

# SOCIAL MEDIA

## IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Charles H.F. Davis III is a Ph.D. student and doctoral researcher at the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Arizona. His research broadly explores postsecondary institutions as sites of cultural value and their impact on issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality in college. More specifically, he examines student experiences and responses to campus culture using ethnographic methods. His most recent publications and conference presentations have been related to African American male student investment in higher education, progressive masculinities and the experiences of White graduate students with issues of race and racism.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past decade, there has been a growing public fascination with the phenomenon of connectedness. One of the most important ways in which society is now connected is through social media –such as social networking sites. While both students and higher education institutions seem to be utilizing social media more and more, there still are enormous challenges in trying to understand the new dynamics generated by social media in higher education, particularly for the context of community colleges.

This research report has several purposes. The first is to document and to describe the various ways in which social media is used specifically by community colleges across the United States. Second, this report explores community college leaders' perspectives on the value, purpose, and challenges of social media to better understand:

1. The types of social media used by community colleges.
2. Community college leaders' perspectives, knowledge, and opinions regarding the value of social media, the various uses of social media, the barriers to using social media, and the role social media should play in the specific context of community colleges.

In the Fall 2011, a total of 378 community colleges were randomly selected from a list of 1,062 existing public and private not-for-profit community colleges across the United States. An email invitation to respond to an online survey was sent to a range of community college leaders (i.e., chief academic and student services officer, chief academic officer, chief student services officer, marketing director, director of library services, recruiting director, admissions director, and online learning director) who work in these 378 community colleges. The research team designed the survey instrument to include questions around several areas of interest: (1) type of social media used for personal and professional purposes, (2) institutional resources dedicated to social media, (3) perspectives on the value of social media in an educational setting, (4) perceptions of the barriers to expanding the use of social media, (5) general perceptions of social media, and (6) demographics of survey respondents.

A total of 763 community college leaders representing 280 community colleges responded to our survey. The response rate of the study is of 74%. We learned that a relatively low proportion of community college leaders report that they never use social media for personal (8%) or professional (11%) purposes. Surprisingly, among those leaders who use social media daily, a higher proportion of them use it for personal (40%) rather than for professional (24%) purposes. Other significant findings include:

- As reported by leaders, with some exceptions, 3 social media platforms emerged as the most widely used among community colleges: Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

- Community college leaders think of social media as having a *moderate to great value* for delivering information to current students.
- Community college leaders think that social media has *minimal to moderate* value for improving students' outcomes.
- The more frequently college leaders use social media for *personal purposes*, the more they think it has value for (1) building campus community, (2) student and faculty interactions, and (3) delivering information about college events to current students.
- The more frequently college leaders use social media for *professional purposes*, the more they think it has value (1) for building campus community, (2) as a vehicle for students giving feedback, and (3) for promoting campus or online student activities.
- The overwhelming majority of college leaders (73%) mentioned that insufficient staff dedicated to support the social media technology is a major impediment to using social media.
- Forty four percent of leaders think that their division will use social media to a *moderate extent* in the following 2 years, whereas 30% report they are going to use social media to a *minimal extent*.

Given the findings of this report, we provide community college leaders with some recommendations as they continue to think of purposeful ways to integrate social media into the fabric of their educational institutions. These recommendations include: (a) have a strategic plan, (b) get buy-in from executive leadership, faculty, and staff about the importance of social media, (c) think about your resources, (d) add value by using social media applications and other social media platforms, (e) maintain privacy and confidentiality, and (f) define your metrics to assess the effectiveness of social media.

The tipping point has passed, and almost every community college leader now knows that the social and digital media revolution is here to stay. Technology has introduced new forms of connecting and networking through social media platforms. We must collaborate to provide community college leaders and practitioners with good research and with examples of effective practices that can inform their social media strategies, successful implementation, and timely and on-going evaluation.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, there has been a growing public fascination with the phenomenon of connectedness (Easley & Kleinberg, 2010). One of the most important ways in which society is now connected is through social media (also known as social networking sites). During these ten years, a proliferation of different applications of social media has emerged, enabling the creation of new utilities for users (see Figure 1). These various types of applications all share the innate ability to facilitate social behavior through dialogue—two way discussions providing the opportunity to discover and share new information (Solis, 2008). Therefore, social media is a vast landscape of technology platforms with many different uses that vary by application. It is not merely social networking, video sharing, or blogging but the totality of digital products and services enabling social behavior (Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar & González Canché, 2012).

Social media is redefining how individuals create ties with other individuals as well as how individuals establish relationships with the organizations that serve them. These sites play a key role in peoples' lives because they provide a space for people to “hang out” amongst friends and peers, share links to websites, comment about TV shows, and work out an image of how they see themselves. They also serve as digital public spaces, substituting the types of public spaces that most people traditionally think of, like parks, malls, neighborhood basketball courts, local restaurants and coffee shops, public libraries, and other community gathering places.

Social media is also reshaping the way college students communicate generally and within their college community. But more than utilizing a new way of communication, college students are using social media to connect, to create and consume content, to use and generate applications, and thus to experience college in both real and virtual or online communities. Indeed, college students are shaping their own identities and spaces through their varied engagement with social media (Martínez Aleman & Wartman, 2009). The Community College Survey of Student Engagement of 2009 found that the more students use social networking tools to communicate with other students, instructors, and college staff regarding coursework and other academic purposes, the higher their levels of engagement.

