Social Media as a Tool for Admission, Retention, and Graduation in the Health & Physical Education Department
“The goal of social media is to turn customers into a volunteer marketing army.”
Jay Baer, convinceandconvert.com

The use of social media is not a trend or fad. It is here to stay, so let’s embrace it.

Facebook is a social utility that helps people communicate more efficiently with their friends, family, clients and coworkers. Facebook uses technologies that facilitate the sharing of information. Anyone can sign up for Facebook and interact with the people they know in a trusted environment. There are currently approximately 700 million Facebook users worldwide (Facebook Press Room, 2011).

Introduction

The premise of this Title III proposal is that the creation and expansion of an Eastern Connecticut State University HPE-specific Facebook page will increase student admission, retention and persistence within the PE and SLM majors. Since there is no cost to join Facebook or have a Facebook page, it is available to all income and academic ability groups. Anyone with an email account can join and university students are already very familiar with Facebook as the world’s most prevalent and used social media network.

Literature Review

There is not a large amount of completed research on the use of social media for improving students’ admission, adjustment, retention and persistence in college, but DeAndrea et al (2011) report that social support does play an integral role in these processes. The authors found that the use of social media enhanced students’ perceptions of social support prior to their arrival for their first semester at college.

Several colleges are reaching out to high school seniors through social media channels students are already using and excited about, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogging and open forums. “Moreover, after the admission process is completed, many schools continue to reach out to students [and alumni] through social media.” (Schiffman, 2010)
In June 2011, the University of Arizona reported the launch of a three-year national study to explore the relevance of social media technology to engage students, build connections and improve outcomes within community colleges.

Two UA faculty members have received a Gates Foundation $750,000 research grant for a study to assess how community colleges adopt and use social media technology for strategic purposes: to engage students, build connections, and improve student outcomes for academics and retention. (Ruiz-McGill, 2011)

**Item 4.0 General Scope of Services**

The HPE Facebook page will be an information sharing and community-building device for all students, alumni, parents, administrators, and faculty within the HPE major programs and University. Any interested person can sign up and interact. Virtually all department events, policies, requirements, deadlines, reminders, and other pertinent information will be posted on a regular basis.

This will enable our “fans” to not only stay abreast of the news and facts they need to know, but will also enable them to find and interact with others of similar background and interests, keep up with friends, join special interest groups, and share links and videos. It will also enable the HPE Department to engage and retain students in their majors, attract students to the programs, and permit the exchange of personal and academic ideas. This Facebook page will also provide a feedback forum and help generate “brand” awareness for the HPE Department and University.

The HPE Facebook page was created on May 19, 2011 in anticipation of this proposal; it exists and may be viewed at:

https://www.Facebook.com/pages/Easterns-HPE-Department/203879376316669?sk=wall

**Item 4.1**

In the words of this Title III Grant RFP, the writer contends that the HPE Facebook page will “develop effective cohort support programs that develop or create major learning communities, increase student faculty interaction, assist students to succeed in major gatekeeping courses, or other approach for the purpose of increasing student retention and timely graduation in the major” (Title III Request for Proposal, 2011).
Item 4.2

For the ECSU 2005 entry cohort: the current major persistence and graduation by Fall 2010 data for PE and SLM are:

**SLM:**
- Number of Initial Major Students: 23
- Number of Students Switched Out of SLM: 7 (30%)
- Number Graduated in 2010 as SLM Majors: 7 (30%)
- Number Graduated in 2010 in Other Majors: 4 (17%)
- Five-Year Graduation Rate of Initial Cohort: 48%

**PE:**
- Number of Initial Major Students: 19
- Number of Students Switched Out of SLM: 3 (16%)
- Number Graduated in 2010 as SLM Majors: 9 (47%)
- Number Graduated in 2010 in Other Majors: 7 (37%)
- Five-Year Graduation Rate of Initial Cohort: 84%

**Five-Year Graduation Rate, Both HPE Cohorts Combined:** 64%
**Five-Year Graduation Rate of ECSU:** 46%

(Lashley, 2011a; Lashley 2011b)

Students of color, and low-income and first-generation students will be included in the Facebook cohort, but at the level of sophistication of this project, it will not be possible to “insure specific attention” to those groups. However, students’ familiarity with and ability to effectively use social media is certainly an “asset-based approach” and virtually ALL students, regardless of background or group, already know how to use the technology better than their teachers do.

Item 4.3

Only an extended period of time will truly tell how effective the use of social media will be in the admission, retention, and graduation rates of HPE students. However, it will be possible to administer questionnaires and surveys to students in selected major classes at the end of each term. Part of the time devoted to working on the grant will be utilized for this purpose. The surveys may be administered online through Facebook or via standard in-class procedures; the writer does not know enough about the possibilities at this time.

In addition, the number of total page views and “fans” (Facebook talk for people who “like” and read the HPE page) can be tracked and fan names can be identified
easily. This may allow the grant “coordinator” to ascertain the effectiveness of the use of social media on students of color, and low-income and first-generation students. **At this writing, the HPE Facebook page has already had over 15,000 views.**

**Item 4.3 [sic]**

Dr. Neil Williams will coordinate the project and be the Facebook page developer and administrator.

**Item 6.0 Budget:**

Stipend: faculty stipend for N. Williams: 1500 USD

**Item 8.1 Faculty contact information:**

Dr. Neil Williams, Professor, HPE
Sports Center 227A
860-465-5170
williamsn@easternct.edu

The Department and University have ample capacity to provide the services described herein.

**Item 8.2 Proposed Plan:**

The **HPE Facebook page will become THE primary and almost exclusive source of HPE information dissemination to our students.**

The plan of action will include, but not be limited to:

- May 19, 2011: creation and launch of the Facebook page
- May 21, 2011: creation of the HPE Facebook page logo
• June 2011: creation of HPE Facebook bar code for cell phone scanning

• June 2011: announcement posters placed in the Sports Center
• June 2011: initial blast emails to current HPE students and HPE alumni to alert them
• July and August 2011: additional blast emails to incoming HPE students, current HPE students, and HPE alumni
• May, June, July and August 2011: Facebook page postings every second or third day
• August 2011: addition of Twitter to the Facebook page (Twitter is an information network connecting users to the latest information in real time)
• August 2011: announcements during the first week of classes
• September 2011: Fall 2011 logo design contest
• September - December 2011: Facebook page postings every second or third day; collection of data for “fan” use, numbers of page views, anecdotal information
• October - November 2011: blast emails to incoming transfer and first time students for Spring 2011
• December 2011: administration and data analysis of questionnaires and surveys; identification of cohorts of students of color, and low-income and first-generation students
• January 2012: announcements during the first week of classes
• Spring 2012: continuation and repetition of the appropriate steps above with “specific attention,” if possible to cohorts of students of color, and low-income and first-generation students
• May 30, 2012: grant report submitted
References


Lashley, B. “Fall 2005 Full-Time *First-Time Freshmen*: Retention and Graduation Within and Between Majors” (report), Eastern Connecticut State University, 2011a


