section attempts to provide a brief introduction of some of the most popular, and therefore most relevant, social media sites. The introduction of social media sites has lead to the development of terms that may not be familiar to every user. For a glossary of the most common social media terms, please reference Appendix A.

### *Facebook*

Facebook is the most popular social media site with over one billion monthly users (Smith, 2013). Research has shown that anywhere between 85 and 99% of college students use Facebook (Junco, 2012). Facebook describes its mission as giving people the power to share and make the world more open and connected (Facebook, 2013). Facebook offers users the capability to create a personal profile page where they can share information about themselves, add friends, post status updates, as well as post pictures. Recently, Facebook updated profile pages to a new

format called Timeline; the purpose of this format is to "share pictures, stories, and experiences that tell your story" (Facebook, 2013). Facebook profiles are meant for individual use only and creating a profile for a business or organization is a violation of the Facebook user agreement.

In addition to the individual Timeline, Facebook also offers the ability to create Groups or Pages. Groups are more suited to providing a closed space for a small group of people to communicate about shared interests (Facebook, 2013). Any Facebook user can create a Group and Groups have privacy settings that can be set to open, secret or closed. Open Groups can to be found and joined by any user on Facebook.  A closed Group can be found through the Facebook search feature, but a user must be a member of the Group in order to access the content within the group. A secret Group cannot be found using the Facebook search, and can only be accessed if a current member sends an invitation to a potential member. Groups are best suited to small group discussions and some of their features are limited once the Group reaches a certain size. Members within a Group receive a notification each time another member posts. Members are able to participate in group chats, upload photos to shared albums, and invite members to Group events (Facebook, 2013).

Facebook Pages allow real organizations, businesses, celebrities, and brands to communicate broadly with people who like them. Pages may only be created and managed by official representatives of the group that is represented (Facebook, 2013). Page information is public and generally accessible by anyone on Facebook and anyone is capable of liking a Page in order to receive updates. Pages are ideal for large scale interaction and marketing as there is no limit on size. A Page administrator is the individual or individuals who manage the Page for the organization. These individuals are capable sharing posts under the Page name and the posts appear in the news feeds of people who like the Page and their friends. Page administrators are

able to create customizable apps and use the Insight tool to track the page's growth and activity (Facebook, 2013).

Timeline (personal profiles), Groups, and Pages make up the majority of content within Facebook and each aspect has a different purpose and strengths. These purposes and strengths can be taken advantage of in order to provide the best venues for engaging students within this online community. Later, this report will discuss possible best practices for using each of these tools.

### *Twitter*

Twitter is another popular social media site with 200 million active users (Smith, 2013). Twitter is a microblogging website where users share in short bursts of content. On Twitter this content is shared in the form of "tweets" of 140 characters or less. The purpose of Twitter is to connect users to the latest stories, ideas, opinions, and news they find interesting (Twitter, 2013). Users create accounts and then search out others on the site that they find interesting and follow them. When a user logs in to his or her account, they will see a timeline of the most recent posts for those whom they follow.

The main two ways Twitter users are able to interact with one other and with topics of conversation are by using the @ symbol and the # (hashtag) symbol. Users are able to direct messages at others by using the @ symbol followed directly by a user name, creating a hyperlink to that user's account. The # (hashtag) symbol is used to mark keywords or topics in a tweet. When a hashtag is used followed directly by a word or phrases is creates a hyperlink to all other tweets that have used the same hashtag.

Twitter allows users the ability to create and share content in 140 characters or less. Users are also able to follow other accounts and receive updates from those individuals. If a user enjoys

a tweet from other user, he or she has the opportunity to share that content with his or her own followers by re-tweeting the post. Users also have the ability to indicate they enjoyed a user's tweet by making it a favorite. When a tweet is made a favorite, it allows a user to find it again later and it also notifies the original author of its status as a favorite. Users also have the ability to reply to a specific tweet in order to engage in conversation with another user. Specific uses of Twitter in higher education will be discussed later in this chapter.

A small body of research has been accumulated on the topic of using social media in higher education. With the popularity of Facebook and Twitter, the majority of this research has focused on these two social media sites.

## Literature Review

As social media use continues to become more prominent on college campuses, a need has risen to understand its impact on the student population. There is a limited amount of research on the impact of social media on college student engagement. (DeAndrea, 2012; Junco, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012; Junco, 2011) Facebook and Twitter are the most two popular social media sites (Smith, 2013) and the research conducted in this field has centered on the use of these sites. Some topics researched are: the role of social media on student adjustment to college (DeAndrea, 2012), the relationship between frequency of Facebook usage and student engagement (Junco, 2012), impact on first year students' sense of belonging and persistence (Strayhorn, 2012), and the effect of Twitter on engagement and grades (Junco, 2011).

### *Adjustment to Campus*

The use of social media in higher education can assist with the adjustment of students to the college campus. These websites can be used as a source of information for incoming students

and provide a sense of connection before even setting foot on the university campus. Many university programs have been conducted over the years to help establish student social networks once students are on the college campus (see Mattanah et al., 2010). Social networks provide the ability for these peer support networks to begin to form prior to arrival on campus. There is research that suggests that participating in social networks helps to improve the social capital of the user (Valenzuela, 2009). Valenzuela defines social capital as the resources available to people through their social interactions. These resources help develop trust and reciprocity, which are important for engagement in group interactions such as involvement in campus activities. Developing this social capital through social media use prior to arriving on the college campus can help ease the transition period that students face.