Simultaneously, the use of social media for business and organizational purposes has exploded in recent years. Institutions of higher education, nevertheless, had a very slow start in social media in comparison to the nonprofit and business sectors. Colleges and universities were afraid of losing control of their online messaging, and while they were not participating, students and alumni were creating communities for their colleges and universities on Facebook and YouTube (Mansfield, 2010). Slowly, though, institutions of higher education have recently begun to embrace social media. Currently, presence in social media for colleges and universities is now commonplace. According to a study by the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth Center for Marketing Research<sup>1</sup>:

- 100% of colleges and universities studied are now using some form of social media
- 98% of colleges and universities have a Facebook page

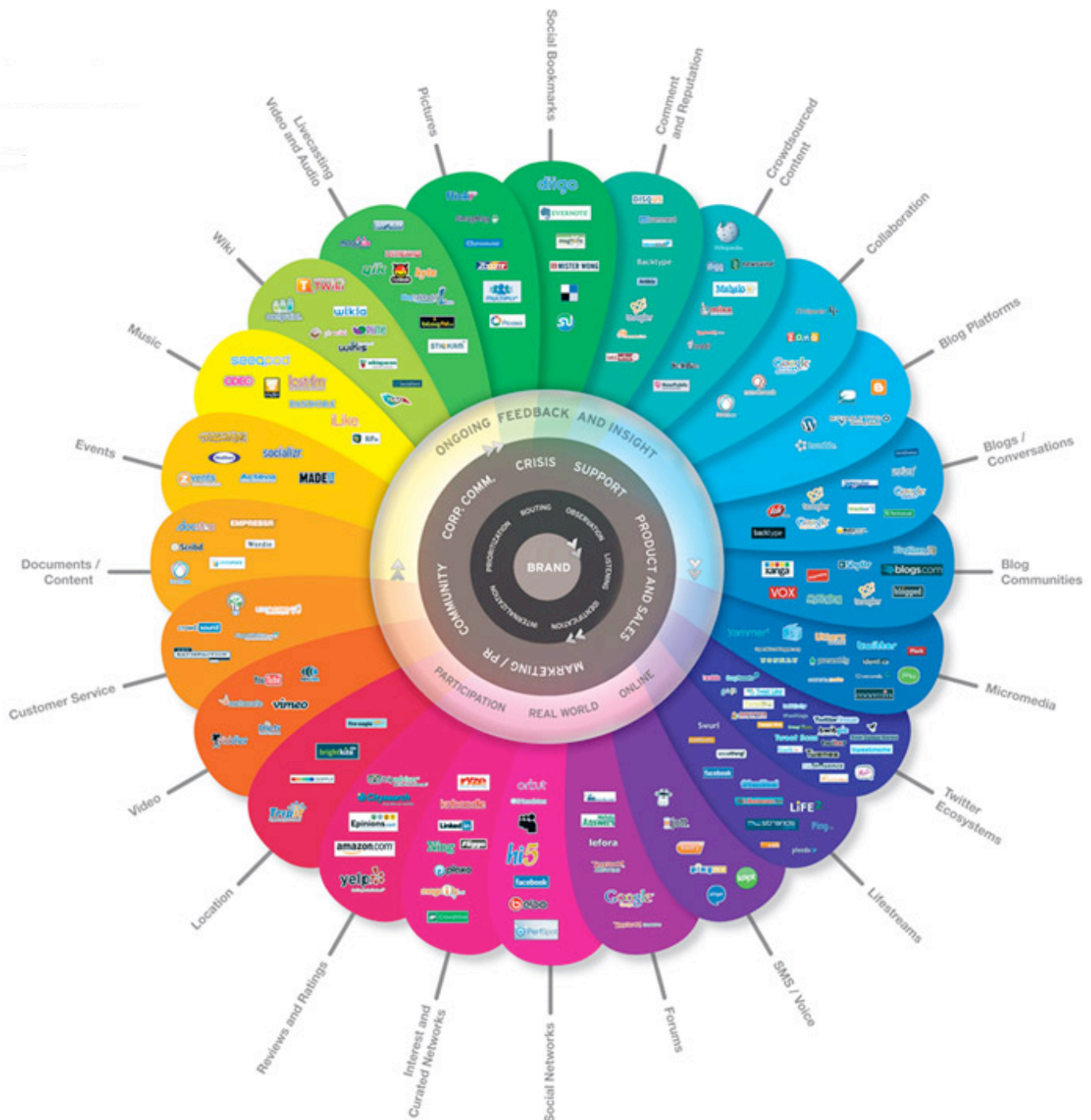
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<sup>1</sup> Results mentioned in this report are for the 2010-2011 study that can be found at: <http://www.umassd.edu/cmr/>



- 84% have a school Twitter account
- 66% have a blog
- Podcasting is being used at 41% of schools
- 47% of admissions professionals are using LinkedIn
- Only 8% of colleges and universities are using MySpace
- 85% of colleges and universities are using YouTube

Figure 1. The Landscape of Social Media by Solis (2008)



Indeed, colleges around the country are increasingly viewing social media as valuable channels to communicate with students, potential students, alumni, and the community in general. The most frequently stated benefits of using social media in higher education include: (1) being where your “target” is, (2) increasing cost-effectiveness and time-efficiency, and (3) building relationships (National Council for Continuing Education and Training [NCCET], 2010).

While both students and higher education institutions seem to be utilizing social media more and more, there still exist enormous challenges in trying to understand the new dynamics generated by social media in higher education, particularly for the context of community colleges. For instance, very little is known about: (1) how effectively community colleges use social media to accomplish their mission; (2) how community colleges find and allocate resources to develop coherent institutional strategies around social media; (3) how community colleges train staff and faculty to use these tools on the job; (4) the challenges social media pose for the operation of these institutions; (5) the value of social media; and (6) the potential benefits of social media use for specific purposes (e.g., marketing, recruitment, and social and academic engagement of students).

Given the impressive presence of social media in modern society, the biggest challenge for community college leaders, practitioners, and educators today is skillfully negotiating these technologies to develop tools that can help students succeed. Sadly, research has not paid sufficient attention to the role social media plays in community colleges. Moreover, little is known about community college leaders' perceptions of the role social media should play in their organizations. This report has several purposes. The first is to document and describe the various ways in which social media is used specifically by community colleges across the United States. Second, this report explores community college leaders' perspectives on the value, purpose, and challenges of social media to better understand:

1. The types of social media used by community colleges.
2. Community college leaders' perspectives, knowledge, and opinions regarding the value of social media, the various uses of social media, the barriers to using social media, and the role social media should play in the specific context of community colleges.

