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SEARCH 

University Turning to Social Media as Comm. Tool

News & Public Affairs Office establishes council to coordinate efforts

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By OFFICE OF NEWS & PUBLIC AFFAIRS |
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An informal survey of social media on campus last semester found that more than 300 departments, organizations and individuals tweet, pin, post or blog on behalf of Boston College.

That's a lot of messaging.

In an effort to bring together social media practitioners from across campus, the Office of News & Public Affairs – which administers the University's official social media channels – has established the Boston College Social Media Council to promote collaboration, share best practices and set a strategic direction for strengthening the University's overall social media presence.

The group has quickly grown to include representatives from nearly every school, as well as from undergraduate admission, alumni/advancement, student services, student affairs, information technology, athletics, libraries, police and other departments and organizations.

In its first six months, the SMC has developed a set of [social media guidelines](#), started [publishing a blog](#) and created a University social media directory. BC has also emerged on national social media higher education rankings lists, including a ninth-place ranking in the US based on Klout scores – a measure of a user's influence across a social media network – according to Mashable.

Director of News & Public Affairs Jack Dunn said that with US colleges and universities now using social media, the medium has emerged as a crucial communication tool.

“The Office of News & Public Affairs was quick to embrace social media because we realized that it was destined to become the predominant means of communication in a world that puts a premium on speed and interactivity,” said Dunn. “While we will always engage in traditional media, social media enables us to communicate instantly and directly with anyone, anywhere who has an interest in Boston College and the work of our faculty, students and alumni. Social media is the future, and we are pleased to be directing

By the Numbers*:

360,883 – Photo views on the
[Boston College Flickr](#) page

this effort for the Boston College community.”

Most importantly, organizers say, the SMC has provided a cross-departmental support system for various social media administrators, all of whom are balancing the increasing social media demands with their regular workload.

“We heard time and time again from those who run social media channels,” said SMC co-chair Melissa Beecher, social media manager for the Office of News & Public Affairs.

“They asked for support, education and encouragement. Each department or school was operating in its own silo, reinventing the process of getting involved with social media and maintaining their accounts, all to differing degrees of success. The Social Media Council is our answer to the growing need for social media support.”

SMC co-chair and News & Public Affairs Deputy Director Patricia Delaney explained that a strong social media presence has implications both on campus and beyond.

“The council enables us to link social media efforts happening across campus divisions and work together to enhance BC’s social profile. We’re excited about what has been accomplished after only four meetings. In addition to drafting and posting guidelines for BC social media administrators, which is a first step toward development of a formal policy proposal, members are exploring new platforms, collaborating on initiatives and serving as resources for one another.”

There also have been tangible measures of success, Delaney added, noting BC’s strong ranking on recent surveys of social media influencers, posts that drew the attention of national media outlets to BC news items, and a recent outpouring of book donation offers generated through social media for an alumna trying to establish a library for the students at her New York City school.

Student Services Communications Specialist David Ayers, one of the founding members of the SMC, said Facebook, Twitter and other platforms have changed the way he does his job.

“Social media is more than just an added responsibility for me; it’s forethought,” said Ayers. “Everything I see, hear, or understand is approached with a social media lens in mind. It’s a bit taxing to adopt this mentality, since it often means that one is always ‘on.’ The time-consuming nature of social media — reviewing and evaluating posts, mostly — is an unfortunate side effect of our cultural connectedness. But this is the new way of interacting.

“I think the question is what impact has social media had on the current generation of college students. It pervades their everyday. As purveyors of information we need to be conscious of how the target audience is using the medium. We also have to realize the medium’s ability to directly send messages (for free) to a specific group of individuals — a marketer’s dream. Social media is and will continue to be a big part of Boston College communications.”

Student Services Senior Communication Specialist Carolina Ritschel concurred.

“I was thrilled when this council was put together. I felt like social media was something that could be important, but I did not know to what extent other departments were using it. To see and understand how useful social media is for Athletics, for instance, is so interesting. The council brings us together, but it also helps with a set of guidelines we should follow, which is very important,” said Ritschel.

Boston College Bookstore Assistant Director David Werda, another SMC founding member, said that many departments — including his — have started to rely more and more on the ability to speak directly to students and customers.

“I believe we are at a place and time where the use of social media is no longer an afterthought for organizations but a primary method of communication. An organization’s website has traditionally been a major place to showcase their identity. The shift from website presence as a primary virtual identity to various social media channels continues to evolve as users develop new social media channels and new ways of using these channels.

“I think the idea of a SMC where these many groups can come together to discuss ideas only helps us stay relevant in this space,” said Werda. “The meetings have been invaluable from a number of standpoints. With a growing number of groups on campus using one or

314,842 – Average weekly impressions of [BC Facebook Page](#) this month

301,010 - Video views on the [NPA YouTube Channel](#)

56,750+ – Boston College Facebook fans

25,450+ – [Boston College Twitter](#) followers

10,375+ – Tweets from Boston College

1,719 - Followers of [Boston College Instagram](#)

871 – People who +1 [Boston College on Google+](#)

782 – Pins on [Boston College Pinterest](#)

89 – Boston College Klout score (ninth highest in the country)

31 – Departments now represented at the [Social Media Council](#)

10 – Departments at the first SMC meeting

*data gathered on 11/27/12

more social media channels we can learn a great deal from each other as to how our community is viewing and using social media.”

Daniel Landers, a communications specialist in the Lynch School of Education, is one of the newest members.

“The Lynch School’s social media efforts give our community a voice in national conversations about theory, policy, and practice in the fields of applied psychology and education. Through Facebook and Twitter we disseminate research findings, service opportunities, and theories from our students, faculty, and staff to audiences across the Boston College campus and the nation.

“It is our hope that this online social presence gives way to new connections and allows experts in related fields to turn to the Lynch School as a resource and partner.”

BC Law Marketing & Communications Director Nate Kenyon said he immediately saw the value in the SMC’s mission.

“I’m thrilled to participate in the council,” said Kenyon. “Social media is crucial in reaching our core audiences these days, and to be able to share ideas, experiences and resources across Boston College is both energizing and extremely valuable.”

In keeping with its efforts to highlight social media offerings on campus, News & Public Affairs is planning a media convergence website that will serve as a one-stop point of entry to BC channels. Future agenda items for the council include information sessions with social media thought leaders, security on social media channels and development of a proposal for a formal University policy on social media. Representatives from any BC school or division not already involved are welcome — just drop a line to social@bc.edu.