In a study of the impact of social media and its role in improving adjustment to college, DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, and Fiore (2012) examined a social media website called Spartan Connect, which was designed to facilitate building relationships among students who would be living in the residential community. They drew two important conclusions as a result of this research. The first is that social media can play an important role in shaping self-beliefs and the perception of social norms. Second, self-beliefs and perceived social norms can affect students' adjustment to college. This research focused on a particular social media website designed as a private online community for the residents of a specific Midwestern university. The study was conducted using a sample of first year students at the university; these students were informed about the website and invited to take a pretest survey before creating a profile. A total of 1639 students completed the pretest survey, and 1576 students created a profile on the website prior to the first day of classes. A post survey was included in the annual survey completed by all first year students during the first month of classes; the total number of students

completing this post survey was 1616. The final sample of students that completed the pre survey, created a profile, and answered the post survey was 265. The study showed that using the social network increased feelings of self-efficacy and that in turn increased confidence in academic success. While this study was specifically focused on the use of Spartan Connect, it was necessary to collect information on the way students used other social networking sites such as Facebook. Through this data collection, it was possible to examine the impact of Facebook on students' adjustment to college. The study controlled for the number of Facebook friends and found that the number of Facebook friends in the hall was also a significant indicator in students' feelings of self-efficacy. These feelings of self-efficacy lead to an easier transition to the college campus. Therefore, even if institutions do not have the desire or ability to create these private social networking sites, they can take advantage of the tools available through Facebook and other existing social media sites in order to achieve the same results.

The summer before attending college can be a period of high anxiety for many students. They are leaving behind friends that they have known for a number of years and coming to a new place where they do not know anyone and do not understand the social norms. Using social media as a space where students can build peer relationships and learn about the culture of the institution can be extremely beneficial for those students.

### *Facebook Use and Student Engagement*

Reynol Junco (2012), conducted research to measure the amount of time students spent on the popular social media site and compared it to a student's level of engagement with the college campus. He found that anywhere between 85 and 99% of college students use Facebook. Moreover, he found there is a positive relationship between the use of Facebook and the development of social capital. Roblyer et al. (2010) found that students report interest in using

Facebook for educational purposes in addition to their use of social media in their personal lives. These students saw the value in interacting with faculty and student affairs professionals on social networking sites.

Junco designed a research study to examine the relationship between the frequency of Facebook use, as well as various Facebook activities, and student engagement. He also examined the impact of Facebook and time spent preparing for class and time spent engaging in co-curricular activities. When looking at frequency of use of Facebook, Junco looked at two distinct features: time spent on the website and number of times the website was checked throughout the day. In order to have a clear answer to these questions, he asked a general question of how much time do they spend on Facebook and how many times to they check Facebook a day, along with a more specific question about how much time they spent on the website "yesterday" and how many times they checked the website "yesterday" (Junco, 2012).

A unique aspect of Junco's research is that not only did he look at amount of time that students spend on Facebook, he also studied the types of activities that are conducted while logged into the site. Due to the ever changing number of activities available on Facebook, as a result of addition or deletion of features, Junco used his personal social media network to develop a list of activities for his research project. This list was collected through his social network and then compiled and collated into a list of 14 non-overlapping items. The list was shared with two separate groups of undergraduate students for input before being included in the research survey. The final list of items including in the survey was 1) playing games, 2) status updates, 3) sharing links, 4) private messages, 5) commenting, 6) FB chat, 7) checking up, 8) events, 9) posting photos, 10) tagging photos, 11) viewing photos, 12) posting videos, 13) tagging videos, and 14) viewing videos (Junco p. 167, 2012).

Junco found students spent an average of 101.09 minutes a day and 74.97 minutes "yesterday" on Facebook. He also found they checked Facebook an average of 5.75 times a day and 4.8 times "yesterday." Frequency of activity was measured on a Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Very Frequently." Viewing photos, commenting on content, and checking in to see what others are doing were the three most popular Facebook activities. Full results of Junco's findings of activity use on Facebook can be seen in Appendix B.

Junco's study looked at the relationship between frequency of time spent on Facebook and student engagement, as well as Facebook activities and student engagement. He was trying to determine whether or not time spent on Facebook and the activities carried out while on Facebook have an impact on student engagement and if so, whether that impact is positive or negative. The results of the study show that Facebook usage does have an effect on student engagement and that effect is mixed between positive and negative impact. Junco discovered that the amount of time on Facebook and the number of Facebook checks were both negatively predictive of engagement scale score, but that the amount of time was not the strongest predictor. Facebook activities appeared to be much more impactful on the engagement score than the amount of time spent on Facebook, and depending on the type of activity, that impact could be either positive or negative.

Junco found the activities that were negatively related to student engagement were checking up on friends and playing games, while creating or commenting on content, creating or replying to events [RSVP], and viewing photos were all positive predictors of student engagement (Junco, 2012). These results indicated the type of activity was more important than the amount of time spent using the site. Activities which were communicative in nature

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positively impacted student engagement, while activities that were non-communicative negatively impacted student engagement.

The results from this study reinforce the concept that simply using social media will not increase the level of student engagement. Social media websites such as Facebook can be a useful tool to increase student engagement. The study indicated that if left unguided, use of Facebook and other social media websites can have either a positive or a negative impact on student engagement. The types of activities that students are participating in while on these sites are more important than the amount of time spent on a given site. In order for student affairs professionals to be able to use social media to enhance the level of student engagement, steps must be taken that promote activities which will positively impact student engagement. Student affairs professionals should focus their use of social media on creating content that students are interested in commenting on as well as placing pictures on these sites. Taking advantage of the Facebook events feature and making students aware of these events are also good ways to increase the positive impact of social media.

### *Impact of Social Media on Student Belonging and Persistence*

Social media can be a useful tool to promote a sense of belonging within the campus community and contributing to persistence of students. Strayhorn (2012) examined the relationship between frequency of social media use and two measures of retention: the feelings of belonging on campus and academic persistence decisions. Strayhorn conducted a survey of 755 first year students in order to determine if higher frequency usage of social media sites such as Facebook and MySpace contributed to academic success and persistence to graduation.