It is expected that the information provided in this report can help community college leaders, researchers, and decision-makers, along with the general public, learn more about the opportunities and challenges posed by social media. We also provide some specific recommendations for community college leaders that can be helpful when making decisions about social media adoption.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Media in Higher Education Institutions

One of the most comprehensive reports that examines the role of social media in higher education was conducted by Rueben (2008). In her report, she describes the various types of social media available to colleges and universities, as well as the kinds of social media actually used by higher education institutions. A total of 148 higher education institutions in the U.S.,

Canada, Australia, and New Zealand responded to her survey. Rueben (2008) reports the different types of social media used by institutions are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and MySpace, and she describes the concerns—loss of control, time commitment, information load, and privacy—that higher education institutions face regarding the use of social media. Unfortunately, we do not know the characteristics of the institutions surveyed. We also do not know who responded to the survey, or how generalizable the findings are; therefore, the potential of her report to inform the higher education community is limited.

A second report, conducted by Ganim Barnes and Lescault (2011), analyzed the most recent trends in social media adoption among 4-year accredited institutions in the U.S. The researchers interviewed individuals who were employed by these institutions as managers of social media from November 2010 to May 2011. The results are interesting and support their previous report (conducted in the academic year 2007-2008): Colleges and universities are using social media, especially social networking sites, not only to recruit, but also to research prospective students. In addition, they found that schools are now moving away from some tools and embracing others, demonstrating a more strategic approach to social media technology.

Another important research to mention is the book, *Online Social Networking on Campus: Understanding What Matters in Student Culture*, by Martinez Aleman and Wartman (2009). These authors highlight the tensions between students' uses and interpretations of social media and the perspectives of student affairs administrators regarding these online interactions. Furthermore, Martinez Aleman and Wartman (2009) urge college administrators to recognize, understand, and accept the new online realities and identities of their students if they aspire to reach their students effectively. They claim that it is perhaps a good strategy for administrators to join the online community, even though they do not consider doing so a strict necessity. However, if administrators decide to join online communities, they should be aware of and trained in "impression management" (p. 93) and privacy practices. The best way, they claim, for student affairs administrators to connect with students and dialogue about their Facebook use is through student leaders.

## **Social Media in Community Colleges**

Community colleges do not always get the same amount of recognition as other types of institutions, including universities, but students attending these types of educational institutions are no exception to the social media "bandwagon" (Corral, 2011). In fact, community colleges have recently tapped into the potential opportunities that social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and even LinkedIn can offer. The obvious fascination college students have with social media has caused some community colleges to engage enthusiastically with social media as a strategy to gain more exposure for their institution, promote their campuses, encourage more students to consider pursuing the community college route, and help current students become more engaged with their classes and extracurricular activities.

Most recently, community colleges have been recognized as leaders in the use of technology. The Digital Community Colleges Survey of 2011 reports on how these institutions are using technology to improve services to students, faculty, and staff. The Center for Digital Education identified the top 5 digital community college trends from 2010: (1) mobile access; (2) technical



support; (3) video, social networking, and webcasts; (4) career guidance; and (5) distance and blended courses. Two years before, in 2009, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), which included more than 400,000 students from 663 institutions, described the potential of online connections to increase student engagement. One of the most important findings in the report is that student engagement level increases when social networking is used for academically purposeful activities. Another important role community colleges play regarding social media is related to the training of students on social media skills. The *Community College Times* (2012) has recently reported that some community colleges (e.g., Sandhills Community College and Madison Area Technical College) are now offering social media certificate programs in an effort to adjust to changing workforce needs and to provide students with skills they will need to obtain jobs.

To summarize, social media is broadly used across colleges and universities. Despite the lack of research on the topic, community colleges are also finding ways to use social media to reach out to their students, alumni, and the broader community. Most importantly, community colleges are also creating opportunities for current and future students to acquire the training they need to successfully participate in the job market. Community college leaders, researchers, and practitioners must continue to find ways to collaborate in the conduct of systematic research that illustrates the role social media plays in these organizations and among the students and communities they serve.

## METHODOLOGY

### Study Sample & Design

In the Fall 2011, a total of 378 community colleges were randomly selected from a list of 1,062 existing public and private not-for-profit community colleges across the U.S.<sup>2</sup> We implemented a sampling design known as stratified, proportional and randomized (Sheaffer, Mendenhall & Ott, 2011). This approach was used to ensure that colleges were chosen randomly while all types of community colleges (based on the 2005 Carnegie Classification) were represented proportionally in the sample. As a result of the sampling strategy we implemented, our sample of community colleges is indeed representative of community colleges across the U.S. (see Table 1).

### Survey Instrument

The research team designed the survey instrument that was sent to community college leaders at the selected sample of colleges. The survey was informed by a review of the literature on social media in higher education (see Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar & González Canché, 2011), and by our own research with community college students. After the survey was designed, we asked community college leaders, including several experts in the field, to provide us with feedback, and we revised the survey accordingly. The final survey design included questions related to several areas of interest: (1) type of social media used for personal and professional purposes, (2) frequency of use of social media for personal and professional purposes, (3) institutional resources dedicated to social media, (4) perspectives on the value of social media in an educational setting,

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<sup>2</sup> The list of all community colleges is available through IPEDS' website.

(5) perceptions of the barriers to expanding the use of social media, (6) general perceptions of social media, and (7) demographics of survey respondents.

Table 1. Sample of Community Colleges

	Number of institutions in U.S	% in U.S.	Number of institutions in sample	% in sample
<b>City</b>				
City large	114	11%	31	11%
City mid	87	8%	21	8%
City small	138	13%	37	13%
<b>Rural</b>				
Rural distant	50	5%	14	5%
Rural fringe	238	22%	66	24%
Rural remote	16	2%	4	1%
<b>Suburban</b>				
Suburban large	148	14%	41	15%
Suburban mid	25	2%	9	3%
Suburban small	17	2%	6	2%
<b>Town</b>				
Town distant	94	9%	21	8%
Town fringe	8	1%	3	1%
Town remote	127	12%	26	9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1062</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Data Collection

We used an online survey software to collect the data. More specifically, an email invitation to respond to the survey was sent to a range of community college leaders (i.e., chief academic and student services officer, chief academic officer, chief student services officer, marketing director, director of library services, recruiting director, admissions director, and online learning director) that work in the random sample of 378 community colleges<sup>3</sup>. A total of 763 community college leaders representing 280 community colleges across the country responded to the online survey. The response rate of the study is of 74%<sup>4</sup>. This response rate is considered considerably high for online surveys (Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> The list of emails from all community college leaders was obtained from HED-Connect. HED-Connect is the online version of the Higher Education Directory. For more information go to [www.hepinc.com](http://www.hepinc.com).

