

#LGBT



From selfies to social networking, a guide to connect online with the **LGBT** community on your campus.

Colleges and universities have online power.

It's no surprise that students are finding more and more ways to communicate with their friends, peers, and instructors on college campuses. Institutions of higher education are starting to reframe conversations regarding student engagement of the 21st century, specifically the way social media is being used in that process.

Colleges and universities have a lot to gain from effectively using social media to engage students, including a more visible presence in the public eye and for marketing purposes.

Many schools leverage social media from a strategic standpoint. In fact, a study showed that 100% of universities have a social media presence.

It is worth asking how LGBT students are connecting over the Internet.

What does social media have to do with connecting with the LGBT population? LGBT students have been exploring their identities via the Internet for a long time. The Internet has been the "unsung hero" for the LGBT community, allowing for individuals to

look up information, resources, and support right at their fingertips.

The Internet allows LGBT students to tell their story, both personally and, if they choose, in an online safe space.

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2013

What does a "safe space" online look like?

A "safe space" online can be a space constructed by an administrator (instructor, faculty, or staff) or by students that allow private conversations to occur over the Internet. For today's LGBT students, the Internet is closely tied with real life expectations. According to Bharat Mehra from *New Media & Society*, the conversations that occur online often contribute to "constructive change in offline realities".



LGBT students feel safer online and some feel more free to express themselves. According to *Queering the Conflicts: What LGBT Students Can Teach Us Online* by Peters and Swanson, LGBT students feel, “freer to represent their sexualities without complications or inhibitions that real-time, in-person conversation imposes.” However, if student affairs professionals are absent from those spaces, LGBT students may miss out on the opportunity to discuss, analyze, and critique their online activity face-to-face.

The Impact of Social Media

The Internet permits LGBT individuals to discreetly learn that they are not alone, regardless where they live, from the comfort of their own home. The rise of the blue bird (Twitter), polaroid camera (Instagram), the thumbs up symbol (Facebook), and continuous connectivity via smartphones only accelerate the decrease in isolation for the LGBT community. Now, more than ever, LGBT individuals have more options from social media to online dating, applications, and activism.

Identifying Social Media Needs & Online Presence

Before logging online to check out every social media networking site, first get out pen and paper. That’s right! As a Director, Program Coordinator, Staff Member, Student, or Volunteer, start to write down all the reasons why you use social media personally and professionally. Sit down with your staff and decide why you want to add social media for your division, department, or office to your already busy schedule. Are you doing this to promote your department’s events? Are you doing this to build an online community? Whatever site(s) you use to connect, communicate with your staff why and how you are using social media to connect with students.

Not all social media sites work for everyone. For most of us, social media uses the process of trial and error and requires a great deal of patience. As a team, you may want to decide roles, responsibilities, and expectations (clearly written down) so that you use the most of your trial and error stage.

Before you start deciding what pages or sites you want as an office, understand what social media sites you already have and how you are using them to engage your students.

Create an Inclusive Social Media Plan

Steps to Connecting

1. Strategy & Support

What does your target LGBT audience look like? Where do they communicate online? Survey students. Brainstorm with your team.

2. Decide How/Who Will Develop and Maintain Your Efforts

What staff members will want to use social media, if any?

3. Shift Your Paradigm

It’s time to think beyond e-mail, posters, and newsletters. Shift the approach to using Facebook, Twitter, blogs, photo, and video content.

4. Define What Will Characterize Success at the End of the Year

For some of you, success means more fans and followers. For others, it may mean how much increased traffic your website gets. “Did our social media draw people into our offices/events?”

5. Do the Little Things Well

Work on a relationship with your strategic communications department. They may have more resources for creating marketing campaigns. Develop your departmental/office brand. Listen, then engage. You’ll find students online who are already talking about your school/office.

Remind Students to T.H.I.N.K Before They Post Online

T - is it true?

H - is it helpful?

I - is it inspiring?

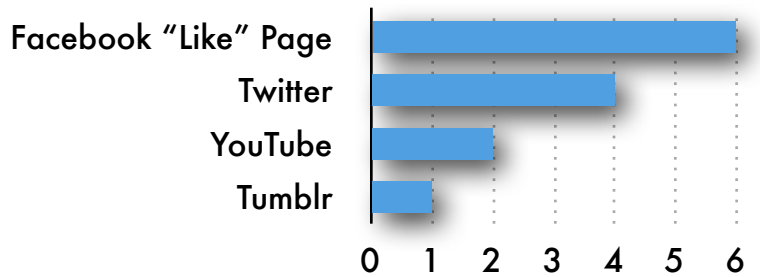
N - is it necessary?

K - is it kind?

How are LGBT centers using social media?

A survey was sent out to the University of California (UC) LGBT centers or spaces to compare what offices are using and how they are using social media websites. Overall, Facebook "like" pages were most popular with Twitter accounts coming in second place. Tumblr was a platform that spaces wish they had more knowledge about and how to use it to connect with students.

Which social media site do you use most often?



