

Connecting Communities: A Case Study of Social Media Recruitment at Three Community
Colleges

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ABSTRACT

In addition to recruitment pressures felt by all in higher education, community colleges have the unique challenge of communicating with students of all ages, interests, and academic levels, and doing so with limited staff and resources. Many recruiters have turned to social media as an important tool for reaching potential students. However, for community colleges with few staff, social media communication can be difficult and time-consuming. This study explores how community college administrators are using social media as a recruitment tool, and how this use aligns with students' needs and expectations. This two-part study employs uses and gratifications theory to guide qualitative interviews with the social media administrators at three Virginia community colleges and focus groups with current students at each of the colleges. This study takes a unique approach to theory by comparing the uses and gratifications of both the message creator and user. Social media administrators at the community colleges were found to use social media to gratify their awareness, recruitment, and reach/engagement needs. Students thinking about the recruitment process were found to expect community colleges' social media content to gratify their needs for socialization, discovery, and access. Administrators are meeting many of the students' reported social media recruitment needs but could use the data provided in this study to improve their social media efforts in a few emerging areas.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Community colleges have to communicate with potential students of all ages, interests and education levels to recruit new students. Community college administrators have started using social media as a way to communicate with all of these different people, but communicating effectively via social media can be difficult and time consuming. This two part study analyzed how community college administrators are currently using social media as a recruiting tool, and how students want community colleges to communicate with them on social media for recruitment purposes. The findings show that community college administrators use social media in an addition to more traditional media, such as websites and e-mail. Administrators were found to use social media, because they believed it would allow them to create awareness, recruit students, and increase the reach and engagement of their content. Students reported that they want administrators to post content that will facilitate socialization, help them find information in the discovery process, and will be easily accessible. For the most part, administrators are meeting the reported needs of students with their social media recruitment communication, but could make improvements in select areas.

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Introduction

The way that colleges and universities market to potential students has changed. Gone are the days where an institution could rely on its prestige to survive. Instead, institutions have begun to adopt many of the same marketing and communication strategies as for-profit organizations, including embracing social media. Carr (2015), defined social media as, "Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others" (p. 50). Social media are no longer simply a means for people to connect with other individuals but have become a necessity, which allow organizations to remain relevant. Ninety-two percent of marketers admit that social media are important in business and that these platforms have increased their business' exposure (Kusinitz, 2014). Almost half of Americans believe that organizations need a strong social media presence (Walters, 2016). Forty million small businesses have pages on Facebook, 83% of Fortune 500 companies are on Twitter and over five million businesses have joined Instagram (Smith, 2017; Instagram, 2017). Over 90% of higher education institutions use some type of social media (Hootsuite, 2017). However, while social media can be a necessary and convenient tool for communicating, these media introduce new challenges and expectations.

Community colleges have an additional challenge when it comes to communicating with potential students. Community colleges must cater to an extremely diverse group of people, including recent high school graduates, delayed enrollment students, those returning to school late in life, high school students looking to get ahead, individuals

looking for personal or professional development opportunities, university students looking to take advantage of the lower tuition rates of community college education, and more. A community college, compared to its university counterpart, not only works with diverse groups of people, but also with limited resources. On average, two-year public institutions spend \$118 per student on recruitment, while four-year public institutions spend \$578 per recruited student (Council, 2016; Ruffalo, 2016). Due to these limited resources, individuals responsible for communication at community colleges have jumped at the opportunity to use quick and cost-effective social media to reach their target publics, which makes sense considering over 80% of community college students are using social media (Smith, 2016).

While using social media may seem quite simple on the surface, the process of crafting an effective social media message that will reach the correct group can actually be quite complex (Ward, n.d.). Therefore, community college administrators must be strategic with their social media communications (Charest, Bouffard, & Zajmovic, 2016). Knowing how to communicate with specific groups via social media requires knowing how these groups use social media platforms and how they expect others (particularly potential community colleges) to use these platforms.

Age is an important factor that can predict how individuals use social media. For example, there are differences in what percentage of each age group uses various social media platforms; 88% of 18 to 29 year olds, 79% of 30 to 49 year olds and 61% of 50 to 62 year olds use Facebook. For the same age groups the percentages are 59%, 31% and 13% for Instagram and 36%, 22%, and 18% for Twitter (Pew, 2017). Age can also affect what an individual uses social media for. For example, females age 25 to 32 have been found to be

the most versatile of social media users (Lorenzo-Romero, Alarcon-del-Amo, & Constantinides, 2012). Data on how various demographics use social media can help social media administrators understand how the people they want to communicate with use these media and can show them how to best fit their own communication into the existing social media culture (Navarro, Moreno, & Al-Sumait, 2017). Understanding how community college students use social media, and what they expect from recruitment material disseminated by community colleges, can aid administrators in finding the most effective ways to craft recruitment material.

Recruitment is essential to community colleges, as tuition is one of two primary sources of income for the college (the other being external funding) (Morris, 2017). Community colleges, especially those in rural areas, face diminished funding from the state in times of economic difficulty; higher education funding is often one of the first to be cut in these situations, meaning that being able to successfully recruit students is essential to the success and stability of community colleges (Morris, 2017).

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of how community college administrators are using social media as a recruitment tool, and what types of recruitment material community college students want to see on social media. If community college administrators know what types of information prospective students want and expect to see from the colleges on social media, the process of creating this content will be more efficient. This thesis, using uses and gratifications theory as a theoretical lens, will conduct a case study of three community colleges in Southwest Virginia. The first part of this study involves interviewing social media administrators at each of the three colleges to discover how they are currently using social media, and the second part of the study includes

holding focus groups with students at each of the community colleges to gauge their perceptions of what the schools are currently doing and to discover what more they would like to see the colleges do. The majority of recent uses and gratifications research has looked at how individuals use social media; very few studies have explored how organizations use social media from a uses and gratifications perspective. This study is unique in that it will look at uses and gratifications from both the perspective of the individual (viewer) and the organization (creator), allowing for a more comprehensive analysis. The goal of this study was to provide community college administrators with the information needed to craft effective recruitment messages on social media. Now that the context and significance of this study have been addressed, the following section will summarize previous research relevant to community colleges, social media, and uses and gratifications theory.

Literature Review

The following literature review will provide a summary of the relevant literature on community colleges, social media, and uses and gratifications theory (U&G). It will begin by describing how community colleges and their students differ from other colleges and universities and their students. It will then describe the adoption of social media by community colleges. It will explore the college search process that students go through when determining what school to attend, focusing on their use of social media during this search. The limitations of social media will also be addressed. The literature review will then describe the origin, application and limitations of U&G, and its application to social media both in general, and to specific platforms.

Community colleges are institutions that offer postsecondary education. These institutions have existed in America for around 100 years and were developed by communities to fit the needs of that particular community; some community colleges served as extensions of public high schools, while others focused on vocational and technical training (Education, 2000, p. 1). Many community colleges were created to give returning World War II veterans access to higher education (Education, 2000, p. 1). The funding of community colleges varies from school to school. All community colleges receive some sort of funding from the state (Education, 2000, p. 1). Community colleges also rely on federal grants and loans and local contributions (American, 2017b).

As of 2016, 12 million students enrolled in 1,123 community colleges in the United States made up 46% of college undergraduates (Crisp, et. al., 2016). For the 2015-2016 academic year, “49% of all students who completed a bachelor’s degree at a four-year institution had been enrolled at a two-year public institution in the previous ten years (48% in Virginia) (National, 2017). University students often overshadow community college students, especially in research, but considering that community college students comprise almost half of undergraduates in the U.S., it is essential that this group be understood.

Community colleges and the students who attend them are markedly different than their university counterparts. While admissions at universities can be extremely competitive, community colleges will accept any student with a high school diploma (and those without a traditional diploma in some cases) (Mellow & Heelan, 2014). Students who attend a four-year university are usually doing so to earn a bachelor’s degree, while students may attend community college for a number of reasons: to obtain an associate’s

degree, earn or maintain a license or certification, “upgrade their skills” or “pursue a hobby” (American 2017c, Clagett, 2012, p. 49). Forty-one percent of students enrolled in community college in 2015 were enrolled in non- credit courses or programs, and in the same year these colleges awarded only about 3,000 more associates degrees than certificates (American, 2017b). Students may also attend a community college to take a class in a different format than is offered at their university, or to get ahead by taking classes during university breaks. Students often take advantage of community colleges’ lower tuition rates by taking classes that they then transfer to four-year universities (American, 2017c, Clagett, 2012). In the 2015-2016 academic year 49% of students who attained bachelor’s degrees had attended a community college, and 22% of those students only attended community college for one term, showing that many students are taking advantage of these opportunities (National, 2017).

Community colleges face the challenge of communicating with a diverse group of potential students. While people often assume that community colleges are primarily home to recent high-school graduates, “the average age of a community college student is 29” (American, 2017a). The number of graduating high school students is declining, so community colleges are focusing even more on the growing group of 25 to 39-year-old students (Clagett, 2012). The students who attend community colleges can be vastly different than the typical university student in a number of ways, and many are considered nontraditional students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, nontraditional students are characterized by enrollment patterns, financial and family status, and high school graduation status (National, nd). Students are considered nontraditional if they waited one or more years after completing high school to enroll in

college, have a dependent other than a spouse, are a single parent, work a full-time job while in school, are financially independent, or if they received a GED or a certificate of completion rather than a standard high school diploma (National, nd). Nontraditional students between the ages of 20 and 24 have been shown to differ from traditional students in multiple areas, such as background characteristics, reports of their own ability, financial support, and institutionally related characteristics (Hurtado, Kurotsuchi, & Sharp, 1996). A student's level of non-traditionalism can range from minimally nontraditional (displaying one nontraditional characteristic) to moderately nontraditional (displaying two or three nontraditional characteristics) to highly nontraditional (displaying at least four nontraditional characteristics) (Horn, 1996). Because community colleges communicate with such a diverse group of individuals, these institutions must be strategic when determining which communication methods to utilize.

Colleges' Adoption of Social Media

As colleges and universities have evolved, so have the communication strategies that these schools use. While colleges once relied on prestige and unique characteristics to attract students, the schools now have to depend on some of the same strategies as for-profit organizations. Factors like competition for students, athletics, and federal research funding have pushed schools to implement branding and marketing plans (Bok, 2003). According to Fay (2016), "branding is a strategy for communication and image building among target groups," which can include physical communication like a website, or a phone call (n.p.). The goal of these communications is to make an individual feel "an emotional connection to a brand" (Fay, 2016, n.p.). According to Burns (2015), "students are no longer making college choices simply on academic reasons; universities are now

selling an anticipated social experience” (p. 100). Following the lead of other organizations, post-secondary schools have begun to experiment with social media marketing as a channel for creating these emotional connections.

Social media have transformed the way organizations communicate with customers and share information about products and services. According to Aral, Dellarocas, and Godes (2013), social media “represent one of the most transformative impacts of information technology on business” (p. 3). Where organizations previously relied solely on print, broadcast, and web marketing, which are all time consuming and costly, they can now utilize social media, which have the potential to reach millions of people at minimal costs. According to LYFE Marketing (2016), the cost of reaching a thousand viewers via social media is \$2.50 in comparison with direct mail at \$57, newspapers at \$16, and radio at \$10. The quick, cost-efficient and far-reaching nature of social media make it especially appealing to organizations like community college that have limited resources to dedicate to communication efforts.

It has become out of the ordinary for an organization to lack a presence on social media. An examination of the broad use of social media by organizations provides a general context for understanding social media growth. According to Walters (2016), “forty-one percent of Americans say it’s important that the institutions they engage with have a strong social media presence” (n.p.). As of 2016, 40 million small businesses had active “Pages” on Facebook (Smith, 2017, n.p.). However, “only 20 Fortune 500 companies actually engage with their customers on Facebook, while 83% have a presence on Twitter” (Smith, 2017, n.p.). Of U.S. companies with one hundred or more employees, 65.8% use Twitter as a marketing tool (Smith, 2017, n.p.). Over five million businesses are on

Instagram (Instagram, 2017). A 2017 study of 427 brands (from nine different industries) found that 64% of these organizations had created Snapchat accounts, but only 67% of those organizations were still active on the platform (Chen, 2017).

Most colleges have adopted Facebook and Twitter and some have even begun using Instagram and Snapchat (Dreid, 2016; Hanover Research, 2015; Tom, 2013). A survey of 423 higher education professionals, conducted in July of 2017, showed that 72% of higher education administrators use social media as a tool to market the schools they work for, and 71% use it as a recruitment tool with 65% using it to “run targeted campaigns to attract prospective students (Hootsuite, 2017, p. 7). When asked why they have taken advantage of social media, 70% of administrators said it was because they felt that students expected more engagement on these platforms, and 44% said that it was because they were feeling more pressure to compete with other institutions (Hootsuite, 2017). According to Wendover (2010), colleges are wise to take advantage of these social media opportunities, considering millennial students report that they prefer to be contacted digitally, rather than in person (As cited in U.S., 2017). In her study of Mississippi community college students, Smith found that 87.5% of the participants used social media, and with so many students present on social media, colleges are eager to use these quick and cost-effective resources to communicate with them (Smith, 2016, p. ii).

While colleges and universities have begun to utilize social media, many have done so without fully understanding how to best incorporate the platforms into the schools’ communication strategy. According to Smith (2016), “using the tools of technology will not come easy and poses a significant challenge as administrators need to understand how to bridge the physical world with the virtual world in a way that is mutually reinforcing” (p.

38). If a college hopes to find success in the social media environment, it is essential that the college's social media administrators understand how students expect them to engage via these platforms. The top five reasons that higher education institutions use social media are to share news, promote events, build brand awareness, encourage student and alumni engagement and run campaigns targeted at attracting potential students (Hootsuite, 2017). In order to understand how colleges can best self-promote via social media, the schools' administrators must first understand the process that students go through when searching for colleges. This is the case for both universities and community colleges.

How Students Research Schools

For a college to understand how it can best attract new students via social media, those in charge of the accounts must first understand how students go about researching potential schools. A study of 1,000 high school seniors revealed that 41% of these students used Google to search schools by name, 35% found schools by searching words and phrases in Google and 38% utilized sites like The College Board that match students with schools that are compatible with the students' desires (the 2017 social admissions report found that 90% of students use these matching or review sites) and ("The maturation", 2017; Noel-Levitz, 2009).

Along with understanding how students find schools, it is important for college administrators to know what types of information students are looking for once they find a school they are interested in. When students are using digital tools (websites, social media sites, digital applications) they are in "discovery mode" trying to learn about the schools to make an informed decision ("The maturation", 2017). At this point students are looking for the following: scholarship information (85%), information about the college (84%),

admissions information (73%), financial aid information (63%), college ratings (57%), and information about campus life (56%) (The maturation, 2017). Students value the information that colleges provide; when asked how much of the content they actually read 79% said they read all admissions details and deadlines, 74% read all cost and aid content, 52% read all information about campus locations and 44% read all content regarding academics (Noel-Levitz, 2009). Colleges must be sure to have this information readily available and easily accessible for potential students.

Being able to find specific information is important to students; 72% reported that they would be disappointed if a school's website didn't provide the information they wanted, but that they would seek this information out in other ways (Noel-Levitz, 2009). However, 16% of students said that if a school's website didn't have adequate information, the student would probably stop pursuing the school (when a student is only at the prospect stage, 23% say they would stop looking at the school) (Noel-Levitz, 2009). Accuracy was even more important with 57% of students saying that if a college's website has incorrect or out of date information they are likely to remove this college from their list (Noel-Levitz, 2009). Social media administrators can use this data on what content potential students are seeking to determine what information they should be sharing on social media in order to meet these students' needs.

With dozens of social media sites available, college administrators must determine which platforms to use to communicate with students. Although many students engage with social media on a regular basis, they can be particular about the types of information they like to see on these platforms, and these preferences can differ from one platform to another. First it is important to be aware of what social media platforms students are

currently using in their college search. Few researchers have explored students' social media use in their search for colleges, but the 2017 Social Admissions Report found that 37% of high school students said that they had or planned to use some sort of social media to research colleges, and 60% had already liked or followed a school they were considering attending ("The maturation", 2017). This data shows that a small percentage of students are using social media to seek out information, but over half of students are using social media to receive updates from colleges they are interested in. Seventy percent of students said that colleges should have a presence on social media, and 74% said that they would like for colleges to create private, password protected communities that students could be invited to (Noel-Levitz, 2009). However, only 51% of students felt that colleges should use these mediums to contact prospective students (Noel-Levitz, 2009). Why are there more students saying they want colleges to be present on social media than there are students actually using these resources, and why do over half of students not want to be contacted by colleges on social media? One potential answer is that schools aren't currently using social media in the ways that students want. This assumption is supported by the 2017 Social Admissions Report, which found that when asked about the content they have seen on college social media sites, only 21% of students found the information very relevant, 40% found it moderately relevant, and three percent found it not relevant at all ("The maturation," 2017). Students have expectations regarding who, what, when, where and how social media should be used, and do not like when social media use is inconsistent with their expectations (Mazer, 2007). This study will attempt to provide a clearer idea of how community college students want colleges to communicate with them on social media for recruitment purposes.

Social Media Limitations

While social media sites appear to be the ideal, cost-efficient way to reach students, colleges must be careful with how they use these sites, because a bad social media presence can be even more harmful to an organization than lacking a social presence altogether (Kolowich, 2009). Montgomery (2016), addressed four concerns that may arise when higher education institutions adopt social media. The first concern is loss of control. A college does not have complete ability to control what others post on its social media accounts. A college can delete negative comments that are made on its own page, or attempt to have a negative post made by another user deleted, but it is often up to the platform's administration whether the post warrants deletion. Even if a college can have a negative comment deleted, deleting comments of this nature can be risky, and communications professionals suggest dealing with the issue directly, rather than trying to ignore it (Stránská & Stránská, 2015). The account administrator can use a negative comment as an opportunity to show that the college welcomes open dialogue and takes complaints seriously by responding to the user and trying to solve the problem.

The second concern when using social media is the workload that comes along with it. Thirty percent of admission offices that utilize Facebook do not measure their performance and cite a lack of time and the difficulty of collecting data as primary reasons for not doing so (Varsity, 2013). It is not surprising that colleges struggle to find time to dedicate to social media, considering that 87% of colleges surveyed by Varsity Outreach only have one to three people dedicated to managing the medium, and these individuals are often also responsible for managing other areas of the college's communication (2013). Community colleges in particular often have small communications staff (Council, 2016).

Some colleges only have one staff member in charge of all external communications. When all communication responsibilities fall on one person, social media can often be lacking in quality or neglected altogether.

The third concern with social media is information overload. With so many social media platforms available users can quickly become overloaded with information, which may hinder their ability to keep up with more traditional media, like broadcast and print (Montgomery, 2016). Every minute 1.3 million pieces of content are shared on Facebook;, Twitter sees 500 million tweets per day, and around 85 million pieces of content are uploaded to Instagram daily (Lowe, 2016). The amount of content each user sees on a daily basis is dependent on the number of platforms used, number of people the user friends/follows, and how active those friends or followers are. According to a 2013 Adweek article, the “typical social media user consumes 285 pieces of content daily, which equates to . . . 54,000 words . . . and as many as 1,000 clickable links” (Bennett, 2013, n.p.). These numbers have likely increased in the last four years, considering that daily usage of social media from 2013 to 2016 increased 13% for Facebook and four percent for Twitter (Instagram usage decreased six percent) (Duggan & Smith, 2013; Greenwood, et. al., 2016). When an individual sees hundreds of social media updates along with other digital messages like e-mails and text messages and print material all in one day, the user is likely to feel overwhelmed with information and will be unable to intake it all. The overload of content may even make individuals less likely to remember the information that they do read (Walker, 2015).

The final concern is that most social media do not verify a creator’s identity when creating an account with a college name. Twitter does give users the option to verify an

account after the account has already been created; this verification shows users that this account is the official account for the individual or organization (Twitter, 2017b).

Therefore, if a student or professor were to create an account with a college's name, the college could no longer use that same name to create its official account. Having more than one account associated with a college could cause major confusion for users and create inconsistent branding.

Social media have taken over communication and changed the way people interact with those around them, both personally and professionally. Individuals' expectations for communication have changed, leading organizations to adapt communication plans to include social media. Scholars are interested the use of social media, including how and why people use these platforms, and in order to answer these questions many researchers have turned to uses and gratifications theory, which focuses specifically on the needs, motivations and gratifications that lead individuals to use specific media.

Theoretical Application – Uses and Gratifications

Since the advent of the radio in 1895, communication researchers have been curious about what draws individuals to the media they engage with; the massive expansion of technology in the past 20 to 30 years only increased this curiosity. The evolution of technology has completely changed the way we live and communicate. As media have advanced and become more readily available our needs and expectations of them have changed. The uses and gratifications approach (U&G) has provided communication researchers with a framework for exploring the use of and need for these constantly developing media. These studies provide marketers, advertisers and public relations

professionals with the information needed to successfully communicate with their target publics.

Theoretical origins and application. The U&G approach has a prominent history as a sub-tradition of media effects research (Ruggiero, 2000). The basic objective of the theory is to understand what media individuals use, how they use them, and what leads them to those specific media, particularly when there are other options available. Scholars disagree about the origins of U&G; some believe the theory was developed in the 1920's with the Payne Fund Studies, which were conducted by the U.S. Motion Picture Research Council to research the effect that movies had on American youth (Lowery & DeFleur, 1983). Others believe that U&G did not develop until the 40's, when research began to focus less on how the media effected the people, and more on why people used multiple media forms, such as listening to one radio format instead of another (quiz shows, soap operas, play-by-play sports, etc.) or listening to the radio verses reading the newspaper (Papacharissi, 2009; Wimmer & Dominick, 1994). Regardless of its origins, U&G research took off in the 1950s and 1960s with the emergence of the television. Researchers wanted to know why different people and groups were drawn to different television programs, why children watched television, how social class impacted television watching for educational purposes and why time spent watching television varied among men, women and children (Bogart, 1956; Geiger & Sokol, 1959; Maccoby, 1954).

Where previous media research had focused on direct and immediate effects, the new U&G approach "sought to replace the image of the audience member as a passive victim, thought to be implicit in effects studies, with one of a person who could actively bend programmes, articles, films, and songs to his own purposes" (Blumler, 1979, p. 10).

Rather than focusing solely on the media, U&G is an audience-centered approach “that emphasizes individual choice in explaining media effects” (Kim & Rubin, 1979, p. 107). This shift in how the audience was viewed was partly due to research by Joseph Klapper (1960) in his book *The Effects of Mass Communication*, which made the following three conclusions: “the mass media appear to have less power than the average citizen,” “media effects are of a minor nature” and “the actual process of media effects is [a] complex . . . function of many factors” (Klapper, 1960; Papacharissi, 2009, p. 137).

As technology continued to develop U&G research followed suit, by expanding its focus to include magazines (Kim, et. al., 2015; Payne, et. al., 1988), cell phones (Leung & Wei, 2000; Sowa & Marshall, 2012), Mp3 players (Zeng, 2011), the Internet (Jimenez, et. al., 2012; Ko, et. al., 2005; Leung, 2001), social media (Alrajehi, 2016; Quinn, 2016; Sheldon, 2008), mobile apps (Gerlich, et. al., 2015; Schmitz Weiss, 2013) and video games (Jansz, 2005; Lucas & Sherry, 2004). In addition to allowing researchers to gain information about different media forms, U&G research has explored the differences in media choices among various groups, including teenagers (Duke, 2000; Jimenez, et. al., 2012; Roe & Minnebo, 2007;), transgender individuals (Kosenko, et. al., 2016), the elderly (Bramlett-Solomon & Merrill, 1991; Schutter & Malliet, 2014) and immigrants (Hwang & He, 1999; Veronis & Ahmed, 2015; Walker, 1999).

The fundamental idea of the U&G approach is that people have needs and wants that lead them to actively seek out media. The media use provides some sort of gratification to the users’ needs (Papacharissi, 2009). These needs vary from person to person “and are connected to the social and psychological makeup of the individual” (Papacharissi, 2009). According to Papacharissi (2009), “individuals typically employ the mass media as

functional alternatives . . . to complement or substitute for aspects of their environment they are not satisfied with” (p. 141). A major strength of the U&G approach is its ability to be applied to a wide variety of media (Papacharissi, 2009). Each U&G study generally focuses on one medium or makes comparisons among multiple mediums, and studies generally follow a similar pattern. At the most basic level the researcher is trying to determine what wants or needs led the user to the media, and what, if any, gratifications or satisfaction did the user get from the media use.

Uses and gratifications categories. U&G research has explored the gratifications gained from media use. Throughout the years researchers have developed their own typologies of gratifications, or adapted gratification typologies from past studies. Social media have altered the way scholars approach U&G research; according to Alhabash and Ma (2017), “the emergence of social media . . . extended the U&G approach to include a larger set of motivations and different forms of identifying usage behaviors” (pp. 2-3). Scholars have suggested that new media, like the internet, video games and social media, provide new gratifications that traditional media could not.

One of the great values of U&G is that it can be applied to a variety of media, both traditional and nontraditional, and because the theory has been applied to such a wide range of media, multiple typologies of needs have been developed. In the 1940s Herta Hertzog examined the motivations of those who listened to serial radio shows, and found three common motivations: education, emotional appeal, and wishful thinking (vicarious satisfaction through others’ experiences) (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Shortly afterwards, in 1958, Lasswell developed three categories of gratifications that users turn to media to satisfy: “(1) the surveillance of the environment; (2) the correlation of the parts of society

in responding to the environment; (3) the transmission of the social heritage from one generation to the next” (as cited in Lasswell, 1964, p. 38). In 1972, McQuail, Blumler, and Brown identified diversion, personal relationships, personal identity, and surveillance as gratifications of media in general. In 1983, Rubin found that relaxation, companionship, entertainment, social interaction, information, habit, passing time, arousal, and escape were the nine recurring motivations for television use. Katz, Haas and Gurevitch (1973) developed five categories of needs: cognitive, affective, social integrative, personal integrative (related to gaining credibility or status), and needs related to escaping daily life. Wang, Tchernev, and Solloway (2012) later defined needs related to escaping daily life as habitual needs. In her study of personal home pages, Papacharissi (2002) developed a typology of 6 motivations: information, entertainment, self-expression, communicating with friends and family, professional advancement, and to pass time. Researchers will often combine typologies from two or more studies to better fit the medium they are researching (Kim, 2016; Pittman, 2016; Stragier, 2016). For example, Haridakis and Hansen (2009) combined gratification typologies that had been used for Internet and television to discover that people watch and share YouTube videos for convenient entertainment, interpersonal connection, convenient information seeking, escape, co-viewing, and social interaction gratifications.

Lichtenstein and Rosenfeld (1983) were the first to suggest that gratifications that are specific to a particular medium might be a result of the medium, rather than the innate needs of individuals. Based on Lichtenstein and Rosenfeld’s (1983) proposal, Sundar and Limperos (2013) set out to determine whether new media created new needs and therefore new gratifications, or if the same needs of traditional media use were simply

being gratified in new ways. They reviewed the typologies of 20 U&G studies on different media from the 1940's to around 2013 and found that many of the gratifications for new and traditional media overlapped. The authors suggest, "there are some core reasons for media use that cut across specific media vehicles of the time" (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p. 507). Even gratifications obtained from video games, like competition and challenge, were reported as gratifications of listening to radio in the 1940s (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Sundar and Limperos (2013) suggest that when new gratifications do arise, it is often because they aren't actually new gratifications but more specific ones that could be classified under some of the broader categories of traditional media gratifications. For example, Whiting and Williams, identified surveillance/knowledge about others as a sub-motivation of the traditional motivation called information (2013).

Rubin (2009) suggested that scholars choose more specific categories when looking at gratifications of new media, since this specificity allows us to find more nuanced gratifications that fit a specific medium in a specific context. According to Sundar and Limperos, "relying simply on broad categories and existing measures may indeed be obfuscating our ability to understand potentially new gratifications" (2013, p. 517). Sundar and Limperos argue that content gratifications, which come from the media content and process gratifications, which come from using the medium cannot account for the mobile and fluid nature of some new media, and suggest a third type of gratification: social gratifications (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). They also state that the technology of the medium should be considered as a fundamental factor for gratification, because it is the new features of the media that allow for new process gratifications. They use the MAIN model, created by Sundar in 2008, which established four "classes of affordances in digital

media:" modality (the ability to present various types of content—text, photos, videos, audio), agency (the ability to broadcast or filter content), interactivity (the ability to manage and change the content in real-time) and navigability (the ability to move and explore the medium) (as cited in Sudan & Limperos, 2013, p. 512). They suggest that each of these affordances will prompt users to expect new gratifications from media. Examples of modality gratifications are realism, coolness, novelty, and being there. Agency-enhancement, community building, bandwagon, filtering/tailoring, and "ownness" are possible examples of agency gratifications. Interactivity gratifications could include interaction, activity, responsiveness, and dynamic control. Navigability gratifications could be seen in browsing/variety seeking, scaffolds/navigation aids, and play/fun. (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). A number of scholars have incorporated Sundar and Limperos' gratifications into their own studies (Horning, 2017; Miller, 2015; Rice, 2017).