<sup>4</sup> The response rate was calculated by dividing the total number of institutions that responded to the survey by the total number of institutions included in the random sample (280/378).

## Analytical Approaches

Once the database was complete with the survey data, we analyzed the data in two ways. The first approach involved the use of descriptive statistics to get a general picture of community college leaders' perceptions, beliefs, and opinions about social media. It is important to mention that our analyses concentrate on specific survey questions that, we believe, capture the most important topics addressed in the survey. The second approach consisted of examining how community college leaders' perceptions, beliefs, and opinions vary according to different institutional and personal characteristics, including the locale of the institution and the community college leaders' educational background, years of experience, and personal and professional use of social media.

## FINDINGS

### Who Responded to the Survey?

As noted above, a total of 763 community college leaders representing 280 community colleges responded to our survey. Figure 2 shows the distribution in terms of the distinct leadership positions occupied by the survey respondents. Interestingly, a relatively high number of respondents (39%) thought the job categories we provided in the survey did not appropriately describe their current position. A list of distinct positions is also provided in Figure 2 to better reflect the survey respondents. Among the leaders who selected "other," the majority were community college presidents.<sup>5</sup> It is important to highlight the wide variety of perspectives because respondents occupy a range of very distinct positions, ranging from presidents, provosts, and deans, to coordinators, managers, and directors of different services and programs. Furthermore, it is also important to emphasize that community college leaders who responded to our survey have relatively lengthy experience in their current jobs. In fact, 43% of respondents indicated they have been in their current position for 6 or more years, and the same proportion responded that they have been in their position 2 to 5 years (see Figure 3). Finally, we must mention that, as expected, community college leaders are highly educated. Indeed, the majority of respondents (55%) indicated their highest level of educational attainment is a master's degree. For 31%, the highest degree attained is doctorate, and for 13%, the highest degree attained is an associate's degrees.

### Are Community College Leaders Using Social Media?

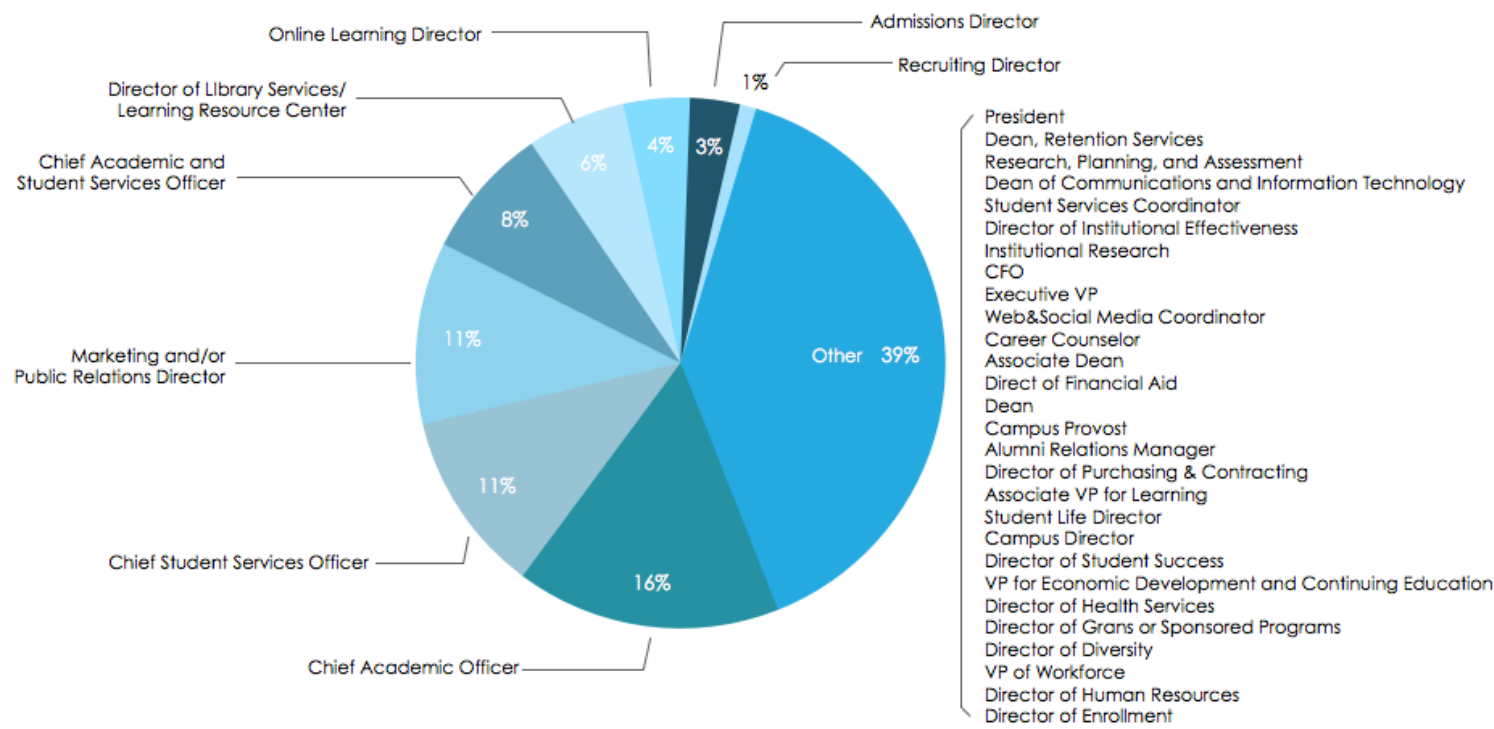
In addition to providing some demographic characteristics of the community college leaders, we wanted to know more about *if, how frequently, and for what purposes* they used social media. We learned that a relatively low proportion of community college leaders reported that they *never* use social media for personal (8%) or professional (11%) purposes. Surprisingly, among those leaders who use social media daily, a higher proportion use it for personal (40%) than for professional (24%) purposes (see Figure 4).