Strayhorn's research examined social media use and accounted for demographic differences such as gender, race/ethnicity, international status, living arrangement, transfer

status, fraternity/sorority membership, and college grades. The sole purpose of this study was to find out what role, if any, social media played with student sense of belonging and persistence decisions. By controlling for demographic differences, Strayhorn was able to make some interesting discoveries about the use of social media sites. This study indicated how certain factors impacted use of social media. Specific examples include: students of color use social media more frequently than their white counterparts, women use more frequently than men, students who lived on campus used these sites more frequently than those off campus, and first generation students had a higher frequency of use than non-first generation students. There were also several factors that did not have a significant impact on frequency of social media use: international status, transfer status, or membership in a fraternity or sorority (Strayhorn, 2012).

Results indicate that increased frequency of social media use contributes to higher feelings of belonging, but that social media was the weakest of the indicators discussed. The main uses of social media were to maintain and nurture relationships which were formed offline and to reduce the feelings of homesickness and loneliness. When looking at creating a sense of belonging, social media can be a tool that helps students connect with others and with the campus community.

### *Effect of Twitter on Engagement and Grades*

Twitter is the second most popular social networking site (Smith, 2013). There is a limited amount of research on its use as a tool to increase student engagement. Junco, Heiberger, and Loken (2011) conducted a study of first year pre-health students enrolled in a one-credit seminar course. The study contained an experimental group of students who used Twitter for class and other educationally purposeful activities and a control group that used the more static online service Ning. Groups were randomly selected and both groups completed the same

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activities throughout the course. Class activities included: class discussions, book discussions, attending an upper-class panel, shadowing a healthcare professional, video and article review, and a service project (Junco et al., 2011). These activities were consistent for both the control and experimental groups.

The study by Junco, Heiberger, and Loken found that the students who used Twitter for the seminar class showed a higher level of engagement and received better grades than the control group. The high level of engagement was based on quantitative and qualitative data; the authors looked at how frequently student interacted with each other and with the faculty, as well as the content of those interactions. GPA was a quantitative measure used in the study, and it was found students who used Twitter throughout the semester had higher semester grades, even though there was no difference in high school GPA scores between the groups.

There are many examples that illustrate how using Twitter can positively impact the engagement of students. One of the benefits of Twitter that was highlighted in the study by Junco et al. (2011) was the ability for the discussion over the material to extend well past the time that would have been allowed in the typical one hour class period. Students were able to engage in the conversation for hours, and even days, after the topic was introduced. The use of Twitter made it easier for students to contribute their thoughts and questions in a candid way that would not be typical for an average first year class. Students appeared to be more comfortable asking questions through Twitter than they normally would be during an average class.

The study suggests ways in which Twitter can be use to engage students. The data supports the idea that Twitter can help to encourage cooperation, promote active learning by helping students relate the course material to their own lives, enables prompt feedback,

maximize time on task, communicate high standards, and show respect for diversity (Junco, Heiberger, and Loken, 2011).

Using Twitter within the class also helped students to develop personal connections with each other that extended outside of the classroom walls. Students were able to interact with each other and learn more about each other's personal lives, values, and common interests in ways that may not normally occur in a typical class experience.

### *Summary of Research*

The research on the topic of social media and student engagement, while limited, shows promise for the use of these sites to positively impact students on college campuses. Social media websites have a great amount of potential in connecting students and providing opportunities for continuing the impact of educationally purposeful activities. Left on their own, social media sites could either positively or negatively affect student engagement. However, when these sites are used properly by student affairs professionals, they can generate conversation and provide opportunities for students to become more involved with their academics and with the campus community. It is important for student affairs professionals to use these tools in ways that will benefit the engagement and development of students.

## Making the Most of Social Media

It is clear that students are active users of social media in their personal lives; this usage can either enhance student engagement with the university or because a source of isolation for the student. With the interactive nature of social media and the ability for users to "opt in" to receiving information, it makes sense for student affairs professionals to take advantage of these resources to create another avenue of connection with their students. It is possible to use social

media in a way that will draw students in and enhance the way they interact with the university and with their peers.

## *Current Areas of Social Media Use*

Many on college campuses are beginning to take advantage of social media to interact with their students. If a person logs into Facebook and searches the term "Kansas State University" they will find thousands of results for pages, groups, and profiles. Student organizations, academic departments, offices, and more are creating and using their personal profiles as well as creating pages and groups to interact with students. Two areas within student affairs that have embraced the use of social media are Admissions and University Programming Councils.

Admissions departments focus on creating connections with students in order to be a resource in the university selection process. Admissions offices exist to bring in the next wave of qualified applicants to the university and they must be both a recruiter and a source of information. Admissions offices are investing in social media usage because so many students use these sites looking to get a more authentic feel for the university. These departments are seeking to expand their university's image past the mailings and emails with which high school students are already overwhelmed. Students spend so much of their time online that it makes sense for admissions officers to meet them in their natural habitat. Social media offers tools for targeting and marketing directly to the students who are interested in attending a university. In a two part article in *Time Magazine*, Victor Luckerson (2012) discussed the role of social media for admissions officers. He examined how high school students are taking steps to make sure their social media profiles do not negatively impact their university applications. These students are tightening their privacy settings and removing anything that could reflect negatively on them.

In a recent survey of 350 admissions officers by Kaplan Test Prep, more than 25 percent of the respondents said they researched applicants online (Choe, 2012). High school students want to make sure that if an institution searches for them on social media, nothing negative will be found. The same survey reported that 87 percent of schools used Facebook to recruit new students and 76 percent used Twitter in their recruitment efforts. Admissions departments are creating Facebook pages and groups for applicants to get pictures of the campus, learn about events and services, and have their questions answered without ever setting foot on campus. This dual use of social media in the admissions process provides an example of the impact of these sites.