Theoretical limitations. Despite U&G's longstanding history and application to a diverse number of media and groups, the approach has received various criticisms. Swanson (1976) stated, "the nature of the theory underlying U&G research is not totally clear" (n.p.). This lack of clarity may be a result of researchers' tendency to combine U&G with other theories. Although some believe that combining U&G with other theories weakens its theoretical clarity, others believe that the combination of theories adds depth to the research (McDonald-Russell & Elane, 2002; Rayburn & Palmgreen, 1984). The U&G approach has been applied in conjunction with multiple communication theories. Dependency and deprivation theories have been heavily used in U&G research to explore audiences that display high and low levels of media usage. Dependency theory supports that an individual's level of dependency on media is determined by the relationship

between the media system and other social systems (Ball-Rokeach, 1985). Media systems in some social societies may have access to more media than they would in other social systems; the media system would not have strong ties to the social system in countries like Ethiopia and Haiti, which are underdeveloped and lack much access to technology, while the media system and the social system are much more interdependent in developed countries like the United States, where media and technology are more widely available (Ball-Rokeach, 1985). The more interdependent the social and media systems are, the higher the possibility that individuals will become media dependent; if the media system gains “exclusive control over dissemination of certain message forms” individuals have no choice but to become dependent on that media for the information (Ball-Rokeach, 1985, p. 489). Media deprivation theory has also been combined with U&G. Media deprivation is related to media variables like media consumption, motivations for using media, and level of involvement with media, and nonmedia variables such as socio orientation (refers to growing up in a family environment where the child is taught to respect elders and hide their feelings), socio concept (refers to a family environment where children are taught to express ideas and are made aware of contrary ideas to incite debate), and activities with peers and parents (Windahl, et. al., 1986). When the gratifications sought from media lead an individual to become dependent on that media, the individual is more likely to suffer from media deprivation when that media is no longer available. According to time relations theory, viewers of media show varying levels of activity before, during and after viewing, and their media preferences may change based on both gratifications sought and gratifications obtained (Levy & Windahl, 1984). This change in activity suggests that a users activity level may vary based on whether or not their sought gratifications are being

obtained through consumption of the media. Each of these theories, when used in conjunction with U&G, may allow for a more in-depth analysis of the subject at hand. Although some researchers do choose to combine U&G with other theories, this practice of combining theories is not unique to U&G and it seems that most of the U&G research relies on U&G alone (Ancu & Raluca, 2009; Chen, 2011; Gerlich, et. al., 2015; Han, et. al., 2015; Kim, et. al. 2015).

U&G has been criticized because much research has failed to distinguish between “gratifications sought and actual gratifications” (Curras-Perez, et. al., 2014, p. 337). In order to overcome this limitation, researchers have combined U&G with other theories to allow the research to account for both types of gratifications. Curras-Perez, Ruiz-Mafe and Sanz-Blas (2014) combined U&G with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which attempts to explain behavior based on the individual’s beliefs, attitude and intention. Wang, Busemeyer and Lang (2006) created a mathematical model to account for the numerous factors that lead to media usage, and Wang, Tchernev and Solloway (2012) used the dynamic motivational activation model, which suggests, “motivated media choices and use can change a users’ motivation in real time, which further influence subsequent media choices and use” (Wang, et. al., 2012, n.p.). This study attempts to overcome this limitation by exploring both gratifications sought and gratifications obtained.

The concept of the active audience also received heavy criticism in early research, because researchers believed that “media use [was] less the result of an active choice by audience members and more the byproduct of media availability or other extrinsic factors” (Levy & Windahl, 1984, p. 52). However, the vast changes in technology have altered researchers’ perception of the audience. The merging of traditional mass media and digital

technology has drastically altered audiences' consumption patterns (Weiyan, 2015). With the vast number of media choices that became available to audiences, motivation and gratification reemerged as two of the most important factors of audience analysis (Ruggiero, 2000).

Researchers have criticized the tendency of U&G studies to rely on self-reports of media use and the motivations behind that usage, rather than relying on observable behavior. Critics do not believe that users fully comprehend the processes that lead to their media choices (Rosenstein & Grant, 1997; Severin & Tankard, 1997). However, Ruggiero (2000) believes the U&G approach "furnishes a benchmark base of data for other studies to further examine media use;" he argues, "any attempt to speculate on the future direction of mass communication theory must seriously include the U&G approach" (pp. 3-12).

Despite the criticism U&G has received, researchers have been able to overcome the theory's limitations by combining U&G with other theories, addressing the theory's valuable function as an exploratory tool and explaining the theory's increase in applicability due to media development. The current study will explore the use of social media by community college administrators and the media-related recruitment needs of community college students; due to the need-focused nature of this study, and the fact that U&G has been praised for its application to exploratory studies, this study will be guided solely by U&G theory. At the time of this study, very little research on organizational uses and gratifications of social media were available; what research has been done will be addressed in the following sections, as will relevant U&G research that has been conducted on individual media use.

Uses and gratifications of social media. Similar to the advent of television, the emergence of social media has captured the attention of billions of people around the world (Chaffey, 2017). The widespread adoption of social media has prompted scholars to determine why users are so attracted to these new mediums, and U&G theory has been heavily used to guide this research. The first social media site, called Six Degrees, was released in 1997. The site was short lived, but Internet users quickly began to adopt blogging and instant messaging. By 2000 the idea of engaging online gained popularity, and in 2003 the first social media surge occurred with the release of MySpace. Two years later Mark Zuckerberg produced Facebook, and by 2010 there were multiple social media sites for every service (socializing, listening to music, sharing photos, reading news) (Fekri, 2017). Today there is a social media site for every purpose and person, and these sites compete among one another for users.

Organizational uses and gratifications. Organizations should use social media as a tool to facilitate dialogue between the organization and its publics making the organizational system more open (Reitz, 2012). An organization with an open system uses the feedback it receives to develop and strengthen relationships, respond to public requests and opinions, and to adjust to environmental changes (Reitz, 2012). Reitz (2012) found that organizations use social media to build and maintain strong organizational identities, and adjust these identities based on feedback from the public. Social media allows organizations to create more authentic and emotional relationships with stakeholders (Reitz, 2012). Organizations can use social media to monitor the environment, share pertinent information, solve problems or lessen concerns in crisis situations, and facilitate social corporate responsibility by publicizing organizational efforts (Reitz, 2012).

Sicilia and Palazon (2008) explored a virtual community created by Coca-Cola Spain and found that the community met the needs of Coca-Cola and that the community allowed Coca-Cola customers the opportunity to share their own opinions, gave them access to entertaining content, saved Coca-Cola money that would have been spent on market research, and increased their sales by 15% (Sicilia & Palazon, 2008). When an organization creates an online environment that provides users with social, psychological, and hedonic benefits, users are more likely to engage actively in the online environment and in turn will be more trusting of and committed to the brand (surprisingly, monetary benefits were not found to significantly impact online engagement) (Kang & Fiore, 2014). It is essential that organizations use these social media strategically to create a sense of belonging and meaningfulness (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Some tools that organizations can use to create these types of environment are sweepstakes, contests, online events and games (Jahn & Kunz, 2012).

The following sections will provide an overview of the social media platforms that are being explored in this study followed by a summary of the relevant U&G research on each platform. These particular social media platforms were selected because the college administrators are currently using them or expressed interest in adopting them. Colleges that are only used limitedly by the colleges and were not mentioned by the students will not be discussed.

Facebook. Facebook is a social media site that allows users to post updates, photos and videos, follow other users, view and react to others' posted content, and communicate with other users both privately and publicly (Nations, 2017). Some believe that Facebook is falling in popularity due to its loss of four million high-school age students and almost

seven million college-age users from 2011 to 2014 (Matthews, 2014). However, Facebook “remains the most-used social media site among all ages, used by 64% of Americans 12 and up” (Walters, 2016, par. 23). Facebook is so popular that it “accounts for one in every six minutes spent online and one in every five minutes spent on mobile” (Walters, 2016). As early as 2011, 82% of universities had Facebook accounts, and with students spending so much time on Facebook, it is no wonder that colleges are taking advantage of this opportunity to market themselves.

Few researchers have looked into the use of Facebook by colleges and universities for recruitment purposes, and most existent research focuses on universities rather than community colleges. Previous research has found that not all colleges are identical in their use of Facebook. In its 2013 survey, Varsity Outreach found that 73% of schools use Facebook to reach out to both prospective students and those who have recently been admitted, while only 18% use it solely to communicate with recently admitted students and only eight percent with prospective students only (Varsity, 2013). Participants felt that Facebook was more effective for communicating with recently admitted students than for recruiting students (Varsity, 2013). Of 226 admissions and marketing professionals (from 226 colleges) that utilize Facebook, 58% of respondents reported that they use Facebook predominantly to disseminate information, while 32% reported using Facebook to answer questions (Varsity, 2013). When asked about their role on Facebook, 43% of professionals described themselves as broadcasters who distribute information, 25% said they were facilitators who answered questions (even ones that weren’t directed at them) and provided users with resources, 18% said they were observers who only posted corrections

and answered important questions, and 12% labeled themselves as conversation starters who have and start active conversations with users (Varsity, 2013).

Uses and gratifications of Facebook. Some of the earliest Facebook studies looked broadly at use of the medium and found that college students use Facebook frequently throughout their day and mostly for keeping up with current friends, making new friends, finding old friends, looking at or posting photos, passing time, following fashion, sharing problems and for affection, while very few students reported using the platform for sharing information about themselves, for dating purposes, or to feel connected (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Raacke et. al., 2008). Men have been found to log onto the site more, friend more people, and use the site for dating, while women have been found to update their profiles more often but were more likely to have their profile set to private (Raacke et. al., 2008). Facebook is used for approximately five to 15 minutes at a time to check and respond to messages, view photographs, check what friends are doing and get information on social events (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Users spend more time on Facebook when they want to procrastinate (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). As the platform developed, new gratifications have arisen, such as medium appeal, self-documentation, self-expression, professional advancement, and expressing a true self (Alhabash, Chiang & Huang, 2014; Brubaker & Haigh, 2017; Tosun, 2012).

Twitter. Twitter is a micro blogging site that allows users to share images and messages up to 240 words in length (Rosen & Ihara, 2017; Twitter, 2017a). Users can “follow” others to keep track of anything they post. Twitter also allows users to “retweet” or repost others’ posts, comment on their posts, or “like” their posts. In his 2015 study of college-age students, Chen (2015) found that many college students adopt social media,

like Twitter, due to peer pressure, then continue their use of the medium because of the satisfaction they receive from it. Chen also found that students are more likely to use their computer to check Facebook, while they check Twitter through their smartphone.

Participants in the study labeled Twitter a smartphone social media, because they either only use their smartphone to check the medium or their use of the medium is significantly increased by their owning a smartphone (Chen, 2015). The participants in Chen's (2015) study reported that they use Twitter to follow their friends, celebrities, comedians and parody accounts as a way to "fill time" and "get a good laugh out" (p. 215).

Uses and gratifications of Twitter. The text-based nature of Twitter has led to it being lumped in with other text-based social media sites, like Facebook, in U&G research (Pittman & Reich, 2016). Chen (2011) found that people use Twitter to create a connection and that time spent using Twitter impacts the gratification of this need. He found that people who use Twitter weekly to Tweet and reply to Tweets are more likely to find that connection (Chen, 2011). College-aged Twitter users are the most likely (of Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram users) to interact with people who they do not know outside of the site (Phua, Jin and Kim, 2017). When individuals use Twitter on a mobile device, rather than a computer they are more likely to get immediacy-related gratifications, such as immediate feedback, that they seek from the platform (Han, Min, & Lee, 2015). U&G research has explored how journalists use Twitter to create relationships with the public, the power of Twitter to enhance users' knowledge of news, how attitudes toward a politician's messages change when those messages are viewed on Twitter and on television, and how professional athletes use Twitter to talk to fans and other players

(Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Kim et. al., 2016; Lee, 2013; Lee & Oh, 2013; Quan-Haase, Martin, & McCay-Peet, 2015).

Instagram. Instagram is a photo-sharing site that allows users to post photos and videos with brief captions. Users can comment on and “like” others’ photos. Instagram allows users to edit and apply filters to their photos. Users can add hashtags to their posts, which allow users to view photos that are similar in subject, or search for photos related to a specific word. Instagram gives users the ability to link their account to other social media accounts, such as Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr. On August 2016 Instagram added a “Stories” function (very similar to Snapchat), which allows users to post photos that followers can view in a slideshow like format, but are deleted after 24 hours (Instagram, 2016).

Marcus (2015) discovered that while many social media sites are used to build and continue relationships with others, Instagram serves as a platform for users to promote themselves by posting photos of themselves. Instagram’s hashtag feature gives it an element of community engagement. Instagram users are more likely to participate in high levels of interpersonal interaction; this correlation is likely due to the fact that socially active individuals use popular social media in order to “portray their creative skills” and to “keep up with their friends” (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016, n.p.). While researching individuals who use social media sites to follow brands, Phua, Jin and Kim (2017) found that of six different need categories, Instagram users most commonly used the platform to show affection, follow fashion, and demonstrate sociability.

Uses and gratifications of Instagram. Many of the identified uses and gratifications of Instagram have been similar to that of other social media: convenience, entertainment,

passing time, medium appeal, surveillance/knowledge about others, documentation, coolness and, creativity (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

Research on Instagram has differed from that of Facebook and Twitter, due to the visual nature of the platform. Alhabash and Ma (2017) compared Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat and found that students spend the most time on Instagram daily and that Instagram was the platform most commonly used to satisfy the self-expression motivation. Similar to self-expression, those who are more socially active have been shown to be more motivated to use Instagram for documentation (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Documentation was identified as a motivation that is distinctive to Instagram, since it “acts as a kind of virtual photo album for many people;” however, other social media platforms have this same capability (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016, p. 94). Instagram use has been tied to narcissism in that participants’ narcissistic tendencies were positively related to the time spent editing photos before posting them (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Other research has explored gender differences in Instagram use (females are more likely to use Instagram than males) and the effect of Instagram use on loneliness (the intimate, photo-sharing nature of Instagram was said to decrease loneliness and increase happiness and life-satisfaction in young adults) (Pittman & Reich, 2016; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

Uses and gratifications of following brands. Very little research has looked at branding on social media using U&G theory as a framework. Phua, Jin and Kim (2017) found that individuals use different platforms to follow brands for different purposes. Instagram was most commonly used for following brands (38%), followed by Facebook (30.5%), Twitter (19.7%), and Snapchat (two percent). Students followed an average of 39 brands on their preferred brand-following platform. Those who used Snapchat most

frequently to follow brands used it for passing time, sharing problems, and improving social knowledge (Phua, et. al, 2017). Users who follow brands on Instagram use the platform for showing affection, following fashion and demonstrating sociability (Phua, et. al., 2017).

The amount of trust a user has for a social media site, strength of connection with other users, and homophily impacted the relationship between what social media site users followed brands on most frequently and their brand community-related behaviors (Phua, et. al., 2017). People who most commonly follow brands on Twitter felt the highest “brand community identification,” had the “strongest attachment to brand communities,” share “brand-related objectives,” and see “themselves as part of the larger community” (Phua, et. al., 2017, p. 421). Brand community membership intention is highest among Twitter users, followed by Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat users (Phua, et. al., 2017). Twitter users are most likely to regularly visit the pages of brands they follow, continue to follow brands, create their own content, and spread word of mouth (Phua, et. al., 2017). Instagram users show the “greatest belongingness and pride in the brand pages on which they participate, and show the highest commitment to the brand and community engagement with the brand” (Phua, et. al., 2017, p. 422). Brand community commitment was highest among Instagram users, followed by Twitter and Facebook (Phua, et. al., 2017). These findings “have tremendous managerial implications for effective management of social media platforms for brands, because the more connection a user has to a brand, the more likely they are to buy from that brand (Phua, et.al., 2017, p. 422; Scarpi, 2010).

Uses and gratifications of universities. A 2006 master’s thesis (Stafford, 2006) looked at the home web pages of 100 colleges and universities to better understand what

colleges use these pages for and how students evaluate them. Findings showed that the majority of the home pages included the information that students found most important. The study also found that layout and design were consistent among the schools, and there was considerable overlap in usability and content (Stafford, 2006). Omilion and Leah (2016) used U&G theory to explore how universities use social media in times of crisis. They found that universities use first information responders (employees, clients, volunteers, vendors, students, etc. who are the first to a crisis) and “immediate and intimate communication channels” to disseminate crisis information (Omilion & Leah, 2016, p. 636).

The above review of the literature addressed the role that social media play in both daily and organizational life. It also outlined the unique nature of community colleges and the students who attend these institutions. While there has been extensive research conducted on individuals’ use of social media, and some researchers have looked at the use of social media by organizations and universities, very few researchers have explored the role that social media plays in a community college context, and no one has done so from a U&G perspective. This study will attempt to fill that gap in the literature by determining how and why community colleges use social media for recruitment and how students expect colleges to share this information. This study will also add to the research on U&G by being the first to compare the uses and gratifications of the creator and the user. The findings from this study will provide social media administrators with data on what types of content potential students are most receptive to, which should make the process of creating recruitment content more efficient. Because community colleges have limited staff to dedicate to communication, knowing the most effective way to use social media to

recruit students will save these busy administrators time, effort and money. With these goals in mind, the study aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How do community colleges use social media to recruit students?

RQ2: What social media platforms do community college students want to see recruitment content on?

RQ3: What types of recruitment messages do community college students find most influential in the decision-making process?

RQ4: How do community college students prefer for community colleges to format recruitment content posted on social media?

RQ5: What gratifications are students seeking from social media recruitment content posted by community colleges, and to what extent are those gratifications being met?

Methodology

This study employs uses and gratifications theory as a lens to explore social media recruitment material disseminated by three community colleges in Virginia and students' reported needs regarding this material. The first part of this study used interviews with the professionals in charge of social media communication at each of the three community colleges to investigate the professionals' motivations behind choosing the particular social media platforms currently in use by the college and the purposes guiding the recruitment messages they disseminate on those platforms (refer to the interview guide in Appendix A). The second part of this study used focus groups to explore community college students' expectations of recruitment messages on social media (refer to the focus group guide in Appendix C).

Part One

To answer RQ1, four individuals responsible for social media communication at each of the three community colleges, were interviewed. These individuals were chosen for interviews because they create the content posted on the colleges' social media platforms, and therefore are the only ones who can explain their own thought-processes regarding why they post recruitment messages on social media and what they hope to achieve by sharing these messages on these platforms. The three colleges are located within 81 or fewer miles of one another, meaning that residents in the Southwest Virginia area, or individuals looking to move to the area, could potentially choose between each of these three schools during the college search process.

Recruitment. Following approval from the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A), a list of potential interviewees was created by looking at the colleges' directories and selecting individuals whose titles suggested that they might be in charge of the college's social media communication. Once this list was compiled, each individual was sent an e-mail to determine whether this person was the administrator of the college's social media accounts. If the individual contacted was not the social media administrator, this person was asked to identify the social media administrator.

Once the social media administrator was identified, each was provided a brief overview of the study and asked to participate. Colleges A and B both have two individuals responsible for social media. Both administrators at College B agreed to participate in interviews, however, only one of the administrators at College A agreed to participate. Data from both administrators at College B were included to provide a more complete understanding of the administrators' efforts. Participant titles cannot be identified for

confidentiality reasons; titles are similar to Engagement Coordinator, Development Services Coordinator, Digital Media Manager, Public Relations Administrator/Assistant, Director of Social Media, Director of Marketing, Director of Strategic Communications, Director of Online Communications, etc.

The community colleges. College A enrolls over 4,000 students (Administrator A, personal communication, February 5, 2018). The number of faculty and staff employed by College A was unavailable. College A describes itself as offering over 40 academic programs (College A, n.d.). College A has two individuals dedicated to the college's social media efforts. College B enrolls over 12,000 students and employees almost 90 full-time faculty, approximately 400 full-time staff and part-time faculty, and has two individuals dedicated to social media (College B, 2016a). College B describes itself as offering 12 areas of study, which include associates degrees, career studies certificates, fast-track certificates and professional development/personal enrichment programs (College B, 2016b). College C has an enrollment of around 4,000 students with around 40 full-time faculty, 140 adjunct faculty, over 100 administrators, full-time staff, and part-time employees, and has one individual responsible for social media communication (College C, 2017b). College C describes itself as offering associates degrees, technical programs, developmental courses, workforce development, and continuing education (College C, 2017a).

All three colleges are most active on Facebook. Each of the colleges includes a visual element in almost all Facebook posts, whether that be by adding a photo to the post or linking to another post (which includes the photo for the linked post). For the most part, all of the college's Twitter posts are shorter versions of their Facebook posts. Collectively, the

colleges' social media content is related to promoting events, extracurricular information, educational programs and courses, and sharing deadlines.

Interview Procedures. Interviews with administrators were held in-person at a location chosen by the administrator (either the administrator's office on the college's campus or another space in the same building). McCosker, Barnard and Gerber (2011) stress the importance of holding interviews in a setting where both the researcher and participant will be safe and comfortable and will have privacy. Face-to-face interviews can make the participant feel more empowered to respond, because they can see that the interviewer is engaged in the conversation (Shuy, 2002). At least 24 hours prior to the interviews, participants were e-mailed a copy of the interview questions and a consent form informing them of any risks associated with participating in the interviews and explaining that the interview would be audio recorded. On the day of the interview, I provided the participant with an identical consent form to sign (See Appendix A).

Before beginning each interview, I reminded participants that their participation was voluntary and they could stop participating at any time. Participants were reminded that they could refrain from answering any questions without penalty, and that, to maintain confidentiality, they would not be identified by name, title, or college affiliation. I then asked each participant to sign the consent form and asked for verbal consent as well before beginning the interview questions. At this point each interview began being audio-recorded for transcription purposes.

Interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes and lasted 26 minutes on average. Each administrator was asked the same set of questions (see Appendix B). A structured interview guide was used to ensure that each participant was asked the same questions

and that all interview experiences were similar. Once the interview concluded, the participant was informed that within four weeks, they would be e-mailed a copy of the interview transcript to review and accept. I transcribed the audio recordings verbatim using the program Inqscribe. Inqscribe allows the user to play audio at a designated pace, making transcription quicker and more accurate (Johnson, 2011). Once the data was transcribed, I went through each interview a second time to check the transcripts for errors. Interviewees were given the opportunity to accept the transcript if they believed it was accurate or reject anything that they did not believe was accurate or that they wished to retract. All interviewees accepted the transcripts with no or minimal edits. Once data from all interviews had been collected and analyzed and the final product had been developed, each interviewee was provided with a copy of the results, so that they could implement the provided suggestions into their own social media communications.

Trustworthiness. Throughout data collection and analysis processes, steps were taken to ensure that the data being gathered were trustworthy. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research were followed. The first criterion of trustworthiness is credibility. One way to establish credibility is through prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement "is the investment of sufficient time to achieve the certain purposes." One of these purposes is to learn the culture of the phenomenon under study. I established credibility by taking the time to become familiar with the community college environment, social media and U&G theory and established this knowledge in the literature review. Credibility was also established through member checks. Each interview participant reviewed the interview transcription for accuracy.

The second criterion of trustworthiness is transferability. Transferability is established by providing a thorough description of the research process, so that another researcher could transfer a conclusion from the present study to another time or context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I established transferability by supplying a step-by-step description of the methodology and analysis used in the current study, as well as providing copies of the interview and focus group guides that were used.

The third criterion of trustworthiness is dependability. Dependability requires that the findings of the study are consistent and the study is replicable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability was established similar to credibility: by providing a precise account of how the research was carried out. Dependability was also established through audit checks by my committee and member checks of the transcripts.

The final criterion of trustworthiness is confirmability. Confirmability is established when the research findings are established by the participants and the data, rather than the researcher's bias or motivation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability was established by using an inductive method of analysis and through external audits conducted by my committee. Confirmability was also established by using multiple sources to corroborate the findings of the study.

Analysis procedures. Data from the study were analyzed using an inductive iterative process. An inductive approach allowed me to explore the data without being constrained by the existing theory (Orton, 1997). An iterative method "emphasizes the importance of data in shaping theory" (Orton, 1997, p. 429). The iterative approach was appropriate for this study, because the study aimed to fill in a gap in the U&G research.

I coded the data manually without the use of computer-aided software. Manual coding allowed me to compare the data from each college, since I used structured guides. Manually transcribing the data allowed me to become familiar with the information, and manually coding allowed for an even deeper understanding of the data. I analyzed the data myself, rather than using an independent coder, because an inductive approach relies on the researcher to create the categories. The data set was small enough that it did not require an additional coder. As previously stated I took multiple steps to reduce researcher bias.

The analysis began with an open coding phase. Open coding involved analyzing the data piece by piece and asking questions of the data, such as “what category does this incident indicate?” and “what is the main concern being faced by the participants?” (Glaser, 1998, p. 140). During this phase, I went sentence by sentence through the interview transcriptions to look for portions of the data that related to the research questions and added a label to those sections. Each instance represented one full thought. Because the participants did not always speak in full sentences, especially when thinking through their responses to the questions, each instance began with a sentence that introduced an idea and that instance ended when the individual stopped speaking on the same topic. Some instances were a few words, while some were groups of several sentences.

Next came the axial coding phase. During the axial coding phase I “categorize[d] the initial codes into key codes”(Blair, 2015, p. 26). Similarities, differences and relationships between the data labeled in the open coding phase were examined and labels were combined, moved, or deleted to identify relevant themes. According to Owen (1984), recurrence, repetition and forcefulness determine the presence of themes. Recurrence

occurs when “at least two parts of a report [have] the same thread of meaning” (Owen, 1984, p. 275). To determine recurrence, I counted how frequently a particular idea was present in the data. Repetition is when “an explicit repeated use of the same wording” is present (Owen, 1984, p. 275). Repetition was determined by counting the number of times specific words were repeated in the data. Forcefulness occurs when “vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses” are present in the data (Owen, 1984, p. 275). Forcefulness was determined by listening for vocal cues during the transcription process.

The axial coding phase continued until theoretical saturation had occurred; theoretical saturation occurs when “sufficient data has been collected for the researcher to have gained an adequate understanding of the dimensions and properties of the concepts and themes that have emerged” (Watling & Lingard, 2012, p. 856).

The final phase in the coding process is selective coding. During the selective coding process “all categories are unified around a “core” category” (Corbin & Stauss, 1990, p. 14). According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), “the core category represents the central phenomenon of the study (p. 14). The categories established in the axial coding stage were reviewed several times to ensure they were fully developed. U&G theory served as a guide in determining the core category present in the data, by guiding me to determine the uses and gratifications (both sought and obtained) by the participants.

Example social media posts from each of the community colleges that represented the themes found in the data were selected and used as stimulus for conversation in the focus groups in part two of the study. The nature of social media do not allow for much control over the format or design. These prototypes were simply formatted as text with an

image, rather than being formatted as content from a particular social media platform, so that participants could discuss the appropriateness of the content for any platform.

Part Two

In order to answer RQ2 through RQ5, six students from each of the three community colleges participated in a focus group discussion. Current students were chosen for this portion of the study, because gaining access to potential community college students (without limiting the demographic to soon-to-be college graduates) would be difficult, and gathering data from a diverse group of individuals was essential in attempting to mimic the nontraditional nature of the community college community.

Recruitment. Following a second approval from the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix C), students were recruited from public speaking courses at each of the colleges. Each of the colleges offers a public speaking course that is required by a significant number of programs offered by the college. Working with these public speaking courses allowed for access to the widest range of individuals. For example, all of College A's Associate of Arts and Sciences transfer programs and ten of the colleges' Associates of Applied Science programs require students to take public speaking. At College B, all 38 offered degrees and one certificate require students to take public speaking. At College C, all students must take between three and six credit hours of communication courses, and it offers two communication courses. Focus group participants were selected from the course that the college offers the most sections of (meaning that this class was in higher demand), which was public speaking.

The colleges' online staff directories were used to find contact information for the public speaking instructors (College B's IRB provided the contact information of the

individual in charge of the public speaking program at that school). I e-mailed the instructors of the public speaking courses to ask for their assistance in disseminating information about the focus group opportunity to their students. Once an instructor had agreed to assist in reaching students, I provided a message, flyer, and consent form to be shared with students via email outlining the details, requirements, and compensation for participating in the focus group.

Focus group procedures. Focus groups were scheduled for times immediately following the college's public speaking class, or during class time on a day that the students were not required to be present in class. This scheduling was intended to allow participants to walk to the designated location together following class. All of the focus groups were conducted in classrooms that were within the same building as the public speaking classes, or in a neutral campus location (such as the library for College C). College B's focus group was held in a building of a different name, however the two buildings were internally connected.

The focus group method was utilized for its ability to provide complex data that reveals information that the researchers may not have even considered beforehand. Participants can speak on a topic much more quickly and easily than if they were forced to write a response to a question, meaning that participants can share more information in a shorter period of time in a focus group than they could in a survey (Wiseman, 1905). Because the researcher guides focus groups, participants do not have to try to interpret what the question is asking if they do not understand it, they can simply ask the researcher to clarify. They also do not have to try to guess how much the researcher expects them to respond; instead they can say as much as they like in response to a question and expect to

be prompted to say more by way of a follow up question if more explanation is desired. According to Kitzinger and Barbour (1999), “any group discussion may be called a focus group as long as the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to, the group interaction” (p. 20). A focus group format also allows the participants to feed off of one another’s ideas and energies, meaning that participants may be more engaged than they would be in a more one-on-one setting during an interview or survey; if one participant makes a comment, this comment may generate thoughts within other participants that may not have come up in a one-on-one setting. Although focus groups are more time consuming than surveys, the focus group format allowed for detailed data collection that was less limited in scope than that, which would have been gained from a survey. The goal of a focus group is not to gather individual attitudes or perceptions but to understand the overall view of the group as a whole. This is not to say that contrasting opinions were ignored, as these viewpoints can lead to further understanding of the concept at hand; “It would be a pity to follow an approach that did not allow the researcher to take advantage of additional insights that such intra-group comparisons might yield” (Barbour, 2007, p. 31).

This study used already existing class groups for ease of access, and because “holding focus groups with pre-existing teams may facilitate more rounded or reasoned responses,” since the participants are more likely to be comfortable talking around one another (Barbour, 2007, p. 4). The nature of public speaking courses should have made students even more comfortable speaking in front of their classmates during the focus group, since the focus group conversation was much less formal than many of the speeches they have already presented to the class on their own (Lyons & Spicer, 1999).

I began the focus groups by introducing myself and explaining the context and purpose of the study. I explained that the participants would be shown example social media content and asked to provide their opinions and perceptions of the content, as well as answer general questions about the colleges' current or potential social media use. Participants were informed of the minimal risks associated with participating in the focus group, and were reminded that they would be audio recorded, but that I would be the only one with access to the recording. I told participants that they would not be identified in the research project. Participants were reminded that they were free to withdraw from the study at any point. I told the participants that the discussion was informal, that I simply wanted to hear their honest thoughts and feedback, and that all questions asked about personal preference, so there were no correct answers. Participants were informed of the compensation for their time. Each participant provided an e-mail address. All e-mail addresses that were confirmed to be valid were sent a five-dollar Amazon e-gift card as compensation. Focus groups lasted between 18 and 40 minutes and lasted 27 minutes on average.

Participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire (see Appendix D) with information regarding their social media use, purpose for attending their college, and to indicate whether specific items, which can qualify one as a nontraditional student, applied to them.