### The Landscape of Social Media in Community Colleges

The first question we asked community college leaders was to list all the examples of social media/social networking technology that they could think of. The list of responses was certainly

extensive, ranging from e-mail, websites, web-conferencing, wikis, and blogs to Google+, Spotify, YouTube, Second Life, Twitter, and Facebook.

Figure 2. Current Position at your Institution



Indeed, we found that community college leaders are aware of the vast landscape of social media technology (see Figure 5). Nevertheless, while leaders indicated awareness of an extensive list of social media, three platforms represent the most popular responses: Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

- We also asked community college leaders about the types of social media used by their institutions and by their particular divisions. The following findings emerged from the survey responses:
- With some exceptions, 3 social media platforms emerged as the most widely used among community colleges: Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.
- Five percent of community college leaders responded that they did not know what social media platforms are used by their institution.
- Seven percent of community college leaders responded that no social media platform is currently used by their division, and 4% said that they did not know what type of social media technologies are used by their division.

**The Value of Social Media**

Community college leaders think that social media has *moderate to great value* for the following activities (see Table 2):

- Delivering information to current students Student interactions with peers
- Delivering information to prospective students Campus announcements

Community college leaders think that social media has minimal to moderate value for the following activities (see Table 2):

- Improving student outcomes
- Student learning
- Students providing feedback
- Student interactions with faculty and staff

Figure 3. Years of Experience at Current Position

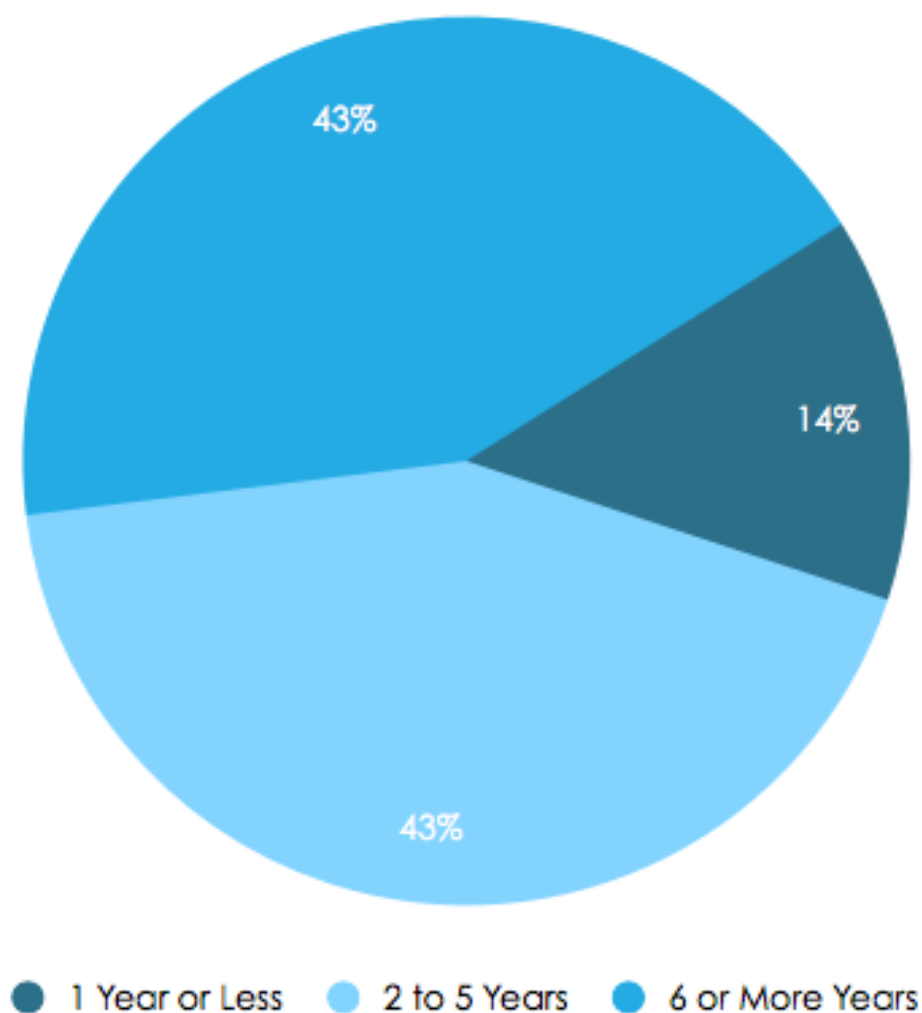
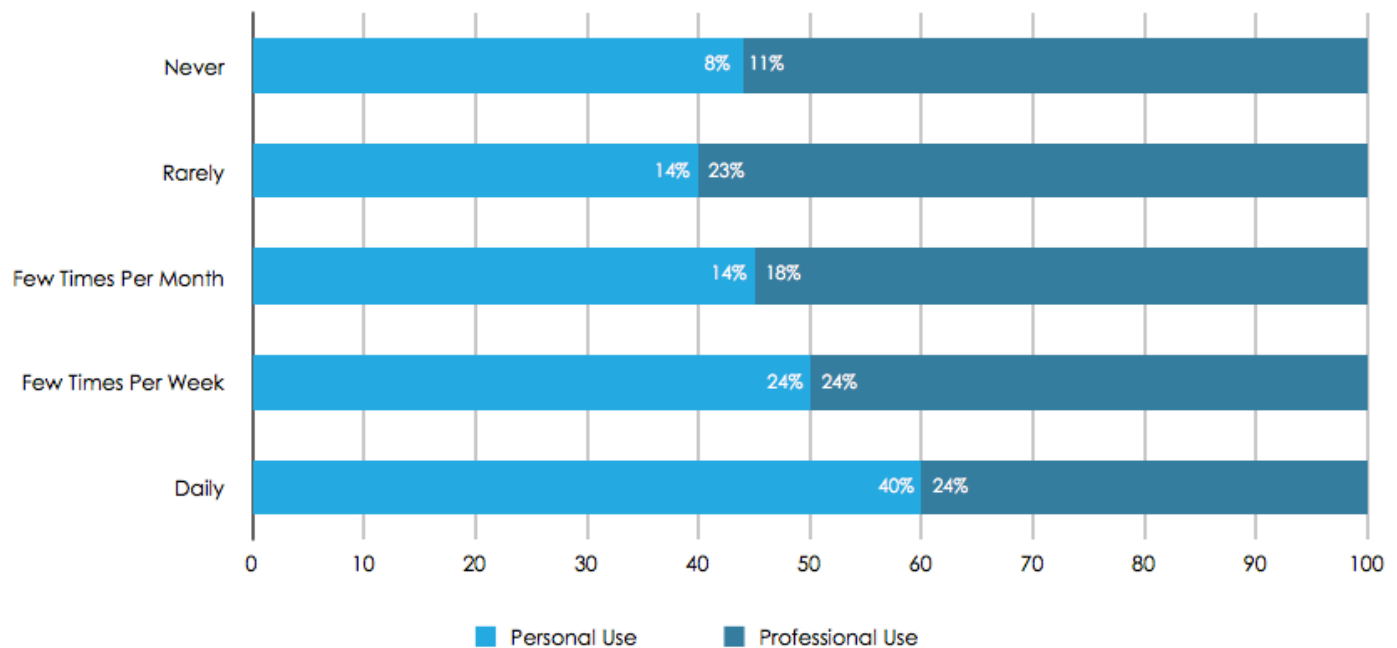