University programming councils are student organizations that plan and execute events for students on campus, typically housed within the university's student union. They are another example of a student affairs departments taking advantage of social media. Program councils use Facebook pages and twitter accounts to promote upcoming events and let students know what is happening on campus. It is typical for these councils to create a Facebook event for an upcoming on campus event and invite students to attend. The K-State Student Union Program Council manages both a Facebook page and a Twitter account (Simonds, 2013). These accounts are managed by the student who holds the Vice-President of Promotions position with assistance from a full time staff member. These pages are consistently used to create Facebook events for upcoming on campus events and post Facebook statuses promoting events. (Simonds, 2013). Campus program councils can also post pictures and videos of events, take polls of students, and offer contests through the use of their social media pages. The purpose of using these social media accounts is to educate more students about campus events and to increase participation in

these events. Social media is used as a venue to educate and inform students about events in order to engage more students in these existing activities.

Admissions and university program councils are just two examples in the growing list of departments that are taking advantage of social media. These two areas have high levels of direct contact with students and are using social media to reach out to these students in new ways. Over time, these methods of interacting with students will be able to be assessed in order to determine the most effective uses of social media.

### *Need for Training*

With social media being such a large part of students' lives, the assumption is made that no work needs to be done to educate and advise students on the use of these technologies. However, it is important to distinguish between personal use of social media and the use of social media in student affairs. Students use social media throughout their daily lives, but the content they post may or may not be positive. Students may be guilty of posting content that reflects inappropriate or illegal behavior, and may not fully grasp the concept that information put on the Internet becomes public and permanent. Opportunities must be taken to train and educate students on the use of social media both in their personal lives and for use in the area of student engagement. Student affairs professionals have the responsibility to educate students and help them develop their personal identities; a student's online identity is equally as important in this developmental process. Professionals must take advantage of the chance to impact student development through the use of social media.

As Junco (2012) demonstrated, it is not simply the use and time spent on social media sites that are impactful with students, it is how these sites are used. When left unmonitored, social media use can either be positively or negatively impactful on student engagement. Student

affairs professionals have the experience in creating meaningful educational activities and this experience is important to translate into the social media world. Students may have an understanding of how to post pictures, videos, and statuses to these sites for personal use, but the experience of student affairs professionals is vital in the shaping of the messages for use in positively impacting student engagement.

Students are attempting to create and use the tools within social media with a minute amount of guidance from student affairs professionals. If individuals working in this field hope for social media tools to be an effective means of engaging students in meaningful activities, then it must be approached with an understanding of student development and engagement. Student affairs professionals must take an active role in the implementation of social media usage. This section will attempt to identify some of the common problems in social media use and provide suggestions for moving towards best practice in this field.

### *Making the Most of Facebook*

Facebook offers a variety of tools that could be taken advantage of in order to increase student engagement. Personal profiles (Timeline), Facebook Groups, and Facebook Pages are all ways individuals and organizations can manage their information within the social media website. Each of these methods has pros and cons, and each is better suited for certain uses. For a visual reference of each type of Facebook tool, a screenshot of each has been placed in Appendix C-E.

Timelines are designed for individual non-commercial use. They are the starting point for each user on Facebook. Every user who creates a Facebook account has a Timeline; this Timeline must be held under an individual's name. Using a profile for a business, organization, or a fictional person is a violation of Facebook Terms of Use (Facebook, 2013). It is through a

person's Timeline they are able to upload pictures and videos, post status, view friends, and carry out their personal business on Facebook. A person can use his or her Timeline to join groups and like pages in order to interact with small groups, organizations, businesses, and brands within Facebook.

Facebook Groups are designed for small groups of people to communicate about shared interests (Facebook, 2013). Facebook groups have privacy settings that can allow them to be open, closed, or secret. Open groups are available to be searched and joined by anyone. Closed groups can be found using Facebook search, but a user must request to become a member of the group and be approved by a group administrator. Secret groups are unable to be found using Facebook search; the only way to find and join these groups is by being invited by a current group member. The privacy settings available to groups, along with the notification, chat, and document features, make them ideal for use by small student organizations, group officers, or classroom activities. These small groups can take advantage of the chat setting that will allow them to continue their organizational or classroom discussions into the virtual world. The chat feature allows all member of the group to see what other members are saying in real time and for the conversation to take place. The group document feature allows groups members to collaborate on the creation of documents, every member within the group and view and edit the document.

Facebook Pages are designed for businesses, organizations, and brands. They allow these organizations to create and share their stories with people on Facebook (Facebook, 2013). Formed like a personal Timeline, pages allow administrators to add statuses, photos, add apps, and create events. Information posted in a Facebook page will appear in the News Feed of the users who have liked that page. Facebook Pages are a great way for university departments and

organizations to connect with students on the website. Pages provide the ability for students to "Like" the page in order to opt in to receiving updates from the organization. Facebook pages are used by businesses, brands, and organizations to share their messages; therefore, they are one of the most public tools on Facebook. Individuals can interact with a page much in the same way they can interact with another individual user. Facebook pages are great tools for student organizations and campus departments to interact with students at a given institution. These pages can post content and create events that are beneficial for students. They also have the ability to have an open wall feature that allows students to make comments and ask questions. Pages allow for a high level of positive impact on student engagement because they allow for the creation of content, the ability to comment on information, event creation, and posting of photos. As shown in Junco (2012), these are the activities that have the most significant positive impact on student engagement. Successful use of pages in the realm of higher education can be achieved through consistent posting of comments and questions through the page status feature. Encouraging topics that will draw students into the conversation will mean a higher level of engagement. Using Facebook events hosted on the page offers opportunities to connect what is happening in the real world with the conversation taking place online. Further connections can be made by capturing photographs of students participating in these real world activities or events, and then posting those photos on the Facebook page.

Facebook is the most popular social media site, (Smith, 2013) and therefore is the logical place to start when beginning a social media presence. Facebook offers many tools for student affairs professionals; but for most departments, creating a Facebook Page is the first step to engage with students. Pages offer the most features that can be used to interact with a large number of students at once. Here are some suggestions for creating and using a Facebook Page:

- A page can be created from an individual's homepage by clicking on "Like Pages". From this screen, there is a button for "Create Page".