I asked the participants to think back to when they were researching potential colleges to attend or trying to decide which college to attend when answering the questions, so that they would be in the mindset of potential students. First, I asked the participants four questions about their use of social media for gathering information about

potential colleges. Second, I asked participants one question about their likelihood of sharing a post made by the college. Third, I asked participants about topics that might or might not be appropriate for the college to discuss on social media and showed example content. Fourth, I asked participants two questions about what platforms the college should be present on and how often the college should post on those platforms. Fifth, I asked participants four questions about how social media content might impact their interest or participation in the college or its events/programs and showed them example content. Finally participants were asked one question about the example content they saw, one question about their opinions on student run accounts, and one question about video content. Participants were then asked if they had anything else that they wanted to share regarding community colleges' use of social media to recruit students.

A difficulty of focus groups is that some participants will try to dominate the conversation. When this occurred, I tried to involve other participants by directing the same question at another participant, or by asking: "does anyone agree or disagree with that statement?" Some individuals may feel uncomfortable offering their own opinions in a group setting, which is why I chose to work with already existing groups of individuals who had experience speaking in front of one another.

As with part one of the study, I transcribed the recordings verbatim (See Appendix I) using the program Inqscribe, and once the data was transcribed I went through the entire recording again to check the transcripts for errors.

Analysis procedures. Analysis of transcripts followed the same pattern of analysis as part one: open coding followed by axial coding followed by selective coding. Themes were again determined using Owen's (1984) strategy of looking for recurrence, repetition

and forcefulness. The gratifications sought and gratifications obtained by the students were compared with the efforts described by the administrators to determine how successfully the community colleges were meeting the needs of the students.

In order to make the data obtained in the study useful to the social media administrators, a shortened report of the results was created and disseminated to each of the interview participants.

The information obtained in this study added to the body of U&G research, by applying the theory to both individuals (user) and organizations (creator) within one study and contributed to the minimal scholarly research on community colleges' recruitment communication.

Findings

Part One

RQ1 focused on how community colleges use social media to recruit students. In order to answer RQ1, four administrators who are responsible for the community colleges' social media communication participated in interviews (one administrator for Colleges A and C and two administrators for College B). The findings from these interviews describe how and why community college social media administrators use social media as a recruitment tool. The gratifications that emerged in the data have been organized into categories and subcategories and will be described below. Quotations from participants and examples from the colleges' social media platforms have been included for further explanation and understanding.

The purpose of RQ1 was to determine how community college administrators are using social media to recruit new students. During the open coding phase of RQ1, 24

categories were uncovered. During the axial coding phase, these categories were condensed to six primary categories and five subcategories. During the selective coding phase, each category was placed under one of three classifications of gratifications and the previous categories became subcategories with the previous subcategories becoming examples. The findings of RQ1 show that the community college administrators primarily use social media to satisfy three primary gratifications: awareness, recruitment, and engagement. These categories represent the gratifications that the administrators are obtaining from their social media recruitment efforts. The following sections will define each of these gratifications and outline how each applies to the colleges' social media efforts.

Awareness. When administrators use social media to generate awareness, they do not make enrollment of new students their only or primary goal. Instead, they use social media to share information about the college. The purpose of the information being communicated is to make all users/followers aware of the college and what it has to offer, and through doing so, the college may be able to attract new students.

Administrators at each of the three colleges discussed the importance of making people aware of the college and all it has to offer. A College A administrator stated:

I guess it depends on how you look at recruitment, but we just try to you know let people know what the college is about, what we do here, that kind of stuff.

Later College A's administrator also said, "I think we just try to show what goes on at the college and what we have to offer here and in itself that's kind of a recruiting tool".

One of College B's administrators said that social media is used as a window to show people what life is like on the college's campus and what the culture is like in order to tell

the college's story. This administrator also stated that social media allows the college to remain relevant and front of mind. An administrator at College B made a statement similar to administrator A by saying:

Most of the time we're not directly trying to sell enrollment except during enrollment periods. It's more about telling people what we do and why we do it and letting them come to decide they want to come here.

Administrator C viewed social media activity very similarly to Administrator A, saying:

I think sometimes it's just an awareness platform more than a recruiting platform. It's just letting people know what we're doing, because how else will they find out if it's not on social media.

All three colleges emphasized that they use social media as a tool for making people aware of what the college offers and what it is doing, as well as using it to have a presence and be front of mind.

Community focus. The first subcategory under awareness was community focus. When administrators use a community- focused strategy to recruit via social media, they share information with the community as a whole in hopes that doing so will allow their content to reach more potential students. All three colleges' administrators said that they focus on community when managing social media. They will market not only to students or potential students, but to the entire community in an attempt to have a user share the information with someone who might be interested in attending the college, such as a friend or family member. The administrators want the entire community to be aware of what they do and offer.

Stories/people. The second subcategory under awareness was stories/people.

Administrators post information or stories about people who are connected to the college (students, faculty, staff, etc.) to build community, show what it is like to be part of the college/what life on the campus looks like, and to showcase the opportunities that individuals have already taken advantage of and where those opportunities led them (see example post below from College A).



Figure 1. Stories/people post. Example post of stories/people from College A's Facebook.

All three colleges said that they use social media to tell stories about people. College A's administrator reported sharing stories of students or faculty who have won awards. One of the College B administrators reported that the college's most successful post was an inspirational story about a graduate who was a nontraditional student; the post was seen by users on the other side of the country. College B administrators also do an annual countdown in the Fall, which features a student each day for 30 days. The post will include a photo of the student and that student's plans after graduation (see example post below).



Figure 2. Stories/people post two. Example stories/people post from College B’s Instagram. One College B administrator reported that this countdown consistently performs well (the administrator did not explain how success of the countdown was determined). College C’s administrator reported that the college’s most successful posts are the ones that are about a person who is recognizable as being affiliated with the college (again measurement of success was not clear).

Events. Administrators use events occurring at the college to showcase its diverse offerings in a more interesting way. All three colleges use social media to inform users about events going on at the college. College C’s administrator reported using social media to promote events that are tied to a program that the college offers in order, not only to promote the event, but the program as well. College A’s administrator provided the following example:

We had a camp this summer like a forensic science/police science camp and it was for high school students, but I think highlighting that camp shows the program that we have for it.

This type of post has the ability to catch the attention of those interested in the camp, parents with children who may be interested in the camp, and those who may be interested in the program itself. See the following example of a post from College B that discusses a showcase event at the college and one of the college's classes.



Figure 3. Events post. Example events post from College B's Facebook.

Event posts may also simply serve the purpose of informing users of an upcoming event without connecting the event to a specific program or class, such as in the example post below from College C.



Figure 4. Events post two. Example events post from College C's Facebook.

Nontraditional focus. Administrators will often attempt to create awareness specifically among potential nontraditional students. Administrators may share different types of information, and may alter where, why, how, and with what purpose they share the information to increase awareness among this specific group. All three of the colleges' administrators acknowledged that their service of many nontraditional students impacts the way they use social media. The administrators described two ways that they focus on nontraditional students: by sharing career development opportunities and when selecting platforms to communicate through.

Administrators will concentrate their communication on aspects of the college that cater to career and professional skills. All three colleges' administrators reported using

social media to share information about career development opportunities within the college. Administrators tailor this content to individuals who may want to begin a career, find a new career, or move up in their current career field. College A's administrator stated:

A lot of times we will reach out to the nontraditional student letting them know we have these short-term courses in case they want to change careers, or if they are already working and they want to do more training to help them move up in that field.

The following example post from College A showcases a program that may target nontraditional students.



Figure 5. Nontraditional post. Example nontraditional post from College B's Facebook.

When discussing a current campaign, a College B administrator said, “For this one we are targeting people who are 25 to about 45 who might be under employed or unemployed looking to start a stronger career . . .” Similarly, College C’s administrator said:

We do market to professionals in the sense that there are workforce development programs. Some of those programs are targeted to people who have jobs, but may want to get a different job and they may be 30, 40, 50 years old.

Administrators working to recruit nontraditional students are likely to concentrate their efforts on the platforms that these students are known to use regularly, and will use language that they believe will resonate with these students. The colleges reported that working with nontraditional students impacts the platforms that they use and what information they put on those platforms. When asked how working with nontraditional students impacted the college’s social media efforts, College A’s administrator said:

If we were just focused on people coming right out of high school, we might try to be on Snapchat and all of those, but since we have a lot of nontraditional students, we don't jump on every social media that's new and comes out. But Facebook is a great one because kinda every age is on that so it does reach the nontraditional students as well as the ones that come out of high school.

College B’s administrator stated that the fact that the college serves nontraditional students impacts the social media outlets it uses and where it places advertisements, as well as making it harder to target specific demographics due to the wide range of ages. Administrators at both colleges B and C said that they find that the various social media platforms call for different languages or different types of posts, depending on what

type of user/student uses the platform. College C's administrator provided an in-depth explanation of the thought process behind catering language to the specific platform:

When I create a message for a social media platform, I think about the target demographic. Facebook is a little bit older, so the language I use on Facebook may sound a little different. On Twitter, of course you are limited in characters, but you can use a little less formal language. And then Instagram is just visual, so you can't put links in it. You can't direct them anywhere, and that's all visual, so we kind of have to tweak each message to the different platforms. We may have the same image, but we may say it differently or share it differently, and I think that helps reach different audiences. You may have the same image, but you may have to direct it to a different demographic or a different age group.

All three colleges reported that Facebook was the platform that was most successful in helping them to meet their recruitment goals. College C's administrator reported that this success was due to the fact that the college has the largest following on Facebook. College B's administrators reported that Facebook had the largest group of students of all of the platforms and particularly more nontraditional and older students.

Recruitment. Recruitment was the second administrator gratification to emerge in the analysis. In order to have the recruitment gratification satisfied, administrators share information that has the primary goal of getting individuals to enroll with the college (see the following example post from College A).

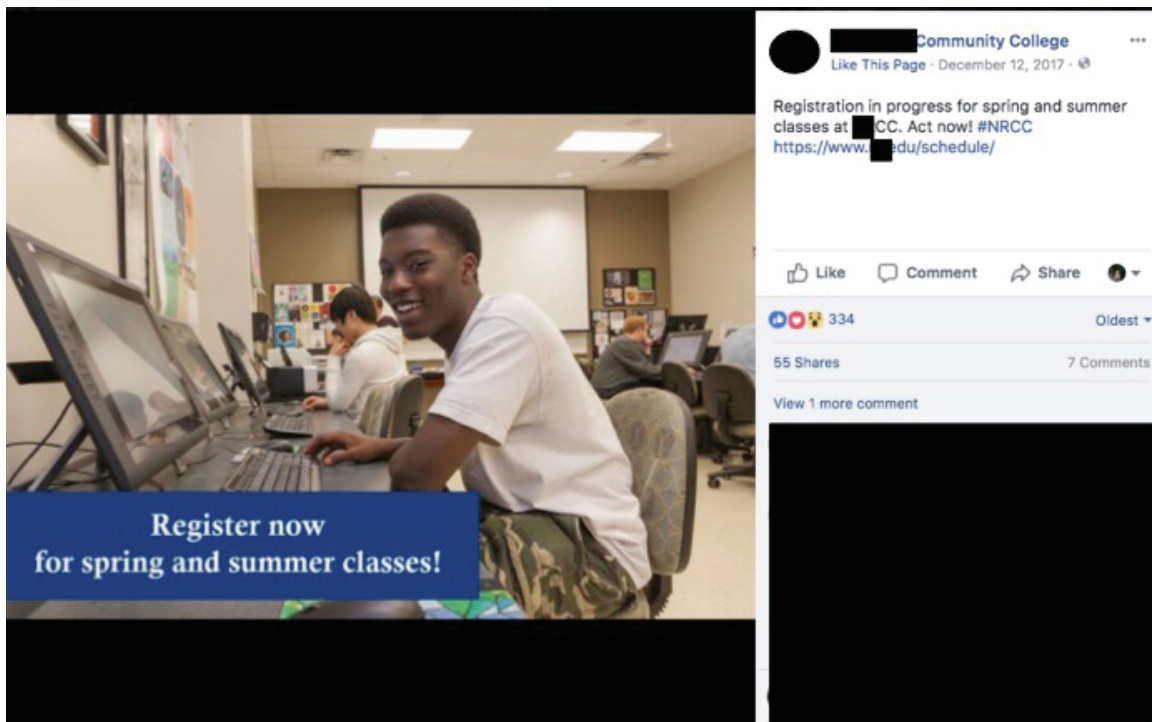


Figure 6. Recruitment post. Example recruitment post from College B’s Facebook.

All three colleges report using social media to tell users when the college is in an enrollment period and to suggest that they enroll.

Reach/engagement. The third gratification to arise from the data was reach/engagement. Administrators want their posts to be seen by and interacted with by as many users as possible. They believe that the more engagement (shares, likes, comments, etc.) a post receives, the more people will see it, and the more likely it is to reach a potential student. All three administrators reported a focus on reaching as many users as possible. Administrator A reported using Facebook because it allows the college to reach the largest number of users. A college B administrator shared a story in which a post that was created reached users all the way in California. Administrator C pointed out that the college uses social media as a supplement to more traditional communication, and that social media allows the college to reach students that can’t be reached by other means:

It seems to be that we don't necessarily reach them on television, because they're not watching commercials. We don't necessarily reach them in newspapers or radio, because there's satellite radio and they don't read the newspapers. They all seem to be on some form of social media.

Administrator C also said that social media allows the college to reach these students in a manner that is cheaper than other mediums. Administrators at colleges B and C both mentioned the importance of generating engagement, whether that be engagement with the post specifically through likes, comments, and shares, or following links to a webpage.

Visual messages are a key to engaging users. Administrators regularly use photos and videos to add a visual element to their content, and make it more eye catching and engaging to viewers.

All three colleges emphasized the importance of incorporating images into their social media posts. They reported that they try to include an image in every post, because users are more likely to look at and engage with the post if it includes an image.

Administrators at College B in particular shared a successful strategy that the administrators find quite humorous:

Do you want to know what my most popular posts are, and it's really silly and I make a joke in this department: the sky. It's very strange I know. Sometimes I do it and my colleges are like "oh really," but I get the most likes and feedback on something pretty. I think there's a tricky balance of making social media feel like a constant advertisement, and this is just like oh no they're just appreciating something, and letting me appreciate it versus being informative.

See the post this administrator is referring to below.



Figure 7. Reach/engagement post. Example reach/engagement post from College B's Facebook.

Both college B and C administrators said that they incorporate video when possible, but that they would like to include more video if they had the time and resources.

Administrators also attempt to increase engagement on social media by respecting boundaries and following the social norms and expectations of each platform.

Administrators try to respect the fact that many users have adopted these platforms for personal and social reasons.

Colleges B and C explained that there are some places on social media that their presence may not be welcome, or that some types of communication may not be appropriate on specific platforms, and they try to be respectful of these boundaries and expectations. Administrator C stated:

I just try to be cautious not to go into a place where they don't want us, and there are places where they don't want to see us. Sometimes I think Snapchat is the place where they don't want to see us.

Administrator C did not directly explain why students might not want the college to be on Snapchat, but mentioned that teenagers use it one-on-one with each other, and that being reached out to by the college on Snapchat might be seen as invasive. As mentioned in the quote from College B about the posts of the sky, Administrator C said that students do not want social media content to make them feel like they are always being pushed to do something. A College B administrator also stated that they do not want their social media efforts to feel obtrusive to students.

Part Two

For part two of the study 18 students currently enrolled at each of the community colleges participated in one focus group per college (six participants per focus group). Data collected from the focus groups was used to answer RQ2 through RQ5. Nine of the participants showed no nontraditional characteristics and were considered traditional students. Half of the participants were nontraditional students (two from College A, four from College B, and three from College C). Each focus group contained two minimally nontraditional students. College C's focus group included one moderately traditional student and College B's focus group contained two. In line with what other research on community colleges has suggested, the community college students involved in this study cited various reasons for attending the colleges in their responses, such as to transfer to a four year university (11), to gain an associates degree for use in their future career (6), or to take courses that would help them advance in their professional career (3) (Claggett,

2012, p. 49). The most common nontraditional characteristics reported by participants were holding a full-time job (5), being financially independent (2), having attained a GED, rather than a traditional high school degree (2), having a dependent other than a spouse (1), and having waited a year or more after completing high school to attend college (1). Fifteen of the 18 participants used Facebook (one from each school did not), nine used Twitter, 12 used Instagram, and 15 used Snapchat.

RQ2. RQ2 looked to determine what social media platforms community college students want to see recruitment content posted on. All of the students seemed to agree that the colleges should have a presence on Facebook, because a lot of people (and diverse groups of people) are on Facebook. All of the College A students agreed that Facebook was the most important platform for the college to be on. Many of the students also felt that the colleges should be on Twitter and Instagram. College B students were split with half believing Facebook was the most important and the other half choosing Twitter. Other social media platforms that were listed were YouTube (by one College A student) and Pinterest (by one College C student).

The platform Snapchat received mixed reviews from the participants. All of the students at college B seemed to think that it would be fine for the college to use Snapchat. One minimally nontraditional (displaying one nontraditional characteristic) participant said, "I think they should be on anything, because I feel like the more social media that you're on the more people you're going to get." A traditional (displaying no nontraditional characteristics) College B student stated, "I don't think they're on Snapchat, but Snapchat a lot of people actually use, including magazines." This statement alludes to the idea that while Snapchat started out as a platform that was used between close friends, it has

evolved into a more all-encompassing platform that even organizations use. However, five of the six students at college A were very against use of Snapchat by the college. Students at College C seemed on the fence regarding Snapchat and did not give any definitive answers on the college using this platform.

Focus group questions that aimed to answer RQ3 through RQ5 were accompanied by stimulus material. First the participants were asked a question that focused on a specific type of recruitment content, such as content about events or programs offered by the college. After providing an initial answer, participants were shown stimulus material (see Appendix E). The stimulus would depict an example post that contained the type of content being discussed. The purpose of the stimulus material was to prompt more detailed and specific feedback. Sometimes participants would not respond to the initial question, and the stimulus material helped them to gather ideas to talk about.

RQ3. The goal of RQ3 was to discover what types of recruitment messages community college students want to see on social media. While none of the students could report on social media content that they had seen prior to attending the college because they did not follow the college before attending, the students did suggest what types of posts they would have liked to see or what types of posts could have influenced their decision to attend the college. After going through the coding process to analyze the students' responses, three gratification classifications were established: socialization, discovery, and access. These categories reflect what gratifications students want to satisfy when they visit a college's social media accounts.

Socialization. When students explore or use a community college's social media platforms, the students want this content to help them socialize with other individuals

associated with the college. There are two subcategories of content that will satisfy potential students' need for socialization: information about extracurricular activities and information about faculty and students.

Extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities refer to any activities, events, programs or opportunities to interact personally with other students outside of the classroom. A traditional College A student stated:

"I'm looking for how active the students are in the actual school, because if the students are active, most likely [there's] probably going to be more to choose from . . . activities and just like more people to talk to in general."

Multiple students stated that before attending the school, they were unaware of the activities held on campus. One minimally traditional College B student said:

Before I attended here I didn't see anything like what was going on, but then when I attended here the school bulletin showed what was going on. So, I feel like if they would post out more to the public and not just to the students they would also get more people.

This student suggested that while the school currently sends announcements about extracurricular activities to the students' e-mails, if the school were to post these announcements on Facebook the information would be available to potential students as well. A traditional student at College C even suggested that if potential students were aware of the events happening on campus, they might show interest in scheduling campus visits during these events. There were three types of extracurricular activities that students said they would like to see on social media: events, free food, and sports.

The first type of extracurricular activity is events. An event would include any planned happening, not directly related to classes. Participants said that they would want to know what types of events the college holds, such as spring flings, movie showings or holiday celebrations. Participants also said that they would want to see images of students participating in these events. Students not only want to connect with other students, but want to connect with the community overall. When asked about what types of event posts might influence their decision to attend a college, a minimally nontraditional College B student stated: “Something like to get out to the community and not just stay in a bubble” and a traditional student added:

Yea say it's like for charity or something, it doesn't necessarily really have to be for us but like we could be doing this for charity, because a lot of people do like schools that participate in a lot of charities.

This statement suggests that students don't necessarily need the events to benefit them directly, but that the events should offer them the opportunity to engage with others in the college or community.

One unexpected idea that was mentioned in the focus groups with students from Colleges A and B was free food. Many events provide free food to those who attend. The students indicated twice in each of these focus groups that they would like to see that a college holds events or programs that offer free food. Students said that they are more likely to attend an event if free food is offered. Free food is often an incentive to bring students to events where they can socialize with one another.

Another type of event that students found important was sporting events. Sporting events would include organized games put on by the college, intramural games, or even

pick-up games planned by students. Two students at College B and two students at College C mentioned the importance of promoting sports on social media. One minimally nontraditional College B student stated: "One of the main things I was looking for was like sporting events, like what I would do outside of school." All of the colleges have athletics programs of some form. The schools could promote these opportunities to potential students who might be interested in participating in these sports, and also to students who would be interested in attending these events as spectators.

Faculty and students. The second subcategory of socialization was faculty and students. Posts that relate to faculty and students are any posts that introduce the user to people who work at or attend the college and allow the viewer to learn about these people. Students mentioned that they would like to have the opportunity to "meet" faculty before attending the college to get an idea of what these individuals are like. For example, a traditional College A student said:

I know it might be kind of odd, but kind of get to know the professors before I actually have them. Because there's a couple of professors that I've had, not here, but like I get into the classroom like "what in the freak did I just get myself into". So I think that would be pretty cool.

Advisors were another group of faculty members that students said they would like to see information about on social media. A traditional College A student provided an example:

They did it for orientation. It was like different academic advisors would talk a little bit about themselves, like where they were and stuff like that. And that was helpful, because I was able to find and like kind of figure out some more stuff about her.

Students will work with professors on a daily basis, and they trust advisors to have the students' best interests in mind. Since these individuals are so important to the students' success, students want to know that they will be able to connect with the professors and advisors.

Just as students want to be able to connect with faculty at the college, they also want to know that their personalities will fit well with other students at the school. A traditional student at College A provided an example from a nearby University that she felt could be implemented at the community college:

I follow Virginia Tech on Instagram and Facebook, and they do like a Humans of Virginia Tech thing, kind of like Humans of New York, and I think that would be cool too like for [College A] to do. It kind of gets like personal with people and tells their story of why they chose to go to [College A] or why they decided to start their college career at [College A].

By viewing content about the faculty and students at the college, potential students can determine whether they will feel welcome, or whether they will fit in with those people at the college.

Discovery. The second gratification that emerged from the analysis was discovery. When viewing a college's social media content as a potential student, individuals want to see information that helps them better understand the college and what it offers. There are two specific types of discovery information that students reported wanting to see: offered programs and classes and available services.

Programs and classes. Content related to programs and classes would include any posts that discuss the overall programs, degrees, certifications, or individual classes that

the college offers. The students mentioned that they would like to be aware of all of the programs offered by the college, because it would allow them to know whether the college offers programs or degrees that interest them. One moderately (displaying two or three nontraditional characteristics) nontraditional student at College B referred to posts that the student had seen the college post previously:

This summer they were doing this countdown to the start of fall classes, and they would countdown with like pictures. So, they had pictures of people in different programs and groups of people holding numbers and they would be like “eight days until whatever”. And then they would say “these students are graduating from the nursing program, and they're super excited” or whatever. And they would have like a link to the nursing program information, so I thought that that was cool.

Not only do posts like the ones mentioned by the student promote the program in general, but also provide information on the people in those programs and their plans after college.

Students also discussed the importance of providing information about more detailed aspects of the programs and classes. A traditional College B student stated:

The degree I'm going for, we have a big mock trial. It's two days, and we basically argue in front of a judge in an actual courtroom and everything. Like post it and if somebody who would like to do that degree would see it then they would be like “okay that's really cool; this other college doesn't do that” like this kind of makes it (the program) seem more interesting.

Students not only want to have an idea of what programs, degrees and classes are available to them, but also what types of work they will be doing in those classes.

Services. Services could include those that aid the student in an educational or personal context. Educational support services may help them with things like finding classes to take, planning their schedule, and seeking academic assistance when they are not performing as well as they would like. Personal support opportunities would refer to content that informs students of services such as mental health counseling, or even advising on how to handle a college course load, or how to plan for the future. Students want to know that it will be easy to find the information and help that they need once they are admitted into a college. When asked what types of content they would like to see, one minimally traditional student at College B said: “Probably basic information, like registration for classes or like how to register and stuff like that.” If the colleges post links or step-by-step instructions on how to perform these tasks, it shows students that this information is already easily available, and they will not have to search to find it once they are admitted to the college. A minimally nontraditional College A student mentioned a service offered by the college that they felt should be promoted:

Um, I guess you could do like mental health for one, because I know [College A] they have a mental health section just for like kids that are struggling with that, whereas other colleges don't.

Students want to be confident that the college they are considering will provide them with all of the services and support they will need to succeed, and using social media to promote services shows students where they can go when seeking information once they are admitted to the college.

RQ4. RQ4 engaged the focus groups to determine how community college students want their colleges to format the recruitment content that is posted on social media. The

coding process uncovered one gratification category related to students' formatting preferences: accessibility.

Accessibility. The accessibility gratification refers to the users' desire for the content to be easy to view, understand, and interact with in the context of each platform. Four subcategories that further explain students' accessibility needs were established: image-based, directive, purposeful, and semi-unique but platform appropriate.

Image-based. The first accessibility subcategory is image-based. A post that is image-based includes at least one photo, video, or GIF (Graphics Interchange Format). Students suggested that incorporating an image in every post would increase the likelihood that the post would be read. These posts can also contain text whenever appropriate; however, that text should meet the standards discussed in the following subcategories. A traditional College B student stated: "I definitely think the key is a picture, because I'm gonna be more likely to read what's underneath if there's a picture that I find interesting." A moderately traditional student agreed saying:

Well especially like if it's Twitter or something and it's all words, words, words and then you see a picture it kind of just like catches your eye and you're more willing to like stop on it.

Students at College B suggested that the college post short (no more than one and a half minutes) videos of things like sporting events, or hands-on work in classes, such as the culinary classes cooking or chemistry classes performing experiments. Images seem to be more effective than text at catching users' attention.

Directive. The second subcategory of accessibility is directive. In order for a post to be considered directive it needs to contain only the information necessary for the reader to

understand the content. Students reported that they are more likely to read short posts than long posts. When the participants were shown the stimulus material (see Appendix E) they reported liking some of the posts, because they were “short, sweet, and to the point.” A minimally nontraditional College B student said:

I feel like if the college gave like a three paragraph long description and everything a lot of people won't read it because people don't want to go on social media and read a novel. So I think doing a short sweet like that (referring to the stimulus post) with a link if you're interested.

When discussing posts about events College B students stated that the example event post provided as stimulus (see Appendix E) was lacking information regarding where the event was being held. The following conversation ensued:

Participant 1 (traditional): “You don't need many more details, just like where.”

Participant 2 (minimally nontraditional): “When and where.” Participant 3

(traditional): “Just like when, where, why.” Participant 1: “I don't need a reason, just where it is.”

Students want just enough content to know how to attend, sign up, or find more extensive information.

Students not only expressed that the text in a post should be directive, but that any images should also be directive. As discussed in the previous category (image-based) Students will automatically decide, based on a first glance at a post, whether they will actually read the post or scroll past it. In order for students to stop and read the post, the images need to be simple and have a specific focus.

When showed a stimulus post containing a photo of students sitting at a table painting pumpkins (see Appendix E), traditional College A students said:

Participant one: "It wouldn't really catch my eye." Participant two: "It's just like a jumble of stuff." Participant three: "Yea like looking at it from here I mean . . .it's like a whole lot going on. It's a lot of colors in a small area, so it there's too much going on. Knowing me, I just scroll by it."

The participants suggested that a photo of a painted pumpkin would have been a more directive image, which would have been more successful at catching their attention. Both the image and text in the post are expected to be minimal and to the point.

Purposeful. The third accessibility subcategory to emerge from the coding process was purposeful. A post is considered purposeful if the creator has a specific goal in mind when crafting the content. A post should not be created simply for the purpose of filling space on the account. Students want the content that they view to be meaningful.

Participants felt that the colleges likely did not have content worthy of posting every single day. When asked how often they thought the college should post on social media a moderately traditional College B student said:

I would say maybe like they shouldn't try so hard to post something. That way it's not like forced. So with that whole thing, (referring to a stimulus post wishing the students a "mindful Monday" (see Appendix E)) the good morning post, if they were also posting a goodnight thing I feel like that would be kind of weird.

Another reason that students provided for limiting posting to purposeful content was to avoid flooding users with updates. The following quote was pulled from a conversation the students were having about how many school announcements get sent to their school e-

mail accounts; however, they seem to be applying the same idea to social media. One minimally traditional College B student stated: “I get so many emails from them I don't really even look. . . so you would miss the important information, because you would see their name pop up and you'd be like oh it's probably another good night post.” If an account posts too much content too often, and especially if that content is not purposeful, students will lose interest, and stop paying attention to any content posted by that account, or unfriend/unfollow the account altogether.

Semi-unique but platform appropriate. The final accessibility subcategory is semi-unique, but platform appropriate. Semi-unique refers to students' desire for the content that they see to have some sort of unique quality to it, so that if students follow the college on multiple platforms they do not have to see the same content repeatedly on each platform. Platform appropriate describes students' wish for the content to fit the unique standards of each social media platform. When students were asked how they felt about the college posting the exact same content on different social media platforms, they had mixed feelings. One traditional College C student stated: “If you follow them on each one you don't want like notifications or seeing that same thing repeated.” However, the students noted that some content needs to be the same in order to get a message across, especially when a message contains details about an event. For example, a traditional College A student said:

I feel like if you're going to put up one thing for . . . a certain event, you should put the same thing up on a different social media site if you're talking about the same thing, because not everybody that follows you on Twitter will follow you on Instagram.

Students also discussed the unique nature of the various social media platforms, and how they prefer content to be uniquely tailored to the platform. A minimally nontraditional College A student stated: “Yea Facebook and Instagram are kind of the same thing like that, but a Twitter post wouldn't be the same thing as a Facebook post.” The same student later said:

That . . . depends on what kind of content you were talking about, because if we're talking about maybe the college there's a weather delay and they're just getting that out, that's something that fits in perfectly fine on Twitter. It's something that you could see on Facebook. It's not something that would be in place on Instagram, people don't look at Instagram for news.

