

# USING SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR STUDENT RECRUITMENT

NSF –ATE DUE 1501911

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A STUDY OF THREE  
COMMUNITY  
COLLEGES

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## Summary of Findings

The Building Social Media Capacity of ATE Centers and Programs project explored the impact of social media upon student recruitment for technical programs. Despite a number of challenges, all three partnering colleges were able to implement a social media recruitment strategy twice over the two-year life of the project. The recruitment strategies followed the general goals and themes that the colleges originally developed during the project's first year. The project's most important findings include the following:

- 1) Regarding the key question guiding the research- *What impact does the implementation of a best practice social media recruitment strategy have on student enrollment in ATE programs?*- the results are inconclusive. Between the three schools, a total of six "runs" of a social media strategy were completed during the project, three in advance of the Fall, 2016 semester and three in advance of the Spring, 2017 semester. In four of these six runs, program enrollment decreased, while enrollment increased in the other two instances.
- 2) Based upon the social analytic data generated by the schools, there was no consistent correlation between the number of social media posts and the reach of social media messaging. In some cases, less frequent posting, with careful attention paid to the post content and presentation, led to greater post reach. This suggests that messaging (content and presentation) is the driving force behind engagement. At the same time, based upon the experiences of the three college leads, creating engaging content is the most labor-intensive aspect of a social media campaign requiring a highly honed marketing skill set.
- 3) After both runs, the overwhelming majority of surveyed students who said they used social media to learn about the schools' programs indicated that social media influenced their decision to enroll. Nevertheless, most surveyed students indicated that they learned about their programs through means beyond social media (e.g. personal recommendations, college websites). This suggests that social media may be a powerful source of information for prospective students IF they can be prompted to connect with school social media platforms.
- 4) All three schools tended to utilize platforms that they were most comfortable using, particularly Facebook and Twitter. This matched the platforms used by students who indicated they learned about the schools' technology programs via social media.
- 5) Leading and implementing a social media campaign requires more skills and time than being an active social media user. All three college leads were frequent users of social media platforms, but none of them had ever led a campaign before. In addition, the pressure of existing and added teaching responsibilities limited the time the leads could devote to message development and posting. These and other factors resulted in modest posting frequency at all three schools.
- 6) School Public Relations Departments presented an unexpected and sometimes significant obstacle to the implementation of a social media recruitment strategy. While the college PR departments gave initial verbal support for the projects, in actuality they seemed reluctant to open social media space for individual departments. The approval

process for messages and branding were particularly cumbersome.

- 7) Schools intending to provoke engagement with students using social media need to track social media trends closely and to have the resources to adapt new platforms that gain popularity. Project surveys revealed that SnapChat and Reddit were emerging as possible viable platforms over the course of the project. Due to factors like those described in items 5 and 6 above, the schools were unable to test the effectiveness of these new platforms.

### **Evaluator's Comments**

From the overall exercise, it seems that using social media as a college recruitment platform is both expected and elusive. These exploratory efforts have uncovered a range of findings that should prove useful to continuing research. The mixed results should not necessarily suggest that, e.g. social media as used is not as successful as hoped overall, but should be contextualized as an early investigation into a few cases of social media use; these cases have in fact shed some useful light on both the results of and response to that use, the challenges of that use, and the challenges associated with researching those practices. The mixed results are likely a result of the significant differences among the social media leaders, the students, and the colleges themselves and in this context these results shouldn't be seen as failing in any way.

The findings suggest that while social media use might not be the sole source or first source of recruitment and enrollment information, it is an expected complement to the other media sent to prospective students. The field is much more complex than, for example, the print or web media environment, areas that have experienced many years of establishing legacy systems, procedures, and expectations. Additionally, the ephemeral nature of the actual platform (here today, gone tomorrow) brings on challenges no one can reasonably predict, so that it becomes all the more critical that persons in charge of social media campaigns need to be very attuned to the technologies of the time. This is supported by findings that point out how schools themselves might be the biggest hurdles toward entering this space: that PR departments stand in the way of this kind of progress, most likely because it is 1) fast-changing, 2) not legacy-based, 3) not adherent to existing protocols and control measures, 4) may not adhere to branding and other institutional compliance measures, 5) generally a too-fast-changing idiom for institutional systems that are slow or reluctant to shift.

There are valuable clues as to shaping a message (targeting vs. scattershot), repetition of message, and the need for schools to investigate this opportunity more seriously with staffing requirements and strategies to either bring PR departments on board or develop ways to message independent of said departments.

## A. Background

In September 2015, Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) was awarded an NSF ATE grant for the project *Building Social Media Capacity of ATE Centers and Programs* (DUE 1501911). Funding was provided to research the extent to which the use of best practice social media strategies can increase student enrollment in technical programs. Led by EDC, the team included Senior Project Director Joe Ippolito, Principal Investigator (PI); Ann Beheler, Executive Director of the National Convergence Technology Center and project Co-PI, and Gordon Snyder, Associate Director OP-TEC, Research Team, with consultation and technical assistance provided by EDC's Joyce Malyn-Smith and Heidi Larson. Data collection was spearheaded by Collin College's Deborah Miller. Additional guidance was offered by the project's external evaluator, David Reider, principal partner of Education Design.

The research project was an outgrowth of a previous EDC project, also funded by NSF-ATE. The New Media Technician project (DUE 1144220, 2011-2015) developed resources and curriculum to guide college faculty in providing instruction on the use of social media to build a business brand. These materials were developed with the assistance of a national panel of social media experts. Four products of the New Media Technician project informed the design of this effort. These included: 1) an occupational profile of a Social Technology Enabled Professional (STEP) that identifies the skills, knowledge and behaviors needed for someone to use social media effectively in the workplace; 2) performance based rubrics that provide indicators of what the social media skills of a STEP "look like" when performed at four different levels of proficiency; 3) online problem-based lessons aligned to both the profile and rubrics, and 4) an eBook entitled *5 Steps for Using Social Media to Promote Your Brand and Build Your Business* that includes additional resources and curriculum. The research project also drew upon insights presented in a 2010 study of social media use by ATE Centers conducted by the ATE funded Information and Communication Technologies Center (ICT Center).

The project's research design was developed to answer the central question: *What impact does the implementation of a best practice social media recruitment strategy have on student enrollment in ATE programs?* That question however, provoked at least one significant preliminary question, namely *What constitutes a best practice social media strategy?* To address the second question, EDC convened the social media experts who had participated in the New Media Technician project for a work session held in December, 2015. During that session, and drawing upon their work experience and upon the materials they developed in the previous project, these subject matter experts (SMEs) developed a 10-step template for constructing a social media strategy. Each action step in this *Guide for Planning a Best Practice Social Media Campaign* is aligned to questions designed to shape considerations and to provoke reflection about the social media plan to be developed. In the view of the project's SMEs, by thoughtfully completing the template, the colleges would produce a best practice social media plan. The list of experts is found in Appendix A. See Appendix B for the template created with the input of the SMEs- *Guide for Planning a Best Practice Social Media Campaign*. The entire guide can be accessed at <https://go.edc.org/edcsteppublic-research>.

At roughly the same time, three colleges affiliated with the National Convergence Technology Center (NCTC) were recruited to participate in the project. The colleges were selected from members of the Convergence College Network, a network of post-secondary schools affiliated with the NCTC. Participating colleges - El Centro Community College (TX), Polk State College (FL) and the University of North Texas (UNT)- were chosen because they: 1) expressed a strong interest in using social media to enhance student recruitment efforts, 2) committed to following all data reporting requirements established by the study, 3) provided geographical diversity, and 4) provided a mix of 2 year and 4 year schools.

In a February, 2016 work session, two representatives from each of the participant colleges were provided an opportunity to work with an SME to create a best practice social media strategy. Using the *Guide for Planning a Best Practice Social Media Campaign*, the SMEs and college representatives created social media strategies tailored to their specific recruitment goals. Each college determined their own posting platforms and frequencies. The implementation of the three social media plans provided the focus of the project's research.

### **Evaluator's Comments**

It must be noted that the original design for this project was a larger scale initiative that included the development of strategies and toolkits for social media recruitment and subsequent intensive training of participants, and related research on those practices. The funded version eliminated much of the development and training aspects, so the current project essentially examined what could be done with existing capacity in the field. The three college partners worked very hard and responded as best they could with limited support. The haphazard and uneven nature of the data collected is likely a result of a lack of concerted ongoing training and support for social media experts and recruitment staff. Lessons from this project might support a next-stage proposal with a larger level of support to train and study the impact of a more concerted effort. Social media is unequivocally a part of the communications landscape. Many colleges are turning to social media and including it in all messaging practices, including recruitment and enrollment. It seems critical that these practices continue to be studied to help refine, inform, and optimize the field. This project contributes a first important step to that process.

## **B. Research Design/ Method**

The social media plan for each of the three schools identified key elements of their social media strategy, including: 1) the recruitment goals and objectives, 2) a detailed demographic description of the audience to be targeted, 3) the social media platforms to be used, 4) examples of key messaging that might be used as part of the strategy, 5) a posting schedule for each platform involved in the strategy, 6) the social media analytics to be used to assess the effectiveness of the strategy, and 7) the plan for communicating data relevant to the project's research purposes. The completed plans for each school can be accessed at <https://go.edc.org/edcsteppublic-research>.