- Create a specific and recognizable name for the Page, avoiding acronyms or nicknames.

- Complete the information about the organization including the about page, a picture, and include website address, if applicable.

- Once created, it is possible to go into the settings and "unpublish" the Page. This will prevent non-administrators from viewing the Page until it has been developed. By doing this, professionals and students can access the features of the page and decide on basic information before the public accesses the page.

- Assign the appropriate individuals administrator access. Depending on the department, this could be one or several individuals. Involve students when possible.

- As a department or organization, decide on which features or limitations that will be included on the Page. These options can be accessed through the "Edit Page" button at the top of the page.

- When the Page settings have been determined and it has been populated with basic information, "Publish" the Page so it may be viewed by others.

- Page Administrators should invite Friends to Like the Page.

- Upload photographs of the department or organization, including photographs from events.

- Create Facebook Events from the Page to keep students informed about upcoming real life events.

- Post regular status updates. (Content of social media posts is discussed later).

- Watch the number of "Likes" grow and regularly engage students!

## *Making the Most of Twitter*

Twitter is a microblogging site that allows users to post messages with a length of 140 characters or less (Twitter, 2013). Twitter users can choose whom they would like to follow, and they have the ability to view the tweets of those users in their Twitter timeline. Twitter allows users to interact with each other by using features such as hashtags, replies, and mentions.  These tools make it possible to carry on a conversation with specific users or to engage in a larger conversation about a specific topic. A visual reference of a Twitter homepage can be found in Appendix F.

Hashtags use the symbol # followed by a keyword or phrase with no spaces. This feature, within Twitter, allows users to see what others are saying about the same topic. Clicking on a hashtag within a tweet will take the user to a list of all other public tweets marked with that keyword. This feature can be used within higher education to allow students to participate in a conversation about a specific topic or continue a classroom discussion. For example, Kansas State University is currently using the hashtag #KState150 to connect users who are discussing items related the sesquicentennial anniversary of the university. Hashtags are also commonly used by student organizations to refer to an event or conference; allowing participants to see what others are saying about the event even if they are not within the same social group. Using hashtags in this manner is also a good way to build connections among participants. For example, a Twitter user may make a comment that another user finds interesting; this could lead to an online or offline conversation between the two individuals and allow for deeper understanding of the topic. These kinds of connections, through Twitter, allow for a greater sense of freedom, and reduce the fear of rejection that normally accompanies starting a conversation with a new person.

Mentions and replies are both methods Twitter users utilize to interact with one other. They take place when one Twitter user interacts with another user by using the @ symbol, followed by the user name. Both mentions and replies refer to a tweet that is directed at another user or users. When a tweet is posted using the @ symbol followed by a user name, it hyperlinks that tweet to that users profile. It also notifies that user they have been mentioned in a tweet, and it will show up on the mentioned tab of their home screen (Twitter, 2013). A reply is an update posted by clicking on the "Reply" button on a tweet. This opens a new tweet box and it is directed towards the person who originally posted the tweet; it automatically includes @username. Users are able to view both the reply tweet and the original tweet by clicking on the "Expand" button (Twitter, 2013). A mention is a primary update in which the user who posts the @ symbol and a username.

Mentions and replies are wonderful tools for carrying on a conversation with a specific person on Twitter and both of these tools utilize the same features but they have slightly different uses. In an educational setting, mentions can be used to pose questions to the professor or the lecturer. Another reason to use a mention is to draw another user's attention to a piece of content which another person thinks may interest them. It is possible to link and article, quote, event, photo, or another piece of content, and then mention the users with whom it applies. Mentions are also a way of conducting introductions between two or more users on Twitter. The reply feature within Twitter can allow professors or lecturers to directly answer a question that has been posed to him or her. Replies are also used to respond to a Twitter user when there was some type of content that he or she thought the other user should see.

*Incorporating other Social Media Tools*

Social media is constantly growing and changing and sites such as Facebook and Twitter introduced new features regularly. With the ever-changing nature of social media and the addition of new features and new websites, it is important for student affairs professionals to adapt. Facebook and Twitter are the two most popular social media sites in use, but there are many other tools that can be used. Other websites and tools have been incorporated into the Facebook and Twitter websites; YouTube videos and Instagram photos are popular examples.

YouTube is a standalone website that allows billions of people to discover and share originally created videos (YouTube, 2013) but many users choose to embed these videos within the Facebook website to be able to share with their friends and followers. Instagram is an application designed for use with a smartphone (Instagram, 2013). It allows a person to take a photograph, add a filter to change the look and feel, and post. When the image is posted through Instagram, the individual has the ability to share it with Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites (Instagram, 2013). Given the visual nature of social media websites, taking advantage of these two tools will allow students to see content in a way that will create excitement and make them want to interact more frequently with the page.

With the almost constant addition of new features on existing websites, as well as new social media sites and applications, it is impossible to list every way that social media can be used to engage students. It is imperative for university officials to identify the tools that make the most sense for them and to take advantage of those tools.

## Creating an Authentic Experience

There has been a substantial amount of articles and blogs written in popular magazines and websites about using social media. Many of these articles are directed at using social media

in the business world to engage customers. While higher education is not quite the same as the business world, and it is not selling merchandise or trying to bring in customers, there are some parallels that can be drawn.  Higher Education can use some of the information and tips that are being developed in the business world to improve the way that it engages with students on social media. Popular literature written about social media and customers regards a wide variety of topics, but there are some areas in which student affairs professionals can pull lessons for the higher education world. Businesses spend a great deal of time on trying to acquire new customers, creating current customers staying power, building brand loyalty, and providing a high level of customer service. There are parallels in the way universities use social media for admissions, retention, building school spirit, and creating a sense of school spirit. Using the amount of articles and blogs written about using social media in the business world, there are some identifiable areas for using these tools within higher education. There are several general guidelines for creating the most engagement out of social media websites. Areas that professionals should consider when creating a social media strategy are: voice, time, and content. Below are recommendations for acquiring the most engagement out of one's audience.