A traditional student followed up with a similar statement:

I think that they can be more lighthearted. Like if it's Instagram, I know there's a lot of younger people on that, verses Facebook where your whole family is on that.

College C students had a similar conversation, with one traditional student saying:

I think with Twitter mostly like, say when the school's closed, that would be a good way, because Twitter's mostly like simple words so it posts quicker. So I think stuff like that should be focused more on Twitter, but Facebook, say maybe a weekly newsletter on that page saying here's what's going on, maybe some pictures or something.

These statements suggest that the students welcome more frequent posting on Twitter than Facebook or Instagram, and some see Twitter as the key platform for sharing news. However, not all of the students used Twitter, and those who didn't felt that the same or similar messages could be posted on Facebook.

Students do not expect the colleges to post vastly different content on all of their social media platforms. A minimally nontraditional College B student provided the following suggestion after viewing the “mindful Monday” stimulus (see Appendix E): “Maybe like same caption maybe like a different picture of campus or something.” Other students agreed with this suggestion; however, one traditional student recognized the burden that this expectation puts on administrators by saying: “At the same time I feel like it might take a lot more time than absolutely necessary.” Students recognize that the colleges are limited in their time and resources, so they understand the need to reuse some content from platform to platform, but for accessibility purposes, they appreciate when administrators take the time to make small alterations across platforms, and tailor that content to fit the norms of each platform.

RQ5. RQ5 aimed to determine what gratifications students are seeking from social media recruitment content posted by community colleges, and to what extent those gratifications are being met. None of the students reported following their colleges on social media prior to being admitted into the schools. However, one student at College A did report looking at the college’s social media platforms to determine what activities were held on campus. Instead, students indicated that they utilized the schools’ websites for finding information. A College A student reported using an app created by the college to check the college’s academic calendar. However, the student said: “I deleted it, because it’s a waste of space” indicating that the application was not as useful as the student might have anticipated it being. Therefore, for the most part, the students who participated in this study did not seek out the colleges’ social media accounts to gratify any of their needs. The

students did, however, shed light on what needs they might have had as *potential* students, which included socialization, discovery, and accessibility.

The interviews that were conducted to answer RQ1 established three types of gratifications. These gratifications describe not only what administrators get out of their social media communication, but why they use these channels to communicate with potential students. These gratifications include creating awareness, recruiting students, and increasing the reach and engagement of their posts.

To answer RQ2 through RQ5 focus groups were conducted with current students at the three community colleges. These focus groups confirmed that students are open to seeing the colleges on most social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Twitter (RQ2). The focus groups established two gratifications that students expect community colleges' social media communication to satisfy, which include students' desire for socialization, their need to gain information in the discovery process (RQ3). The focus groups also shed light on one final gratification that students expect college's social media communication to satisfy, which is their need for ease of access to the content administrators' content (RQ4). Comparison of the interview and focus group data showed similarities in administrators' use of social media for recruitment and students' reported gratifications being sought from this content.

Discussion

The current study set out to discover potential community college students' and community college administrators' reported uses and gratifications of social media. This study established that creating awareness, recruiting students, and increasing the reach and engagement of posts are community college administrators' key gratifications sought,

which lead them to use these media in their communication strategies. Administrators create awareness by reaching out to the community as a whole, and sharing information about stories and events. Administrators will specifically work to increase awareness among nontraditional students by posting content about career development opportunities and relying on platforms, like Facebook, that nontraditional students often use. To increase the reach and engagement of their content, social media administrators utilize visual messages and try to be respectful of the social boundaries and norms present on these platforms. These findings have the potential to impact community college social media administrators' future use of social media, increase attention to the community college community, and guide future research studies.

When potential community college students go to a community college's social media platforms they expect the content on the platform to aid them in socialization, provide them with information in the discovery process, and be easily accessible. Social media content that includes information about extracurricular activities or introduces potential students to individuals already associated with the college, like faculty and students, helps potential students find ways to socialize with others. Potential students in the discovery process are looking to community colleges' social media accounts to find information on the colleges' programs and classes and any services that are available to students. When students seek out this information they expect it to be easily accessible. In order for social media content to gratify potential students' accessibility need it should be image-based, directive, purposeful, and semi-unique but platform appropriate.

This study established that community colleges are using social media as a supplement to more traditional communication approaches such as websites, e-mail,

television, radio and telephone or face-to-face communication. Social media is not the colleges' primary platform for recruitment, but the colleges' administrators do use social media to reach the individuals who they cannot reach via traditional media. This finding confirms the claims made by Hootsuite (2017) and Smith (2016) that community colleges have begun to adopt social media and have done so because of the ability of these media to reach publics quickly and at low cost.

Administrators reported that they do not want their social media platforms to be overloaded with advertised content that has the potential to turn students off from following or friending the accounts. Instead, administrators want to attract students by informing the entire community of all that the college has to offer, in hopes that potential students will be interested or intrigued by the information that the administrators post and will consider attending the college. The administrators also shared that in addition to trying to reach potential students, they also want to reach other people in these students' lives, in hopes that these individuals will suggest the college to the potential students. This tactic may be more effective than trying to reach potential students directly, since only one of the student participants had looked at the college's social media accounts before attending the school. This community focus may be benefitting the colleges in a second way: students expressed that they like to see that the college provides opportunities to engage with the community as a whole, so creating a community centered discussion on social media may give potential students a feeling of connectedness to the community. This attention to multiple groups echoes previous research, which found that 73% of schools use Facebook to communicate with both prospective and current students, this study

showed that potential students are one of many groups that community colleges use their social media accounts to communicate with (Varsity, 2013).

All of the students felt that the colleges should be on social media, yet none of them reported following the accounts before being admitted, and only one reported even looking at the accounts beforehand. Prior to this study, little research had been conducted on the number of potential students who use social media as a tool for learning about colleges. What research did exist mirrors the current findings, and suggests that the number of students using social media for discovery is minimal, but that the majority of students still expect the colleges to have a social media presence (“The maturation”, 2017).

Four of the ten students who did not follow the college on any social media platforms claimed that they were not aware that the college was present on social media. Other reasons students gave for not following the colleges were that they had never thought of following their college; they didn’t know why they would; they like to keep school and personal life separate; they aren’t very aware of activity or action on campus; and they only follow accounts that post content that inspires them. One key to increasing the number of potential students who use these tools is to make more people, especially potential students, aware that they exist. An administrator at College B expressed an interest in wanting to know if students would be okay with seeing promotions for the college’s social media accounts on campus. A student at College B suggested that the college promote the accounts on the televisions that are located around campus (which display campus news). However, it may be difficult to promote to potential students on the campus, since they would only be present during physical campus visits; administrators could reach this group by adding links or usernames to the college’s social media accounts

on recruitment content that is sent out both via traditional mail and e-mail in order to direct the viewer to these accounts. Administrators should also make sure that the colleges' websites clearly indicate that the college is present on social media and should clearly link directly to these sites. One College B student even suggested that the college add social media icons to their billboards to increase awareness of the accounts. Administrators could even offer small incentives for following the college's accounts, such as awarding a prize to the 1000th follower. Promoting the accounts and making students aware of the types of content that the colleges share on these accounts has the potential to increase the number of potential students following the colleges.

The administrators reported using Facebook as their primary platform, due to its ability to reach a majority of social media users, and most students agreed that Facebook is the key platform for the colleges to be present on. However, some of the students felt that it might be more important for the colleges to be on Twitter, since some groups have begun to move away from using Facebook. The students seemed to share the administrators' uncertainty regarding the colleges' use of Snapchat. While some of the students saw no issue with the college using Snapchat, others were vehemently against it.

The split opinion on the colleges' use of Snapchat suggests that some students may be using the platform for different purposes than others. There are two courses of action that a college might consider before delving into Snapchat: 1) determine how the students at that particular college are using Snapchat, and whether students are comfortable connecting with the college on that platform, 2) create a Snapchat account and make students aware of the account, but only interact with students that seek out a connection, rather than reaching out to all students. By giving the students authority over whether they

engage with the account students are less likely to feel that the college is overstepping boundaries.

U&G seeks to determine how and why people use specific media, as well as why people choose one form of media over another. The current study suggests that potential community college students are not relying on social media as a tool for information gathering in the discovery process (although the current students did report discovery needs), which, based on U&G, implies that there is another medium that may be more effectively serving potential students' information gathering needs. The majority of the students in this study stated that they used the colleges' websites for information gathering. It may be that finding information about the college is easier on the college's website, since websites have more organizational structure than social media platforms. Potential students can visit a website and click on a specific tab or search a keyword to find certain information, while if they were to look to social media to find this information, they would have to scroll through all of the college's posts to find the information they are seeking. This lack of organization on social media may explain why the administrators rely on social media for awareness more than recruitment. This idea aligns with Lichtenstein and Rosenfeld's (1983) proposition that the gratifications obtained from a medium are specific to the medium, rather than the users' needs. Potential students need information about a college's financial aid options; however, because social media does not allow this information to be found simply by clicking a tab or selecting an item in a dropdown menu, these students will not look to social media to gratify this need, which may mean that these social media do not provide the same process gratifications that websites do (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

There was overlap in the data that emerged in the focus groups with current students and that established in the administrator interviews. Students in the recruitment mindset want to see information about extracurricular activities and administrators are gratifying this need to some extent by posting content that shares information about events. Administrators are also gratifying students' need to learn about faculty and students by sharing stories about people connected to the colleges. These stories are also helping to gratify students' need to learn about programs and classes offered through administrators' use of the stories to promote the classes. One discovery need that the administrators may not be gratifying as successfully is students' need for information about support services offered by the college. Administrators could use student stories or testimonials to showcase these services.

For the most part, administrators seem to be gratifying the students' accessibility needs. Students want the content posted to be short and specific. Administrators did state that they try to keep their posts brief; however, they may be able to improve the directness of their posts. Administrators are absolutely meeting students' need for image-based content; administrators explained that they try to include images in all posts. However, administrators may benefit from increasing the number of short videos they use.

Students want the content that they see to always have a purpose. The administrators appear to be meeting this need most of the time. Although students welcome occasional good morning/good day/well wishes posts, they do not want the accounts to be overwhelmed with this type of post. Semi-unique is the one need that administrators may be having the most difficulty gratifying. The colleges often post the same content on more than one social media platform. Making small changes to the content

before posting it on a different platform could make a noticeable difference. However, students do acknowledge the limited amount of time administrators have and take that into consideration when evaluating the colleges' posts.

The current study established a few platform specific uses and preferences. The focus groups established that some students will visit a college's Facebook page simply to look at photos, and that students expect the content posted by the college to be heavily image-based (which supports claims made by Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). The students reported that, of all the social media platforms, they are most reliant on Twitter for news about the college, which supports research conducted by Quan-Haase, et., al. (2010) and Hambrick, et., al. (2010).

The colleges seem to be using Instagram to share the same messages that they share on other platforms, like Facebook and Twitter. If administrators want the colleges' social media communication to fit in with that of the students, administrators might consider limiting the content they post on Instagram to content that is self-expressive (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Self-expressive content could include photos of various parts of campus. Sharing content about faculty, staff and students could also be considered self-expressive content. Administrators might even consider showcasing food options offered on campus, since Instagram users are notorious for posting photos of their meals (Ye, Hashim, Baghirov, & Murphy, 2018).

Socialization was a key gratification uncovered in this study. Previous studies have also found a need among users to socialize with others on social media (Chen, 2015; Phua, et. al., 2017; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Reitz, 2012; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Students involved in this study reported that in the recruitment/discovery process they would use

social media to find opportunities to engage with other students, and would like to see stories that help them get to know people associated with the college, whether those people are students, faculty, or staff. The students suggested some specific people who they want to hear from/get to know before attending the college: teachers and advisors. Administrators may select other faculty and staff, who students can expect to see regularly once admitted, to introduce on social media, such as librarians or those who work in financial aid. In order to better gratify students' need for socialization, administrators could use social media to connect potential students with one another as a recruiting tool. One option would be to set up a private chat between interested students where they could talk among one another. Administrators could also hold conversations or Q&A sessions with current students, faculty or staff. The student, faculty or staff member could type responses to potential students' questions or could even use Facebook live to provide a live video stream of their responses. These opportunities would allow the potential students to create actual connections with these individuals, while also providing them answers to questions that they have. These connections and details would enhance the recruitment process, making it more personal and fulfilling the colleges' need to create an emotional connection with the individual as suggested by Fay (2016).

The current study explored users who have previously been neglected in the U&G literature and uncovered new and specific U&G categories, rather than relying on broad, existing categories (which follows the recommendations of Sundar and Limperos (2013)). These findings have the potential to inform the work of community college social media administrators, spur future research on community colleges, and introduce a new dually focused methodology for approaching U&G research.

Conclusion

This two-part study reinforces findings established in previous research and allows for comparisons of the use of social media as a recruitment tool at universities, which have been heavily studied, and community colleges, which have been discouragingly neglected in research. The current study provides a detailed analysis of the social media recruitment strategies of administrators at three Virginia community colleges, and the potential sought gratifications of students viewing this social media recruitment content. Because this study analyzed three community colleges in Virginia, the results are not generalizable to other contexts. Further research would need to be conducted with other community colleges in order to determine the generalizability of these results. I was only able to gain access to enough students to conduct one focus group at each college. The small number of focus group participants limits even the generalizability of the results to the colleges' student bodies as a whole. This study allows a glimpse into the perceptions of community college students; the colleges involved must gather additional data to determine whether these results mirror all students' perceptions.

I was not able to access potential students and instead relied on data from current students. Future studies should attempt to gain access to potential students to gather the most concrete data possible. Although this limitation may result in oversight of some preferences of potential students, it did allow me to gather data on preferences of individuals who have already completed the discovery and admissions processes. Current students may have insight on types of content that are influential in the discovery process that potential students would not yet know to look for. Therefore, by considering the preferences of current students, social media administrators may be able to provide

potential students with content that they are not even aware they need but has the potential to influence their college selection.

This study focused on administrators' reports of their social media usage, rather than an extensive analysis of the social media content itself. Future studies could benefit from including a content analysis of the colleges' social media sites. Administrators had their own methods for measuring their social media efforts and therefore viewed success on social media differently. These differences could not be controlled for in the data, and this limitation must be taken into consideration when interpreting and using these results.

Administrators may have perceived specific efforts or tactics as being successful, while in fact they may not be. It is also possible that administrators could have emphasized particular social media efforts over others, which might have painted a disproportionate picture of their social media efforts. For example, an administrator might have talked a lot about telling stories, while this same administrator only posts stories once every three months. This report will allow administrators to read their own thought processes and the thought processes of others in similar roles in regards to creating recruitment content on social media. This exposure might allow administrators to see holes or weaknesses in their approach and may help administrators to learn from one another in a way that might not be possible otherwise.

Due to the nature of the structured interview and focus group method used in this study, I was limited in the follow-up questions that could be asked. Future studies may utilize a more fluid methodology to gather even more holistic data.

Although this study is limited in scope, it provides a first step into the exploration of online communication by community colleges. This study also demonstrates a new

approach to U&G studies. While current U&G studies explore either the user or creator, this study combined both approaches. This dual approach allows the researcher to better understand both the creation and use processes. How creators craft content will impact how users can use content, and how users use content should influence how creators craft the content. Due to the interconnectedness of these two groups, it makes sense that they be researched collectively. It is my hope that the information obtained through this study will help community college administrators better understand how they can most effectively market the colleges to potential students, and make the process administrators go through to create social media recruitment content more efficient. Ideally this exposure will prompt future scholarly attention in the community college environment and give these institutions, students, and administrators the consideration they deserve.

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Appendix A: Part One Consent Form

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: Social Media Recruitment: A case study of three community colleges in Southwest Virginia (Tentative)

Investigator(s): Beth Waggenpack bwaggens@vt.edu
Name E-mail / Phone number
Jessalyn Coble Jessalyn@vt.edu/276-389-8692
Name E-mail / Phone number

I. Purpose of this Research Project

This purpose of this research study is to investigate community colleges' use of social media for recruitment purposes. The results of this study will be used as part of a Master's thesis and will be presented to each of the interviewees and the Colleges they are associated with. You are one of approximately five professionals being interviewed as part of this study.

These interviews will shed light on how three community colleges in Southwest Virginia are currently using social media, and what the colleges' ultimate social media goals are, particularly in regards to recruitment.

The information obtained in these interviews will feed into the second part of the study, which will involve performing focus groups with students at each community college to gather data on their social media preferences in a recruitment context. These focus groups will provide the professionals in charge of social media at the community colleges with data and suggestions on how they can most efficiently engage potential students via social media.

II. Procedures

You will participate in a face-to-face interview, during which you will be asked questions that are meant to explore your use of social media to recruit students on behalf of the college that you work for. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The interview will last no more than one hour.

III. Risks

The questions you will be asked will relate to the work that you do as part of your job. Discomfort or risk from answering these questions, if any, will be minimal and no greater than what can be expected in everyday life. Quotes from interviews may be included in the

Master's thesis that will be produced, as well as reports that will be provided to all interviewees and the colleges they work for. Loss of confidentiality is a potential risk due to the small number of participants and the public nature of your job title. To minimize the risk of being identified and enhance confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used when quoting from interviews and small details may be changed. The names of the Community Colleges will not be published. You may choose to consent to the use of quotations from the interview at the bottom of this form. The decision to participate will not affect your employment with your current employer or Virginia Tech.

IV. Benefits

Results from the study will be used to make suggestions on how the colleges can best utilize social media to communicate with students. This study will lead into a study that aims to provide you with detailed information regarding Southwest Virginia community college students' perceptions of social media use by their college. No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your privacy will be protected throughout the process and all the information you submit will be kept confidential. Data collected during the interview will be identified only by participant code. Identifiable participant codes will be stored separately, and securely from coded data. Only study investigators will have access to data and participant codes. Quotes from interviews may be used in reports given to the community colleges and/or in the researcher's Master's thesis. Pseudonyms will be given if/when quotations are used to help minimize identification. Small details of quotations may also be changed to help enhance confidentiality. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent. The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free to not answer any questions that you choose or not respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

Should you withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation, you will be compensated for the portion of the project completed in accordance with the Compensation section of this document.

VIII. Questions or Concerns

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study’s conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu or (540) 231-4991.

IX. Subject’s Consent

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all of my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

I consent the use of quotations from this interview in the researcher’s Master’s Thesis and final report to be given to each community college involved.

Subject signature

Date

Subject printed name

Appendix B: Interview Guide

I want to remind you that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You may decline to answer any question that I ask, and you can stop the interview at any point. Your responses will be audio recorded for transcription. Your name and the name of the college you work for will be removed from your responses to ensure confidentiality. Only the researcher will be able to connect your responses to you. You have received a consent form outlining the possible risks of participating in this interview. Do you understand the form and accept the terms laid out in it?

1. First, can you tell me your job title and job responsibilities?
2. Tell me about the social media platforms you currently use?
 - 2a. Who determines which platforms will be utilized in the college's communications?
3. What platforms are you not currently using, but would like to use?
4. What is your purpose for using social media/what are the goals associated with your social media communication? (Attract potential students, engage current students, engage with the community, etc)
5. How do you use social media as a recruiting tool?
 - 5a. Do you think you are succeeding in gaining the interest of potential students with your social media communication?
 - 5b. Do you have any data to support this that you can share with me?
6. What groups do you primarily target on social media for recruitment? (Recent high school graduates, professionals, ect.)
 - 6a. Why do you use social media to reach these groups?
7. How does the fact that many of your students are "nontraditional" impact your use of social media?
8. What types of recruitment content do you generally post to your social media platforms (updates on events, information about the college/professors/instructors/programs/certificates offered)?
9. How is this content generally formatted? (text, photos, videos)
10. Thinking about type of content and formatting of the content, what types of posts do you think are most effective in getting the attention of potential students?

If time allows:

11. Who do you think most commonly looks at your social media platforms?

12. What do users gain from following/friending you on social media?
13. What are you most eager to know about potential students' social media preferences?
14. Can you rank each of the platforms you use from most successful in reaching your goals to least successful?
15. Why did you rank (first ranked platform) as the most successful?
16. Why did you rank (last ranked platform) as the least successful?
17. How do you measure the success of your social media efforts?
18. What do you find most challenging about using social media in the context of your job?

Appendix C: Part Two Consent Form

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: Social Media Recruitment: A case study of three community colleges in Southwest Virginia

Investigator(s): Beth Waggenpack bwaggens@vt.edu
Name E-mail / Phone number
Jessalyn Coble Jessalyn@vt.edu/276-389-8692
Name E-mail / Phone number

I. Purpose of this Research Project

This purpose of this research study is to investigate students' perceptions and use of content posted on social media by community colleges. The results of this study will be used as part of a Master's thesis and will be presented to each of the three Colleges involved and the social media administrators at each of the colleges. You are one of approximately 72 students participating in approximately 6 focus group discussions as part of this study.

These focus groups will shed light on how students use the content posted on social media by community colleges in the recruitment process.

The information gained in these focus groups will provide the professionals in charge of social media at the community colleges with data and suggestions on how they can most efficiently recruit potential students via social media.

II. Procedures

You will be asked to come to the focus group location at the time you signed up to participate. The focus groups will be held in a building on the college's campus. The location will be easily accessible to all students and will be a building that most, if not all, students are familiar with (such as a student's center or the building that the class you were recruited from is held).

You will be asked to fill out a brief questionnaire with questions related to your social media use, your reason for attending the community college, and one question that will attempt to determine if you qualify as a nontraditional student.

Next you will engage in a focus group discussion. You will be free to speak as much or as little as they would like, but the researcher may prompt participants who have spoken less than others to provide their perspective. The focus groups will last no more than 1 hour.

Focus groups will be audio and video recorded.

III. Risks

The risks involved with participating are limited. You will be discussing your perceptions and opinions of social media content published by your college with other students who you attend class with. You may have opinions that are different than your peers and other participants may disagree with what you say, which could lead to feelings of isolation. However, this risk is no more than what you would expect when engaging in any conversation with others.

IV. Benefits

This study aims to provide social media administrators with detailed information regarding Southwest Virginia community college students' perceptions of social media use by their college. Results from the study will be used to make suggestions on how the colleges can best utilize social media to communicate with and recruit potential students. No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your privacy will be protected throughout the process and all the information you submit will be kept confidential. Data collected during the focus group will be identified only by participant code. Identifiable participant codes will be stored separately, and securely from coded data. Only study investigators will have access to data and participant codes. Quotes from focus groups may be used in reports given to the community colleges and/or in the researcher's Master's thesis. Pseudonyms will be given if/when quotations are used to help minimize identification. The focus groups will be audio and video recorded for data collection purposes. Recordings of the focus groups will be saved on a password-protected computer. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent. The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation

You will be compensated for your time with a \$5 gift card.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free to opt out of answering any questions without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

Should you withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation, you will still be compensated with a \$5 gift card.

VIII. Questions or Concerns

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, have any questions about the protection of human research participants regarding this study, you may contact:

Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board
Telephone: [\(540\) 231-3732](tel:5402313732)
Email: irb@vt.edu

IX. Subject's Consent

I am 18 years or older and I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all of my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

I consent the use of quotations from this interview in the researcher's Master's Thesis and final report to be given to each community college involved.

Subject signature

Date

Subject printed name

Appendix D: Pre-Focus Group Questionnaire

1. What social media platforms do you currently use? Check all that apply.

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Twitter
- Pinterest
- YouTube
- Flickr
- Other _____

2. When are you likely to be on social media? Check all that apply.

- Morning
- Mid-day
- Afternoon
- Evening
- Night
- I don't use social media at specific time just whenever I have a free moment

3. Do you follow your college on social media?

- Yes
- No

If no:

Why don't you follow the college on social media?

If yes:.

Why do you follow the college on social media?

What platforms do you follow the college on? Check all that apply.

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- YouTube
- Flickr
- Pinterest

Did you begin following the college before or after you began attending?

- Before
- After
- Both depending on the platform

4. Why did you choose to attend your college? (think back to when you made this decision not why you continue to attend)

- Location
- Price/funding
- Programs offered
- Faculty
- Other _____

5. What is your goal/purpose for attending community college?

- To gain a degree that can be used to transfer to a 4-year University
- To gain an associates degree that I will use to go into a career
- To take courses that will help me advance in my professional career
- To take courses that will help me get a new job/career
- To take courses that will allow me to develop personally or as part of a hobby
- Other** _____

6. Check all of the following that apply to you:

- I received a GED or certificate of completion rather than a standard high school diploma
- I waited a year or more after completing high school to enroll in college
- I have a dependent other than a spouse
- I am a single parent
- I work a full-time job
- I am financially independent
- Military Veteran

Appendix E: Focus Group Guide

For the following questions I want you to try to think back to when you were thinking about attending the college/researching your options.

1. When you were planning on attending community college how much did you look at social media for information on the college?
 - a. How often did you find the information you wanted on those platforms?
2. For those of you who followed/friended the college on social media before enrolling, did you follow the college so that you could look at the page to find specific information or simply so that you could see the college's posts in your feed?
3. Those of you who did not follow/friend the college on social media, how often did you look at the accounts for information?
4. When you go to a college's social media platforms what type of information are you looking for as a potential student?
 - a. Which one type of information is the most important to you?
5. Would you ever share a post from a community college with someone else who might be interested in the content of the post? Or maybe tag them in it?
 - a. What would a post have to have for you to share it or tag someone in it?
 - b. Have you ever done this before? Do you remember the post?
 - c. What type of post are you more likely to do this for? (*events, programs, classes*)
6. What topics should a community college be limited to posting about?
 - a. What would you think if you saw the college post something like this? (show post from college B with sky)
 - b. Why?



Caption: Good morning – simply sharing a mindful Monday morning moment from campus. Hope you have a good week.

7. Which social media platforms should the college be present on?
 - a. Should they post different content on each of these platforms or can it be the same?
 - b. How different should it be?
 - c. Which platform is it most important for the college to be on?
8. How often should a college post on social media each day?
9. What type of content, if any, could a college post that might influence you to choose to attend that college? (prompts if needed to get discussion going - *specific courses, events, resources*)
10. How did/would/could a post about an interesting event on campus ever impact your decision to attend the college? (Show comic con example post)
 - a. In what way?



Caption: [College acronym]'s 4th annual Comic Con is just about to open! Visit us in [insert building name] today from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. #acronymComicCon4

11. Did/would/could posts that described or showed specific courses or programs influence your decision to attend the college? (Show pharmacy and drone posts)
a. In what way?



Caption: Interested in becoming a pharmacy technician? Check out training beginning next week. *Link*



Caption: Interested in taking the FAA drone regulation exam? ##CC is offering a exam prep course this semester. Sign up today! *Link*
#ACRONYM #drones

12. Did/would/could posts that showed what you get in addition to academics or that portrayed what student life might be like influence your decision to attend the college? (Show advising and pumpkin posts)

a. In what way?



Caption: Today we kick off Student Advisement Week. Students are encouraged to meet with their Advisor this week and plan for the coming 2018 Fall Semester. *Link*



Caption: Pumpkin Painting today until 3 PM. Student Life, 3rd floor. 🎃🎃🎃

13. Of all of the example posts that you saw, which ones, if any, did you feel were appropriate for a specific platform?
14. How likely would you have been to follow an account that is run by students at the college and posts content about what a day in the life of a student at the college is like?
- Would you be interested in helping to run an account like this?
15. Is the content that you see on the college's social media accounts more relevant to potential students, current students, or does it reach a wider audience?
- Can you explain where you see a difference?
16. What type of videos, if any, would you have liked to see from the college?

Appendix F: Focus Group Demographics

College A

Number of participants	6
Traditional students	4
Minimally nontraditional students	2
Moderately nontraditional students	0
Highly nontraditional students	0
Facebook users	5
Twitter users	5
Instagram users	5
Snapchat users	5
Students following the college	0

College B

Number of participants	6
Traditional students	2
Minimally nontraditional students	2
Moderately nontraditional students	2
Highly nontraditional students	0
Facebook users	5
Twitter users	3
Instagram users	5
Snapchat users	6
Students following the college	4

College C

Number of participants	6
Traditional students	3
Minimally nontraditional students	2
Moderately nontraditional students	1
Highly nontraditional students	0
Facebook users	5
Twitter users	1
Instagram users	2
Snapchat users	4
Students following the college	4

Appendix G Table of Categories

Part One Categories

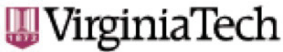
Primary Gratifications	Secondary Categories
Awareness	
	Community focus
	Stories/people
	Events
	Nontraditional Focus
Recruitment	
Reach/engagement	

Part Two

Primary Gratifications	Secondary Categories
Socialization	
	Extracurricular
	Faculty and students
Discovery	
	Programs and classes
	Supportive services
Accessibility	
	Image-based
	Directive
	Purposeful
	Semi-unique but platform appropriate


Appendix H: IRB Approval Forms

Part One



Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
email irb@vt.edu
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 23, 2017 

TO: Beth Waggenspack, Jessalyn Coble

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Social Media Recruitment: A case study of three community colleges in Southwest Virginia (Tentative)

IRB NUMBER: 17-905

Effective October 23, 2017, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at: <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7**
Protocol Approval Date: **October 23, 2017**
Protocol Expiration Date: **October 22, 2018**
Continuing Review Due Date*: **October 8, 2018**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

Part Two



Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
email irb@vt.edu
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 20, 2018
TO: Beth Waggenspack, Jessalyn Coble
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Social Media Recruitment: A case study of three community colleges in Southwest Virginia
IRB NUMBER: 18-026

Effective February 19, 2018, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at: <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7**
Protocol Approval Date: **February 19, 2018**
Protocol Expiration Date: **February 18, 2019**
Continuing Review Due Date*: **February 4, 2019**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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Appendix H: Interview Transcripts

College A Interview

1 J: Okay, so I guess I will go ahead and get us started because I don't want to take anymore of
2 your time than I asked for, but you can, like I said decline to answer any questions that you
3 want. They're pretty basic questions. If you want to stop at any point that's perfectly fine as
4 well.

5
6 A: Okay

7
8 J: So we will just start out . You don't have to elaborate a ton on these first few I just kinda
9 want to get us into talking about social media. Um, so can you just tell me what is your job
10 title and then some of your responsibilities, sort of related to social media.