Figure 4. Frequency of Use of Social Media among Community College Leaders



These general perceptions of the value of social media vary. In fact, when disaggregating analyses by the frequency of use, we found that:

- The more frequently college leaders use social media for *personal purposes*, the more they think it has value for (1) building campus community, (2) student and faculty interactions, and (3) delivering information about college events to current students.
- The more frequently college leaders use social media for *professional purposes*, the more they think it has value for (1) building campus community, (2) students giving feedback to division, and (3) promoting of campus or online student activities.

No differences in perceptions about value were found when disaggregating by locale of institution.

### Attitudes Towards Social Media Technology

As shown in Table 3, there is a perception among community college leaders that students are *not* currently using Social Media Technology (SMT)<sup>6</sup> to discuss academic-related matters or to build relationships with faculty and staff. Similarly, administrators tend to disagree with the statement that community colleges are using social media to improve learning and other academic outcomes. Another interesting finding is that community college leaders recognize the need for faculty and instructors to learn how to use social media more effectively.



Figure 5. Examples of Social Media Technology



Table 2. Community College Leaders' Perceptions on the Value of Social Media

1 = No value, 2=Minimal value, 3=Moderate value, 4=Great value

1 = No value, 2=Minimal value, 3=Moderate value, 4=Great value	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Delivering information about college events to current students	3.66	.57
2. Student interactions with peers	3.61	.62
3. Delivering information about college to prospective students	3.57	.63
4. Delivering information about college services to current students	3.56	.63
5. Marketing and promotion	3.54	.67
6. Campus announcements	3.52	.66
7. Promotion of campus or online student activities	3.50	.66
8. Student engagement	3.46	.67
9. Building campus community	3.42	.70
10. Student recruitment and admissions	3.34	.72
11. Delivering information about college to alumni	3.21	.80
12. Student providing feedback to institution	3.03	.82
13. Student interaction with faculty	2.96	.78
14. Student interaction with staff	2.90	.81
15. Students providing feedback to division	2.81	.89
16. Student learning	2.73	.80
17. Improving student outcomes	2.57	.82

We asked community college leaders about their perceptions of the barriers to using social media technology. As seen in Figure 6, the overwhelming majority of college leaders (73%) mentioned that insufficient staff dedicated to support the technology is a major impediment to using social media. The second most frequently mentioned obstacle was resistance among faculty and staff. The third most frequently mentioned barrier was insufficient funds to support social media technology.

Interestingly, the perceptions of barriers to using social media varied depending on locale:

- Fewer concerns about resistance among faculty and staff in rural colleges
- More concerns about resistance among administrators in rural colleges
- Fewer privacy concerns in city colleges
- Fewer concerns regarding insufficient funds in suburban colleges
- More concerns about privacy in small town colleges

**The Future of Social Media in Community Colleges**

We also asked community college leaders about their opinions regarding the future use of social media. Figure 7 reveals that 44% of leaders think that their division will use social media to a *moderate extent*, 30% report they are going to use social media to a *minimal extent*. Finally, only 23% think they will use social media to a *greater extent*.

**The Future of Social Media in Community Colleges**

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Figure 6. Perceived Barriers to Using Social Media