Following the February, 2016 work session, the project's research team collected baseline data from each of the schools. Each of the three schools implemented their social media plan twice. The first run was implemented during Spring, 2016, targeting Fall, 2016 enrollment. The second run of the plans occurred during the Fall of 2016, targeting Spring, 2017 enrollment. At each school, one individual took primary responsibility for creating and posting messages on the platforms designated by their social media plan.

During each run of the schools' social media plans, the entire project team held monthly teleconferences that included a review of the previous month's social analytic data, a discussion of any implementation challenges and identification of messaging considered especially effective. Instances of successful employment of social media were highlighted and discussed. The PowerPoint presentations used during these teleconferences can be accessed at <https://go.edc.org/edcsteppublic-research>. EDC's Heidi Larson provided resources and suggestions to aid in messaging. Both Mr. Snyder and Dr. Beheler provided in-time consultation related to technical and administrative issues related to implementation.

### **Evaluator's Comments:**

The research team was charged with conducting a limited research study on the effectiveness of social media on student enrollment. As mentioned earlier, this was a significant change from the originally proposed work plan in which far more factors, platforms, activities, and potential outcomes would be supported or researched. The team adjusted to the new design and adhered to the plan and delivered data around the proposed project outcomes. A result of the scaled-down design was that fewer resources (for all partners) limited the amount of effort, time, and continuity personnel could apply to the study. College partners were all full-time staff or faculty, researchers could only invest limited time, etc. Had the research and the SM campaign efforts been more fully resourced, more could have been learned; for example the introduction and feedback from additional platforms, more frequent meetings to refine data collection, personnel support at each of the sites, etc. Given the programmatic shifts called for by the re-framed project, the team did a considerable job providing a basis of knowledge that can be foundational for more detailed studies.

## **C. Data Collection**

The project's findings are based upon: 1) analysis and comparison of the social analytic data collected by each school for each of two runs of their social media plan; 2) analysis and comparison of survey data collected from students at the conclusion of each run of the social media plans and 3) interviews of the individuals at each school with primary responsibility for implementing the social media plans.

The colleges submitted monthly reports detailing the social media analytics for each of the platforms used in their plans. Enrollment figures were collected each semester as they became available. The reach of Facebook posts was considered an indication of exposure to a school's messaging and "likes" were deemed indicators of stronger engagement. Twitter analytics were interpreted as indicating engagement by the number of times users interacted with a tweet by retweeting, replying, following, or liking. Although done inconsistently among the colleges, tracking which posts generated the most user interaction suggested what was working best for each college and should be an analysis strategy for future research efforts.

Electronic student surveys were sent out by each college in September 2016 and February 2017. The research team conducted phone interviews with the leads at each college towards the end of the spring, 2017 semester.



## **D. Findings**

The tables included in this section duplicate the monthly data reports submitted by the colleges and present comparative enrollment data for each semester. The column “# of posts in plan” for the monthly data reports represents the number of posts each school initially anticipated making in February 2016 before actual implementation. The remaining columns provide the actual number of posts and the corresponding social media analytic data.

### **El Centro College**

#### **Background**

El Centro College was the first Dallas County Community College, opening in 1966. It is an inner-city downtown college that attracts students from all parts of Dallas. A Hispanic-Serving College, it also services a large number of African-American students. The college offers over 50 career-training programs such as those in information technology as well as a strong university transfer program. El Centro has been a partner with the Convergence Technology Center Regional (now National) NSF ATE Center since 2004. The school has recently hired innovative and energetic leadership for the information technology programs and have simplified their offerings. The college enrolls over 12,000 students and has a large offering of on-line courses in addition to traditional classroom and lab courses.

Francisco Rodriguez, IT Faculty and Program Coordinator for Programming and Internet Design Technologies (IDT), was chosen to lead the implementation of El Centro’s social media strategy with the assistance of Priscilla Staley, Director of Marketing and Public Relations. Beth Stall, Dean of STEM, supported their efforts. El Centro targeted its social media strategy towards increasing enrollment in its Networking and Information Technology programs by 10%. In addition, El Centro’s plan specifically focused on women as its targeted audience. This focus coincided with the intention of faculty and the Dean of STEM to increase the number of women students. The El Centro team also believed that specifically targeting women provided a narrow enough focus to determine whether or not the social media strategy made a difference.

The social media platforms of choice were Facebook and Twitter. Throughout the project, the posts on both platforms focused on increasing overall interest in Networking and IDT, but specifically on increasing interest among women. Since all postings had to be approved and posted by the school’s Public Relations Department, the number of postings allowed was limited in most cases to four per month for both Facebook and Twitter. This number of postings was reached in most months and exceeded in others. During other months, unforeseen circumstances caused El Centro to fall short of meeting its projected number of posts. This was especially the case in July 2016 when five Dallas Policemen were killed on the college’s property directly adjacent to the college’s server room servicing the IDT courses computer labs. The college was closed over two weeks and both the server room and computer labs were almost destroyed. One of the IDT labs was unusable for the entire fall 2016 semester.

## Run One

The frequency of postings and Facebook and Twitter analytics for the first run are reflected in Table 1.

**Table 1- El Centro Social Media Analytics (First Run)**

El Centro College (Networking + IDT Programs)							
Social Media Analytics							
FaceBook	# Posts in Plan	# Actual Posts	Post Reach	# Likes	# Comments	# Shares	
May-16	4	3	2,131	12	0	2	
Jun-16	4	3	3,012	10	0	1	
Jul-16	4	0	0	0	0	0	
Aug-16	4	3	8,425	20	2	2	
Sep-16	4	7	17,643	31	0	2	
Twitter	# Posts in Plan	# Actual Posts	# Tweet Impressions	# Profile Visits	# Mentions	# Retweets	# New Followers
May-16	4	4	26.8K	745	45	3	30
Jun-16	4	4	12.2k	852	51	0	33
Jul-16	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Aug-16	4	3	19.6K	1341	50	1	40
Sep-16	4	6	24.1k	1275	100	6	27

Twitter posts generated a greater response than Facebook posts during this first run. The lack of activity in July is attributable to the previously mentioned shooting incident. With the exception of June, during those months that posts were made on Facebook, increases in the number of monthly posts coincided with increases in the reach and in the number of “likes.”

Fall 2016 enrollments versus Fall 2015 baseline data are found in the tables below. Table 2 provides this data for the Networking program and Table 3 provides it for the IDT program. Table 4 displays the combined totals for both programs.

**Table 2- El Centro Networking Program Enrollment (First Run)**

El Centro Networking						
Baseline Fall 2015 vs Fall 2016						
Term	Gender Female	%	Gender Male	%	Total Count	Total %
2015FA	53	21%	195	79%	248	100%
2016FA	57	25%	170	75%	227	100%
% Increase Fall 15 to Fall 16	8%		(13%)		(8%)	

Networking enrollments for females increased by 8% from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016.

**Table 3- El Centro IDT Program Enrollment (First Run)**

El Centro College - IDT Baseline Fall 2015 vs Fall 2016						
Term	Gender Female	%	Gender Male	%	Total	Total %
2015FA	108	52%	98	48%	206	100%
2016FA	97	52%	88	48%	185	100%
% Incr(Decr) Fall 15 to Fall 16	(10%)		(10%)		(10%)	

IDT enrollments for females decreased by 10% from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016.

**Table 4- El Centro Total Networking and IDT Program Enrollment (First Run)**

El Centro College - Total Networking + IDT Baseline Fall 2015 vs Fall 2016						
Term	Gender Female	%	Gender Male	%	Total	Total %
2015FA	161	35%	293	65%	454	100%
2016FA	154	37%	258	63%	412	100%
% Incr(Decr) Fall 15 to Fall 16	(4%)		(12%)		(9%)	

Total Networking and IDT enrollments for females decreased by 4% from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016. Networking partially offset the decrease in IDT, but with the number of enrollments in IDT larger than the number of enrollments in Networking, IDT had a greater impact on the total. It is unknown specifically how the IDT lab's being unusable and the subsequent course cancellations for the Fall 2016 semester had an impact on these enrollment figures.

## Run Two

The frequency of postings and Facebook and Twitter analytics for the second run are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5- El Centro Social Media Analytics (Second Run)**

El Centro College (Networking + IDT Programs) Social Media Analytics							
FaceBook	# Posts in Plan	# Actual Posts	Post Reach	# Likes	# Comments	# Shares	# New Followers
Oct-16	4	8	25,628	17	0	0	0
Nov-16	4	6	17,649	9	0	3	0
Dec-16	4	4	8,721	1	0	3	0
Jan-17	4	7	12,180	15	0	3	0
Feb-17	4	8	14,010	22	0	4	0
Twitter	# Posts in Plan	# Actual Posts	# Tweet Impressions	# Profile Visits	# Mentions	# Retweets	# New Followers
Oct-16	4	7	2697	0	0	5	0
Nov-16	4	7	1957	0	0	4	0
Dec-16	4	4	2133	0	0	6	0
Jan-17	4	6	2339	0	0	6	0
Feb-17	4	10	3731	0	0	9	0

The number of postings for Facebook and Twitter were again limited by the number that the school's Public Relations department was willing to post. The content of the postings was again determined by Mr. Rodriguez, however the content still had to be forwarded to the Public Relations Department for posting. Note, though, that the Public Relations Department allowed more postings preparing for Spring 2017 than it had for Fall 2016, thus exceeding the number of posts projected in the original plan.