11
12 A: Okay, um, I'm the public relations assistant here at College A and um, so I work with
13 social media, um, but we also do a lot of other things. There's only me and then one other
14 person in the public information office. Um, so I'm responsible for doing press releases, any
15 flyers that somebody might need for the school or advertisements. Um, we do the business
16 cards as well for anyone that needs business cards. Um, digital signs around the school and
17 social media. So social media is just one part of just kind of what we work on. Um and yea
18 so I mean I manage the sites we check em and respond to people and that kind of thing. Um
19 the official school account is what we manage.

20
21 J: Okay, um and then so can you tell me what social media platforms are you guys currently
22 using?

23
24 A: Um, we're on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube.

25
26 J: Okay, alright cool. Um, and then do you, I know you said its you and one other person. Do
27 you get to decide what platforms? Do you decide together or does the school sort of have
28 some sort of say?

29
30 A: I um, we decide together. Usually like I mean I could suggest one or something um, but
31 we would, since it's just the two of us, we kind of you know talk it through and we would
32 decide together if we want to start a new platform or not.

33
34 J: Okay, cool. Um. and then so this question I'm sort of thinking generally. So what is your
35 purpose or what are your goals that you have for your social media communication?

36
37 A: Um, just trying to I guess connect or um, with the community as a whole, whether that's
38 the ##CC community so including students and faculty/staff and um, board members and
39 you know, people we work with. But also just um being a presence in the new river valley
40 community. Um, and letting them know things we have to offer and events we have going
41 on here and just being a presence to them.

42
43 J: Okay, um, and then so thinking in terms of like using social media as a recruiting tool, so
44 how much is recruiting a focus with your social media?

45 A: Um, not a huge focus, you know obviously we um, do posts with different classes we
46 might offer that people maybe don't know we offer. Um, or when something new comes up
47 to let people know about it. Um, and also every you know semester with new registration
48 opening for the following semester we make sure to let people know about that. Um, but
49 we use social media um, also just you know for promoting events we have or letting people
50 know things that happen on campus or success stories um with students and stuff. Which I
51 guess in a way can be recruiting you know, because if they see a student being successful
52 then that might draw somebody else in. Um, so I guess it depends on how you look at
53 recruitment, but we just try to you know let people know what the college is about, what
54 we do here, that kind of stuff. Um, so some of them are targeted when we offer various
55 maybe workforce classes, that would be um short term training or maybe like a word class
56 that people didn't know we offered, or we offer like a motorcycle safety so we'll post that
57 on Facebook of like did you know that we offer this kind of course? Um, but we don't
58 typically do ads we do that through posts on our page.

59
60 J: Okay. Um, so do you think that, and I know this is something that you kind of have to
61 guess at, but do you think that what you all are doing on social media is helping you get
62 new students or at least get interest and potential new students?

63
64 A: We like to think so you know, but um sometimes it's hard to tell unless you stop doing
65 something which one's effective. Um cause we had a class and we saw increased
66 enrollment, but we had also done a news release and we had done a email thing about it
67 and we did a social media post, so it was kind of like I don't know which one if it did but yea
68 we would like to think so. We, for the fall semester we had done a third party and they had
69 done some advertising for us um, but we didn't really see an increase on our social media
70 account with that, which was interesting. We saw more of a interaction on our account and
71 more likes and followers when we do boosted posts ourselves. So we thought that was kind
72 of interesting when we did that last semester and we were like well, we didn't see much of
73 a interaction increase for us on social media.

74
75 J: That is interesting. Um, so how do you all measure that? So I know you just said yall look
76 at an increase in likes. Is that just through Facebook?

77
78 A: Yea, so we just use like the Insights on Facebook and then the Twitter analytics just to
79 kind of look, and you know Facebook will tell you how many people your post has reached,
80 so we kind of just look to see if we are reaching people. And their interactions, if they are
81 reacting to it that kind of thing. Um, or if we have new followers on the page. That's kind of
82 how we gauge it.

83
84 J: Okay, um and then so what groups, I know you said it's sort of community wide, but are
85 there particular groups that you might target more with your social media communication?

86
87 A: Um, I know on there you had suggested high school. I guess we don't necessarily reach
88 out to those as much. We have career coaches in the high schools that work with them, so
89 that's always really helpful in pulling those into the colleges, because we have them in their
90 school. Um, so a lot of times we will reach out to I guess the nontraditional student, maybe

91 letting them know we have these short term courses we offer in case they want to change
92 careers or if they are already you know working and they want to do more training to help
93 them move up in that field. Various things that we might offer in that way, so I think
94 sometimes we with our posts we might focus on those more, on the nontraditional students
95 than the high school.

96

97 J: Okay. That really leads into my next question, so you might have covered it all, but is
98 there anything other than those things that might be impacted by the fact that you all do
99 cater to a lot of nontraditional students?

100

101 A: Um are you talking about like the types of posts we do? Like if that is affected?

102

103 J: Yea.

104

105 A: Um, I think it is because I think it also makes us, I guess which platforms we are on. If we
106 were just focused on people coming right out of high school, we might try to be on Snapchat
107 and all of those, but since we have a lot of nontraditional students um, we don't jump on
108 every social media that's new and comes out, but Facebook is a great one because kinda
109 every age is on that and everyone is on that um so it does reach the nontraditional students
110 as well as the ones that come out of high school.

111

112 A: Yea and then I guess that also that's kind of where we come from and look um trying to
113 market to the community as a whole, because maybe you know the person that sees our
114 post might not be interested in that program but their sister is or their child is you know
115 and they can then share that with them. And we've had students say before, "oh my
116 grandma told me about this" or something you know. So I think having the nontraditional
117 student also helps us to just keep the mindset of we want to market to the community and
118 just make sure the community as a whole is aware of what we offer and do here.

119

120 J: Okay, um so I know you mentioned that you do a lot of posts about the classes, like the
121 motorcycle class, things that people might not know that you offer. Um, what other, are
122 there any other types of information that you would put out related to trying to get more
123 people in?

124

125 A: Um, I guess we were talking about you could do success stories and that might draw
126 people in when we talk about um you know oh this staff or faculty member won an award
127 or this student, we share when they're in the news with a success story that they've had.
128 Um, or we had a camp this summer like a forensic science, police science camp and it was
129 for high school students, but I think highlighting that camp shows the program that we
130 have for it if you are interested out of college, that kind of thing. So, I think we just try to
131 show what goes on at the college and what we have to offer here and in itself that's kind of
132 a recruiting tool.

133

134 J: Okay, cool. And then most of the content that you post, would you say that it's like some
135 text with a photo or mostly text or do you guys do a lot of videos?

136

137 A: Um, we try to do photos most of the time and always have text with it obviously to
138 explain, but we try to keep the text minimal if possible. You know we will put a link to more
139 information that they can go to if they're interested, but you know get that little text to get
140 them the basic information in the photo, but we try as much as possible to include a photo
141 with the post just because we've noticed it reaches more people and you know even for me
142 when I'm scrolling I stop more at a picture than the thing that's lots of text.

143
144 J: Okay. Um, and then so we've talked about content and we've talked about formatting, so
145 if you could come up with one type of post, as far as, and you may have already said this
146 separately, but one type of post as far as what is the content that is going in and then how
147 are you formatting it. What do you think is like your most successful type of post at getting
148 people's attention?

149
150 A: Um, definitely it seems photos are. Um, and a lot of times the thing that gets the most
151 reaction from people are um, various you know fun activities on campus that really people
152 seem to respond to that. When we post about, I'm trying to think, you know, when we have
153 the camps here and we post the photos with that people seem to like those. Or posted a
154 photo of the president for her birthday and people like that, but I definitely see more
155 reaction from people when there's a photo. And even just in the statistics that Facebook
156 gives you of how many people your posts reached; photos really seem to do it.

157
158 J: Okay

159
160 A: A lot more than links too cause sometimes I think a link will be good you know, but um
161 definitely having the photo in there I think helps.

162
163 J: Okay so who do you think is most commonly looking at your social media platforms. I
164 know that's another one that you are probably are sort of having to guess at .

165
166 A: Yea um I actually with that question I looked up and got some of the statistics for you of
167 who is actually looking at our page. Um, again we'd like to think it's the ##CC community as
168 a whole being, whether that is students or we know our faculty and staff are on it as well or
169 various board members we have and people associated with the college. Um, but people
170 that follow us it says statistics wise, 67% are women and 33% are men. Um, and ages 18 to
171 25 is 18%, but 25 to 34 is 28%. 35 to 44 years old is 19% and 45 to 54 is 18%. 55 to 56 is
172 10% and then above 65 is six percent and that's the people that actually follow us. And then
173 there was also for it said people that we're reaching 57% is women and 43% are men. And
174 the age range 18 to 24 is 12%, ages 25 to 34 is 23%, 35 to 44 is 22%, 45 to 54 is 20% and
175 ages 55 to 64 is 13%, and above 65 is eight percent. So I don't know if that is what you are
176 looking for but.

177
178 J: No that works.

179
180 A: But those are I guess the analytics that Facebook gave us about who the type of people
181 are that are looking at us and following our stuff.

182

183 J: Okay cool. And then this one feels a little out of place, but I wanted to make sure that I got
184 to it. So since I'm going to, hopefully the goal, is that I'm going to be talking to students at all
185 three of the colleges, is there something that you would really like to know about their
186 social media preferences and what they would like to see. If not that's fine I just wanted to
187 try to help you guys out as much as I can with this.

188
189 A: Yea, when I saw that question I just thought of what information they like to see on there
190 you know kind of what we're posting that does interest them or is there things they would
191 like to see that we haven't been posting. That kind of thing, but I'm kind of just curious to
192 see what our students say they like seeing on Facebook.

193
194 J: Yea that's basically the goal of what I want to get out of it, so hopefully I will be able to
195 answer that for you.

196
197 A: Yea that's what I figured.

198
199 J: Um, so you told me what platforms you use. Could you rank them in terms of which one
200 you think is most successful for you all in reaching your goals and then to the least
201 successful.

202
203 A: Um, I think the most successful would be Facebook and then Twitter, and then probably
204 Flickr and then YouTube.

205
206 J: Okay, and then could you tell me why Facebook is top?

207
208 A: Yea, um, I mean one I guess easy way to look at it is we have the most followers on that
209 platform, but I think it's because we do try to target you know the community and we have
210 nontraditional students and I think it's just a platform that everybody's on. Where a lot of
211 social media platforms are going to be more women are on this, or more you know high
212 school students on this where you know you're gonna of get everybody on it and so I think
213 that's kinda why it's the most effective. We can reach the most people that way.

214
215 J: Okay yea that makes sense. Um and then could you tell me why YouTube ranks last?

216
217 A: Um, we have some of our commercials on there, but a lot of times YouTube is used as
218 posting events or programs after the fact and so it's not really promoting it's more okay
219 this is what happened and so sometimes it can end up being long videos if you're posting
220 someone's speech or whatever. So, I think sometimes with the long videos and it being
221 after the fact it isn't as popular as the other ones.

222
223 J: Yea. Um and then so in the context of your job and using social media in the way you do
224 what is the most difficult part of that?

225 A: Um, I guess there's a couple things. One being sometimes you don't always know what's
226 going on on campus or you know knowing something with students, faculty, staff to create
227 that post. So always knowing something that's happening. And then the other is it's not um,
228 just social media is not just my job, so it's like trying to fit that in and work that in and

229 utilize that as well as do all of the other things that need to be done. I think those are the
230 two main things. Sometimes it's you know one week I'm trying to figure out what's going
231 on around campus and then other weeks people are like hey post this, hey post this and
232 then I'm like trying to prioritize and okay what really should be posted and so that's kind of
233 hard prioritizing that, but I think the two main things would be just time wise and making
234 sure we cover everything on campus and knowing the stuff that's there to cover.

235
236 J: Okay, um and then last question, this one isn't on there I don't know where it went. Um,
237 are there any social media platforms that you all aren't currently using, but you're maybe
238 sort of thinking about using or that you maybe tried to start using and decided it wasn't
239 really worth it?

240
241 A: Um we're planning on starting an Instagram soon. We've talked about it and we're going
242 to it's just that we haven't started it yet, and that's I think the main one. We're interested in
243 starting an Instagram account with the college, as well as starting one maybe a day in the
244 life type one and let students show what you know a week in the life of them as an ##CC
245 student is like, so we're kind of looking into both avenues and maybe starting two different
246 accounts on that platform.

247
248 J: That's a really cool idea. Um, is there anything else that you think I should know that I
249 didn't think to ask about?

250
251 A: I don't think so. I think you covered it all.

252
253 J: Okay cool. Um so then that's all I have for you, so I will, if you think of anything.

254
255 A: Yea, um I was gonna, sorry I just thought of this. Just for your knowledge or if you care
256 we use um, it's just an excel sheet, but we have like a social media content calendar and
257 that helps us coordinate between the two of us what we're posting. So we have like a
258 monthly one that just says things that are going on that day or what we're going to post and
259 then we have an actual you know what platform it's going to be posted on and what the
260 message is going to be, if we're going to have a photo with it or a link and that kind of thing
261 and the character count for Twitter, which now has changed. So yea I just figured I would
262 mention that. That's kind of how we, and that's just a sample of it, but that's kind of how we
263 try to organize all of our social media and what we are going to post.

264
265 J: Okay perfect. Thank you. So I will, I'm going to say have this transcribed in four weeks
266 and I will send you a copy. It's probably going to be way sooner than that, like hopefully
267 within the next few days actually, but I will send you a copy over email and you can take a
268 look at it and if you see anything that you are just like I don't think that was right or I don't
269 want that in there just let me know no problem. Um, if I don't hear from you within a week
270 I will just figure that that means you're fine with it.

271
272 A: Yea I'll still email you back hopefully and let you know that everything's fine, because I
273 like my emails being answered. You know acknowledging that someone saw it.

274

275 J: Yea that's sort of something you have to do when you have a ton of people, but with three
276 people it's not super necessary, but you just want to cover all of your bases. Um, then, like I
277 said if you think of anything else that you wish you had said or you're like I wish I hadn't
278 said that, just let me know and I'll take anything out or add anything in. And then once I've
279 done the complete thing after I've talked to students and have done everything I will send
280 you a copy, I think I'm going to do sort of like a report for you all that I'm interviewing that
281 will be most helpful for you and then if you want a copy of like my entire thesis, which I
282 don't know if you would, but I would be happy to provide that as well.

283
284 A: Okay, cool

College B Interview 1

1 J: So before we get started this is completely voluntary. You can decline to answer any
2 questions that you would like, I should give you a copy of the questions, I meant to do that,
3 so that you can look at them as we go.

4

5 B1: Oh I saw them in the email too, but yea.

6

7 J: So you can decline to answer any questions that you like. If you decide that you want to
8 stop at any point that's perfectly fine, just let me know. Like I said you won't be identified,
9 the college won't be identified by name. Um, you've seen the consent form, so you're good
10 with all of that right?

11

12 B1: Yup, no problem.

13

14 J: So we'll just start out pretty simply. If you just want to tell me your job title and then sort
15 of some of your basic responsibilities.

16

17 B1: Okay well I'm the director of marketing and strategic communications at College B and
18 so I oversee the entire marketing office. We report to the institutional advancement
19 division here at the college. Um, primary roles include media relations, marketing,
20 advertising, public affairs, might be some lobbying duties in Richmond, that sort of thing,
21 um, communications across campus, social media of course, and then overall kind of
22 management of resources, that sort of thing.

23

24 J: Okay, lot of stuff. So then can you tell me about what social media platforms you all are
25 currently using for the college?

26

27 B1: Sure, we um, our largest platform currently is Facebook. We use Instagram as well,
28 Twitter, um Snapchat is one that we've gotten into, LinkedIn, um we do a little bit with
29 Pinterest, and those are the primary ones.

30

31 J: Okay, and who determines what platforms will be used? Is that you, is that sort of a group
32 effort?

33

34 B1: Um, it's me but it's also [name omitted], who's a marketing specialist within our office.
35 We also have an event planner who works on them as well within our office. There are
36 other divisions across campus that have some different outlets of social media, and so
37 occasionally we'll get someone wanting to create their own page. We kind of discourage it
38 to be honest with you and try to have it all in-house, but they're some that have been
39 grandfathered in, but I don't think that anybody's doing any platforms any differently. I
40 think most of the time it's a Facebook page I want to say.

41

42 J: Okay and then are there, you are using a lot of different platforms already, are there any
43 that you aren't using that you all have considered or thought about?

44

45 B1: Um, I did forget to mention YouTube as well, but as far as ones that we aren't doing that
46 we would be interested in doing, not that I'm aware of. Um, there are ones that we would
47 like to do more with, um I'm sure there are more out there that we have pockets of student
48 that might be using, but I don't think there's anything with a large enough usage that we're
49 really intent on starting up right now.

50

51 J: Yea I mean you're on Snapchat, which is the newest one that people are trying to get in,
52 so you're already there.

53

54 B1: A little bit, yea we kind of started last May around graduation time we were trying to
55 get some filters approved, which is much more challenging than we thought it would be,
56 but I don't really use Snapchat personally. [Name omitted] is the one doing that.

57

58 J: Okay: And then, with your social media, what would you say is the overall purpose or
59 overall goals that you have associated with that communication?

60

61 B1: Well we use it for several different purposes. Our largest goal for a lot of things is
62 enrollment. So, we're looking to recruit students, but also help with retention. Um,
63 retention is becoming a bigger push here, and I think amongst all of the community colleges
64 across Virginia, and so we're trying to find the best way to use social media to help with
65 that, get students interested in different things on campus, as well as student services,
66 making them aware of those and things that can help them stay enrolled. Um, recruitment
67 is number one, so we're trying to get new people interested as well as during our
68 enrollment periods we're trying to make people aware of when that's going on and get
69 them signing up. But we also use it for emergency management communications that sort
70 of thing, just campus life, and then just overall community awareness. We also, one of our
71 primary focuses is economic development. We try to help with that as we need to.

72

73 J: Okay. So, you mentioned that you do use social media as a recruiting tool, so how do you
74 use it to recruit?

75

76 B1: Well, we've been using more social media advertising the past few years. Initially it was
77 all organic posts that we tried to do, but the past few years we've been doing more
78 advertising. Initially we started with Facebook and Twitter and we kind of don't use
79 Twitter as much for advertising, but really Facebook and Instagram. So right now we're in
80 the spring semester enrollment period so I've got a ad campaign running of still photos and
81 information about the college to try to get students interested. So that's running until
82 January. Um, we also will boost posts about enrollment and recruitment, whether it's open
83 houses or special events, we've got an open house coming up December 11th for our
84 workforce division that we're doing an ad set to promote the open house and we're also
85 boosting the event page.

86

87 J: Okay. And then so, this might be something that you sort of have to guess at, or you al
88 might look at statistics and be able to sort of infer from that, but do you think that what you
89 all are doing on social media is helping you to gain potential students?

90

91 B1: Um, this push for Spring of 2018 enrollment is kind of the biggest ad campaign that
92 we've done on Facebook and Instagram. We've done others working with a marketing
93 agency for search engine marketing and retargeting ads, banner ads that sort of thing, but
94 this is the biggest spend that we've done on social media ads, which is about a \$10,000
95 budget, and I think we're seeing really good results. We're getting a lot of click throughs. I
96 think last time I checked yesterday it was about 48 cents per click, which I thought was
97 much better than what we've seen in the past, so I think it's very good. I'd have to look, but
98 we're about halfway through the campaign and um, I think there's a couple thousand click
99 throughs to the website, which is kind of our goal is to get them in and looking at the class
100 schedule. Um, and as far as the reach and the views, I could get you numbers, but it's
101 looking really strong so I'm very encouraged by it.

102

103 J: Okay awesome. So what groups do you all primarily target on social media for
104 recruitment specifically?

105

106 B1: Well for this campaign we've kind of done nontraditional students and a little bit older.
107 Typically we've done a wide range depending on what it is, but we've done high school
108 students, we've done parents, but for this one we are targeting people who are 25 to about
109 45 who might be under employed or unemployed looking to start a stronger career, so
110 we've looked at demographics for that and we also look at program demographics. So one
111 of our programs, culinary, is growing we're expanding a building and in Fall of 2018 it's
112 going to have the ability to take in about three times as many students. Hospitality is a big
113 growth area in the Roanoke region, so a big portion of that is focused on people who might
114 be interested in cooking as a career, who list that as hobbies, that sort of thing. So, we kind
115 of try to drill down on specifics like that. Another area right now that we have is HVAC that
116 we're focusing on as well as healthcare, because in the Roanoke Valley Carillion Clinic is
117 our largest employer, so there's a lot of healthcare careers, nursing and that sort thing. And
118 then we still do transfer as well.

119

120 J: Okay. And then how does the fact that so many of your students are nontraditional, how
121 does that impact the way that you all use social media?

122

123 B1: Well I think it impacts which social media outlets we are using and then where we are
124 placing the advertisements. We've done some focus groups on campus with students, and
125 um I think the largest group of students are using Facebook, which is usually the
126 nontraditional students and the older ages are using that. A lot of our younger students are
127 using Snapchat, so we're delving into that a little bit, but it's more just for fun. Whereas
128 we're trying to do the advertising on Facebook. It also just, I think is easier for us right now
129 to figure out how to market and advertise using Facebook than the others. Like I said
130 before, I did try Twitter in the past and didn't really see the results. I don't know how many
131 people in our area who might be interested in the college are using Twitter or are they just
132 using it for news and things like that rather than really engaging and learning about
133 programs, that sort of thing. So that's sort of why we've settled for the time being on
134 Facebook and Instagram.

135

136 J: Okay. And then when you post recruitment content do you, what types of content is that
137 that you're usually posting? Is it mostly about classes that you offer or events? What does
138 that usually look like, or is it a broad range?

139
140 B1: Well we always focus on just the enrollment period when it's open enrollment time that
141 sort of thing. When it's not open enrollment, when it's currently enrolled students we try to
142 target down to them as well. But we also promote events like open houses. We will do
143 individual classes. So I had a faculty member come to me last week who was a little
144 concerned that some of his classes were down in enrollment, so we've started making some
145 specific posts for those classes. We're kind of reliant on faculty in a lot of ways to let us
146 know and help us know that a specific class needs promotion. But also we'll hear top down
147 from administration if they're a new program starting up that they really want promoted,
148 so we'll specifically promote that. Um, is there anything else to that question that you
149 needed?

150
151 J: Um, I think that . . .

152
153 B1: Yea we look at the programs, what's being offered, certifications are a big push from
154 the system, Virginia Community College System as a whole. It's part of our strategic plan as
155 a system to triple the amount of credentials that are earned within the state. I think 2021 is
156 the year, but I could be off, and so certifications are something that we hear from the
157 system and we're pushing that as well.

158
159 J: Okay. And with that content, when you post it is it generally mostly text, is it text with a
160 photo, do you try to put photos in most things, do you do a lot of videos, what does it
161 generally look like?

162
163 B1: We try to generally use as many photos as we can because you know the research says
164 more people open them. We've been trying to do more video. We on our staff don't have a
165 videographer there actually is one on campus, he really works with academics a lot.
166 Occasionally we'll have some video work and YouTube videos, that sort of thing that we can
167 use. But we're trying to do a lot more video, if it's just smart phone video. We've done some
168 experimentation with live streaming some class sessions. [Name omitted] might talk to you
169 a little more about that because she actually did that and promoting that to give people an
170 idea of what a class might be like here. So I see us moving more toward video, but we're
171 focused on images and links as well.

172
173 J: Okay. And who do you think, oh no I'm skipping one. So if you had to come up with one
174 post that you think embodies your most successful type of post, um thinking about both
175 content and format, so like what is the message about and then is it some text with an
176 image and a link, what would that look like, your most successful post?

177
178 B1: Well, I'd say if I'm talking outside of paid advertisements the ones that have been the
179 most successful have been tied to kind of an inspirational story. So, um, around graduation
180 time especially we always try to look for a student story to really highlight the year. Usually
181 that story is something through media relations that I'm pitching to reporters as well. And I

182 can give you an instance with a student who was, I think he was 93 at the time, graduating
183 first time, earning a degree his children and grandchildren have all gone to college and
184 everything. But he was a very nice man and he, when his wife passed away he always
185 wanted to learn French, so he came here and started taking French at the encouragement
186 of his children and grandchildren to have something to do. The French faculty member
187 took him under her wing and he was kind of like a grandfather to her, but they worked one
188 on one and he ended up graduating so when that happened I did an interview that we video
189 taped to put on YouTube. We also had news coverage about him and then I also wrote a
190 story for our website. So, at graduation, there was already, I had already posted all of these
191 thins, and that morning the big front page newspaper article ran so at graduation a lot of
192 people in the audience knew who he was and he went across the stage and got a big
193 standing ovation. So I took some photos there, put them on Facebook, so it's kind of a
194 combination, a photo, a description of the student Mel Quinn, brief text about him and then
195 I think I hyperlinked to probably either the story or the video that we did so it was
196 probably a combination of the three, but nothing, not a whole a lot of text but really just a
197 video and a link where you could find out more about him, but people kind of could get the
198 gist of it from one sentence.

199
200 J: Okay. That's Awesome.

201
202 B1: That got a big organic reach, it was being seen in like California and stuff, which is, it
203 never happens for us.

204
205 J: Yea that's really awesome. So who do you think is most commonly looking at your social
206 media platforms?

207
208 B1: Um, probably current students I think. We especially around this time of year and the
209 start of spring semester is when we will get a lot of hits from current students, because we
210 have school closings from the snow and that's our biggest normal organic hits, is when
211 we're expecting snow in the forecast and a lot of times the social media is the first place
212 people will hear from us that we're closed or delayed or whatever the case might be. Um,
213 we do have quite a few parents as well looking at it, but I think probably current and
214 former students is our largest group.

215
216 J: Okay Awesome. And then what, um would you say that your users or followers or friends
217 or whoever they are gain from that connection with you on social media?

218
219 B1: I think staying informed about what's going on at the college. We try to post a lot of
220 events, what's happening, so students might find out about things happening on campus
221 there, but we do also share news coverage and other larger stories about the college so
222 people can be informed about what's going on. Community members can find out about
223 what we're doing here at the college to help the Roanoke region as a whole. So really it's
224 mostly informative. Most of the time we're not directly trying to sell enrollment except
225 during enrollment periods. It's more about telling people what we do and why we do it and
226 letting them come to, decide they want to come here.

227

228 J: Okay, and then what, since my goal is to have some focus groups happen with students
229 here at the school, what would you be most eager to know about students' social media
230 preferences?

231
232 B1: Um, well we want to know what social media they're using and how they're using it.
233 Kind of when they use it as well. The types of content they're looking for. We see some data
234 about times of day that typically people use it, but are students and potential students
235 different? And, also, I'd like to find out how to best utilize it so that they're sharing the
236 information with people they might think could benefit from coming to College B. We'll see,
237 it's always exciting when we have posts about a program or an event and we'll see people
238 sharing it to someone else's name and that really direct connection that you know they
239 might be interested in the culinary program for a career, and see how we can better
240 facilitate that.

241
242 Okay great. And if you had to rank the platforms that you all are using right now from most
243 successful at helping you reach your goals, so least successful. You have a lot, I'm sorry, of
244 platforms that you use, but how do you think those would compare to one another?

245
246 B1: Um, probably Facebook most successful and I guess Facebook slash Instagram. We do
247 the combined advertising we do both. Followed by Twitter and YouTube. Then probably
248 after that I guess Snapchat. LinkedIn we kind of use, I think the career center mostly uses it,
249 so there is some use there, but probably at the bottom would be Pinterest.

250
251 J: Okay and so you've hit a lot of this but it there's something you haven't already said, why
252 would you rank Instagram and Facebook top?

253
254 B1: Um, I think it's because right now we have our largest audience there, we're reaching
255 the most people. I think we're able to share the messages that we want to share the most
256 effectively there and it also right now has been the most successful route for advertising.

257
258 J: Okay, and then why would you rank Pinterest last?

259
260 B1: Um, I think it's because we probably don't use it to its full potential and quite honestly
261 we have probably not enough man hours to manage all the social media that's our there,
262 and that's one that we've put at the back burner, because I'm not sure that it has as much of
263 a direct connection to what we're trying to do.

264
265 J: Okay and then how do you all currently measure the success of what you're doing on
266 social media?

267
268 B1: Well we look at the insights and we look at how many people are liking and following
269 us, and then as far as the advertising there's very good data on how successful it is so we
270 look at that.

271
272 J: Okay and then what do you find the most challenging about using social media in the
273 context of your job?

274
275 B1: I think definitely the time commitment. When I first started it, it was me doing it and
276 there definitely wasn't anywhere near enough time, and since [name omitted] joined us,
277 she's a part time employee, but she does the lions share of posting on social media. I usually
278 do the advertising. But there's, we try to keep it as fresh as possible and post as frequently
279 as possible, but there's never enough time in the day and there's always more going on that
280 we could be posting about that we just don't have the ability to get to because we have
281 other duties as well.
282
283 J: Okay. And then is there anything else that I should know that I didn't think to ask about?
284
285 B1: Um, I don't think so, I mean I'd be interested, are you doing a cross sectional of other
286 colleges?
287
288 J: Yes, so there's three in the area that I'm looking at.
289
290 B1: I'd be interested just to hear how much others are using it, we actually um, the public
291 information officers at all of the community colleges we do a get together and there was a
292 lot of talk about social media. Obviously some do it more and better than others, so we try
293 to all kind of share best practices, whether it's timing of posts, the types of posts to do, how
294 to do it. But some of the colleges really use some auto generated posting things to try to
295 manage their time better that we're trying to grow into so that we can do more with less,
296 because like everyone else I'm not sure that we're going to be given more personnel to
297 work on it, so trying to automate things it would be interesting to hear how much people
298 are doing that and what they're seeing success with.
299
300 J: Awesome, well that's all that I have for you. And my plan is that I will have this
301 transcribed within four weeks of today, hopefully sooner, but we'll see. Um, and so I will
302 send that you through email and you can take a look at it, and if there's anything that you're
303 like oh, I wish I hadn't have said that, or this doesn't sound like I meant for it to sound, or I
304 wish I had said this you can just let me know and if I don't hear from you within like a week
305 I'll just assume that it's fine, but I will be sure to send that to you. And then one I have done
306 the focus groups and have everything done, I'm going to send everyone who I've
307 interviewed a copy of a shorter report than my entire thesis that will hopefully help you
308 guys out a little bit and be able to show you what each school is doing and how they
309 compare and things like that, and then if you wanted a copy of the entire thing I will be
310 more than willing to give it to you, but I think you will probably be happier with the short
311 version.
312
313 B1: Well sure that all sounds great and I'm sure that the short version would probably be
314 good. I've got my own gathering dust on the bookshelf, but that's not to say that yours isn't
315 going farther than mine, but I'm sure there will be a lot of good information.
316
317 J: I hope so I'm excited

College B Interview 2

1 J: You have the interview questions in front of you there. So before I start into the
2 questions, completely voluntary, if you want to stop at any point or if there's any questions
3 that you're just like I don't really want to answer that, that's perfectly fine. Like I said it's
4 recorded and that it will be transcribed, but you won't be identified, the college won't be
5 identified. Me and my advisor will be the only people who know who is even being
6 interviewed. And that's about it. So you're good with all of that right?

