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Colleges Raising the Bar in Using Social Media

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Posted by [Neal Leavitt](#) on December 26th, 2011 at 1:45 pm



Odds are you're using Facebook, Twitter, other social media tools to communicate with your kids, nieces, nephews, etc., that are away at college. I suspect there are quite a few first-year students who might be flabbergasted to discover that they can actually make and receive calls from their cell phone.

Not a major headliner these days, but colleges and universities have been tapping social media for a number of years now to not only reach students, but alumni as well as working adults 30+ who only attend online and/or evening classes.

According to a recent study by the Center for Marketing Research at the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, 100% of universities surveyed used social media to communicate with students, up from 61% in 2007-2008. The study also revealed that 98% of the responding colleges have a Facebook page; 84% have a Twitter account.

“Social media is past the fad phase,” said Nora Barnes, director of the center. “The numbers speak for themselves. Many students can’t afford to visit the campus, so they are depending on podcasts and blogs to get answers.”

One San Francisco-based company, Inigral, has created a Facebook app that helps colleges create centralized Facebook sites. Arizona State University (ASU) used Inigral’s *The Schools App* that enables students to interact with faculty and staff without becoming Facebook friends – it allows all parties to keep their personal lives personal, while benefitting from school-specific communication that the app fosters.

A number of other higher education institutions are also doing some really interesting stuff as of late:

A few examples:

- Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton is using Foursquare to let students check in via SMS or a smart phone app and share their location with friends while also collecting virtual badges and points.
- The University of New Mexico has an active group on Flickr – more than 350 members, 900 items available that highlight events, campus activities, art projects, and work done by students.
- The chairman of the math department at Berry College developed a calculus music video with his students, who sang about derivatives in a YouTube video (*The Derivative Rag*).
- The University of Kentucky created a campaign around the school’s blue and white colors and a site, *SeeBlue.com*, which includes videos from students and staff.

- Kaplan University in Fort Lauderdale uses LinkedIn to support career endeavors for its 53,000+ students and alumni. Sophie Vlessing, the university's VP-strategic marketing and student experience, said the school has posted webinars and 80 videos from *Visionary Voices*, a recurring series of discussions with thought leaders.
- Highbury College Portsmouth (United Kingdom) uses QR codes on posters to drive potential students to find the college on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, encouraging them to enroll.
- Pace University established a Facebook question and answer interaction board where potential students discuss issues/concerns/questions with students who've previously attended the institution.

The examples are endless but you get the gist – this ain't your parents' university.

Dean Tsouvalas, editor of *StudentAdvisor.com*, summed it quite nicely.

“A successful social media campaign is when students are able to have a one-to-one connection, speak directly to the school and get interesting information that they never knew before,” he said.

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[December 26, 2011 at 3:25 PM](#)

Great summary of colleges using social media well Neal. One of the things we always stress to schools is the importance of not only joining the conversation where the students are, but also tying back your activities to measurements that are improving institutional objectives and student outcomes.

As the community manager at Inigral (www.inigral.com) we've seen many schools (including ASU) improve enrollment and retention by creating private social communities for each university. With so many social platforms to manage and monitor schools must prioritize where to spend their efforts and be sure that students are getting what they want, and we're not just tweeting for twitter's sake 😊

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