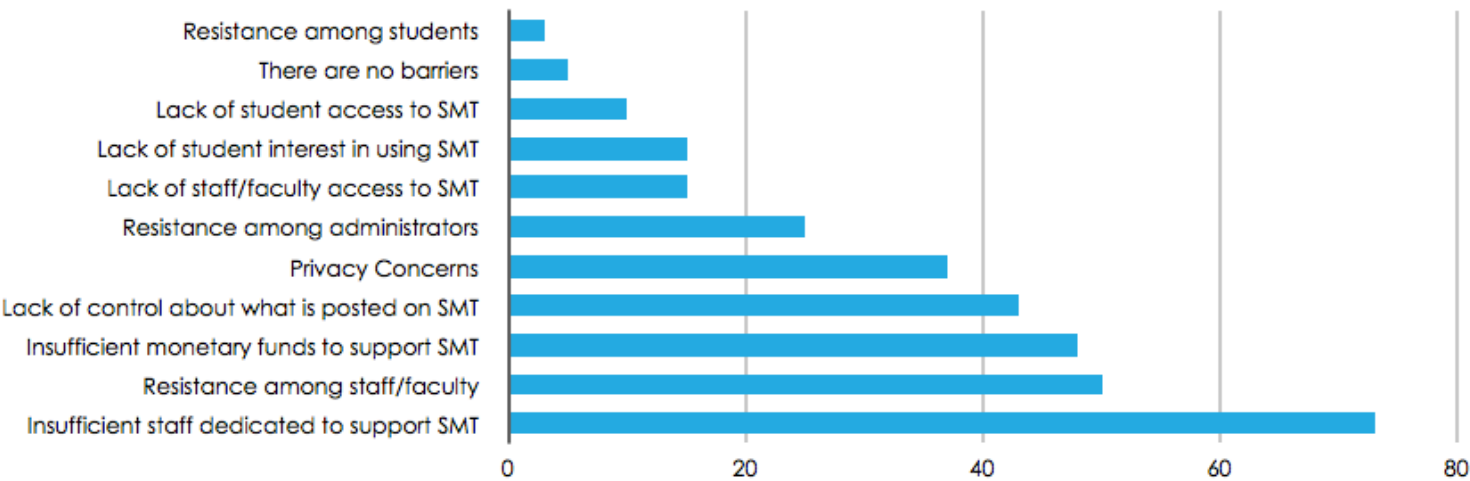
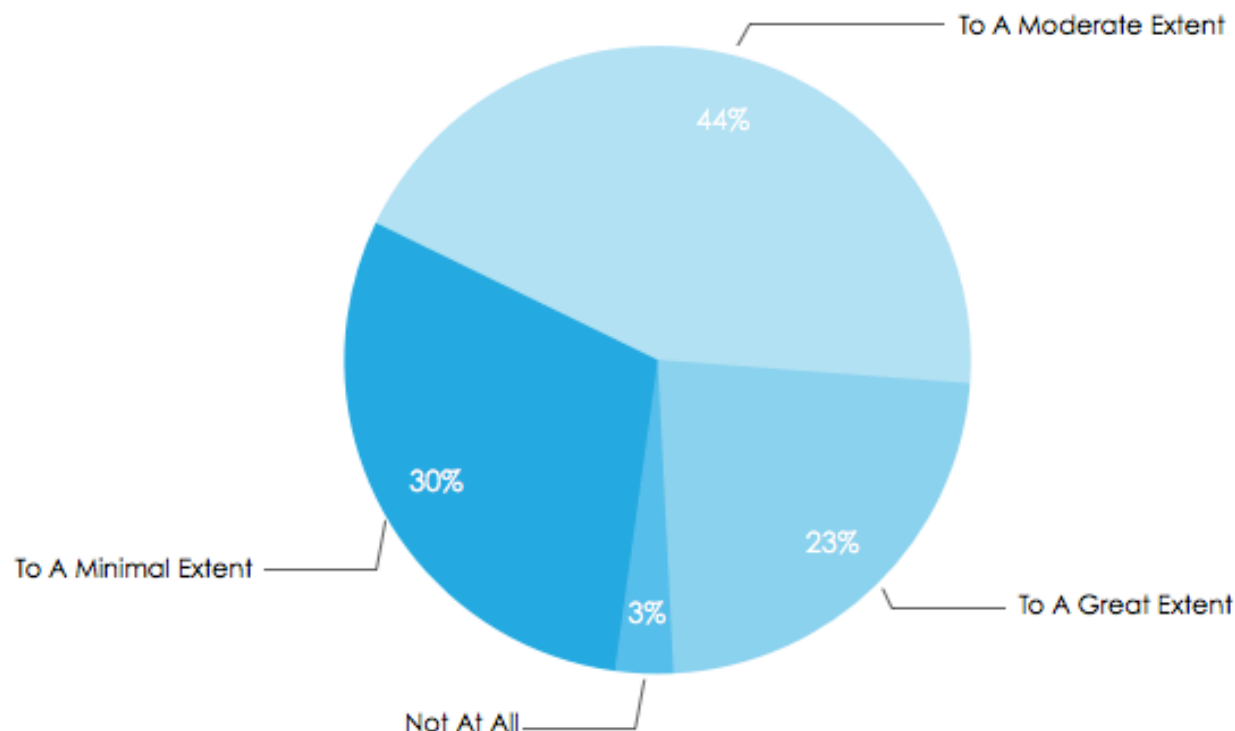




Table 3. Attitudes Towards Social Media Technology

1 = No value, 2=Minimal value, 3=Moderate value, 4=Great value	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Faculty and instructors should learn how to use SMT more effectively</b>	<b>3.26</b>	<b>.68</b>
Students currently use SMT to feel connected to their institution	2.71	.87
Students need to figure out when to shut down their use of SMT, pay attention, and learn	3.01	.85
Internet access during classes should be restricted to academically-oriented sties only	2.62	.98
SMT availability enhances academic productivity among students	2.66	.75
Students currently use SMT to collaborate with peers on academic matters	2.63	.74
The responsibility and consequences of posting info on SMT is NOT taken seriously by administrators	2.25	.89
Students currently use SMT to provide feedback to their institution	2.48	.80
SMT availability enhances productivity among faculty and staff	2.38	.75
SMT availability enhances students career/professional networks	2.96	.71
Students currently use SMT to build and grow their self-esteem	2.65	.75
Colleges should make a special effort to preserve traditional in-class lectures	2.57	.84
The content posted by students in SMT is of poor quality	2.58	.76
The opportunity involved in posting information on SMT is NOT taken seriously by students	2.88	.85
<b>SMT is currently being used by institutions to improve learning and other academic outcomes</b>	<b>2.49</b>	<b>.71</b>
Students currently use SMT to make social connections with their peers	3.60	.57
The responsibility and consequences of posting information on SMT is NOT taken seriously by staff and faculty	2.48	.81
<b>Students currently use SMT to build relationships with faculty/staff</b>	<b>2.36</b>	<b>.67</b>
This college currently uses SMT strategically to address recruitment enrollment	2.62	.87
<b>Students currently use SMT to discuss academically related ideas</b>	<b>2.26</b>	<b>.68</b>
Reducing the amount of time students spend on SMT will give them more time to study	2.39	.75
Multi-tasking with SMT is a bad strategy to succeed academically	2.38	.79
Students who work and have families do NOT have time to use SMT frequently	2.07	.72
SMT is addictive	3.01	.77

Figure 7. In the next two years, to what extent do you see your division using SMT?