7
8 B2: Mmhm. Yes.

9
10 J: Great. So, to get started can you just tell me your job title, and briefly some of your
11 responsibilities?

12
13 B2: Sure, um, my name is [name omitted], if you want me to say that, and I actually do not
14 remember my job title as funny as that sounds. I'm part time at the college I don't know
15 what it is in terms of how it's filed in HR anymore. I just refer to myself as marketing and
16 communications with a focus on, predominant focus on social media. Um, however, that
17 said, as I was saying before the start of this interview, we're kind of an all hands on deck
18 department, and all pitch in with everything. The joy of that is that every day is totally
19 different. I may be taking photographs, interviewing, writing press releases, helping set up
20 a photo-shoot, or commercial, or proofing. At the same time though it's hard though,
21 because you're spread thin. But everyday I will do some social media, so that's why it's easy
22 for me to say that I'm the social media person, and if people have questions they will come
23 to me . . . or want to post something.

24
25 J: Okay, awesome. And can you tell me what social media platforms you guys are currently
26 using?

27
28 B2: Sure, we have um, a Facebook page, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, that's more for
29 almost our own archival purposes, and a little bit of Snapchat, and then there is a YouTube
30 channel, but we don't manage that, that's another department, but I will pull from it and
31 monitor it. And then also, that's what we use out of this office, and then various groups on
32 campus also have Facebook pages.

33
34 J: Okay, perfect. And who determines what platforms are going to be used? So, I know you
35 said you guys sort of work as a team, so would all of you decide together if you were
36 thinking about a new platform, or something like that?

37
38 B2: Um, yes for the most part, but it's often, well yes is the . . . because there's four of us, we
39 can pretty much just chat in the hallway about it, but [name omitted] is the director, so I
40 would say that the director of communications and marketing is the ultimate decision
41 maker. And we'll often talk about the benefits of using it, a platform and we have, since I've
42 been here added three new platforms.

43

44 J: Alright, and what platforms, if any, I know you all are already using a lot of different
45 things, are there any that you aren't currently using, but you've maybe thought about or
46 would like to be using?

47
48 B2: Um, actually platform management is something I would probably like to dive into
49 more, and we've explored a few times. Um, I don't know if that would count for your
50 answer.

51
52 J: So that, things like Hootsuite and stuff like that?

53
54 B2: Right, there's Hootsuite or Sprout Social is what I kind of keep coming back to. I don't
55 know if you want me to answer specific questions about that. I find Hootsuite a little
56 clunky, and Sprout Social is a little cross-prohibitive.

57
58 J: Okay, great. And what would you say is your purpose for using social media? What are
59 sort of your goals that are associated with that communication?

60
61 B2: Um, it's tricky. I'm curious to hear [name omitted]'s answer on this. So for me it's
62 telling, ultimately telling the college's story. That's the easy answer, it's kind of like I see it
63 as a window peering into what is life like on this campus. What do students see, what does
64 a classroom look like, what is the social life like on campus. But, it's interesting we're not
65 pushing, we're not selling or promoting, um tennis shoes, like one simple product. Because
66 we're a school we have, we have development purposes, so fundraising, so the foundation
67 will access social media for that, and we have, all of the different schools, so it's almost like
68 many products at once that we're promoting or teaching the community about, so I would
69 say it's a global message with lots of little messages underneath.

70
71 J: Okay, awesome, and what, how do you use social media, if at all, for, as a recruiting tool?

72
73 B2: Um, a lot of like of what I was just saying we will use it to tell the general story, and
74 then also very direct messaging of classes are almost starting and register now for classes,
75 um if you need help with financial aid these tools are available, or we'll have special office
76 hours or campus events to encourage participation. Also again, it's just the message of, for
77 me it's culture too. What is, what does campus look like, what type of people go to school
78 there, will I feel comfortable, will I fit in, you know trying to make it put faces that might,
79 you might relate to with stories you might relate to in there.

80
81 J: Okay, and so do you think that you all are succeeding in gaining the interest of potential
82 students with what you're doing?

83
84 B2: I hope so. I hope so. I think I mean I hope so everyday and I think there are a lot of
85 amazing things happening on this campus, and I think that's the biggest challenge is how to
86 reach people, how to get that across. I would say probably one of the most successful
87 campaigns that we've done over the years, and we've repeated it and sometimes I wonder
88 oh is this getting stale and yet at the same time it seems engaging. We do a fall countdown
89 where we take a picture for thirty days we take a picture of an actual student or, yea it's

90 usually a current student, and then what happens is their friends usually see them and it's
91 kind of saying and then their next step it's like I went to high school with them, or oh
92 they're going to that college, I went there and um, I think that it's really been a positive one.
93 One campaign where I can really see the relevance, but it is hard to measure, like is this
94 getting out there, but I think because so many people are engaged in social media it would
95 be foolish not to participate.

96
97 J: Yea absolutely. Okay, and what groups would you say you all are primarily targeting on
98 social media for recruitment purposes specifically?

99
100 B2: That also is the challenge of being a community college verses a more traditional four
101 year college, is because there is, the age range in target population is so wide. Um, the
102 breadth of people is wide, however the region is not, so we target the community, but um,
103 anywhere from school age to like high school students or even middle school, to the adult
104 learner, so is that answering your question?

105
106 J: Yea. Yes.

107
108 B2: Yea recent high school graduates, professionals. And then also there's the tag too of
109 we're doing some really neat things on campus through various grants like national grants,
110 national science foundation grants or we're also doing a stem project um, with Howard
111 Hughes Medical Institute, so it's also linking into those groups and showing them that we're
112 doing the research we've been asked to do. And also, um, in engineering and mechatronics,
113 those go beyond the campus and students can go directly to Universities outside the state
114 in that program we kind of, and also it's an economic development tool, I don't know if
115 [name omitted] mentioned that, but um, there's some recent economic development in the
116 community has been directly correlated with College B's training ability. So, it's great for
117 the community too, because it's bringing in wealth and industry and jobs, and then it's also,
118 so not only are we gaining students we're almost an economic driver, seen as an economic
119 driver recently, so that's another side population. It's just kind of to keep messaging out to
120 the community of we do.

121
122 J: Why do you use social media to reach those groups, rather than other, maybe more
123 traditional types of communication?

124
125 B2: Because they are too, and because we live with our phones, I mean our phones are,
126 gone are the days where, well maybe some people do, but most of us live, our phones are
127 essentially little computers that we check throughout the day and that's how most of us
128 seem to, I mean our culture is that we're staying connected with the world through our
129 phones. And actually it's interesting, the different platforms seem to have different flavors
130 to me, like which populations seem to utilize different platforms and I think it's important
131 that the college utilize all of them to catch everyone. Like um, Twitter I have noticed even
132 though a lot of students use Twitter, um, my notice has been that if there's something going
133 on in terms of an economic development piece, or community relations, or a special
134 distinguished guests, or there might be a government representative, if we link and post
135 them on Twitter, then their offices will often comment almost immediately, so it's keeping

136 everyone kind of in a loop that way. Um, so I guess that might answer why do I use social
137 media, it's kind of keeping our message relevant. Front of mind.

138
139 J: Okay, perfect. So how does the fact that many of your students are nontraditional, how
140 does that impact the way that you all use social media?

141
142 B2: Um, it's harder I think to target populations, or it's and I try to think when I post things
143 and schedule them, is the time when the posts come up, sometimes I'll post just all
144 throughout the day more sporadically, but if there's a really specific message that I want to
145 get across, about registration or a workforce training program that I think may apply to a
146 more traditional student, or nontraditional student, I may choose a time that I think they
147 would, and again it's arbitrary, it's kind of looking at data analytics as best I can, and then
148 I'll try to think well what would they be doing on Sunday afternoon, or you know when is
149 their house calm and they may be checking their phone near the end of the day or a lunch
150 break, those kind of, does that, I hope that answers the question.

151
152 J: Yes it does absolutely.

153
154 B2: But I think that's it so.

155
156 J: Okay and so when you are posting recruitment content trying to get the attention of these
157 potential students what is the post generally about?

158
159 B2: Um, I wouldn't say, in terms of recruitment, well I look at recruitment kind of in a
160 couple different categories. I look at it as a very specific, like we would like students to
161 enroll now, so that would be um, enrollment windows, or enrollment events, we'll have like
162 on campus events where everything is, almost like quick shopping, everything is right there
163 and your questions can be answered, and we'll be as helpful as we possibly can. Or then
164 there's the constant messaging of hey, you might really like it here, feel very at home here.
165 So, I guess some events I post truly as an event, like on a Facebook page, or on Instagram
166 might be a picture of the event or something that might imply the event, or it might be
167 FASFA's logo to help people with their financial aid forms, and then others may be more
168 story based or a link to a blog, I forgot to mention our blog, I don't know if you would
169 consider that a social media platform, it's a Wordpress.

170
171 J: Okay, yea.

172
173 B2: It's set on the front page of our website, so it might link that to make you dive a little
174 deeper.

175
176 J: And, so how is that content generally formatted, I know that this could vary depending on
177 the platform, but do you?

178
179 B2: I always, sorry. . .

180
181 J: No you're good.

182
183 B2: I always try to get, and I don't always succeed, but I always try to get a quality image, So
184 okay, actually mine I will say kind of range from quality . . . in my ideal world I would love
185 for all of them to be these gorgeous pictures, but then I'm kind of experimenting right now
186 in that . . .um, and I do look at other four year schools to see what they have and there's
187 something to be said about it all looking like this high quality, almost magazine quality
188 photo, but then I also kind of like the gorilla style, candid, not great photo, because I almost
189 think that's more genuine, so it's like you know the table of cupcakes that the student club
190 is doing a fundraiser for. And that's the other thing, so not only are we using it as a
191 recruitment tool, it's also engagement for current students to be aware of campus events,
192 and that fun things are going on, even if you don't feel a part of it, or you're just, feel
193 absorbed in your class, my hope is that they can go to our social media platforms and see
194 that they are a part of something and that things are happening here, or that there may be
195 something that they want to get engaged in. Um, so I guess I'll do, we do do videos, we've
196 experimented with Facebook Live in a couple of different formats, and then we've done
197 simple text, but even with just a copy post, we usually have an image of some sort with it. I
198 gave you a long answer there.

199
200 J: That's okay, the more information the better. Um, and then so, when you are thinking, if I
201 were to tell you to come up with an example of your most successful post, considering the
202 content, the message that you're telling, and then how is it formatted, what do you think
203 that would look like? I know that's kind of hard because you do a lot of different things, but.

204
205 B2: You're gonna, um, so I have a couple of quick funny answers. Do you want to know
206 what my most popular posts are, and it's really silly and I make a joke in this department:
207 they sky. And I'll just be like, we've had very low activity, I'm going to go take a picture of
208 the sky.

209
210 J: That's so strange.

211
212 B2: It's very strange, and I know, I sometimes I do it and my colleges are like, oh really
213 [name omitted], but I get the most likes and feedback on something pretty, and I think it's, I
214 think people want to be, and this is my own personal theory there's no science behind this,
215 but I think humans have an innate appreciation for beauty and wanting to connect and it's
216 very safe and it's beautiful and so and it's something, because it's taken from this campus
217 there's a connection. So recently I did, and it wasn't, you know I'd love to see our platform
218 size grow, but or our participation grow, and that's probably been my challenge, but this is,
219 this picture right here. It's just red berries against a blue sky, it's one of our most popular
220 posts.

221
222 J: That's so funny, and so when you have a post like that, what is generally the text that goes
223 with it?

224
225 B2: I'll just say something sweet like good morning or beautiful walk to campus. This one I
226 just wrote campus, and it got the most and quickest likes on it, and it um, yea it's funny. I
227 don't know if you know people would appreciate that, because there wasn't a lot of effort

228 behind it, but I think that it's very genuine and simple and it also doesn't feel, I think other
229 things, there's a tricky balance I think of making social media feel like a constant
230 advertisement, and this is just like oh no their just appreciating something, and letting me
231 appreciate it versus being informative. Um, so yea I always get a get a kick out of that the
232 skies consistently post well.

233

234 J: That is really funny.

235

236 B2: Hopefully that will provide some unique answers for you. Um, and then that said,
237 campaign wise, [name omitted] does all of the promoting, if there's anything, that's
238 something I'd really like to dive into more deeply. But if there's something that he wants to
239 boost or post um with money he does that. All of mine are organic. So I would say most of,
240 and I will work with him in creating things and he will decide to go behind it and boost it or
241 promote it. But um, I would say the things that do well, like that countdown campaign
242 tends to go well, some people are like oh here it is again, yet they look forward to it at the
243 same time, Um let's see if I can find it for you. Well it's going to have to go back a ways, but
244 anyway, that is the one with the most direct results, where we've really dove into the
245 analytics, and also we did a fun day on campus around Halloween and we did see like a
246 direct spike, but that was a social thing, so. I don't know I kind of wandered there, so let me
247 know if you need more information.

248

249 J: I think I got it.

250

251 B2: But this is the campaign, it's basically telling graduating class, what they studied, last
252 year I did their next step, so I told their graduating class, instead of highlighting the
253 program I said transferring to such and such, going to work um, next week or something
254 like that. But anyway.

255

256 J: So, who do you think is most commonly looking at your social media platforms? I know
257 that might be a guess, or you might have some data that you've looked at.

258

259 B2: I'd be curious of [name omitted]'s answers too. Um, staff look at it, employees look at it,
260 that's another way I think, another benefit of social media is keeping the campus, a 70 acre
261 of faculty and administration, faculty and staff all with very different jobs connected,
262 because they can kind of look at this, it's almost like their magazine. Um, I don't know I
263 would say it's kind of equally spread between faculty, staff and students, or no wait and
264 community. That's one of the three categories I would say, employees, students and
265 community, almost divided into thirds would be my guess.

266

267 J: Okay. Um, so what would you say that the people who friend you or follow you on social
268 media, what do they gain from that connection with you?

269

270 B2: Um, knowing what's happening on campus, upcoming events, um, also feeling a part of
271 something, so feeling connected to it, and um, there will be it is fun to see like if I make a
272 posts where that person is followed a lot on campus, or that person has a lot of social media
273 following and it's fun to see um, I get a kick out of seeing people go, oh I saw you on

274 campus, or you know seeing people comment on there I'm aunt so and so that's my
275 nephew, I always get a kick out of that, so it's that personal connection too.

276
277 J: Okay, what, since my goal is to do focus groups with students who are currently
278 attending, what would you be most eager to know about their social media preferences?
279

280 B2: Um, I struggle with this one. I have sat in a couple of focus groups myself, um, I'd be
281 really curious to see what their primary use of social media is, when they're on it, when as
282 in time of day and how often, and what platforms, as well as like what, what is there like
283 connection with it, like what do they want. Is it just for seeing their friends, or do they want
284 to um, are they do, are the reminders helpful, are the stories helpful or do they feel
285 intrusive? And then, almost their, I'd like to know the nuts and bolts of when and what and
286 where, and also like more of their emotional connection with it, to kind of figure out how to
287 be genuine and respectful of that and really connect authentically and mindfully, versus
288 just this kind of like very arbitrary, very arbitrary, and there is this kind of like advertising,
289 communicating, sharing, like how to do that. Yea, and I've found, actually I've been
290 surprised at honestly how limited some of the social media use is, and how confined it is
291 and so how to also, what would be a good way to encourage, if the college, knowing the
292 college wants to connect with students, what would be a good way to do it without being, in
293 a way that would engage them and not, and make them say yea I want to sign up and follow
294 my college's social media platforms, versus, because I've even thought at orientation could
295 we just ask everyone to take out their phone and follow, ask them to follow Facebook and
296 you know ask them to follow our platforms, and we even did, I gave made these little
297 posters in the little stands and put them around campus encouraging people to follow, and
298 just you know is that reminding them to stay connected, is that obtrusive, is it welcoming,
299 is it ignored? Like kind of that, so that's a wide range of questions.

300
301 J: Okay, awesome. Hopefully . . .
302

303 B2: Oh, you know what, and would they want to participate, that's what I would want to
304 know too, like would they want to, something I've been trying to get going but it's been
305 very challenging is a student driven social media posting. Would they want to be the ones
306 posting on the page, because I would love that, I would, I think they have a more real, a
307 better perspective, and one thing I have done is encourage teachers, I've encouraged
308 faculty to send me pictures of events. But it's hard you know they have other things in
309 mind, and I can't be everywhere, but it's worked out great having them send me pictures,
310 like this one was sent to me by a dean. And they're slowly learning, it's taken a long time to
311 kind of quote unquote train them to do that, but um and this was sent, we had a project, a
312 class do a field study, I mean I obviously, I was not on that hike, so that was and those were
313 some great pictures I thought. They're starting, what's neat is now people are starting to
314 recognize me, and they're starting to know me as like the social media person, and they're
315 starting to um. I think one good thing of social media that has come up has been pride in
316 the school and the programs and they kind of want to tell their story. And just this semester
317 I've seen a significant increase in faculty being willing to send me pictures and say hey,
318 we're doing this cool thing, I want to share it. And that's been really exciting, I hope that
319 happens more. That was not a question, but hopefully you can fit it in there.

320
321 J: That's okay. Um, I know this is going back a little bit, but thinking of the social media
322 platforms that you all currently use, could you rank them from the most successful in
323 helping you to reach your goals to least successful?
324
325 B2: Okay, um, yes, I would say least successful is Pinterest. I don't use it as a reaching tool, I
326 use it more as a recording tool. And most successful depends, and I would guess [name
327 omitted] would say Facebook is most successful, that's the most controlled with the best
328 data. Um, but I would say some events, especially if it's a government official, I would say
329 Twitter. But, I would say Facebook and Pinterest would be, Facebook one, Pinterest the
330 last.
331
332 J: Okay. I think you answered my next two about why you ranked those there. So, how do
333 you all measure the success of what you're doing on social media?
334
335 B2: Um, looking at engagement really, just engagement and increasing in um, engagement
336 in terms of participation and views of a post as well as overall following on our platform.
337
338 J: Okay, and what do you find the most challenging about using social media in the context
339 of your job? And you may have hit some of these.
340
341 B2: Um, well all the unknowns we talked about. The who is looking at what, and that's
342 another thing I find fascinating is I'll ask students what is your favorite platform, or I just,
343 I'll walk around the student activity center and student life building and ask people one
344 person might say Twitter the other person might say Facebook, the other person might say
345 I don't do it. Um, Snapchat, Snapchat is, I find it, we have a filter, but I find it really hard to, I
346 find it this really hard moving target, and we don't . . . we don't put a lot of . . . we have a
347 pretty . . . [name omitted] over time has definitely been shifting his budgeting funds more
348 to social media, but on the whole historically we have not put a lot there. It's growing
349 quickly. What do I find most challenging? Also it takes a lot more time than people realize.
350 It takes a lot more time, you know in some ways, and some days we do, it's also finding that
351 sweet spot, like I couldn't do, I'm of the thought of do a few quality posts, where [name
352 omitted] will say let's just do twenty posts. And you know though there's something to be
353 said for that, and they both work. I'm trying to think, like graduation day e will fill it with
354 tons of posts, and more on Facebook than anything, and I feel like it's kind of overkill, but it
355 does tend to get a lot of activity, so it's also that balance of like, how many posts do you
356 want to see from College B in a day, or from a college in a day, so I don't know. I find the
357 challenge of it's really time consuming, a lot more I think than even I realize sometimes,
358 and quality and quantity. So yea, it's all hard.
359
360 J: So those were the questions that I have for you. Is there something else that you think
361 that I need to know that I didn't think to ask about?
362
363 B2: No and I was very chatty.
364
365 J: That's okay.

366

367 B2: Yea and if you think of something else feel free to . . .

368

369 J: Okay and, so the way this will work, I will within four weeks, hopefully sooner, will have
370 this transcribed and I will email you a copy of it and you can look over it. If there's
371 something that you're like I wish I hadn't said that, or I wish I had said this, or this isn't
372 really getting across the point that I was trying to make just let me know and I will fix
373 whatever, but if I don't hear from you within about a week I will assume it's fine and good
374 to go. But that's about all that I have for you.

375

376 B2: Okay thanks it's been a pleasure. I look forward to learning what you learn. This is very
377 valuable research.

378

379 J: Yes, I will. Thank you that was my goal

College C Interview

1 J: Okay so before we start, just a reminder that you are recorded. You can decline to answer
2 any questions that you don't want to answer. Um, you can stop at any point if you decide
3 that you want to stop. Um, your name and the college's name will be confidential, none of
4 that will be in there. Um, I will be the only person that knows that your responses are your
5 responses, and that's about it.

6

7 C: Okay

8

9 J: Are you good with all of that?

10

11 C: I think so.

12

13 J: Alright, so we just go ahead and get started with the questions. These first few are just to
14 get us thinking about like social media, so you don't have to go into a ton of detail on these
15 first couple. So even though I know, can you go ahead and tell me your job title, and just
16 some of your major responsibilities?

17

18 C: I'm a development services coordinator, and my responsibilities range from public
19 relations and marketing advertising, fundraising, grant writing, special events.

20

21 J: Alright and then so what are all of the social media platforms that you all are currently
22 using?

23

24 C: Right now we use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

25

26 J: Okay and then um, who determines what platforms you use, if that all you or do you
27 consult with anyone else?

28

29 C: Um, so far um, the only one I have implemented since I have been in the position has
30 been Instagram. The other two were already used when I came into the position. Um, I've
31 just started it with the permission of my supervisor. Our student services um, they have
32 some accounts too, and one of them has a snapchat account, but the College image itself
33 does not use Snaphat. Student services does.

34

35 J: Okay perfect. Um, and then are there any platforms that you're not using right now, but
36 you've sort of thought about?

37

38 C: We are looking at Snapchat to try to figure out how to make that work as an institution. I
39 know some other colleges use it successfully and we are kind of reviewing that with the
40 student services folks to see the best way to make that work.

41
42 J: Okay. Cool. Um, and then so, what is your sort of overall purpose or goal when it comes to
43 what you're doing on social media, so that could be anything from you know, like reaching
44 out to students or getting information out to the community.

45
46 C: I think we use it for all of those things. We use it a lot to promote events on campus. We
47 use it for enrollment periods. We try to post something legitimate every single day to
48 engage a different group. It may be potential students, it may be current students, it may be
49 community members. I think that we could pretty much say that we use it for all of the
50 above.

51
52 J: Okay. That makes sense. Um, and then so how do you use social media as a tool for
53 specifically recruitment?

54
55 C: We try to share stories: student stories, alumni stories. Um, things that are going on, on
56 the campus that are important. For example, our physical therapy assistant program all of
57 them recently passed their examination, so that's a good way for us to promote that
58 program, and perhaps bring some potential students into there, even though it's not direct
59 recruitment it's more of a public relations image type of recruitment. And just kind of word
60 of mouth about the college, being first and foremost in their mind when they think about
61 the college.

62
63 J: Okay. Perfect, and so do you think that you are sort of succeeding in getting the interest of
64 potential students with what you're doing?

65
66 C: What we're finding is that word of mouth is the number one recruiting tool, according to
67 the feedback that we get. The student survey that we send out, up until, it will happen this
68 year, but up until this past year had never asked the question about did you hear about us
69 through social media, so I asked that that survey be changed, so we can record those
70 students who say yes, we heard about you through social media. We ask them about
71 newspaper and TV, and other things, it's just the survey hasn't caught up with the um, the
72 internet and the website, so we've added that question this time. We do get some feedback
73 from the tools on the website, and the social media, the feedback from there that's saying
74 you know engagement is up or down, and we can kind of see the age ranges there. So those
75 are increasing, we're getting a little more traction and we've starting using a lot more
76 graphic images and those kind of things and that obviously it's getting us some more

77 feedback. And having Instagram, which is fairly new to us, has helped get us a little more
78 student engagement.

79

80 J: Okay awesome. Um and then so what groups do you primarily target on social media for
81 recruitment purposes specifically?

82

83 C: I think we, we look at the high school students, although we realize they're there they
84 aren't necessarily active on Facebook. Um, they're a little more active on Instagram. We
85 have fewer followers on Twitter, I think we have way fewer on Twitter than we do on
86 Facebook. Um, so we market to their parents, their grandparents, the people that are on
87 those platforms. Um, we do market to professionals in the sense that there are workforce
88 development programs. We have, um some of those programs are targeted to people who
89 have jobs, but may want to get a different job and they may be 30, 40, 50 years old. So, we
90 target that. You know we do some of those profiles, like successful graduates, those kinds of
91 things and try to market to those potential students too.

92

93 J: Okay. And then why do you use social media to reach those groups? Is it just like a
94 supplemental thing, or?

95

96 C: It is a supplemental thing, but I believe that that's where everyone is. It seems to be that
97 we don't necessarily reach them on television, because they're not watching commercials.
98 We don't necessarily reach them all on, in newspapers or radio, because there's satellite
99 radio and they don't read the newspapers. They all seem to be on some form of social
100 media. We can typically find just about every subset of student on one of our social media
101 platforms, and it's inexpensive.

102

103 J: Yea.

104

105 C: That's a, it's a really good tool for the price that we pay, which is nothing. That's really
106 nice.

107

108 J: And then, so how does the fact that you all target a lot of, or work with a lot of
109 nontraditional students, how does that impact how you use social media?

110

111 C: We use, when I create a message for a social media platform, I think about the target
112 demographic. Facebook is a little bit older, so the language I use on Facebook may sound a
113 little different. On Twitter, of course you are limited in characters, but you can use a little
114 less formal language on Twitter. And then Instagram is just visual, so you can't put links in
115 it. You can't direct them anywhere, and that's all visual, so we kind of have to tweak each
116 message to the different platforms. We may have the same image, but we may say it

117 differently or share it differently depending on, and I think that helps reach different
118 audiences. You may have the same image, but you may have to direct it to a different
119 demographic or a different age group, if that makes sense.

120

121 J: Yea definitely. Um and then, so you sort of went into this, but if you just want to like
122 reiterate or add anything, what types of recruitment content are you generally posting? I
123 know you said you do like the success stories, are there any others that you can think about
124 that you didn't list?

125

126 C: Um, we have concerts. We have a community band and community choir. We promote
127 those concerts through social media. Um, if we have a faculty member who's doing
128 something really cool, or teaching something different, or there's a new course we use that.
129 Just about anything that we can think of to add to what we are doing here, or make people
130 aware. I think sometimes it's just an awareness platform more than a recruiting platform.
131 It's just letting people know what we're doing, because how else will they find out if it's not
132 on social media. You know you can't put, you can't buy that much time on television. You
133 can't you know buy that much radio or TV time, but social media is endless. We can post a
134 couple of times a day every day and still be an effective form of communication, where
135 that's just not something you can do with any other platform.

136

137 J: Yea. Alright. Um, and then so, how, what does your content generally look like, as far as
138 format. So do you, I think you mentioned that you do primarily a lot of photos, um would
139 you say that photos are sort of in most of what you do, or it is mostly like text or both?

140

141 C: I try to use an image, something, with everything I post. Instagram forces us to, but
142 Twitter and Facebook, you know, years ago text was okay, and 120 characters was fine, but
143 now they want to see the image with it ,so even if I say we have an event on this day and
144 this time I have a graphic that goes with it that says we have an event this day and this time,
145 because they're more likely to look at that and maybe see that information than they are to
146 read the little thing. We try to keep it short and sweet and the graphics you know we use
147 some free software, like we started using Canva, which is really neat, but there are some
148 free options there, just to create some quick graphics that look neat and clean. We try to
149 keep it minimal and we try to use student photos when we can. People that are
150 recognizable in the community, faculty members that are well known. Um, one of our posts
151 that had the most likes, I think it was maybe 14 thousand or something, was a faculty
152 member, a new faculty member that was just very well known in the community and his
153 picture just spread like wildfire. They clicked on it to see what he was doing because they
154 saw his face, and some of those with just a face are more engaging than a flier about
155 something. If I put the image of a person they want to click on that and see what that
156 person is doing, because they know the person and they want to find out more about them.

157 But with just about everything, I can't think of a time in the last six months or a year that I
158 haven't found an image to go with something, if I can't I'll create something if I have to . For
159 some reason the images seem to be more engaging than just the words.

160

161 J: And so you try to do that on Twitter too?

162

163 C: We do.

164

165 J: Okay. Um. So, what, if you had to pick one post that you come up with, what do you think
166 is the most successful type of post that you have? What reaches the most people? If that
167 makes sense, does that make sense?

168

169 C: It does. Um, the ones that seem to , that we get the most feedback are just those that have
170 images of people that we know. Or, images from graduation. Student related images or
171 faculty related images where they're you know maybe two or three students from the
172 community. And their moms and their dads and their grandparents and their aunts and
173 uncles and their friends and they all you know share it and like it and look at it. Or a faculty
174 member who's done something really neat. Those are the kinds of ones that we get the
175 most feedback about, that seem to be the most engaging is someone recognizable. The
176 graphic does better than the words, but the real people image does better than the graphic.

177

178 J: Okay awesome. And then who do you think, I know this might be a guess, or you might
179 have some data from the social media platforms, but who do you think is most commonly
180 looking at your platforms?