During each month of the second run, the number of Facebook and Twitter posts was greater than the number of monthly posts during the first run. In the case of Facebook, the monthly addition of 1-5 posts yielded a significant increase in reach. In four of the five months of the second run, the Facebook post reach exceeded 10,000. During Run 1, the Facebook post reach exceeded 10,000 in only one of the months.

The increase of Twitter posts each month however coincided with significant decreases in the number of Tweet impressions between Run 1 and Run 2. More significantly, the entire collection of Twitter posts during the second run did not yield a single profile visit. With fewer tweets, the first run had 10 times as large a reach as the second run. Priscilla Staley, Director of Marketing and Public Relations speculated that the reasons for this could be: 1) hash tags were NOT used to promote tweets during the second run, while they had during the first; 2) the postings in the first run were brand new. In many cases the postings in the second run were the same used in the first run, which could have caused the audience to ignore them; 3) the more engaged audience of the first run may have retweeted more of the tweets, and 4) El Centro lost their part-time social media person which had some impact since this person was able to oversee the social media posts and modify follow ups more diligently.

Spring 2017 enrollments versus Spring 2016 baseline data are found in the tables 6-8. Again, note that the data is presented by discipline (Networking and IDT) and by combined total.

**Table 6- El Centro Networking Program Enrollment (Second Run)**

El Centro Networking Baseline Spring 2016 vs Spring 2017						
Term	Gender		Gender		Total Count	Total %
	Female	%	Male	%		
2016SP	52	24%	169	76%	221	100%
2017SP	62	26%	181	74%	243	100%
% Increase Spring 16 to Spring 17	19%		7%		10%	

Enrollments for females in Networking increased by 19% from Spring 2016 to Spring 2017.

**Table 7- El Centro IDT Program Enrollment (Second Run)**

El Centro College - IDT						
Baseline Spring 2016 vs Spring 2017						
Term	Gender Female	%	Gender Male	%	Total	Total %
2016SP	94	51%	91	49%	185	100%
2017SP	95	64%	54	36%	149	100%
% Incr(Decr) Spring 16 to Spring 17	1%		(41%)		(19%)	

Enrollments for females in IDT increased by 1% from Spring 2016 to Spring 2017.

**Table 8- El Centro Total Networking and IDT Program Enrollment (Second Run)**

El Centro College - Total Networking + IDT						
Baseline Spring 2016 vs Spring 2017						
Term	Gender Female	%	Gender Male	%	Total	Total %
2016SP	146	36%	260	64%	406	100%
2017SP	157	40%	235	60%	392	100%
% Incr(Decr) Spring 16 to Spring 17	8%		(10%)		(3%)	

Female enrollments in Networking + IDT increased by 8% from Spring 2016 to Spring 2017. Again, the larger number of students in the IDT program had a greater impact on the combined results.

## **Polk State College**

### **Background**

Polk State College was established in 1964 and has an annual enrollment of over 10,500 students. It is a multi-campus institution with the main campus located in Winter Haven, Florida. Programs include Bachelor of Applied Science, Bachelor of Science, Associate in Arts, and Associate in Science degrees, and a wide range of certificate and workforce training options. Cliff Bennett, Professor and Department Coordinator for the Network Systems Engineering Technology, led the efforts for Polk State for this project. Rachel Pleasant, Director of Communications, provided assistance in the beginning.

Polk State elected to focus its social media strategy on its Network Systems Engineering Technology program because of the high market demand. The school had recently revised the degree and certificate to a more generalized IT degree because enrollment was beginning to fall and in need of attention. However, Polk State did not have strong business support for creating this generalized IT degree.

The goals for Polk State's social media strategy were: 1) to increase the enrollment of 18-24 year olds by 10%, 2) to re-energize the image of the program, and 3) to educate the public about the program. Overall growth in the program was deemed important as well. A decision was made to limit Polk State's social media strategy to postings on Facebook after the Director of Communications, who was supportive of the project, left the college. Although Mr. Bennett was committed to the project, he was new to social media and did not feel he could adequately perform the administrator and content creation roles for more than one platform.

## Run One

The frequency of posting and Facebook analytics for the first run are reflected Table 9. There was a gradual ramp-up of Facebook postings in the May and June timeframe, with post reach, likes, shares, and postings higher in July and August.

**Table 9- Polk State Social Media Analytics (First Run)**

Polk State College Social Media Analytics						
	# Posts in	# Actual				
Facebook	Plan	Posts	Post Reach	# Likes	# Comments	# Shares
May-16	32	6	14	0	0	0
Jun-16	32	9	67	2	0	0
Jul-16	32	20	3066	17	0	6
Aug-16	32	10	1455	0	0	0
Sep-16	32	21	503	4	0	4

Fall 2016 enrollments versus Fall 2015 baseline data are found in Table 10. Overall enrollments declined 41% with enrollments of 18-24 year olds decreasing by 51%. It cannot be determined what caused the decrease. It is possible that project factors such as social media messaging misses may have contributed to the decrease, but unless the messages were deemed highly offensive- which would have been brought to the school's attention- such large decreases were probably caused by a combination of external factors. The departure of the college's Communications Director, potential students being absorbed by the area's full IT employment, or lack of business support for the generalized Network Systems Engineering Technology program could all be potential contributors.

**Table 10- Polk State Program Enrollment (First Run)**

Polk State			
Baseline Fall 2015 vs. Fall 2016 Enrollments			
Age Category			
Semester	<25	25+	Total
Fall 2015	57	69	126
Fall 2016	28	46	74
% Incr (decr) Fall 15 to Fall 16	(51%)		(41%)

## Run Two

The frequency of postings and Facebook analytics for the second run are found in Table 11. Note that all Facebook analytics reflect significant increases in March. After analyzing the results of the previous months, Mr. Bennett developed and launched a new Facebook posting strategy in March. The overall marketing approach was changed from re-posting content from other sources to more personalized posts with a focus on currently enrolled Polk Networking program students.

**Table 11- Polk State Social Media Analytics (Second Run)**

Polk State College						
Social Media Analytics						
	# Posts in	# Actual				
Facebook	Plan	Posts	Post Reach	# Likes	# Comments	# Shares
Oct-16	32	11	530	2	0	0
Nov-16	32	22	252	1	0	1
Dec-16	32	21	706	2	0	1
Jan-17	32	3	27	4	0	0
Feb-17	32	10	590	1	0	0
Mar-17	32	4	2108	20	2	1

Spring 2017 enrollments versus Spring 2016 baseline data are found in Table 12. Overall enrollments increased 5%, attributable to the 75% increase of enrollees 25 or older. While enrollments in the targeted group of 18-24 year olds decreased by 32%, the rate of decline was slower than the previous year.

**Table 12- Polk State Program Enrollment (Second Run)**

Polk State				
Baseline Spring 2016 vs. Spring 2017 Enrollments				
Age Category				
Semester	<25	25+	Total	
Spring 2016	25	38	63	
Spring 2017	17	49	66	
% Incr (decr) Spring 16 to Spring 17	(32%)		5%	

### University of North Texas

#### Background

The University of North Texas (UNT) is a major public research university based in Denton, Texas with an enrollment of approximately 38,000 students. In 2014, the UNT's Bachelor of Arts in Information Technology (BA-IT) degree program received full accreditation by ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology). This accreditation affirmed that the BA-IT program meets all ABET requirements while still utilizing workforce courses in the supporting area. The BA-IT program is located on the UNT engineering campus which is located several miles away from the main campus in Denton. David Keathly, Principal Lecturer in Information Technology led UNT's efforts.

The overall goal of UNT's social media campaign was to increase enrollment of students in the BA-IT Program (majors in BA-IT) by 10 - 15% with an emphasis on transfer and/or currently employed populations. The college chose to target potential students who were: 1) age 20 and over, 2) had some college credit and 3) attended classes on-site. LinkedIn Facebook and Twitter were selected as the platforms for the social media campaign. Both males and females were targeted age 20 and over. Onsite students (those who come to campus) with some college credit were initially targeted with a focus on using LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter.

#### Run One

The frequency of postings and social media analytics for the first run are presented in Table 13.