### *Developing Voice*

Creating a strong and consistent voice is an important aspect of building a relationship with one's audience on social media (Seiter, 2012). The voice is the way these official pages and accounts interact with those who follow them. It is the personality and style with which posts are made; an organization's voice could be informational, fun, witty, irreverent, inspirational, or an unlimited number of other descriptors. It is important for each organization, department, or person to understand what they want their voice to be and to be consistent in that message. This can be a struggle for an individual to achieve and becomes even harder when a group of people

share control of a single page. By making a decision on the kind of voice the organization wants to put forth and creating guidelines, it is easier to have all members who contribute to follow those guidelines in order to create a consistent message. When deciding on the voice an organization wants to put forward, it is important to look at audience as well as culture and values.

Within higher education, the audience will primarily be students, but it could vary depending on the type of department, organization, or service. Certain departments or organizations may have a high level of interaction from parents or faulty, which is just another reason professionals should be in the conversation about social media. They will have insights about the audience that students may not have. The culture of the organization or department will also have a large impact on the social media voice. A campus programming council will have a much different voice than the office of the president. Having professionals in the process with students to look at what the background of the organization is along with the current cultures and values will go a long way in determining what the social media voice looks like.

### *Timely Interaction*

Social media is about instant access to information and interacting with one another quickly. With this in mind, it is nearly impossible to monitor and respond to social media twenty-four hours a day. There will be sometimes that a person or group will not be able to post to their sites or respond to those who have commented or asked a question. When considering the timing of social media, it is important to determine how frequently the person or organization will post to the sites and when are the best times to post in order to gain the most engagement from their audience. It is important that social media tools are used to their greatest advantage; a user does

not want to have a site that has not been updated in the last month, but it is also important not to flood one's followers with unnecessary posts.

It is important to have a timely response to questions posed through social media, but it is unrealistic to believe that departments and organizations will be able to respond to everyone immediately. Therefore, it is important to be clear with one's audience and let them know what they can expect from this group. If someone is only going to be available during normal business hours, then that information should be posted on the social media site. With the way that students operate, it may be important for an organization to consider dividing social media responsibilities so that responses can be made even on the nights and weekends. Look at the nature of the social media site and determine if a response is needed and how quickly to respond. On a social media site such as Twitter, a student affairs user may find that an occasional retweet or reply is enough to keep the audience engaged; whereas on a Facebook page, each question or comment may need a direct reply.

Due to the quick paced nature of social media, it is important to have frequent updates in order to be visible and viable with one's audience. However, organizations should not post so frequently that they are overwhelming the students they are trying to engage. Organizations should be posting on their social media sites anywhere from once a week to several times a day. Regardless of how frequently an organization posts on social media; each post needs to be meaningful to the audience. If social media posts are not meaningful and do not add value to the recipient, then it could be viewed a spam and it could be possible to lose those followers.

*Content*

Along with determining the voice and timeliness of social media posts, it is imperative to understand the content of these posts. Social media is a great opportunity for higher education

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professions to interact with students in new and meaningful ways. It is important to develop content that will be engaging to students and will draw them into the conversation. When posting content to social media, organizations can create original content or can share meaningful articles, posts, etc. from other sources. Any of this content could take the form of text, photos, videos, polls, or a number of other types.

The content posted through social media will be different for each institution of higher education and vary according to institutional mission. Within an institution, content may also differ depending on the department or organization that is posting. The content for the social media postings should reflect the needs of the audience and should contribute to a meaningful learning environment. Due to the rise of sites like Pinterest and Instagram, there has been an increased demand for imagery and photos on social media. Thus, it is vital, when developing content, to use multimedia sources such as photos, videos, images, and infographics (Bullas, 2013). In the Facebook news feed, images and videos take up a larger amount of space, which impacts that number of people that interact with those materials. If higher education interaction on social media is limited to posting text, those messages will often be overlooked by users. Incorporating images and videos into the content that student affairs professionals create is necessary to gain the highest level of interaction with users.

Content should be specifically designed for the intended audience, but taking advantage of images is a tool that all areas of higher education can use. Departments and organizations that are event focused can take pictures during the event to post afterwards. Students are then able to visit the social media sites to view and comment on the experience, reliving the time spent in the activity and expanding on the learning that happened. When using social media for educational purposes, charts, graphs, and the like could also be posted.

Including a mix of original content, information from outside sources, and user generated content can help one's social media presence from getting stale. Social media makes it exceedingly simple to share content that others have created. Many websites, articles, and blogs feature buttons that allow a person to share that content directly with their audience. Asking students to submit their own material can also be a valuable tool in gathering meaningful content for use on one's social media sites. Students can be asked to share videos, photographs, or blogs that can enhance the topic of conversation. Asking questions through social media sites is also a great way to gather user generated content and extend the conversation.

# Chapter 4 - Conclusion

Student engagement is an important aspect of student success in college. Alexander Astin introduced his theory of student involvement in 1984 and it has been widely accepted and tested in the realm of higher education. In recent years, the opportunity has presented itself to engage students by using online technologies in order to extend the learning even more. Only a limited amount of research has been conducted on using social media for student engagement (DeAndrea, 2012; Junco, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012; Junco, 2011) and it needs to be expanded upon to further understand the impact of these technologies on student engagement. Early indicators show however, these websites can be valuable tools to positively impact student engagement and overall success of students.