181

182 C: As far as demographically, or?

183

184 J: Yea, or just anything that you know, and I know that could just be a guess or an I don't
185 really know.

186

187 C: I'm not sure. If I had to guess it would most, it would probably be more parents of
188 students than it would be students on some platforms, for example Facebook. Um, a lot of
189 them are folks that are attached to the college in some way: donors or friends of the college
190 or people who work here. Lots of people who work here engage with our social media and
191 share our social media posts, which is very helpful. Um, our students are, they know that
192 we're on Facebook, but they don't engage with us on Facebook they just watch from a
193 distance. So, I think we get a little more engagement with Instagram and I think if we can
194 get Snapchat up and going we'll get a little more engagement. I just try to be cautious not to
195 go into a place where they don't want us, and there are places where they don't want to see
196 us, and sometimes I think Snapchat is the place where they don't want to see us, but I've

197 seen some other colleges and universities use it less invasively than I guess than what I'm
198 seeing you know younger teenagers use Snapchat with just one another. I think it's a little
199 more difficult for an institution or business to use Snapchat than it is one on one, student to
200 student. And we, I try to listen to student and find out where they're going to be next, what
201 they're into and what's coming next, so I actually ask them when I have the class, where are
202 you, what are you into, what are you looking at, are you still here, are you still there? And
203 most of them still have Facebook, but they say they don't, they look at it they don't do
204 anything they don't post anything. They do interact on Snapchat, but just with each other.
205 They don't text each other, and Instagram, they seem to be, most of them are involved in
206 Instagram. It looks like maybe our female students are a little more involved in Instagram
207 than the male students, and I think our female students are a little more involved in social
208 media as a group than our male students are.

209
210 J: Okay.

211
212 C: We try to listen to them.

213
214 J: That's a great thing. Um, and then what would you say that the people that follow you or
215 friend you on social media what do they gain from that connection with you?

216
217 C: We try to keep them informed. Informed of events, of dates, of what's going on at the
218 college, why you should come to college here, who our instructors are, who our staff are,
219 what they're doing in the community on campus and off campus, um, those are the kinds of
220 things we want to make sure we get the word out about.

221
222 J: Okay, and then, what are you most eager to know and to get out of me doing this, about
223 potential students or students' social media preferences?

224
225 C: We would like to know where they stay, and if it's effective. Do they get as much
226 information from us as we want to think that they do. Do they not engage with us is it, why
227 don't they engage with us if they see us on social media? Because they don't feel like they
228 need to? Are we not providing an opportunity for them to engage with us? What do they
229 want to see? What is the most interesting? Maybe they want to see something that we
230 haven't thought about. Maybe they want more videos or shorter videos, or less photos or
231 whatever it is that they want and how they want to receive that information. Anything that
232 they can let us know, we would be happy to use that.

233
234 J: Okay.

235
236 C: We think we know, but I'm not sure that we always do.

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J: Okay. Awesome. And then so, of the social media platforms that you said that you are on, can you rank them in which ones you think are most effective at meeting your goals?

C: I think just based on the followship of them, Facebook would be first. We have the most followers and the most engagement there. Um, Twitter we have, Instagram is fairly new I think we'll get more folks on there. Um, they're probably even as far as engagement we just have less folks following us on Instagram right now than we do on Twitter. So Twitter has, looks like it has more engagement, when in reality I think it's just a difference in size, and I think once um, Instagram is, the word has spread a little bit more that we're there and that we're sharing things there too just in a different sort of manner, that that will gain a little more feedback than say Twitter will. But Facebook is definitely our largest platform right now.

J: That makes sense. Alright so you got the next two. Um, and then, so how do you, if at all, measure the success of your social media efforts?

C: Um, we do have, um our Webmaster kind of keeps an eye on them. He also helps administer some of our social media sites and he keeps an eye on it and he gets a weekly email that shows you know trends and new followers and likes and all those kinds of things. And we can look at each post and see you know was this post engaging, and we can look at it and say well okay this post wasn't as engaging as this other one what was different about them? Was it because it wasn't a human being in the photo? Was it because it was an event they weren't interested in? So we can look at them like that or we can look at it anecdotally and say you know this one got 40 likes and this one got 10, but in reality there's a little more to it. There's shares there's the link, Did they click on the link? It just depends on what we want to look at, because if we're trying to direct them to a web page, then maybe success is based on did we get them to click on that link not how many people looked at it, so there are a couple of different ways that we measure that. And we are going to ask in the student survey this time how you found out about the college, or how you got information about enrollment and social media is going to be an option for them to look at this time so we'll be able to measure that too.

J: And with that email he gets is that just Facebook, or is that all three?

C: It is Facebook and Twitter and Instagram I don't think is on there yet, because again it's fairly new in its inception so I don't think it's gotten into that feed yet.

275 J: Okay awesome. And then, last question, so what do you find, I think I know the answer to
276 this, but what do you find the most challenging about using social media in the context of
277 your job?

278
279 C: There are a couple of things. One of them is, is finding the line between the audiences
280 that we want to reach. I want to sound different to their parents than I do to the student.
281 Finding the right voice: like I try, if you read the Facebook posts I want them to have a
282 similar voice. Twitter has a different voice. Instagram it's a little more cheeky. Like trying to
283 find the right voice for each platform, but being one person doing all of these and being
284 aware of the fact that you've got different audiences and how do you talk to each one of
285 them in a way that is engaging or inappropriate is not the right word, but you don't want to
286 speak to, there are different languages basically that you can speak to students than you
287 can speak to parents. You know you try to keep aware of how students phrase things,
288 because if you speak to them differently than they're used to hearing things, then they
289 think eh, that's out of touch, and you don't want to be out of touch with students, but you
290 also do want to be out of touch with parents and use language that they're not familiar
291 with, so It's kind of a fine line between trying to reach different audiences in different
292 platforms in the appropriate way that they want to be reached and use the language that
293 they understand. I think that's one of the harder things. And finding the time to spend on all
294 of them, and the appropriate time, because we've tried to, when we first started doing this
295 it was like make sure you update weekly, now it's like make sure you update every few
296 days, and last week it's like make sure you update ten times a day. So, finding that, there
297 are colleges that will update, I think that's a little much, but there are colleges that will
298 update 4, 5, 6 times a day, and you try to find that balance between getting kicked out of the
299 feed. And that's kind of where I stand, you know once or twice a day is enough that you
300 may not aggravate the viewer and get kicked out of the feed, because we want to make sure
301 that we stay in their feed and at the top of their posts. And we want to make sure that when
302 they do see something from us it's something that's interesting, not just filler. And I think
303 that that's a harder thing to, is to try to keep in touch with what's going on, on campus, and
304 try to do all of the other things that are involved in your job and manage the social media
305 account and make sure you're capturing all the things that are going on, on campus that are
306 interesting to get out to people. That's difficult. There's thing going on all the time, its just
307 can we cover them? Can we get a photo of it. Is there someone here to handle it? We would
308 love to do more video, it's just there's one or two of us at any given time we can't be x
309 number of places. But, I think we're doing a little bit better than we have before. We're
310 getting better.

311
312 J: Alright and that's all of my questions. Is there something that I should have asked that
313 you can think of that I need to know?

314

315 C: Um, I think you did a really good job of covering everything. It is, the more social media
316 platforms that we add the more difficult it is to keep up with everything and track
317 everything, and pay as much attention to it as you need to. You have to be available to
318 respond to people, that's something that we, I didn't really think about when I took over, is
319 some people send you message, private messages through Facebook and they want
320 information about the college and you have to be able to answer them and answer them
321 quickly and with the correct information, because I don't want to come back to them and
322 say I don't know, call this person, so whoever handles those accounts needs to at least have
323 some base level knowledge of everything to at least send them in the right direction. And
324 that's one of the things that I think I didn't think about coming into it. You need that base
325 level of knowledge to be able to answer questions that come in through social media and
326 handle sometimes those difficult things that are posted on social media, negative things and
327 how do you handle those? And those are things that we've had come up. Thankfully not too
328 many negative things, but every now and then you have to be able to respond to those
329 promptly and quickly and try to make everyone at least satisfied with the response. And, I
330 think we've done a pretty good job on the response rate and getting messages back to the
331 person quickly, because whether they post it on our wall , or they send it in a private
332 message. So, we haven't gotten any messages on Instagram yet, but I assume they will be
333 coming as we go up in viewers and followers.

334

335 J: Alright, awesome. Well then that's all I have for you, so I um, am saying four weeks,
336 within the next four weeks I will have this transcribed and I will send you a copy of it and
337 you can review it if you want to review it. Um, and if you see anything that you're like, I
338 don't think that's right, or I don't want that in there, just let me know and I will fix it or take
339 it out, or whatever need to be done and then if you think of something that you're like I
340 wish I had said that, or I wish I hadn't said this, just feel free to email me. And then, so I will
341 send it to you within four weeks and then if I don't hear from you within um, a week I'll just
342 assume that it's fine, and then once I get focus groups done you'll get a copy of the entire
343 thing. I think I'm going to do a report for all of you who I am interviewing that will be a
344 little bit shorter, and then if you wanted a copy of the entire thesis then you are more than
345 welcome to that too.

Appendix I: Focus Group Transcripts

College A Focus Group

- 1 J: Okay, so we'll go ahead and get started so that I don't keep you here forever. So
2 throughout this when I'm asking questions what I want you guys to do is think back either
3 to when you were thinking about coming to **CC or is that was a long time ago and you're
4 like I can't really think about that, think about yourself as someone who is getting ready to
5 attend community college and what you might think about these questions that I'm asking
6 in terms of that. Does that make sense? So you're someone who's thinking about going into
7 community college, or you're thinking back to when you were looking into **CC.
- 8 J: Alright so first question. When you were planning on attending community college, how
9 much did you look at social media for information on that college?
- 10 1: Not really at all.
- 11 6: Yea I didn't at all.
- 12 J: Nobody?
- 13 2 and three shaking heads.
- 14 J: Okay cool. So did any of you on that sheet say that you friended or followed the college
15 before you started attending?
- 16 All say no
- 17 J: Nobody, okay cool. So I get to skip a few questions there. So since none of you followed
18 the college, did any of you ever like seek it out to find some piece of information or
19 anything?
- 20 1: Just their website.
- 21 6: Yea just the website
22 (2 nodding in agreement.)
- 23 J: Just the website, but never any social media of any sort?
- 24 3: I used it just to find out like activities that they normally do on campus or whatever.
- 25 J: Okay so you did look for activities and things like that.
- 26 2: I used to have the **CC app. They had an app and I'd use that like to look at the academic
27 calendar, but I deleted it because it's a waste of space.
- 28 J: Alright and that's all? So who follows or friends **CC on any type of social media now?
- 29 1: Currently no.
- 30 J: Nobody?
- 31 (All say or shake head no.)
- 32 J: Okay. So if you did, would you ever share a post or comment on a post or like, you know
33 on Facebook people will, if they see a post and they want a friend to see it they'll put their
34 name in the comments or something like that. Would you ever do something like that with
35 a post that a community college or **CC had posted on social media?
- 36 6: I don't normally do that anyway, so I probably wouldn't.
- 37 4: It depends on the post.
- 38 2: Yea
- 39 J: So what might have to be in a post can you think of something that you would be
40 interested in doing that?
- 41 1: If it's your friends or you that's probably when you would share it.
- 42 J: Like if you were featured in the post?
- 43 1: (Nodding yes.) In (fall or involved...unintelligible.)
- 44 J: Okay. Anything else?

45 2: If there was like an event that had like free food, for sure.
46 J: Okay. So we've got if you were featured in it, if it was like if it was an event or there was
47 going to be free food, is there anything else?
48 3: Um just really any activity. Something to keep me active.
49 1: If there's like a show.
50 J: Alright cool. And so none of you have ever done that before it you don't follow the college
51 right.
52 All no.
53 J: What topics, if there are any should the community colleges not talk about. Is there
54 something that you're like that's something they shouldn't talk about on social media?
55 5: I mean I don't really know what they do talk about, so.
56 J: Okay that makes sense because you don't follow.
57 2: I think anyone has the freedom to talk about whatever. Maybe I mean obviously a school
58 shouldn't talk about something that's discriminating or be offensive.
59 J: Okay that makes sense.
60 1: No berating, like berating students, professors, or clubs, or whatever.
61 J: Okay.
62 3: I think it's also really good to know the views of the school that you're looking into
63 before you actually attend, so that if you don't actually know much about the school or how
64 they view students or how they treat their students. There's I mean if you don't know too
65 much about that why go there.
66 J: Okay good point, awesome. So I have an example post here, and so none of these are
67 going to be formatted to look like they're on any specific platform, and I'll ask a question
68 about that later. So photo, trees and the sky it says good morning, simply sharing a mindful
69 Monday morning moment from campus. Hope you have a good week. So what would you
70 think if you saw this post posted by College A?
71 4: They're just hoping you have a good day.
72 5: I'd probably say that's nice and scroll past it.
73 J: Okay so you would like it, but no interaction with it?
74 3: Yea. 1 and 4 agreeing.
75 J: Okay. Do you think a post like that is appropriate for a college to post?
76 6: Yea. Welcoming.
77 (All nodding.)
78 J: Okay cool. What social media platforms do you think that the college should be on, if any?
79 3: They should or shouldn't?
80 J: Should.
81 4: Facebook.
82 6: Yea.
83 (2 and 3 nodding yes.)
84 1: YouTube
85 3: I think, uh probably Instagram. I think it would be okay.
86 5: Twitter
87 6: Yea I mean I wouldn't do like Snapchat
88 J: You wouldn't do Snapchat, so no one thinks they should be on Snapchat?
89 1,2,3,4 all enthusiastically saying no or shaking heads.

90 [00:06:58.13] J: Okay good to know. So you named a couple of different platforms, so when
91 a college has a Facebook an Instagram, a Twitter, should the content that they post on those
92 platforms be different or can it be the same?
93 2: What do you mean?
94 J: So like
95 6: You mean like do a post on Facebook and a post on Twitter from the same account? Or
96 same like college?
97 J: So you know how when you post something say on Instagram it gives you the option to
98 like connect it to Facebook so it would post the exact same photo and the exact same
99 caption. If they did that sort of thing would that be okay?
100 3: I mean I think it's okay. 1, 2, and 6 agreeing.
101 5: Yea Facebook and Instagram are kind of the same thing like that, but a Twitter post
102 wouldn't be the same thing as a Facebook post.
103 J: So those two would be different?
104 5: Yea
105 J: Okay
106 J: So you said that it would be okay, but do you guys think it would be better if they were
107 different?
108 3: I think it would be better.
109 5: Yea me too
110 (1 nodding yes.)
111 2: Unless it was like they're notifying you of like an event then you would want to post the
112 same thing.
113 J: Because those would be pretty specific things.
114 2: Mhmm
115 J: So how different do you think it should be in that case. Can they post about the same idea,
116 but talk about it differently or should they post about completely different topics in
117 general?
118 3: I feel like if you're going to put up one thing for like about a certain event you should put
119 the same thing up on a different social media site if you're talking about the same thing,
120 because not everybody that follows you on Twitter will follow you on Instagram.
121 J: Okay that's a great point. (To 5) Were you going to say something else?
122 5: Well I mean that I guess depends on what kind of content you were talking about,
123 because if we're talking about maybe the college there's a weather delay and they're just
124 getting that out, that's something that fits in perfectly fine on Twitter. It's something that
125 you could see on Facebook. It's not something that would be in place on Instagram, people
126 don't look at Instagram for news.
127 2: True
128 J: Okay cool.
129 1: I think that they can be more lighthearted. Like if it's Instagram I know there's a lot of
130 younger people on that verses Facebook where your whole family is on that.
131 (2,3,4, nodding in agreement.)
132 J: Okay awesome. And you mentioned some of the platforms that they should be on. I think
133 I know the answer to this question. Which one is most important do you guys think for
134 them to be on?
135 3 and 4: Facebook. All agreeing.

136 J: Okay cool. How often should the college post on social media per day? And that might
137 differ on the different platforms, so if you want to specify that you can.
138 3: I don't think you should post very often.
139 1: Maybe once a day
140 3: Because like...
141 4: Maybe once a week to be honest with you.
142 3: Yea
143 4: Unless there's like certain events happening that week.
144 J: Okay so I've got one for once a day, three for once a week. Where are you guys leaning (to
145 5 and 6)?
146 6: I don't know I guess definitely just not once a day, because my high school did that and it
147 was like they would have three different pictures of a teacher like waving and it's like oh
148 bla bla wants you to have a good day and it's like okay.
149 (All talking or nodding like they understand and agree.)
150 3: They don't have something to talk about every single day.
151 6: I'd say probably between the two.
152 5: Yea
153 J: Okay, interesting. So is there any type of content that a college could post on their social
154 media that might influence your decision to attend that college? That doesn't mean that it
155 has to, you see it and you're like oh I'm gonna go there automatically, but maybe if you're
156 on the fence could it like sway you. Can you come up with anything that might influence
157 you?
158 4: It depends on how involved they are, because some colleges they'll post something just
159 to make it seem like they're involved, but they're not really but if you can show me that
160 you're involved with the students...
161 J: Can you, I know this is putting you on the spot, could you think of an example of
162 something that might show that they're really involved?
163 4: Um, I guess you could do like mental health for one, because I know **CC they have a
164 mental health section, just for like kids that are struggling with that whereas other colleges
165 don't.
166 J: Okay.
167 3: I think that would be cool. I don't think you should put up a picture of somebody reading
168 a book, because that's, of course you know it's a college you're going to be reading books no
169 matter what, but that's not the first thing that comes to mind if I'm looking for a school to
170 get into. I'm looking for like how active the students are in the actual school, because if the
171 students are active most likely it's probably going to be more to choose from based off of
172 our activities and just like more people to talk to in general.
173 J: Okay
174 2: I think something like showcasing new programs and new classes, because I know I got
175 an email from College A about a new class, like a graphic skills class (it was new at the time)
176 and um yea if they posted that it would probably help somebody choose if they wanted to
177 go to this college. Like new programs or I think even, I follow Virginia Tech on Instagram
178 and Facebook and they do like a Humans of Virginia Tech thing kind of like Humans of New
179 York and I think that would be cool too like for College A to do. It kind of gets like personal
180 with people and tells their story of why they chose to go to College A or why they decided
181 to start their college career at College A

182 J: Okay awesome. Anything else?
183 1: Free food
184 J: Okay. So if you know that the college does a lot of free food offerings. So some of this
185 might get a tiny bit repetitive, but we'll make it work. So I have another example post. This
186 one says **CC's forth annual comic con is just about to open. Visit us today from 10am to
187 4pm #**CCCOMICON4 So what do you think about that type of post?
188 2: It's good
189 J: Good.
190 6: I think it's fine
191 1: Definitely relative
192 J: Okay. So would like an event post similar to that be one that could sway a decision?
193 (1 nodding yes.)
194 2: yea
195 6: Yea it could influence it
196 J: It could influence it. Okay cool. Okay and then you mentioned some posts about
197 programs, so here would be some examples of those. This one says, Interested in becoming
198 a pharmacy technician check out training next week. What do we think about that one?
199 2: Yea, I think there could be more information.
200 5: Yea
201 J: Alright, what do you think about the photo?
202 4: I mean it seems like...
203 J: Alright cool. And then another one. Interested in taking the FAA drone regulation exam?
204 **CC is offering an exam prep course this semester sign up today, a link #**CC #drones
205 How about this one?
206 (1 and 2 nodding yes.)
207 4: That seems like something my old superintendent would post on Twitter
208 J: Is that good or bad?
209 4: I don't know he posted everyday
210 2: I like it
211 1 and 3 agreeing
212 2: The picture is cool
213 3: It doesn't seem staged
214 J: So it's more authentic
215 6: Yea it looks real
216 5: Yea.
217 J: Okay cool. So which one of those, the pharmacy one or the drone one, which one might be
218 more likely to influence you?
219 All say drone
220 J: Okay awesome. So what about a post like this one? Today we kick off student advisement
221 week. Students are encouraged to meet with their advisor this week and plan for the
222 coming 2018 fall semester. So the photo says student advisement week start a conversation
223 with your advisor and the road ahead. What are your thought about that one?
224 1: It's appropriate
225 3: Pretty cool
226 (2 and 4 nodding yes.)
227 J: Okay and then pumpkin painting today until 3 p.m.

228 J: (to 6) did you say no?
229 6: Well I don't know. I guess if that's interesting to some people. Like that says caption does
230 that mean I'm just going to see that on the feed and those are going to be the words with it?
231 J: Yea it would just say pumpkin painting until 3pm and then it has the three little pumpkin
232 emojis
233 5: I mean it's a bit lacking in information.
234 6: Yea
235 1: You've got to know where it is
236 2: True. And also the picture I would probably scroll past it because it's not specific enough
237 I think.
238 1: It wouldn't really catch my eye.
239 2 It's just like a jumble of stuff.
240 3: Yea like looking at it from here I mean I also don't have my contact in but it's just like a
241 whole lot going on. It's a lot of colors in a small area so if there's too much going on
242 knowing me I just scroll by it.
243 5: I'd scroll right by it
244 J: Okay good to know. So maybe you mentioned, somebody mentioned there was not
245 enough information. What if this were posting it after the fact, so maybe before they had
246 posted information about it like hey come by today this time this place we're going to have
247 pumpkin painting this is what we'll have there and then maybe this is afterwards showing
248 we did this. Would that make it more okay?
249 (1, 2 nodding yes.)
250 3: I think you should also post a picture
251 1: With some pumpkins
252 5: Like a finished pumpkin
253 3: Yea a finished pumpkin, because if you're posting that afterward, most likely if I scrolled
254 by it the first time where it's just the words and then I'm just now seeing it I'm like of wait
255 where is this coming from.
256 (Most nodding in agreement.)
257 3: I think if you're going to post something just post it all in one and then maybe just like
258 post a reminder saying hey this is going on.
259 1: Yea multiple ones get out to more people though, so maybe that's an incentive.
260 4: In all honesty if I saw that picture I would keep scrolling because I would have thought it
261 was something that like a family relative would have posted. I wouldn't have taken the time
262 to actually stop and look at it.
263 J: Okay but you might have if it was like a finished pumpkin or something?
264 4: Yea (All agreeing verbally or nodding yes.)
265 J: Interesting. Okay, so those two posts, pumpkin painting and the student advisement one.
266 Would either of those ever be able or posts like those be able to influence a decision to
267 attend somewhere?
268 2: Maybe the pumpkin one, because the advisement one is more like an alert
269 1: Yea
270 (3 nodding yes.)
271 J: Okay. Alright so of all of those posts. I'll go back through them again. We've got the trees,
272 we've got comic con, pharmacy tech, drone class, student advisement week and pumpkin

273 painting. Which one do you guys like the most? What would resonate the most with you?
274 What might be most likely to influence your decision?
275 6: Probably the advisement. Honestly unless it's something like that, if it's something like
276 that referring to pumpkin picture, or if it's like have a good day I'm not going to look at it,
277 but if it's something that's like actually going to benefit me then I will look at it.
278 2: You're asking us which one would influence us when choosing the college or...
279 J: Or just which one you like the most in general. Basically any of those.
280 2: I mean I'm not into drones but it just has the most information the picture is genuine and
281 I think it advertises the college well.
282 (1 and three nodding yes.)
283 J: Okay anybody else have a different one that they liked best?
284 3: Um I kind of like the one that he said. Like whenever I'm going to leave the house I like to
285 actually get something done unless I'm doing something active. And then also I'm not very
286 artistic whenever it comes to painting stuff.
287 J: Alright cool. So how likely would you maybe if you were going and looking into colleges
288 now, how likely would you be to follow an account that was run by students rather than the
289 college, students at the college who attend? Sort of showcasing what a day in the life of that
290 student is like?
291 6: Like any college or community college specific?
292 J: Community college specific.
293 1: It could be beneficial
294 3: Mhmm
295 J: You seem a little iffy (to 6)
296 6: I'd probably follow it for a little while and then if it's just stuff that like I don't think it's
297 going to help me at all then I'll probably unfollow it.
298 J: Okay can you think of anything that you would like to see on something like that?
299 6: So for like before like the semester starts?
300 J: Yea so like before you even know that you want to attend. When you're like sort of
301 thinking about it
302 6: I guess like an information kind of night thing if they talked about that I would definitely
303 look at it for a bit, but if it's just like come to the... I don't know but if it's just like, unless it's
304 informative then I'm not going to look at it.
305 2: I think it would also be hard because not everyone can relate with that student, because I
306 feel like community college really varies on the type of people that are here. Like there's
307 young people and there's people who like are married and already have jobs that are just
308 like looking to further their education so like I think it would be hard to like reach a lot of
309 people with that but it does sound like pretty cool and I would probably, if I was like
310 younger and not in college yet I would probably follow it for a while.
311 J: Okay and would it help if they had maybe multiple different types of students run it to
312 make it a little more diverse?
313 2: I think so like different majors or like different backgrounds
314 (All nodding yes.)
315 5: Yea
316 J: Alright awesome. Would you as a student ever be interested in helping to run an account
317 like that?
318 1: Not me but I'd say there are people that are definitely interested.

319 J: Okay so none of you but you could think of people who maybe might would
320 2: I would maybe want to. Not for College A
321 All Laugh
322 2: I just...
323 3. There's too many people that I know here.
324 2: I don't know anyone but I just it just...College A you know the aesthetic is not pleasing,
325 but I don't know I think it would be kind of cool. I already run different social media
326 accounts for just one club and it's like really hard work but I also just enjoy social
327 networking anyways, so I think it would be cool.
328 3: I think one thing is like how interesting is the school, like if there's nothing to catch our
329 attention.
330 1: Nothing happening
331 3: Especially here like there might be some things that go on on the Dublin site that I'm not
332 aware of but if there's nothing going to actually like catch my attention or something that I
333 should look out for I'm probably not going to pay too much attention to it just because the
334 idea of a community college especially because when I came from a school in West Virginia
335 like it was different because there were more activities based off once you finish eating you
336 go right back to your dorm you can find things to do but if there's nothing already set out or
337 planed or pretty much talked about like around the campus there's not a lot of material
338 that you have to pull from.
339 J: Okay alright awesome. So we've talked a lot about photos and things like that. Do you
340 think that the college should use video in their social media?
341 1: I think it would be helpful. So maybe like a tour or looking in a lab of this science class or
342 just seeing how general things work.
343 6: So are you counting YouTube as a social media type of thing?
344 J: You can yea.
345 6: Okay because they do like they did it for orientation, it was like different like academic
346 advisors would talk a little bit about themselves like where they were and stuff like that
347 and that was helpful because I was able to find and like kind of figure out some more stuff
348 about her, but other than that I would say probably no.
349 J: Any other ideas that you would like to see videos
350 3: Um I went to, it might be kind of odd, but kind of get to know the professors before you
351 actually have them. Because there's a couple of professors I've had, not here but like I get
352 into the classroom like what in the freak did I just get myself into. So I think that would be
353 pretty cool.
354 J: Okay. Any others?
355 J: Alright awesome. That's the last question I have. Do you guys have anything else you
356 want to say about anything we've talked about? Alright well then that's all I have for you.

College B Focus Group

- 1 J: When I'm asking you guys these questions I want you to think back to either when you
2 were thinking about attending College B or if you're like I can't really think back in that
3 way, pretend that you are someone right now who is thinking about attending a community
4 college. So try not to think as so much a current student, but someone who might be
5 looking into attending a college or community college in particular. So when you were
6 either planning to attend College B or if you were planning to attend a community college
7 right now, did you guys look at social media at all for information on the college?
8 2: Not really
9 1: I wouldn't say social media, but I definitely would have looked at the College B website.
10 2: Yea research isn't on social media, if that makes sense.
11 J: Okay so you would say you probably never looked at it at all before you came here?
12 2 and 6: yea
13 1: Probably not
14 3 (Shaking head no.)
15 J: Okay, so did any of you say on that sheet that you follow or friend the college on any of
16 their social media platforms?
17 6 (Nodding yes.)
18 J: (To 6) Yea, which ones?
19 6: Facebook
20 3: Facebook
21 2: I don't follow
22 1: I don't follow them
23 J: Okay so for those of you who do, how often do you look, do you ever like go to their page
24 or is it just like you see it when it comes up on your feed and that's about it?
25 6: I see it when it comes up on my feed.
26 3: Yea pretty much the same. I've been here a long time, so sometimes when I participate in
27 different events or whatever with my friends the photographers will go around and take
28 pictures, so sometimes I'll go and look up the pictures from those events or something like
29 that.
30 J: Okay cool. So since none of you looked at **CC's social media before you came here, let's
31 all try to put ourselves in the shoes of someone who would be thinking about attending
32 community college. If you were going to look at the college's social media sites, what type
33 of information would you want to find there?
34 1: Probably basic information like registration for classes or like how to register and stuff
35 like that.
36 2: I would also definitely say not like fully, but definitely some of the fields offered at the
37 college.
38 J: Okay so some of the bigger program areas?
39 2: Yea some of the programs
40 6: Same as him (referring to 2)
41 3: Yea I think it's cool when they showcase different programs and also like I know College
42 B puts reminders of like different important dates, so if you were looking into a school that
43 would be cool too, because you could like oh I need to go do this.

44 J: Okay perfect. So you might have answered this and some of these might be a little
45 repetitive, but just remind me. So is there any one type of information that is most
46 important to you on social media to see? [pause] Would it be the programs that they offer?
47 1 (Nodding yes.)
48 2: Yea probably for me personally yea probably
49 6: Yea programs.....
50 2: If I was looking into the college yea cause that would just be easy to see whether they
51 offer what I want to go for or not.
52 J: Okay. Okay and so you guys (1 and 2) will probably say no to this one, but maybe for
53 those of you who do follow the college, have you ever shared anything that the college has
54 posted on Facebook or maybe like you know how on Facebook you will instead of sharing it
55 you might tag someone in the comment, have you ever done anything like that?
56 6: Yea like a couple times.
57 J: Okay can you think of any of the posts that you did that with?
58 6: Once last year at spring fling there was like a lot of pictures going on and I was like this
59 was really fun and I'm glad I got to do it, because I didn't know that they did that until my,
60 one of my friends she was in {unintelligible} talking about it and then that when we came
61 here, because everybody started walking around with food.
62 J: Okay alright and then you said that you had? (To 3)
63 3: Yea, well same thing. At spring fling last year me and my friends had a booth, so the
64 photographers were like walking around taking a bunch of pictures. And then one time I
65 did a project for a class and it was like sit down in the hallway and the photographer took a
66 picture of it and tagged me in it on Facebook and so I you now I shared that.
67 J: Okay cool. And then you guys might be able to answer this one too (to 1 and 2). What
68 would a post have to have for you guys to be willing to comment on it or share it or maybe
69 even just like it?
70 2: That's a good question. I think if it was something that like pertained to me like say she
71 was at the spring fling or whatever like that she like took the initiative to comment on it or
72 whatever, so I guess if it was something that pertained to me I would share it I don't know.
73 J: Okay so you would want it to have some sort of direct connection to you?
74 2: Yea or if there was like some type of event that I was a part of and they said something
75 about it I would repost it or whatever.
76 1: So like if we did a project and they came in and took pictures of our project and stuff like
77 that then yes I guess I would share that but I'm not gonna like, if it wasn't pertaining to me I
78 wouldn't really do anything about it.
79 J: Okay.
80 6: I would do that but if there was like a school closing or something because a lot of my
81 friends, I'm from a pretty small town, they all pretty much come here. A lot of them just got
82 accepted but I would share like school closings or something.
83 [Two more participants come in] J: Gets new participants up to date.
84 J: Are there any topics that you guys think the community college should not post about?
85 Maybe that you've seen them post or maybe you've seen other colleges or even
86 organizations post about that you just don't think are appropriate on social media?
87 2: I would say definitely stay out of politics.
88 6: Yea
89 4: Are you talking about on social media?