**Table 13- University of North Texas Social Media Analytics (First Run)**

University of North Texas Social Media Analytics								
Facebook	# Posts in Plan	# Actual Posts	Post Reach	# Likes	# Comments	# Shares	# Impressions	Engagement
May-16	62	10	12	0	0	0	204	16
Jun-16	62	1	9	0	0	0	9	0
Jul-16	62	16	6	0	0	19	5	19
Aug-16	62	18	67	0	0	67	0	67
Sep-16	62	2	5	1	0	22	13	23
Twitter	# Posts in Plan	# Actual Posts	# Tweet Impressions	# Profile Visits	# Mentions	# Retweets	# New Followers	
May-16	93	2	94	3	0	0	0	
Jun-16	93	0	15	8	0	0	0	
Jul-16	93	0	23	1	0	0	0	
Aug-16	93	6	112	5	2	0	0	
Sep-16	93	1	15	1	0	0	0	
Instagram	# Posts in Plan	# Actual Posts	# Likes	# Comments	LinkedIn	# Posts in Plan	# Actual Posts	# Profile Views
May-16	45	2	0	0	May-16	31	1	0
Jun-16	45	0	0	0	Jun-16	31	0	0
Jul-16	45	0	0	0	Jul-16	31	0	0
Aug-16	45	0	0	0	Aug-16	31	0	0
Sep-16	45	0	0	0	Sep-16	31	1	0

One month after launching the campaign, a determination was made that the number of platforms and the number of posts projected in the original plan was unrealistic. As content was created for each application, it became apparent that some would not be as effective as others for the types of posts UNT would typically have available, and also for the target audience of working professionals and transfer students. A decision was made to focus on Facebook and Twitter for the remainder of the first run. At the same time, the project lead assumed an increased teaching load, limiting his time to develop posts.

Table 14 shows Fall 2016 enrollments versus 2015 baseline data. Overall, enrollments increased 37% from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016.

**Table 14- University of North Texas Program Enrollment (First Run)**

University of North Texas Baseline Fall 2015 vs. Fall 2016 Enrollments						
Semester	Total	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Fall 2015	112	98	88%	14	13%	112
Fall 2016	153	136	89%	17	11%	153
% Incr (decr) Fall 15 to Fall 16	37%					(1%)

## Run Two

The frequency of postings and social media analytics for the second run are provided in Table 15.

**Table 15- University of North Texas Social Media Analytics (Second Run)**

University of North Texas Social Media Analytics									
FaceBook	# Posts in	# Actual							
	Plan	Posts	Post Reach	# Likes	# Comments	# Shares	# Impressions	Engagement	
	Oct-16	62	3	6	0	0	1	16	1
	Nov-16	62	10	41	0	0	21	53	21
	Dec-16	62	0	35	1	0	0	0	0
	Jan-17	62	0	22	0	0	22	0	22
	Feb-17	62	9	83	4	0	29	171	12
Twitter	# Posts in	# Actual	# Tweet	# Profile			# New		
	Plan	Posts	Impressions	Visits	# Mentions	# Retweets	Followers		
	Oct-16	93	2	53	9	0	0	2	
	Nov-16	93	0	23	2	0	0	0	
	Dec-16	93	11	62	1	1	0	2	
	Jan-17	93	0	21	0	0	0	2	
	Feb-17	93	5	28	3	0	0	2	
Instagram	# Posts in	# Actual		#		# Posts in	# Actual		
	Plan	Posts	# Likes	Comments	LinkedIn	Plan	Posts	# Profile Views	
	Oct-16	45	0	0	0	Oct-16	31	2	1
	Nov-16	45	0	0	0	Nov-16	31	10	0
	Dec-16	45	8	0	0	Dec-16	31	8	0
	Jan-17	45	0	0	0	Jan-17	31	0	0
	Feb-17	45	0	0	0	Feb-17	31	5	2

As was the case during the first run, the goal was to drive readers either to the program's Facebook page (in the case of Twitter) or to the UNT CSE webpage for the BA-IT program (all cases). While the program did occasionally disseminate a video that was already posted on YouTube, the presence on YouTube for the program was minimal and so it was easier to include those video links in other posts like Facebook and Instagram. The second run included experimentation with LinkedIn as a platform, which yielded limited engagement. The project lead made some use of HootSuite to manage the platforms. It is not entirely clear why months during which no posts were placed on Facebook still registered engagement. Mr. Keathly surmised that this might be a result of posts being uploaded at the end of the previous month.

Spring 2017 enrollments versus 2016 baseline data are found in Table 16. Overall, enrollments increased 19% from Spring 16 to Spring 17 and 37% from Fall 15 to Fall 16. There was a 1% increase in female enrollments Spring 16 to Spring 17.

**Table 16- University of North Texas Program Enrollment (Second Run)**

University of North Texas Baseline Spring 2016 vs. Spring 2017 Enrollments						
Semester	Total	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Spring 2016	125	110	88%	15	12%	125
Spring 2017	149	129	87%	20	13%	149
% Incr (decr) Spring 16 to Spring 17	19%				1%	

### Evaluator's Comments

As the numbers describe, each school site experienced a different response to their social media campaign. The site specific descriptions present each school and context as quite different from each other, variance in expertise and social media experience of staff members, and unexpected situations such as the Dallas shooting, which shut down the program and courses at El Centro for the duration, having significant impact on enrollment for at least one, if not two semesters. Sites selected an arbitrary enrollment target increase of 10-15% which in some cases (UNT) was met, and in others (Polk State) was not. While the targets were not unanimously met, it does not necessarily suggest that the social media campaign failed or had an adverse effect, rather it points to the need to more carefully design this type of research; here, this attempt was a broad brushstroke looking at increased numbers without factoring in critical variables the team may not have known might influence outcomes: role of PR departments (limiting messaging), experience of school social media lead, type of platform, content, length, and frequency of posts, etc. As mentioned earlier, these findings on design might be more important to this area of research than looking at the actual enrollment increases or decreases. As in other early phase studies of this type, the actual data discovered may not be the data originally intended to study, but data that may be more valuable to the field in the long run.

## **E. Student Surveys and Key Findings**

In addition to collecting monthly data on social media usage from the colleges, the research team developed a survey to explore further the extent to which social media played a role in student decision-making about enrollment. The survey was posted online to the three colleges in early Fall, 2016. Survey respondents were limited to students enrolled in the programs that had been targeted by the social media campaigns. A total of 194 students completed the survey. In February 2017, a second survey was conducted that included additional questions. A total of 229 students completed the second survey.

### **Survey 1- September, 2016 (Following Run 1 of social media strategies)**

The survey found that more than a quarter of students enrolled in the targeted programs had used social media to inform their decision about enrollment. These students were asked to identify all social media platforms they accessed to learn about their program. The most commonly identified platform was Facebook, cited by 83.6% of respondents. The next most frequently cited platform was Twitter at 26.2%. These respondents were next asked to indicate the extent to which social media influenced their decision to attend college. Respondents were given a Likert scale and asked to select one of five possible responses (Extremely influential, Very influential, Somewhat influential, Slightly influential, Not at all influential, N/A). Roughly 76% of respondents who used social media to learn about the targeted program indicated that it had had at least a slight influence on their decision to enroll. Less than 25% of those who used social media to learn about the targeted program said it had no influence on their decision to enroll. This suggests that the full potential of social media as a recruitment tool may be dependent upon colleges building greater awareness among prospective students that social media is a relevant source for information about their programs. To do this, college messaging via e-mail, website, print, or other dissemination media could be used to lead targeted audiences to social media platforms.

The 128 respondents who had indicated that they had *not* used social media to learn about their program were then asked to briefly describe how they did learn about it. Nearly one third (32%) of these respondents said they had learned about their program from an advisor, friend or family member. Typical responses included, “My high school professor told me about the UNT program for computer science,” and, “I learned about the program through friends and my brother.” A smaller group of respondents (8%) pointed to a college tour or campus visit as the source of their familiarity with the program they entered. One respondent explained, “I toured the college when I was a Junior in High School, and got introduced to it then.” For students who highlighted electronic sources of program information, school websites were most frequently cited (20% of total respondents). In addition to school websites, roughly 14% of respondents identified the internet as the source of their information.

## Survey 2- February, 2017 – (Following Run 2 of social media strategies)

The second student survey found that fewer than one-fifth of the 229 total respondents (17%) had used social media to inform their decision about enrollment. Nearly 60% of this group of respondents identified Facebook as a platform they accessed to inform their enrollment decision. This was followed by YouTube (36% of respondents) and Twitter (27% of respondents). Although YouTube was not specifically included in any of the school strategies, YouTube videos were linked from both Facebook and Twitter posts. Among these respondents who used social media to inform their enrollment decision, 76% indicated that it had had at least a slight influence on their decision to enroll.

The 153 respondents to the second survey who indicated that they had *not* used social media to learn about their program were asked to briefly describe how they did learn about it. Thirty-three per cent of these respondents said they had learned about their program from an advisor, friend or family member, and approximately 9% of the respondents described some existing familiarity with the school, either as an already enrolled student or as a community resident. For students who highlighted electronic sources of program information, school websites were again most frequently cited (12% of total respondents). In addition to school websites, roughly 9% of respondents identified the internet as the source of their information.