The two most common social media sites, Facebook and Twitter, offer several tools for interacting with students on a college campus. Professionals can take advantage of the tools that seem to work best for the situation in which they find themselves. Using Facebook groups and Pages allows the reach of the campus activity to extend beyond the time spent together and can enhance the level of student engagement and the learning that takes place as a result of these activities. Twitter offers the opportunity to interact with other users and specific content through the use of hashtags, mentions, replies, and retweets. These features allow students and professionals to interact with each other in real time. This capability creates a community that can extend conversations past the face to face and can enable users to interact with each other and engage with the content in new and meaningful ways.

Social media use will continue to grow with college aged individuals; the websites, features, applications, etc. will change and adapt over time, but the concept of interacting with one other online is here to stay. Establishments of higher education and the professionals

employed by these institutions must be willing to learn about these new technologies and incorporate them into the meaningful learning experiences created on campuses. One of the simplest ways to stay up to date with technology is to use it on a regular basis. Professionals can also read articles about social media usage and attend workshops. These tools provide amazing potential for engaging students in new and meaningful ways.

As social media becomes more widely used by campus professionals, the need will arise to assess this usage to determine the most beneficial uses of technology. Creating new assessment measures and studying the impact of new uses of technology will be important to determine the most impactful methods of using social media. Social media use in higher education is just beginning, and it is important for professionals to assess its usage in order to find out the best uses for the technology. Staying up to date will allow institutions of higher education to continue to interact with students in a meaningful way and will allow students to engage with the campus community in order to gain the most out of their education.

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# Appendix A - Glossary of Common Terms

@: used to call out usernames in Tweets. When a username is preceded by the @ sign, it becomes a link to a Twitter profile. See also Replies and Mentions (Twitter, 2013).

#: See "Hashtags" (Twitter, 2013).

Event: a feature that lets one organize gatherings, respond to invites, and keep up with what one's friends are doing (Facebook, 2013).

Friend: people one connects and share with on Facebook (Facebook, 2013).

Follow: to subscribe to a Twitter users' Tweets or updates on the site (Twitter, 2013).

Follower: Another Twitter user who has followed one's tweets (Twitter, 2013).

Group: a closed space for small groups of people to communicate about shared interests on Facebook (Facebook, 2013).

Hashtags: The # symbol is used to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet (Twitter, 2013).

Homepage: A real-time list of Tweets from those one follows (Twitter, 2013).

Infographic:  graphic representation of information or data intended to present complex information quickly and clearly (Customer Magnetism, 2013).

Like: Clicking "Like" is a way to give positive feedback and connect with things one cares about (Facebook, 2013).

Mention: Mentioning another user in one's Tweet by including the @ sign followed directly by their username. Also refers to Tweets in which one's username was included (Twitter, 2013).

Message: messages and messages inbox house ongoing conversations with people on Facebook (Facebook, 2013).

News Feed: an ongoing list of updates that shows one what's new with the friends and pages one follows (Facebook, 2013).

Profile: 1) Twitter: A page displaying information about a user, as well as all the Tweets they have posted from their account (Twitter, 2013). 2) Facebook: See "Timeline" (Facebook, 2013).

Page: Pages allow businesses, brands, and celebrities to connect with people on Facebook. Administrators can post information and News Feed updates to people who like their pages (Facebook, 2013).

Reply: A Tweet posted in reply to another user's message, usually posted by clicking the "reply" button next to their Tweet in one's timeline. Always begins with @username (Twitter, 2013).

Retweet: (noun): A Tweet by another user, forwarded to a person by someone they follow. Often used to spread news or share valuable findings on Twitter. (verb):To retweet, retweeting, retweeted. The act of forwarding another user's Tweet to all of one's followers (Twitter, 2013).

Status: Sharing with a broad audience on Facebook. Things a users shares will appear as posts on one's Timeline and may appear in one's News Feed (Facebook, 2013).

Timeline: Collection of the photos, stories, and experiences that tell one's story on Facebook (Facebook, 2013).

Tweet:  A message posted via Twitter containing 140 characters or fewer (Twitter, 2013).

Username: Also known as a Twitter handle. Must be unique and contain fewer than 15 characters. Is used to identify a person on Twitter for replies and mentions (Twitter, 2013).