90 J: Yes
91 4: Oh yea because that's how you start like big wars and [unintelligible]
92 1: Probably any controversial subject in the world are probably safer to stay away from
93 because you'll drive some people away or you might bring them closer
94 2: I guess it's kind of like business as well, so from a business standpoint you'd be losing
95 customers per say.
96 J: Alright cool, so with some of these questions I'm going to show you some example social
97 media posts and they're not formatted to look like they are on any specific social media and
98 that's for a specific purpose. So for this one we've got a photo of some trees and the sky and
99 so the caption would say good morning. Simply sharing a mindful Monday morning
100 moment from campus hope you have a good week. So what do you guys think if you were
101 to see a post like this on social media? Just what are your opinions?
102 2: I'd be like alright cool; I'd be like sweet
103 1: Is it of College B?
104 1 and 2 talking at same time
105 1: Of like our campus?
106 J: Yes. Yea so **CC would be posting this.
107 6: Yea I would like it.
108 4: So are you saying like just the picture or would it be like the picture and the uh caption.
109 J: Yea so this would be the photo and then that's how they would caption it.
110 4: Yea probably if I see it, especially if **CC did it I probably would like it, but if it was
111 anybody else I'd probably just keep scrolling, like okay that's cool.
112 1: Cause College B's a beautiful location, like if you look out you can obviously see a lot of
113 mountains, so I would like it.
114 J: Okay so you said you would like it, would anybody else engage with it in any way?
115 2: Maybe like it. Maybe, probably scroll through it. But maybe would like it.
116 5: I just don't look at my pictures as much as I used to I just kind of scroll I'm like ooh that's
117 pretty and I'll like it
118 J: Okay. What social media platforms do you guys think the college should be on?
119 2: Twitter. All the way.
120 4: I think they should be on anything, because I feel like the more social media that you're
121 on the more people you're going to get.
122 6: Yea. Snapchat. I don't think they're on Snapchat, but Snapchat a lot of people actually use
123 including magazines.
124 J: Okay
125 4: I mean like my mom she runs a business like a paint party business and I do all the social
126 media stuff for it and so I have like a Snapchat Instagram twitter all like that and then ever
127 since that she's actually gotten more business being a lot of people didn't know because a
128 lot of people shared on social media and everything like that.
129 J: Okay awesome. So since you guys say that they should be on a lot of different social
130 media platforms, when they post on those platforms is it okay for them to say post, if we
131 have this photo and this caption, could they post that same thing on all of the platforms or
132 do you think that it should be different content? So if they posted this on Facebook could
133 they post the exact same thing on Instagram and the exact same thing on Twitter?
134 6: A little different

135 2: I would say because at that point you're seeing it for the second time you're more likely
136 to just be like oh and just go right past it
137 4: Yea I would probably say maybe do one or two maybe the same but like not all of them.
138 2: Maybe like same caption maybe like a different picture of campus or something
139 6: Yea definitely a different picture.
140 5: At the same time I feel like it might take a lot more time than absolutely necessary.
141 J: Okay
142 4: Yea.
143 J: So which social media platform is most important for them to be on?
144 2: Personally Twitter, because I think, I feel like Twitter's more of a obviously it's stupid
145 and there's like jokes on there and stuff, but I feel like it's more of like news paper kind of
146 thing
147 6: Like it's more informative
148 2: yea there's more information than just Instagram where it's just like pictures.
149 4: See I mean I agree I think Twitter would probably be the best because a lot especially
150 kids our age are using more on Twitter than Facebook anymore so especially if the school
151 was closing or whatever post it on Twitter and that way we could see it a lot more than
152 going on like Facebook or Instagram.
153 2: I also think it definitely depends on what type of crowd you're trying to bring in, because
154 like obviously a lot of older people use Facebook, because they're not used to Twitter and
155 stuff like that, so I think it depends on what kind of people you want.
156 6: I still use Facebook. I don't know how to work Twitter.
157 J: So do you think Facebook would be most important then?
158 6: Yea I guess, because a lot of the people I got to school with they have like a bunch of
159 different social medias but if I shared it on Facebook then they can see it and they can post
160 it somewhere else, so it still gets out.
161 J: Okay. Anyone else?
162 5: I use Facebook more than Twitter
163 J: (to 3) and you only use Facebook?
164 3: Yea.
165 J: Okay. Cool. How often should the college post on social media per day and this might be
166 different for a different platform so if you want to specify that you can?
167 6: I mean I guess it would really depend on what they were doing that day, like if there's
168 really nothing going on and it's just a snow day or something, I'd say just post that it's like a
169 snow day. Or maybe if like how Virginia Tech did the snowball fight like something like that
170 you know there was a lot of posting on that but like events and stuff you should post more
171 than you do on a regular day I feel like.
172 4: Yea I'd say I agree with her especially like if something's going on then or upcoming
173 dates, then I probably would send but like maybe not as much on the weekends.
174 2: I would say maybe like they shouldn't try so hard to post something. That way it's not
175 like forced, so with that whole thing (referring to the mindful tree post) the good morning
176 post if they were also posting a goodnight thing I feel like that would be kind of weird.
177 5: I don't like getting all of the emails of the announcements in my Gmail school account, it's
178 just it crowds out the important things from my teachers and stuff, so I feel like maybe they
179 should save that for social media accounts rather than flooding our inboxes.

180 4: And plus back to what he was saying (referring to 2) when he was saying like good
181 morning in the beginning and good night at the end, a lot of people get so many emails like
182 with her (referring to 5) saying the student bulletin, I get so many emails from them I don't
183 really even look. (5 and 6 agreeing). I get so many emails I don't even want to look at
184 student bulletins.
185 2: Like for every one teacher's email there's like four of those.
186 4: So you would miss the important information, because you would see their name pop up
187 and you'd be like oh it's probably another good night post.
188 J: Okay, so if you had to give me like a max number per day like that you would feel like is
189 too many what would that be?
190 4: two or three
191 2: Max three depending on what's going on throughout the day.
192 5: Three
193 6: Yea three or four
194 J: So you guys missed this I want you to think back to when you were planning on attending
195 **CC and you were looking into whether you were going to or not or thinking about
196 yourself as someone who right now is looking into attending a community college, so just
197 try to be in that mindset. So what type of content if any could a college post that might
198 influence you to attend that school?
199 4: Can you ask the question again?
200 J: If you were planning to attend a community college and you were looking at their social
201 media posts is there some type of post that they could put on there that might convince you
202 or push you like over the edge and convince you to attend that school?
203 5: I mean free food is always awesome so
204 2: Yea, heard that.
205 4: Well see like last semester was my first semester as a college student and so I was
206 looking at like regular colleges for when I transferred, and one of the main things I was
207 looking for was like sporting events like what I would do outside of school. So I would think
208 if colleges would post like come out today and watch the baseball game play bla bla bla and
209 all these different events to do outside of academics, I feel like that would bring more
210 people in as well.
211 J: Okay cool. Anybody else? So this is a photo of a comic con event and the caption would
212 say **CCCC's 4th annual comic con is just about to open visit us today from 10 am to 4 pm
213 #**CCCCCOMICCON4 What do we think about that one?
214 2: See like if I saw that and I was into the whole comic con stuff and I had time or something
215 I would definitely be like oh that's cool I appreciate that they posted that.
216 6: Yea I would need a reminder though you know because like jobs and everything and the
217 fact that you've got to work around classes and what not.
218 2: I think that might not be the best time to do it at personally but I think that I think if I
219 saw that and it was something that peaked my interest I would be like that's cool I might
220 go.
221 4: Yea if I was into that type of stuff I would see like if there's any way that I could come and
222 visit between those times, because like I said before (unintelligible) posting something
223 that's outside academics, not something (unintelligible)
224 J: Cool. Alright. So do you think that, and so those of you that don't follow the college might
225 not have an answer to this and that's okay. Do you think that the content that you see

226 posted by the college is it more relevant to you guys as current students or is it more
227 relevant to people who are thinking about attending, so potential students?
228 2: I would say probably current students.
229 6: Yea
230 2: Because a lot of like the emails that we get from like the student bulletin and stuff are
231 like a comic con or something like that. I feel like you wouldn't know anything about that if
232 you didn't attend the college.
233 6: And I feel like if they had like more sports stuff posted too people are really into that and
234 if they think that even a community college should have like a small team or something
235 they'd be more interested in going so they could, because like a whole lot of reasons that
236 people come is to go to a bigger school and not have to pay as much, so I feel like that
237 would be a lot better too if they posted more sports stuff, because they don't.
238 J: Okay cool. Good to know.
239 5: I do have one side note. So I tend to get really self conscious and sometimes I'll look at
240 the pictures on Instagram that **CC has posted and I kind of wonder if the people in the
241 picture had approved that being posted, because I kind of think oh I wouldn't like that
242 being on social media, like I didn't approve that so I think maybe they should get their
243 permission before they take the picture or let them see it after.
244 J: Okay yea, that's a valid point. So I know all of you wouldn't be interested in a comic con
245 event but thinking about posting about events like this, if you were a potential and you say
246 the college posting about cool events maybe something more related to your interest.
247 Would that ever be something that you would be like of yea that school's pretty cool, they
248 do some cool stuff I might go there?
249 2: Yea
250 6: yea cause the only thing they really have is spring fling. Personally I like comic con stuff
251 cause like my dog's name is poison ivy. I'm big into, not like big big into it like I don't dress
252 up like full blown, but I've watched every Marvel and DC movie they have and everything
253 but like that would be something I would visit. Probably not participate in, but like
254 something I would like to go visit and see and I would like to know more about bigger
255 events, because then like you could be like oh they have all that cool stuff going on that
256 makes me want to come kind of visit during the event and see how everything works and
257 how everything goes.
258 J: Okay cool.
259 4: And then plus like before I attended here I didn't see anything like what was going on,
260 but then when I attended here the school bulletin showed what was going on so I feel like if
261 they would post out more to the public and not just to the students they would also get
262 more people as well.
263 J: Okay. Awesome. So what about, before you guys got here they were talking about how
264 they think it's really important for the college to post about programs that they offer. So
265 would a post about a program that they offer maybe be able to convince you guys to attend
266 the school?
267 6: Yea maybe not like a long list but like maybe if they you know got a picture of the group
268 or whatever something that that group was doing. Like my the degree I'm going for we
269 have a big mock trial. It's two day and we basically argue in front of a judge in an actual
270 court room and everything like post it and if somebody who would like to do that degree

271 would see it then they would be like okay that's really cool this other college doesn't do
272 that like this kind of makes it seem more interesting.
273 J: Yea absolutely. Okay so I have an example to go along with that. So the caption would say
274 interested in becoming a pharmacy technician? Check out training beginning next week
275 and then a link to the training. So what do you think about that one?
276 6: Yea
277 2: Again it's one of those things that if that was like the field that I wanted I'd be like yea for
278 sure I'll check that out. Yea something like that would definitely make m interested in the
279 school.
280 6: Yea
281 1: It's just like a nice clean post. Short sweet and to the point.
282 2: It doesn't have like excess information
283 6: Yea
284 J: Anybody not like it?
285 2: No good for them
286 4: And then plus you know I would think especially during the summer maybe do two
287 different programs a week and do something like that and not have like everything all at
288 once and that way it keeps people intrigued the entire summer getting ready for the school
289 year, and that way people start getting excited, because if you do it at the beginning of the
290 summer then all that time towards the school year they might totally forget about the
291 training.
292 3: I thought that College B this summer did a good job. This summer they were doing this
293 countdown to the start of fall classes and they would countdown with like pictures. SO they
294 had pictures of people in different programs and groups of people holding number and
295 they would be like eight days until whatever. And then they would say these students are
296 graduating from the nursing program and they're super excited or whatever and they
297 would have like a link to the nursing program information so I thought that that was cool.
298 J: Awesome. Has anybody else ever seen that?
299 3: I was probably tuned into it because they posed a picture of me in one of them.
300 4: Well see I don't think I really followed **CC until I actually got into the school, so
301 6: Yea I didn't either
302 J: Okay so I've got another example that's similar, so this one says interested in taking the
303 FAA drone regulation exam? **CC is offering an exam prep course this semester. Sign up
304 today the link to sign up #**CCCC #drones. What do you think about that one?
305 2: again it's another good solid post. Because if that was something that interested me yea
306 I'd be like yea I'd be clicking up on it.
307 6: If that was something I was interested in. Ye if it was more informative about like okay if
308 you're interested in this and you're interested in this I wouldn't I kind of heard about
309 College B because my boyfriend went here because he graduated a year before me and I've
310 like talked to people like my senior year and I got to know them more and I didn't really
311 like go on social media, but I feel like that would be just as good as checking out the
312 website.
313 4: And then plus like he said it's short and sweet and to the point. I feel like if the college
314 gave like a three paragraph long description and everything a lot of people won't read it
315 because people don't want to go on social media and read a novel. So I think doing a short
316 sweet like that with a link if you're interested.

317 5: I definitely think the key is a picture because I'm gonna be more likely to read what's
318 underneath if there's a picture that I find interesting.

319 2: Well especially like if it's Twitter or something and it's all words, words, words and then
320 you see a picture it kind of just like catches your eye and you're more willing to like stop on
321 it.

322 6: Yea if you're seeing words you're like oh just another (unintelligible)

323 2: Like if it's like say like a really long tweet or something most of the time I'll just scroll
324 through it if it's not interesting to me so I guess if you're just scrolling through and you see
325 a picture you like stop and then read it.

326 J: Okay cool and so what about posts that are trying to show you the things that you get in
327 addition to academics or that show you what student life might be like on campus. Could
328 things like that influence you?

329 2: yes

330 6: Yea

331 2: I think those are those are the really good thing to have

332 6: Yea. A lot of people want to be involved in stuff. Like I said if they had more sports like
333 showed it more, because we have a mascot but we don't really use it you know.

334 4: Wait we have a mascot here?

335 Trails off into conversation about mascot.

336 6: But if we had more sports or more than just the spring fling event or stuff that lie would
337 be really big like I said the snowball fight if we had done that annually that would be a big
338 thing.

339 4: Or even not even doing like it doesn't have to be with sports if we did like in the summer
340 doing a big yard sale, like what Happy's did. People could come and sell their stuff for one
341 weekend or do a giant bake sale and apparently have a mascot and have him like hand out
342 flyers and say sign up today or

343 6: Yea car wash or something

344 4: Something like to get out to the community and not just stay in a bubble

345 6: Yea say it's like for charity or something, it doesn't necessarily really have to be for us
346 but like we could be doing this for charity, because a lot of people do like schools that
347 participate in a lot of charities.

348 J: Okay. Awesome. So I have an example. The photo for this one says student advisement
349 week start a conversation with your advisor about the road ahead. The caption says today
350 we kick off student advisement week. Students are encouraged to meet with their advisor
351 this week and plan for the coming 2018 Fall semester and then a link.

352 2: See like I would appreciate that because it tells you when the date is and like that's kind
353 of like a forewarning.

354 4: yea.

355 6: yea because I didn't know when I was coming here I was like okay so how do I like talk to
356 me advisor is it like...I had to call and they were like oh because this is what your degree is
357 this is what your advisor and then that took me to like my program head and everything.

358 5: I like that there are big words in the middle so you definitely know what it's about

359 4: It's sad because this is my second semester in this college and I just found out about my
360 advisor this semester, so especially like that right there I feel like that would help a lot.

361 J: Okay cool. And then I have another one. So this one says pumpkin painting today until 3
362 p.m. Thoughts on that one?

363 6: I like pumpkin painting.
364 1: That's like a good solid post.
365 2: That's like if pumpkin painting was my think I'd be like yea.
366 5: it doesn't say where though.
367 6: Yea it doesn't say where. If it's like over in Duncan hall or something that would be..
368 5: You're wandering the college looking for it.
369 4: yea and then you'd be like no contact information for where it would be at or like no link
370 for more information all I see is like pumpkin painting I'd be like well is it just for kids is it
371 for the college students is it for anybody...
372 3: It's cool that they posted it while it's going on though because you could just be like on
373 campus scrolling through and you're like oh I'm not doing anything
374 6: Yea so like spring fling like I said I just legit was looking at all the art and then I was
375 seeing people with food and I was really hungry and I was like where is all this food coming
376 from? And I was like where'd you get your burger I'm like really hungry? And he was like
377 oh up there there's like a bunch of stuff going on there was like tie-dye. This is not my tie-
378 dye shirt. This is a very crappy tie die job but like the re was tie die shirt, Frisbee, you could
379 do the wax hands, there was free ice cream. There was lots of stuff and if they'd been like,
380 because we didn't know where it was and it was over by, in front of the library like the
381 whole place. If I had known where it was at it would have been easier to get to and find out
382 and like I said it was in the student bulletin, but like I get so many of those that I don't pay
383 attention.
384 5: I still get mine from my old college in Lynchburg, so I have like twice as many so it's
385 really annoying.
386 4: Like last semester we had Jimmy Butler come for his birthday come to College B and play
387 a couple pick up games and basketball and only eight people was known (I think he meant
388 only eight people knew). SO like I was known like the night after because one of my friends
389 got invited and so I actually had to take my final right beside it and so I had a chance to
390 meet Jimmy Butler but I couldn't.
391 J: Okay so just telling people so if you're going to have this photo you need to tell us like
392 where is this stuff at, so we can actually get there.
393 6: Yea
394 (Most nodding yes).
395 5: You don't need too many more details just like where
396 6: When and where
397 2: Just like when where why
398 5: I don't need a reason, just where it is
399 4: And like what time. Like what time frame
400 6: Yea
401 6: because if there's free food I'm more likely to show up.
402 5: (Something about the time maybe wants it to say 3:00.) So you know when it ends.
403 Due to technical difficulty, the participants' answers to the final four questions were not
404 recorded. Luckily, the researcher covered the most important questions toward the
405 beginning of the focus group. Missing exact answers to these four questions did not have a
406 significant impact on data analysis.

College C Focus Group

J: Okay I will go ahead and start asking questions so I can get you guys out of here as quickly as possible. I'm going to set a timer so I don't take too long. Okay so for the first question. When you guys were planning on attending *CC or right now if you were thinking about looking into attending another college how much would you or did you look at social media for information about the college?

4: Not a lot

J: Not a lot, not a lot for anybody. (All shaking heads).

J: Okay so for those of you who said on the paper that you friend or follow *CC on some sort of social media platform, did you do that before you stated attending or was that after you started attending?

4 and 5: After

J: Okay so everybody after nobody before?

(All nodding)

J: Okay. And then why did you all start following *CC on whatever platform you follow on?

2: I did it because I had to like some posts for like a costume contest thing.

J: Okay so it wasn't, was that for a class or was it just for some like extracurricular thing?

2: It was just like Halloween if you dressed up you got your picture taken and then like the people who got the most likes on the post won something.

J: Oh okay so it wasn't so much I want to follow them to get this specific information it was I want to follow them to sort of help myself and win this thing right?

2: (Nodding)

J: Okay

1: Well I did it more for the closings and delays.

J: Okay so during the winter.

J: What about anybody else? Anybody know or remember why they might have started following?

5: To see what the new upcoming events are.

J: Events okay cool.

J: Um and then so. For those of you who didn't, well this would be all of you. Sorry, so how often would you say that you go to *CC's accounts to find information? Or do you just like, oh it's in my feed so I see it?

6: I just see it in my feed.

J: Yea?

J: So nobody really hardly ever like goes and seeks out information on the sites?

(All shaking heads no)

J: Okay. Um, would you ever share a post from *CC with like maybe somebody else who might be interested in the topic of that post?

(Five of 6 nodding yes)

3: I don't take part in social media.

J: Okay so you wouldn't.

J: What types of posts, like what would the post have to have in it for you to be willing to share it with somebody, or to like say like on Facebook you put their name in the comment, because I would consider that sort of the same thing?

5: Like if there's a club you think someone would enjoy and there's information about it.

J: Okay.

2. If there's like an event or something.

J: Okay so mostly just clubs events things happening at the college?

J: So have any of you ever done that before? Shared a post with somebody or tagged somebody in a post from the college?

(1 shaking her head no. 2 nodding yes. 4 shaking head no.)

J: To 2: Yea, do you remember what it was?

2: Um I know I shared like the costume thing that I mentioned before and I think I've shared another thing about an event that's happening.

J: Okay. And did you say you have before?

J: Does anybody else if they have they remember what it was? No? Okay that's fine.

J: So what topics if any, do you think the college should be limited to posting about? Is there something that um you maybe think that you've seen the college post or that you've seen other colleges or organizations post that you're like yea schools shouldn't really talk about that on their social media?

4: No not really.

J: Not really. Okay so I'm going to show you an example of a post and so it's not formatted to any type of social media and I'll ask a question about that later. So a picture of some trees with a caption that says "Good morning simply sharing a mindful Monday morning moment from campus, hope you have a good week. So what are your thoughts on if you saw *CC post something like this?

4: I think it would be something nice.

J: Something nice. Okay, would anybody be like I don't like that why are they posting that? (Most shaking heads no)

J: Okay so you would all respond pretty positively to that. Okay what social media platforms do you guys think the college should be present on?

2: I think Facebook is probably just like the most...

4: Facebook

6: Instagram

4: Maybe even Twitter

J: Maybe even Twitter. Okay. Is that it?

1: Pinterest.

J: Pinterest. Okay so you might would follow them on Pinterest.

J: What about Snapchat? Do you think yes or no for Snapchat?

(One person shaking head no.)

5: It depends on

4: I don't use it so.

5: It depends on what the post is.

J: Okay so it would depend. What type of post might be okay? I know that's sort of putting you on the spot, but if you have any ideas. Or what might not be okay?

5: Like a certain club or something.

J: Okay, cool. Do you think, so we mentioned that *CC should be on a couple of different platforms. Do you think that it would be okay for *CC to post the same things on all of those platforms, or should it be different on each platform?

2: I think different, because if you follow them on each one you don't want like notifications or seeing that same thing repeated.

4: Yea

J: Okay does everybody agree? Anybody disagree with that?

J: Okay cool. Um, and so you sort of got to this one. You said you think Facebook is the most important for the college to be on. Does everybody agree with that or does anyone think a different one would be most important?

4: I'd say right now it would be the most important one just because it's kind of like the most popular.

J: Okay, and so since you would want the content to be different on each of the platforms, how different would it need to be? Could they post sort of the same idea but maybe talk about it differently or do they need to have completely different types of communication on all of those?

2: I think for something like Pinterest it would have to be like more something of that sort (referring to image of sky and trees) like just like a pretty picture or something, but other than that they could be mostly the same.

J Okay, anybody else? Alright, cool.

J: How often do you think the college should post on these platforms? Say like per day. And if that differs per platform you can mention that too.

4: I think with Twitter mostly like, say when the school's closed that would be a good way, because Twitter's mostly like simple words so it posts quicker, so I think stuff like that should be focused more on Twitter, but Facebook say maybe a weekly newsletter on that page saying here's what's going on, maybe some pictures or something.

J: Okay so maybe just like once a week on Facebook, but then more commonly on Twitter.

4: Something like that yea.

J: What's anybody else think? You all agree with that?

(6 nodding yes.)

J: What type of content could a college, or did *CC, well not of you followed *CC, so what type of content could a college post that might influence you to attend an event that they're posting about?

5: If they need volunteers for the event that they're doing.

J: Okay so maybe if they need help with it.

J: Okay so let's talk more in general then. If you were thinking right now about attending colleges and you were looking at their social media sites maybe not even thinking events what types of things could they post that might influence you to go there?

5: Sports

4: Sports Yea

J: Stuff about sports, okay.

4: Maybe some of the clubs.

J: Some clubs. Extracurriculars.

Would those event type posts if it was a cool event would that maybe convince you to attend?

4: Yea

(6 nodding yes.)

J: What about certain classes that they offer?

(2 nodding yes)

4: Yea

5: Depends on what the class is.

J: Yea

4: I think I would . . . (unintelligible)

J: So if we look at this post. So caption says " *CC's fourth annual comic con is just about to open. Visit us today from 10 to 4. Um, would or could a post like this maybe convince you to attend the college if you were interested in something like that?

4: Definitely.

(2 Nodding yes.)

(6 Nodding yes.)

J: Okay cool. Do you think based on what you've seen from *CC's social media platforms, do you think that the content is relevant to you guys as current students?

(5 of 6 nodding yes)

J: Do you think it's more relevant to you or to people who are maybe thinking about attending the college?

2: I think it's more relevant to people who are attending, because it's mostly like events and things about what's going on to people who are attending.

J: Okay does anybody disagree? No? Okay cool.

J: Um so this caption says "Interested in becoming a pharmacy technician? Check out training beginning next week and then it's got a link. And then this one "Interested in taking the FAA drone regulation exam? *CC is offering an exam prep course this semester sign up today with a link. So would a post like this that describes a specific course or program would that maybe influence you to attend a college?

4: Yea

(5 of 6 nodding yes.)

J: Yea's all around. Okay cool.

J: So what about we've got this one that says today we kick off student advisement week, students are encouraged to meet with their advisor this week and plan for the coming 2018 Fall semester. And then we've got this one: pumpkin painting today until 3p.m. So both of these are sort of showcasing some of the extra things that you get in addition to like the classes and the diploma that you'll get in the end what do you think about posts like those? Would those sort of maybe sway your decision to go to a certain school?

(2 or three people nodding and shaking heads seeming like maybe but maybe not.)

J: (To 1) You're saying no, why no?

1: It wouldn't convince me to go to the school to see that picture.

J: okay that one wouldn't or that one in particular.

1 shakes head.

J: So what is it about that one that you're like no not really? Is it a specific thing or you just....

2: It's just not like a big enough thing to convince me to like go to that college.

4: Yea

2: But like if you're already going then it's interesting to see.

J: Okay good to know. So of all of the posts that we saw, so I'll just click back through them. We've got pumpkin painting, student advisement, a drone class, pharmacy training, a comic con and the trees with the nice little note. Which of those would you respond the most to, which one do you like the most?

1: I like the one with the pharmacy.

J: The pharmacy one. Okay what about you (to 2)?

2: Um I'd say either the drone or the comic con.

J: Drone or comic con.
3: I agree with her.
4: It would be the same with me.
J: What about you (to five).
5: I'd say that one (talking about the tree and sky post).
J: The tree one.
5: Just like that one little inspirational clip to get you through the day.
6 Points to tree and sky post.
J: Okay alright cool. Are any of these posts ones that you think would work on a specific social media platform?
5: That one would be more Pinterest (referring to trees and sky post).
J: More Pinterest. Okay.
4: And like the uh drone one stuff like that would be more Facebook type stuff.
J: On Facebook.
4: Because the class is like, we're offering this come join us. That's what I see Facebook more for.
J: Okay so Facebook might be more geared toward these are what we offer, these are our classes and our programs? (2 nodding). But then Pinterest what might be some of the other ones that this one (tree and sky) would fit on, if any?
5: Maybe Instagram.
J: Instagram.
4: Instagram yea.
2: I think more of the activities, like the comic con and stuff would go on Instagram.
J: Okay cool. How likely would you all be now or would you have been before you started attending *CC to follow an account that was run by students and sort of showed like a day in the life of students at *CC?
6: I would follow it.
J: You would follow it. Would you follow it only on specific platforms, or on any of them?
6: Any of them.
J: Okay what about anybody else?
2: Facebook is really the only one that I have that they post on, so that just...
4: Same thing Facebook.
J: Okay anybody else? Would anybody just not follow, you said you don't do social media at all so it doesn't apply as much to you, and that's okay. What about you two would either of you just not want to follow one of those types of accounts?
1: shakes head.
J: You wouldn't want to? (To one)
1: No
J: Okay. Would any of you ever be interested in running, help to run an account like that for the college?
(2 nodding yes.)
5: Maybe if you were going into like a web design degree or something like that maybe.
J: Okay but not you personally?
5: Well I'm kind of in that program, so maybe.
J: Oh you are, okay.
J: And you sort of nodded.

4: I think it would be kind of interesting. 6: Yea it would be kind of cool

J: Okay. What do you think about video? What type of videos might you be interested in seeing from the college? Or would you at all?

5: Like maybe the activities that are happening.

J: Okay so maybe if there is an event.

5: Like the Halloween celebration or something like that.

J: So like while it's happening?

(5 nodding yes.)

4: Maybe an example, like say they did something last year maybe an example from that last year.

J: So from like that event last year?

4: Yea so you could kind of showcase what it was like this past year something like that.

J: Okay so sort of like an advertisement almost for the event?

4: Yea sort of yea.

J: Okay any other ideas?

2: For like the drone advertisement or whatever it could have like where he was like doing something on the computer a video showing whatever he was doing on the computer and like watching it fly off. For like the programs or something.

J: So maybe even for just like classes and things like that promoting them not just through photos but also through videos.

(2 and 5 nodding yes.)

J: Okay. Are there, I know some platforms, only some platforms can handle video, which ones do you think those types of video might fit best on of the platforms?

2: I think Facebook.

(4,5 6, nodding yes.)

J: Okay. Alright guys well are there any other comments that you have about anything that we talked about? Okay cool then you are free to go.