Both surveys asked respondents to identify the kind of social media messaging schools should use to get prospective students interested in enrolling. Responses varied between those offering recommendations for specific platforms and those providing descriptions of the type of messaging that might be effective. The colleges' selection of Facebook and Twitter for their social media strategies was correct based on the recommendations of student survey takers. However, the decrease in the percentage of respondents suggesting these two platforms in the second survey, along with the increase of Reddit as a recommended platform, highlight the challenges that colleges' face keeping their social media strategies current. Table 17 compares the percentage of respondents from each survey who recommended each of five platforms.

**Table 17- Recommendations for Social Media Platforms**

Platform	Percentage of Respondents (Survey 1)	Percentage of Respondents (Survey 2)	Difference
Facebook	24%	16%	-8%
Twitter	15%	10%	-5%
Instagram	11%	9%	-2%
Snapchat (emerging)	7%	8%	+1%
Reddit (emerging)	3%	9%	+6%

The examples below are representative of the kinds of suggestions that respondents made for message content:

- Host lots of fun, outreach events and advertise on social media. (lots of pictures of college kids having fun, doing activities with computers, etc.)
- I don't think that the college should do much more than regular promoting, unless they understand the trends on these respective social media websites.
- Images/videos of current students doing cool things.
- Though bias shows, promoting CompSci through Reddit would be beneficial since that is where the more 'technologically inclined' individuals spend their time at. UNT has an unofficial Sub-Reddit, which has some traction.
- Try not to convey the message using recent trends and fads, it's very unappealing. The best thing to do would be to give all the benefits of the school, while eliminating all the extra fluff.

Complete survey data is stored at <https://go.edc.org/edcsteppublic-research>.

### **Evaluator's Comments**

The research team sought to capture student data from a more active perspective (surveys vs. usage analytics) with relative success over the three target schools: 194 responses from the first survey and 229 responses from the second, providing a useful basis of knowledge about how students felt about the campaign and particular platforms. In addition to helpful findings about platform of choice (Facebook), it allowed students to weigh in on the design and usefulness of social media in recruitment with an overall suggestion that yes, social media should have a place in current recruitment and retention practices, but more importantly, it will have a larger and increasingly more critical role in the future. This supports the notion that findings from this exploratory study point toward the need to continue this work in more targeted and informed manners. For example, we know that the platform of today may not be popular (or even existent) next year, therefore research questions need to address what kinds of questions are best posed and responded to on social media, what is the extent and division between passive use (reading posts or tweets) and interactive (responding, engaging, contributing), activities that themselves dictate particular platforms, and how does that factor in recruitment?

## **F. Interviews of college team members**

Researchers interviewed the key project leads at each college in May 2017. The leads were asked to reflect on their involvement in the project and to highlight what they gained from the experience, what challenges they confronted, what they learned and what advice they had for other schools looking at social media as a student recruitment tool. The full listing of interview questions is attached as Appendix E. Interviewees from each college were as follows: 1) El Centro College, Francisco Rodriguez; 2) Polk State College, Cliff Bennett and 3) UNT- David Keathly.

According to the leads, the project provided both institutional and individual gains. It helped underline the necessity of involving school marketing departments, and in at least one instance resulted in clarifying how best to leverage a marketing department for social media messaging. The leads were also able to point to an increased online presence for their programs, with a foundation laid for building a larger number of followers. One lead noted the growth in his understanding of how to better shape a social media strategy, indicating that adding the “personal touch” (student pictures/student stories) to his Facebook postings created much higher engagement.

Each lead faced a challenge carving sufficient time out of his schedule to implement the school’s social media strategies. For example, midway through the project, one lead was assigned additional teaching responsibilities giving him no choice but to prioritize those responsibilities over tasks related to the project. For the other leads, project tasks represented an add-on to already full schedules. While the project helped to create relationships with marketing departments, at two of the schools it did not eliminate the challenge of negotiating messaging through approval processes. In the case of El Centro, this also meant limiting platform choices to Facebook and Twitter. The actual process of developing content for messaging also proved to be a challenge, with one lead wishing there had been more opportunities to brainstorm messaging with the other two schools.

The leads had a variety of suggestions for technical departments considering whether or not to implement a social media strategy for the purposes of recruiting. These encouraged others to: 1) get students involved in order to better understand the social media platforms they frequent, 2) use platforms for their campaigns that they already use, 3) make messaging “easy” by doing things like taking photos in classrooms and posting them, 4) create and stick to a plan to ensure consistency, 5) have one individual responsible for implementing the campaign (i.e., dedicated effort), and 6) engage college recruiters in the effort to help build an audience.

Despite the challenges they faced over the life of the project, all three leads indicated that they intend to continue their social media activities. In the case of Polk State, Mr. Bennett planned to use Facebook over the 2017 summer in a new way- as a tool to engage connect with and 45 high school students that were already enrolled in the program in the Fall program. He believed this would be the most effective method of communication, as the students would not be on campus and thus would not be dropping by.

## **Evaluator's Comments**

Responses from project leads at the participating colleges were summarized into useful suggestions for the next iteration of such campaigns, either at their schools or elsewhere. More importantly however was the evidence that having such a study involving these schools helped force the issue of developing a social media campaign, which in turn brought to the forefront the benefits and challenges each school must face when embarking on such campaigns, including navigating existing PR structures and territories, understanding student culture and population, understanding the communication nuances of each platform, providing adequate support and staff for social media campaigns, and the importance of formative feedback at frequent junctures. These process findings might be more valuable to the field than actual student percentages and platform choice discoveries.



## **G. Factors Affecting Implementation**

Based upon the experience of the participating colleges, common issues affecting their project implementation fell into three categories:

- 1) Administrative support- This varied from school to school, but never reached the level anticipated at the project's outset. At El Centro, while the lead had the support of the school's Public Relations Director, the approval policies regulating social media posting limited the frequency and restricted the content of messaging. In particular, the lead contended with a marketing department that typically favors more general "umbrella" that promotes the entire college, rather than a particular department's initiative or a particular course. This led to tension related to campaign themes and branding. At Polk State and UNT, the absence of support from school marketing departments meant that individual leads bore sole responsibility for engineering social media campaigns. In both instances, administrators placed additional teaching responsibilities on the leads, reducing the already limited time they had to devote to the project.
- 2) Limited social media and/ or marketing skills level- While the leads at both El Centro and UNT had a strong, working familiarity with Facebook and Twitter, and to a lesser extent LinkedIn and YouTube, neither one had ever had full responsibility for running a social media campaign. In addition, neither had extensive experience generating social media content aimed at the audiences targeted by their respective recruitment campaigns. At Polk State, the departure of a marketer with strong social media skills left a project lead with only novice experience generating social media content and marketing. In the case of all three schools, limited experience interpreting social media analytics meant messaging was rarely adjusted to take into account what the data suggested regarding post and messaging effectiveness.
- 3) Unanticipated developments- It is difficult to overstate the impact that the shooting at El Centro had on the entire school, let alone the project. The college was closed for two weeks, and systems did not return to operational status for at least a month. That time period was crucial to fall recruitment. The destroyed IDT lab further impacted the ability of the college to grow enrollments in the IDT program as they simply could not schedule all the classes due to the IDT lab being destroyed. Overall enrollment numbers remained unchanged for Fall 2015 and Fall 2016; however, with the one IDT lab destroyed, the IDT program could not service even the "normal" number of students much less grow the numbers.

### **Evaluator's Comments**

This summary is a very valuable distillation of the study. Much of the subcategories of data collection and analysis detailed above leads to these three areas of action which colleges can address in multiple ways. Again, to reiterate the value of this exploratory study, just knowing these areas to address puts the field somewhat ahead. A future study might begin with these elements (particularly 1 & 2), test and research different factors and interventions, and develop a set of practices or recommendations.

## H. Sample Postings

### El Centro College

El Centro postings sought to grab the reader's attention with visually stimulating graphics or links to additional information. The examples provided below reflected higher likes and post reach in Facebook than others.

Project lead Francisco explained, "My thinking with the *Untangle Your Career Options!* posting was to have a "catchy" line and to illustrate it with humorous photos. I specifically wanted the photos to be women because that was a population we were targeting." The last posting illustrates El Centro's messaging aimed at engaging potential female students.