# Appendix B - Frequency of Participating in Facebook Activities
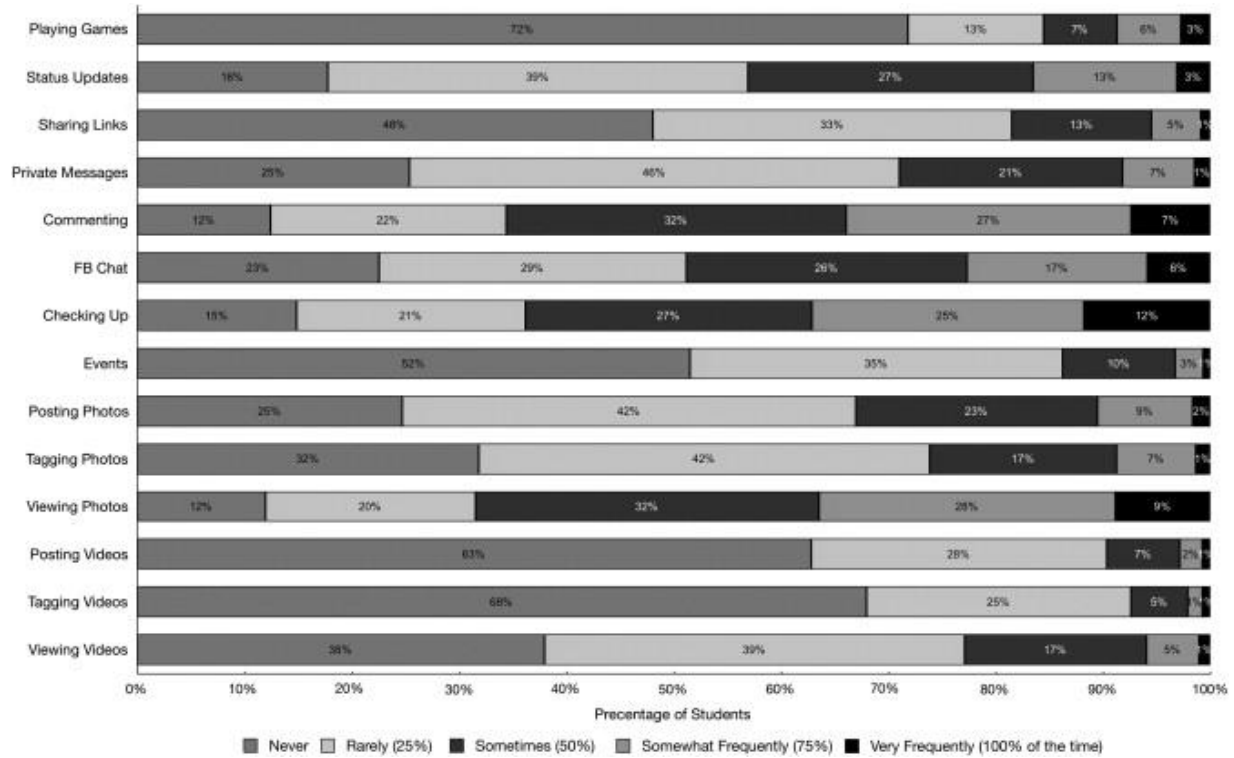


Frequency of participating in Facebook Activities (Junco, 2010)

# Appendix C - Facebook Timeline



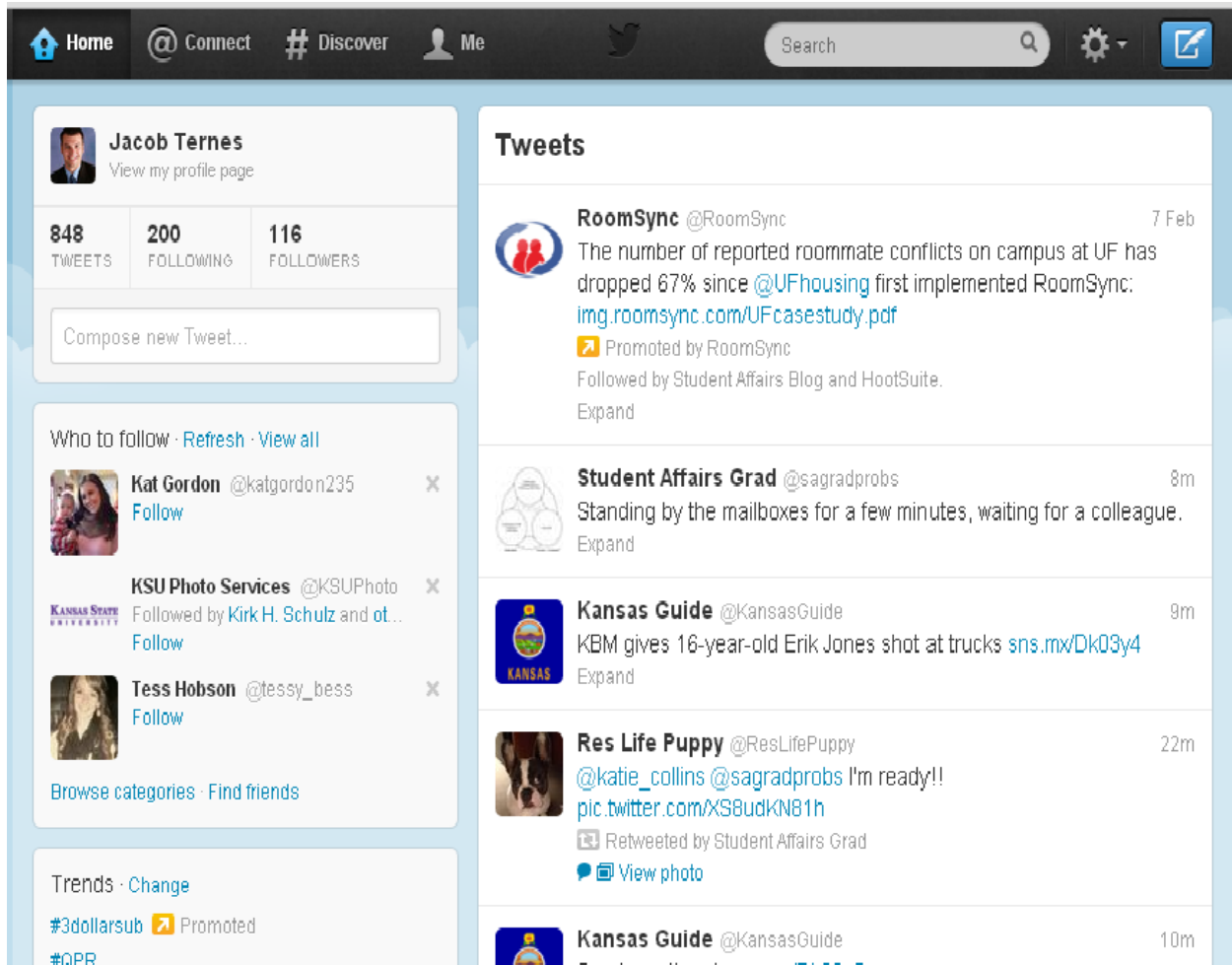Screenshot of Jacob Ternes' personal Timeline from Facebook (Facebook, 2013)

# Appendix D - Facebook Group



Screen shot Wildcats in Higher Education Facebook group (Facebook, 2013)

# Appendix E - Facebook Page



Screen shot of Kansas State University Facebook page (Facebook, 2013).

# Appendix F - Twitter Homepage



Screen shot of Jacob Ternes' Twitter homepage (Twitter, 2013).