

Connecting with students: Online tools for retention

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Background & Purpose

- ▶ Students are more likely to stay at a university if they feel connected with their academic program.
- ▶ To increase this connection, programs are using online tools like social media and listerves.
- ▶ The purpose of this study was to determine how current students perceived social media and listerve use by their academic program and to explore their preferences for content type.
- ▶ Survey methodology was used
 - ▶ 283 students in the College of Agriculture at Kansas State University.
- ▶ Questions were check all that apply, semantic differential on a seven-point scale, and a seven-point Likert scale with 1 being the negative end of the scale and 7 being the positive end.

What is your current major? (N=283)

Major	n	%
Animal Sciences and Industry	104	37
Agronomy	28	10
Agribusiness	25	9
Horticulture	16	6
Agricultural Education	18	6
Agricultural Communications and Journalism	19	6
Agricultural Economics	17	6
Food Science Institute	14	5
Agricultural Technology Management	8	3
Feed Science and Management	8	3
Park Management and Conservation	6	2
Wildlife and Outdoor Management	6	2
Milling Science and Management	5	2
Bakery Science and Management	6	2
Biological and Agricultural Engineering	2	1
Plant Pathology	1	0
Entomology	0	0

How do you think your academic program (major)'s social media is currently used?

	Population	Mean	SD	
It's used too much	COA	4.96	1.36	It's not used enough
	Freshmen	4.87	1.31	
	Sophomores	4.98	1.37	
	Juniors	5.0	1.32	
	Seniors	5.11	1.43	
	Super Seniors	4.47	.137	

Semantic Differential 7-point scale

How do you think your academic program (major)'s social media is currently used?

	Population	Mean	SD	
They don't post what I want to see	COA	3.92	1.35	They post exactly what I want to see
	Freshmen	4.16	1.25	
	Sophomores	3.89	1.51	
	Juniors	3.91	1.23	
	Seniors	3.76	1.49	
	Super Seniors	3.82	1.01	

Semantic Differential 7-point scale

What types of things would you like to see from your academic programs social media? N=283

	n	%
Internships	251	88.7
Program news and information	239	84.5
Industry information	232	82.6
Current student projects, trips, blogs	218	77.0
Other	39	13.4
Other: Awards / Recognition (6), Jobs (5), Scholarships (4), Events / deadlines, (4), Workshops (2), Tips, Awards / Recognition, Pictures from industry. Random facts, crop diseases and insect problems, Throwback Thursday pics of professors and past research		

Content preferences were different between classes

- ▶ All classes had an interest in all content at 50% or greater
- ▶ Differences in classes related to content
 - ▶ Seniors cared the least about internships
- ▶ Juniors cared the least about current student projects
- ▶ Super-seniors suggested combining content into a weekly update

COA : Relationship Between Current Social Media Use and Desire to be Contacted by the Academic Department Through that Platform

Platform	Frequency of Use		Academic Contact	
	M	SD	M	SD
Blogs **	1.56	1.41	3.84	1.90
Facebook **	6.5	1.35	4.94	1.89
Flipogram **	1.11	.57	2.56	1.62
GooglePlus **	1.95	1.78	3.35	1.87
Instagram	4.11	2.81	3.89	2.04
LinkedIn **	2.07	1.75	4.15	2.07
Other **	1.8	1.96	3.15	1.78
Pinterest	3.45	2.62	3.23	1.86
Twitter	4.24	2.67	4.42	2.08
Vine	1.65	1.49	2.57	1.59
YouTube **	5.5	1.60	4.42	2.03

* p=<.05; **P<.01

Do you feel your academic list-serv is used correctly?

	Population	Mean	SD	
It's used too much	COA	3.85	1.31	It's not used enough
	Freshmen	3.90	.99	
	Sophomores	4.04	1.40	
	Juniors	3.88	1.33	
	Seniors	3.69	1.47	
	Super Seniors	3.63	1.41	

Semantic Differential 7-point scale

Do you feel your academic list-serv is used correctly?

They don't send the information I want to see

Population	Mean	SD
COA	4.41	1.56
Freshmen	4.50	4.42
Sophomores	4.42	1.43
Juniors	4.29	1.62
Seniors	4.39	1.69
Super Seniors	4.63	1.50

They send the information that I want to see

Semantic Differential 7-point scale

COA: What types of things would you like to see sent across your academic program (major)'s list serve N=283

	n	%
Internships	253	89.4
Program news and information	228	80.6
Industry information	207	73.1
Current student projects, trips, blogs	193	68.2
Other	14	4.9
Other: Jobs (4), Scholarships (3), Different format, consolidation, study abroad		

Content preferences were different between classes

- ▶ All classes had an interest in all content at 50% or greater
- ▶ Differences in classes related to content
 - ▶ Freshmen and sophomores cared the most about internships.
 - ▶ Juniors cared the least about current student projects.
 - ▶ Seniors cared the most about jobs and industry content.
 - ▶ Super-seniors suggested combining content into a weekly update.

Recommendations Based on This Study

- ▶ Just because students are on a platform, doesn't mean they want academic programs to connect with them on it.
- ▶ On social media students had a preference for Facebook, LinkedIn, and video platforms.
- ▶ Internships are a high priority for information from all classes.
- ▶ Industry information is of the least interest to freshmen.
- ▶ All classes have an interest in internships, program news and information, Industry news, and current student projects.
- ▶ Open-ended comments indicate students want a connection with their academic program.
 - ▶ This aligns with relationship marketing literature and other social media studies.

Recommendations for Your Retention

- ▶ First step is finding out your students needs and most used platform
 - ▶ Like we did in this study
- ▶ Take that knowledge and see what works
- ▶ Measure engagement
- ▶ See what stories connect with individuals and groups
- ▶ For more information on measurement see our online learning resource at www.ruralengagement.org

Questions?

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