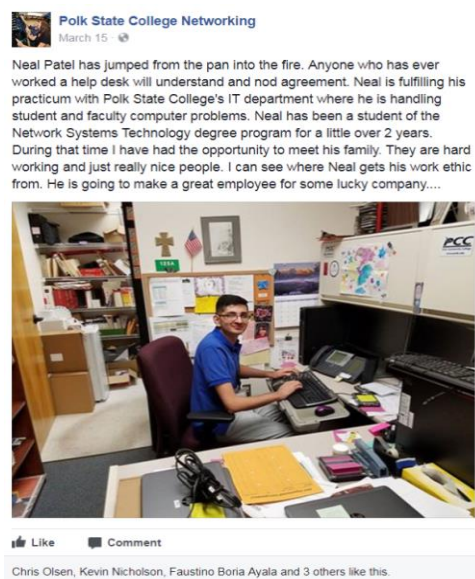
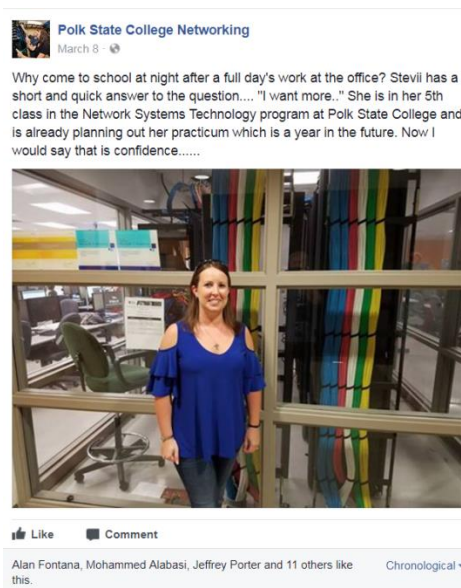
## Polk State College

Initial messaging by Mr. Bennett emphasized stereotypical male images, as represented by the sample post below. He quickly realized that this post and others like it represented content that was not appealing to women. An example of these early posts is shown below.



A brainstorming teleconference facilitated by the Co-PI featuring SME Laura Nicholas and local women leaders in IT yielded a number of suggestions for altering the messaging. Follow-up consultation strengthened the messaging by focusing on themes more likely to engage women. This resulted in a more “personal” approach in Mr. Bennett’s posts during the second run. In March 2017, Polk State’s posts began to include photos of program participants and quotes explaining why they enrolled in the program (example postings below). This shift in messaging resulted in significant increases in reach and likes in Facebook

in March despite a decrease in the number of posts. In February, 2017, 10 Facebook posts resulted in a reach of 590, with 1 like. In March, 4 Facebook posts generated a reach of 2108 and 20 likes. (See Table 11 on page 12.)





## University of North Texas

The UNT posts shown below include video clips and represent a few of the more successful posts that garnered likes, impressions and shares. These videos were uploaded to Facebook directly to maximize exposure on Facebook and also uploaded to YouTube to use as an open reference. Project lead David Keathly discovered that using social media effectively as a recruiting tool requires a person fully dedicated to this task. Full-time faculty members do not have the time to stay on top of all the tasks including creating accounts, selecting tools and learning how to most efficiently use the platforms, finding content to post, soliciting followers that are in the target audience, maintaining a presence and fresh content on a regular and frequent basis, and keeping up with the analytics to then adapt messaging as needed

Another feature on Kyle Taylor BAIT Graduate  
<http://www.dealcrunch.com/.../how-the-penny-hoarder-became-a-.../>



Like Comment Share

UNT BAIT shared National Convergence Technology Center's video.  
June 26 at 10:09pm · 🌐

Brett McCormick - a UNT BAIT Graduate!!!  
<http://connectedtech.org/b.../student-feature-brett-mccormick/>



82 Views

National Convergence Technology Center  
June 26 at 3:47pm · 🌐

Got a minute? Check out this month's 1 minute student highlight featuring University of North Texas alum, Brett McCormick! Read the full article on the CTC Blog: <http://connectedtech.org/b.../student-feature-brett-mccormick/> Know a student with a great story? Let us know!

Like Comment Share



UNT Computer Science and Engineering

May 22 · 🌐

Jessica Hayden Everett graduated in the first Computer Engineering class in Spring 2007, and was part of the very first 6-person Capstone/Senior Design Team in the 2 semester sequence. This was the first time we had ever offered a capstone sequence for any of our degree programs. Now we have three and have 6 - 10 teams per year in each one! She is shown here with the Wall of Fame picture with her teammates.

Like Comment Share

Describing the rationale behind these posts, Mr. Keathly explained, “I think followers are looking to identify with other people who have been successful in graduating and finding interesting jobs. That is also one of the most frequent questions I am asked as an advisor and in my introductory freshman classes ‘What can I do when I graduate with their degree?’ or ‘What kinds of jobs are people getting with this degree?’ or ‘How likely am I to get a good job with this degree?’

## I. Recommendations

The purpose of “Building Social Media Capacity of ATE Centers and Programs” was to understand the potential for academic programs to implement a best practice social media strategy to communicate and engage with potential students with regards to academic program recruitment. Initial funding supported a very limited pilot project. The recommendations for future projects and to the field include:

### Training

**Ensure that the lead people for each college know how to use a social media platform, craft messages, and retrieve and interpret analytics for the platforms. Using a platform for personal use requires different experience and skills than using one to run a sustained campaign.**

Co-PI Beheler spoke with each of the nine applicant colleges to ascertain their skill level using various social media platforms as well as their level of commitment toward implementing a social media campaign. All three leads of the schools selected to participate in the project indicated that they used social media regularly, had a real business need to grow their programs and appeared to be dedicated to doing the social media work demanded by the project.

It became apparent early in the implementation phase that knowing how to use the platform and developing the content for distribution to accomplish a recruitment goal was more difficult than being a user of social media. The leads had more experience with simple messaging like posting pictures than the more complicated and time consuming work involved in drafting new content and posting on a regular schedule.

Equally significant, while casual users of a social media platform may be interested in knowing the number of “likes” or “re-tweets” in response to their posts, they may not have the skill to retrieve and interpret platform to improve their messaging. Moreover, they may not know how to enact efficiencies in their posting, such as repurposing a message for different platforms, using one platform to promote another, or using a tool such as Hootsuite or Buffer to schedule posts.

### Marketing Support

**Ensure that a marketing specialist is sufficiently involved throughout the project to ensure messaging is very well-targeted, consistent, and persistent.**

The leads at the colleges were faculty, not marketing experts, and the leadership team expected that they would benefit from some technical assistance. Thus, consultation on effective marketing messaging was provided at the workshop in February, 2016 by the social media SMEs. This was supplemented by presentations and discussions led by SMEs during

monthly teleconferences. The college leads however, were not prepared to apply fully the suggestions and advice they received without further support. The leads were technical faculty and could not be expected to be savvy about marketing.

El Centro College and Polk State College had involvement from their Public Relations/Marketing departments, but in the case of El Centro, the Public Relations department's workload limited their ability to assist, and in the case of Polk State, the Director of Communications resigned unexpectedly. AT UNT, the lead was not constrained by a marketing department's policies. As a result, he was in a position to experiment in ways the other leads could not.

A college wishing to accomplish real business change via social media should be mindful of the importance of marrying content knowledge to marketing expertise. This may necessitate a "team" approach to message development, while still requiring someone to shoulder responsibility for the mechanics of timely postings and social analytic reviews. It is possible that a group of colleges with the same business need could share marketing messaging support.

### **Fully Dedicated Staff**

**Ensure that adequate funding is provided to support having a staff member who can be dedicated to the social media efforts as part of their job responsibilities, and not as an add-on activity.**

Executing a social media campaign to accomplish a grant or college goal should be part of a person's official job responsibilities, not an add-on to be worked into already-packed days. Additionally, someone should also be able to back up the lead when necessary so the campaign continues without interruption.

All the college leads focused on content that was graphic-, photo-, or video-rich rather than simply text. These postings took a time to develop, with the leads reporting they truly did not have that time to dedicate to developing the quantity of postings projected in their original plans. Funding for this pilot was very limited, so the work, done with modest stipend, was perceived as an add-on.

Having support from the college administration for the effort is imperative; assigning an individual with a specific percentage of their work dedicated to the task of executing the plan would ensure that the work is regularly completed.

## Ongoing Requirements for Technical Assistance

**Those leading/executing a social media campaign must have a way to keep up with emerging social media platforms and on student migration from one to another.**

Although Mr. Snyder presented a webinar on new platforms, getting campaign leaders to switch or add platforms simply did not happen. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube were popular at the beginning of the pilot and were the platforms used. Generally, no more than two of these platforms were used at any time by the schools.

Given the explosion of new media platforms and social media networks during the past few years, there is significant justification for academic programs to continue to adopt strategies to leverage these platforms more effectively. The research indicates academic programs currently are using or experimenting with multiple platforms – from Facebook to YouTube to Twitter – but in many cases without clearly articulated outcomes, expectations, and strategies. The team recommends that programs start developing written strategies leveraging these emerging platforms. The strategy should include a review of current information dissemination practices to determine how the use of social media platforms may streamline current communication practices in order to maximize the use of existing resources. Further, there must be time allowed for training and integration of a new platform into the repertoire of the person executing the social media campaign.

There are means by which colleges can use multiple social media platforms for information dissemination. These means include the establishment of platforms that integrate and support each other. For example, a department YouTube channel can be supported by Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn platforms. Examples of utilizing different platforms include:

- A department video featuring a recent graduate is hosted on the department YouTube channel and also as a Facebook video.
- The first line of the video description is a link back to the department website and/or Facebook page.
- A posting on the department Twitter and Facebook feeds includes a description of the video along with a link to the video and a link to the department website.
- Information posted on the department Facebook page and Twitter account also links users to the department website.