### What Role Social Media Should Play in Community Colleges?

We asked community college leaders about the role they think social media should play in community colleges, and we found the following to be the most popular categories:

- Information distribution
- Marketing
- Enhance communications
- Enhance instruction and classroom discussion Enhance student learning
- Engagement tool
- Building community
- Building relationships
- Reduce the cost of providing education Improve the quality of education offered Improve career services

About 5% of community college leaders mentioned their uncertainty about the role of SMT. Some leaders did not provide a specific role. Instead, they gave their perspective and insights on

this issue. The following are some examples of specific comments that reflect the variety of perspectives community college leaders shared regarding the role and value of social media<sup>7</sup>:

“We still need to figure this out for the classroom. Outside of the classroom/online, it is a great communication tool.”

“I’m not sure. At this point, SMT has been a problem in that students have posted inappropriate information on social media sites. I think you need to move carefully into social media and it may be best used for advertising and linking students together and to the college.”

“As a microcosm of what goes on in the larger society, I think community colleges have to keep abreast of technological changes. As a result, they need to keep current with the technology and realize its impact on students and student learning.”

“I think social media is used by students to connect to one another and others who they see as friends or people they are interested in. They do not want this venue used to advertise to them or formally deliver content of some sort. But it’s a good way to make connections that can be used to enhance learning.”

“There are many roles it can play, from general announcements to student and the public, as well as increasing engagement and a sense of belonging for students. It has real benefits academically when used with intention and integrity. Faculty who use it for office hours report an increase of student contact rather than the traditional brick and mortar office hours.”

“SMT should be used to engage students with each other and the institution, encourage interaction, share useful information, encourage active learning, provide the opportunity to collaborate at a distance.”

“It’s too early to tell and much depends on the demographics of the institution. The role of SMT should be tailored to the needs of the students [and] balanced with the goals of the college.”

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Today, community college students across the U.S. have embraced social media technology. From this report, we learned that some community colleges are creatively finding ways to use social media to reach out to students and strengthen their ties to the institutions. Furthermore, we learned that social media, according to the majority of community college leaders, has a value to deliver information to students. However, the significance of social media for other purposes, including the improvement of students’ persistence and success in college is not yet clear. Without hesitation more research is needed to continue examining the many ways in which social media is used by students and community colleges. In what follows, we provide community college leaders with some recommendations as they continue to think of purposeful ways of integrating social media into the fabric of their educational institutions.

## **Have a strategic plan.**

To lay a strong foundation for the successful long-term effectiveness of the use of social media, you need to define your primary goals and objectives. Why are you using social media? Are you using social media primarily to connect with your students and alumni? To market your college? To provide opportunities for students and faculty to interact? To increase retention and graduation rates? You need to decide what the objectives are. This will help your institution stay focused and give you a baseline against which you can monitor your progress.

## **Get buy in from executive leadership, faculty, and staff about the importance of social media.**

As social media adoption continues to increase by both students and faculty, we believe that we are going to see much more integration of the platforms in certain areas such as college teaching, advising, and information exchange to students. Right now, some faculty members are using social media and more are interested. Therefore, it is essential to involve faculty and staff in the strategic plan and to provide them with opportunities to learn more about using a wide variety of social media to enhance student learning and success.

## **Think about your resources.**

What resources will be used to accomplish the goals? Is there a need to assign staff to maintain and develop the social media strategy? What are the benefits and costs of the strategy? How will staff and faculty be involved?

## **Add value by using social media applications and other social media platforms.**

Think about the types of technology and content that will engage your audience and that will meet your goals. Think, also, about the various ways in which social media can be used. Explore apps and platforms that have been specifically and purposefully designed for higher education institutions, such as Schools App, MyEdu, and KnowU.

## **Maintain privacy and confidentiality.**

Design college policies and guidelines that are consistent with your strategic plan and follow federal requirements, such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

## **Define your metrics to assess the effectiveness of social media.**

Once you have established your goals and objectives, you need to create a system to monitor your progress. It is helpful to create a spreadsheet that tracks, month to month, the activity of the social media platforms your institution uses. Some common metrics include Facebook fans, Twitter followers, and event attendees. While helpful as basic measures of presence, these common metrics are not necessarily indicative of how engaging your presence is on a particular platform. Therefore, some social media platforms offer additional social tools to track users' activity. Think about how to combine your social media metrics with institutional data to learn more about the relationship between your social media strategy and institutional outcomes.

## IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Obviously more than a passing trend, almost every community college leader now knows that the social and digital media revolution is here to stay as part of the fabric of how we communicate and relate to one another. Technology has introduced new forms of connecting and networking through social media platforms. While few studies have investigated the link between social media and college students' success, preliminary findings (see Chen, 2010) speculate that these sites allow students to access and share information easily, and allow them to maintain and develop networks with relative ease. Several institutions are experimenting with the texting and social media to keep students informed about institutional news, deadlines, services, and other resources.

From analyses of the survey data we collected for this report, we conclude that community college leaders think social media has the potential to play a key role in several aspects of the college experience, from marketing and engagement to developing a highly trained workforce. There also seems to be a strong interest in determining how to incorporate social media effectively into academic matters, student learning, and what goes on inside classrooms. At the same time, we also found that some college leaders are unsure or they simply do not know what role social media should play in their institutions. Their skepticism is understandable, given the dearth of research that examines the relationship between social media use and community college students' outcomes (i.e., persistence and success). Furthermore, community college leaders do not have concrete examples of effective use of social media to accomplish the variety of purposes mentioned in this report. We must collaborate to provide community college leaders and practitioners with good research and with examples of effective practices that can inform their social media strategies, successful implementation, and timely and on-going evaluation.

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