It is the position of the research team that the adoption of new media platforms need to be part of existing dissemination activities. The creation and adoption of a coherent strategy for leveraging social media may result in the elimination and/or shifting of some dissemination activities to the new platforms, but even so, additional time is required (faculty reassignment time, hiring of a part-time marketing/social media person, etc.).

The team recommends the adoption of platforms that allow for real-time engagement, such as a Facebook, to allow for more regular communication between the academic programs

and their audiences. For this to be effective, however, the academic programs will need to increase regular communications to 3-4 times per week, at a minimum. While this may seem daunting at first, a key to success is that more regular communication requires a smaller amount of content. For example, a Facebook post can be disseminated first (as a whole) with individual segments of content being disseminated as a follow up to other platforms.

### **Evaluation comments: Summative paragraphs**

These recommendations are aligned with the findings summarized previously. The points made on a well-trained staff, involved marketing team, adequate resources, and flexibility of technology adoption are all suggestions that will require considerable institutional shifts, i.e. none are trivial to do correctly. It is likely, based on this small-scale experiment that institutions will shift very gradually at different rates, depending on many factors, including: 1) what value (or perceived value) they place on social media as a PR platform, 2) institutional flexibility and ability to shift directions, and 3) extent of research on social media communications outcomes available and directly pertinent to their institution.

This last point might be the most important lesson gleaned from this study; that this study has uncovered much useful knowledge that points to and supports the development of a larger-scale study with both a deeper and broader intervention (social media campaign across different platforms for longer periods with outcomes studied in methodical ways that might yield market-useful results in the language that PR and Communications departments understand. In many ways this is a market-research exercise conducted by academics who are not necessarily familiar with the factors and activators of marketing (this was pointed out earlier). Consequently, a marketing expert might be involved as a lead partner in the next-phase research of idiom.

The team has conducted a very earnest and dedicated effort with limited resources to produce knowledge that has proven useful to this nascent field. This alone should argue for additional research in this ever-changing, but necessary context.



## **Addendum to Final Report**

### **Background**

Polk State College's Networking program has been in a steep decline with respect to enrollments. The final report narrative describes Polk State's involvement during the research period and the results its use of social media had on student recruitment over two semesters.

Cliff Bennett, Department Chair, reported that he learned a great deal during the specific research period, and that he planned to continue using social media to grow enrollments beyond the grant period. Mr. Bennett identified dual enrollment as an area that his program had not approached for a number of years. With the approval of the administration of both Polk State and the target high school, Saddlecreek High School, Mr. Bennett promoted the opportunities for dual enrollment available in the fall of 2017 to high school students and their parents during the spring 2017 recruitment events. At that time, 45 students tentatively signed up for dual enrollment, with the approval of their parents. Mr. Bennett's goal was to employ social media over the summer to keep that number of dual enrollment students as high as possible. Additionally, he planned to capitalize on what he learned in the previous social media campaigns regarding the effectiveness of featuring student testimonials in his posts.

This addendum presents the six Facebook posts that Mr. Bennett executed over the summer and an analysis of gender and ethnicity for the dual enrolled students. It provides similar data for the regular on-campus students.

### **Results**

Mr. Bennett believes that the summer social media campaign confirmed his experience from his earlier campaigns- posts featuring students and their stories are more effective. Those posts which featured photos of students and a narrative describing their career aspirations registered greater reach and engagement. He plans to continue social media posts featuring students for the foreseeable future.

With respect to results from the summer campaign affecting enrollments, Mr. Bennett reported that the high school involved changed their plans over the summer to allow only 15 students to participate in the dual enrollment opportunity. Mr. Bennett was given no reason for this change, but the net result was that 15 of the 45 students originally enrolled in dual credit for fall 2017 enrolled. The other 30 students were kept in high school classes on the high school campus. However, Mr. Bennett reports that the 15 students who did enroll are currently retained and doing well in the classes. Further, he reports that the high school has agreed to allow 25 students in the program in fall 2018 and has agreed to start a similar program in business administration.


Additionally, he reported that his entire program enrollment for fall 2017 is 60 including the 15 high school students who are not officially counted because they are less than 18 years of age.

The number of dual-enrolled students is significant in light of the low “regular” enrollments. The analytics and the posts are shown below.

## Social Media Analytics

Polk State College Social Media Analytics					
Facebook					
Postings	Date	Post Reach	# Likes	# Comments	# Shares
5 New Photos of Students Added	6/26	91	3	-	-
Why so Many Top Hackers Hail from Russia	6/26	119	-	-	-
Paving the Path to Successful Careers - Fuhrman	6/26	2447	52	11	2
Congratulations to Mr. Ayala	7/11	209	8	-	-
Paving the Path to Successful Careers - Freeland	7/21	201	8	-	-
Paving the Path to Successful Careers - Salzman	8/7	2149	19	3	3

## Facebook Posts

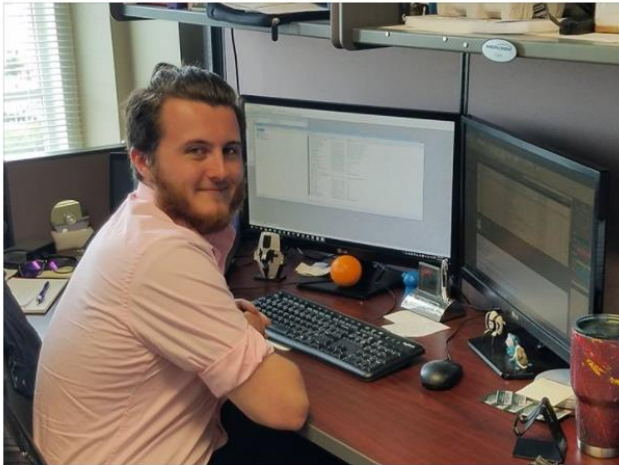

**Polk State College Networking**  
 June 26 · 🌐

Lakeland Collegiate: Paving the Path to Successful Careers

Sam Fuhrman

Sam Fuhrman made it his goal to be among the best of the 2009 freshmen class of the Polk State College Collegiate High School (CHS), and he did just that. He took advantage of a partnership between CHS and the Polk State College Network Systems Engineering Technology AS degree program. The partnership allowed Sam to begin industry level college IT classes during his junior year at CHS. Sam worked hard and was rewarded for his efforts by being hired by MidFlorida Credit Union during his senior year of high school. Sam currently works as a Project Analyst.

As a Project Analyst, Sam makes sure that new IT related software and hardware products being purchased by the bank integrate seamlessly with other products currently being used. His latest project involves the integration of another banking group that was recently acquired by MidFlorida.



52 Likes 11 Comments 2 Shares



**Polk State College Networking**

June 26 · 🌐

<http://bit.ly/2sT9X6r> Why So Many Top Hackers Hail from Russia



**Polk State College Networking** added 5 new photos.

June 26 · 🌐

<http://bit.ly/2sT9X6r>



👍 Like    💬 Comment

Virginia Richard, Kevin Nicholson and Richard Brown like this.



## Polk State College Networking

July 11 · 🌐

### Congratulations:

We would like to extend our congratulations to Faustino Boria Ayala. Mr. Ayala recently completed Polk State's Network Systems Engineering Technology Program and has accepted a position with Citizens Bank and Trust. He is pictured with Jason Hayes (at right), Network Manager for the banking group. Mr. Hayes and Senior Vice President/CIO Chad Tagtow (not shown) have been a driving force in the development of IT programs at Polk State College.

Citizens Bank and Trust has been a leader in community banking since 1920. Polk State is delighted to partner with members of this visionary organization.



👍 Like

💬 Comment

Rachel Pleasant, Richard Brown, Gordon F Snyder Jr and 5 others like this.



### Polk State College Networking

July 21 · 🌐

#### Lakeland Collegiate: Paving the Path to Successful Careers

Ashley Freeland

Ashley Freeland was homeschooled up to the point of entering Polk State College's Lakeland Collegiate High School. As a member of Collegiate's first cohort, there were only two Associate in Science degree tracks at that time: Nursing and Information Technology (IT). Ashley chose to pursue a degree in IT and excelled in her studies, earning membership in Phi Theta Kappa, Polk State College's National Honor Society. After graduating with Honors with a Polk State Associate in Arts with specialization in Computer Information Systems, she attended the University of South Florida (USF) where she earned a Bachelor of Applied Science degree. She currently works as the head of the Application Support Group for CenterState Banks.

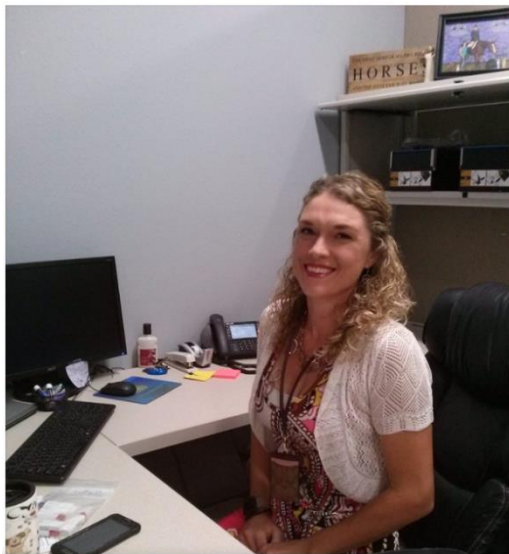
Looking back, she says the skills she gained as a Polk State Collegiate student have been the most beneficial to her career. It was at Polk State College that she gained an understanding of hardware, software, and networking--skills she has put to use throughout her career. She also recalls, with a smile on her lips, that she achieved the highest scores in her class on the A+ Certification Exams that year. She states she will always be proud of

her accomplishments in the program, but also sincerely grateful for all of the opportunities it provided.

Ashley went to work with CenterState while pursuing her bachelor's degree. Mark Brown, a former professor of hers, had taken a position as the Information Security Officer at CenterState, and hired her as a part-time consultant. As CenterState Bank grew (and continues to grow through acquisitions), Ashley's became a full-time Application Administrator and her responsibilities increased.

Although a professed workaholic who loves her job, the good fortune that Ashley has experienced in her career has also extended into her personal life. She married her sweetheart Eric Anthony in 2010 and gave birth to a beautiful baby girl this past February. She has remained an accomplished Equestrian over the years, and recently won a major competition while pregnant--and on a horse that had bone problems!

Ashley has become a master at one thing for sure: meeting problems head-on...and winning!



👍 Like

💬 Comment

Lana George, Mary Ellen Schmitt, Cindy Scofield and 5 others like this.





## Polk State College Networking

August 7 · 🌐

Lakeland Collegiate: Paving the Path to Successful Careers

Trafenia Salzman

Sometimes a single event can change a person's life forever. For Trafenia Salzman, this is absolutely the case. While she was attending a local high school, she received a marketing postcard from the Polk State College Lakeland Collegiate High School. The card indicated that she could get free college credit and have the autonomy to make her own schedule. That was enough to encourage her to attend the advertised information session. At the time, only two Polk State Associate in Science degree programs were offered through the Collegiate program: Information Technology and Business. Trafenia chose IT, and her life course was forever changed.

Trafenia was an outstanding student--blindingly positive and consummately kind to all those in her sphere. She studied hard and mastered the skills associated with industry-level computer systems. She broadened her studies to include Business, ultimately working toward an Associate in Arts degree that included specializations in Computer Networking and Business Administration. At just 17 she was placed as an intern at CenterState Bank. Being both a student and an intern was a challenging, but her determination to excel within the combination of experiences paid off. Trafenia was offered a full-time position, and CenterState has been her home for the past nine years. She now works in Jacksonville.

After becoming a full-time employee, Trafenia decided to get a bachelor's degree in International Business at the University of North Florida (2017). She briefly returned to Polk State to take a few courses for transfer, as the

location and convenience couldn't be beat. CenterState Bank has a long history of encouraging its employees to advance their education, and the company helped support her with a flexible schedule so she could attend college full time. In 2016, she completed a study abroad opportunity in International Economics through the Beijing International Studies University, broadening the host of assets she brings to CenterState.

Trafenia currently works as an IT Controls Specialist. In this position she oversees information technology services for new employees, assists with upgrades and services for employees who change company assignments, provides support for all bank applications, provides access controls and audit functions for the bank, and acts as one of the technical contacts for many bank vendors and bank applications built in house.

Trafenia is happily married to Robert Salzman, also a Polk alumnus. Robert earned his Polk State Associate in Science in Nursing degree and currently works as a registered nurse at St. Vincent's Hospital in Jacksonville. Beloved by faculty and staff, both Robert and Trafenia have shared connections with many students and instructors at the College. Trafenia has also continued friendships with many of her fellow Lakeland Collegiate High School alumni.

Trafenia's advice to anyone considering the Lakeland Collegiate High School program is: "Give it a try! Just do it!"



19 Likes 3 Comments 3 Shares

# Appendix A

## Social Media SMEs Contributing to the Project

Peter Ellis DIF Design Springfield, Massachusetts	Gordon Snyder Springfield Technical Community College Springfield, Massachusetts
Tish Grier TishGrier.com Easthampton, Massachusetts	Tad Staley Scrybe, Inc. San Francisco, California
Carol Hart The Wiring Whiz Enfield, Connecticut	David Sweeney Viz-bang! Agawam, Massachusetts
Jason Kluk-Barany Creative Green Marketing Westerville, Ohio	Jason Turcotte Turcotte Data & Design Easthampton, Massachusetts
Laura Nicholas IBM Global Services Berwyn, Pennsylvania	Michael Qaissaunee Brookdale Community College Lincroft, New Jersey

# Appendix B

## Social Media Campaign Recording Template



## SOCIAL MEDIA RECORDING TEMPLATE

Key Personnel \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Information \_\_\_\_\_

Component of Social Media Plan	
<b>A. Goals/ Objectives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>List the recruitment goals and objectives of your social media strategy.</li></ul>	
<b>B. Target Audience</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Describe the audience you are targeting with your social media strategy.</li><li>Identify all significant demographics of your target audience. For example:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Age range</li><li>○ Gender</li><li>○ Ethnicity</li><li>○ Employment status</li><li>○ School status</li><li>○ Other</li></ul></li></ul>	

Component of Social Media Plan								
<b>C. Platforms</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify with an “X” which of the following platforms will be part of your social media strategy.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facebook</li> <li>Twitter</li> <li>YouTube</li> <li>Vine</li> <li>Instagram</li> <li>Tumblr</li> <li>Other?</li> </ul> </li> <li>Indicate with an “X” what type of content will be posted on each platform in your strategic plan.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formal?</li> <li>Informal?</li> <li>Text?</li> <li>Video?</li> <li>Audio?</li> <li>Other?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Part of Plan?</b>	<b>Formal?</b>	<b>Informal?</b>	<b>Text?</b>	<b>Video?</b>	<b>Audio?</b>	<b>Other? (Identify)</b>
	<b>Facebook</b>							
	<b>Twitter</b>							
	<b>YouTube</b>							
	<b>Vine</b>							
	<b>Instagram</b>							
	<b>Tumblr</b>							
	<b>Other</b>							
<b>D. Key Messages</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide examples of the kind of content you intend to post as part of your social media strategy.</li> </ul>								

Component of Social Media Plan				
<b>E. Posting Schedule</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify for each platform in your social media strategy:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Day(s) of the week content will be posted</li> <li>Time of day content will be posted.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Days Content Will Be Posted</b>	<b>Time(s) of Day</b>	
	<b>Facebook</b>			
	<b>Twitter</b>			
	<b>YouTube</b>			
	<b>Vine</b>			
	<b>Instagram</b>			
	<b>Tumblr</b>			
	<b>Other</b>			
<b>F. Analytics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the social analytic tools you will use to assess the effectiveness of your social media strategy.</li> <li>Indicate how frequently you will use each analytic tool.</li> <li>Identify what you will measure with the analytic tools you have chosen. For example:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reach</li> <li># responses to posts</li> <li># shares/ likes/ retweets</li> <li># interactions in general</li> <li># comments (positive/ negative)</li> <li># impressions</li> <li># Click throughs- to information, enrollment, event registration, etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Platform</b>	<b>Analytic Tool(s)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>What is measured?</b>
	<b>Facebook</b>			
	<b>Twitter</b>			
	<b>YouTube</b>			
	<b>Vine</b>			
	<b>Instagram</b>			
	<b>Tumblr</b>			
	<b>Other</b>			

Component of Social Media Plan	
<p><b>G. Modifications to Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe how fidelity to the plan will be determined.</li> <li>• Identify how you will measure incremental progress towards meeting your recruitment goals. For <b>example</b>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Attendance at informational event</li> <li>○ # of enrollment forms completed</li> <li>○ # of enrollment forms submitted</li> <li>○ # of requests for more information</li> <li>○ # favorite/ share/ like a social media post or account registers</li> <li>○ # responses to a social media post or account</li> <li>○ # of times members of target audience post their own accounts to one of your platforms</li> <li>○ # enroll</li> <li>○ #attend first class</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Identify what trends in your social analytic data, or what trends in incremental progress measures will trigger revisions in your social media strategy.</li> </ul>	

# Appendix C

## College Interview Questions

1. Describe the most significant gains you experienced implementing your social media strategy.
2. Describe the most significant challenges you faced. Consider how the following impacted your ability to implement your social media plan:
  - Your own familiarity using social media
  - Your ability to share, instruct, or guide others to use social media – Your college’s policies
  - Unexpected factors
3. Rank the order of the following social media platforms in terms of effectiveness in reaching potential students (1: most effective, 3: least effective):
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - Instagram
  - YouTube
  - LinkedIn
  - Website
4. What do you think made these effective?
5. Can you describe or cite 2-3 of your most effective posts? Please send copies of these.
6. Were there any other social media platforms you used? If you did, how effective were they?
7. Based upon your experience in this project, what advice would you give to other college technical departments considering whether or not to implement a social media strategy for the purposes of recruiting students? In addition to the technical departments, what other departments or administrative units need be involved with a social media recruitment strategy?
8. What is the future of this work at your college now that “funding is ending”?