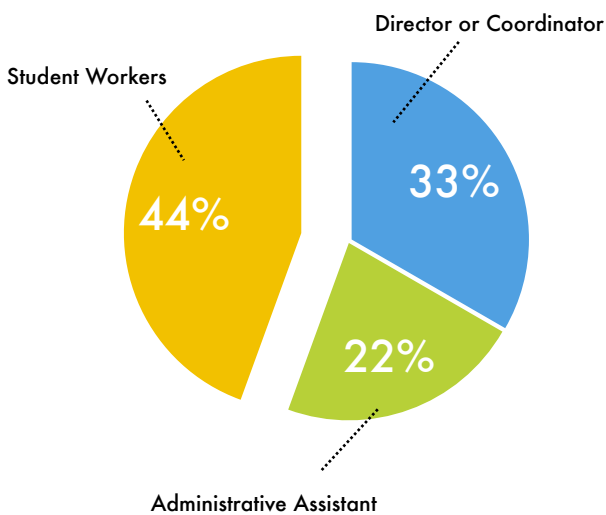
"We host Wiki pages for clubs and organizations.

Usage varies year to year based on who is in charge."

- Administrator from the UC System speaking about students handling social media



Who directly oversees the social media in the center?



Having a "Student Voice" over Social Media

Why is having a student voice over social media sites important for connecting with students? Students want to connect with other students on-campus, often students different from themselves. Having social media training for students is important, particularly if the students are responsible for updating various statuses. In the UC System, student workers and volunteers are the largest group tasked with holding online conversations.

Current students responding to inquiries from potential students invites other students to ask more questions and, in turn, have a higher chance of visiting the office space. Prospective and current students are more likely to trust the "student voice" that holds a pulse on the campus population. Incorporating a student social media voice will help spread awareness of staff, programs, and physical safe spaces.

Every Post is a "Selfie:" The Desire for Social Approval



Every post is a "selfie"- the desire for social approval. As human beings we seek out recognition for that which we value in ourselves.

The act of taking a picture of yourself and posting it to a site can be seen as narcissism, however, *Psychology Today* sees this new trend as "technology-enabled self exploration."



#instadaily #selfie

Selfies are pictures that you take of yourself. Seems pretty simple. After the said selfie is captured, one posts it on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, among other social media sites. So now that we have broken the "selfie" barrier, let us move forward and create wonderful opportunities for students to express themselves socially in a positive way.

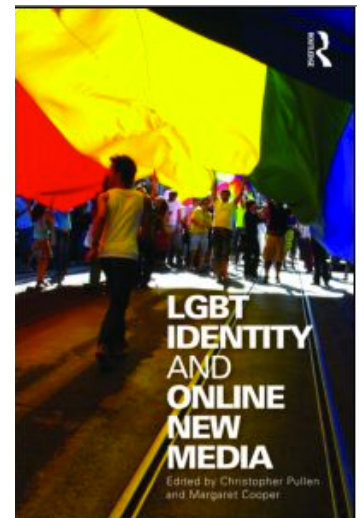
Embrace Identity Exploration

For the LGBT community, selfies allow for identity development and how others see an individual. There are no limits on how many selfies a person can take. Pictures allow humans to express many emotions - from a silly side, to an artsy side, or dressing up to be glamorous. The incoming digital natives, college students that have grown up with technology, experience sharing pictures online to show authenticity and transparency. In this way, they reinforce social identities that we want other people to perceive us to be.

"Images interact differently with the brain," states Pamela Rutledge, Ph.D. She explains that images represent experiences. When humans look at old photos, emotions resurface and we gain insight differently than from text.

Further readings on the LGBT community, new media, and online identities:

[LGBT Identity and Online New Media](#)
by Christopher Pullen and Margaret Cooper
(2010)



[Why Online Privacy, Confidentiality and Security Matter to LGBT Communities](#) (article, 2013)
by Joe Kapp, Co-Founder LGBT Technology Partnership

[Making Academic Departments Welcoming for LGBT Staff and Students](#) (Inside Higher Ed, 2013)
by Elizabeth H. Simmons and Ramon S. Barthelemy

Programmatic Application



Apply the knowledge of the “selfie” directly to the students you are working with. This past April 2013, the Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network created the Selfies for Silence campaign. This campaign incorporates identity and creating awareness to end the silence around anti-LGBT bullying and harassment.

The Day of Silence

This national student-led event focuses on anti-LGBT issues that take place from middle school to college. Students take a vow of silence to spread awareness of bullying and harassment of LGBT identified students and those perceived to be LGBT. To make this event successful in both schools and college campuses, students discuss their intentions of the program with faculty and administrators before the campaign commences.

The GLSEN advises middle school, high school, and college students to gain permission in an effort to create safe spaces within schools for all students.

How is this campaign successful?

The campaign intentionally creates an online and in-person safe space by making this LGBT campaign popular. Students generally log on to see their “selfie” picture from the event and make it their profile picture on numerous websites. Through this awareness campaign, students come together to show how they care about LGBT issues and ultimately make new connections both online and in-person with the student community.

Tweet About This

University of California


Los Angeles

encourages taking photos, creating safe spaces, and encouraging a positive environment while doing it. The staff at UCLA uses their photo booth during events at the center.



At UCLA LGBT events, students typically sign-in during events, but have the opportunity to say “no” to photos and live in fear of having their picture posted online. All they have to do is take a sticker. This process is easier for the staff to keep track, too.

 @DayofSilence

 facebook.com/nationaldayofsilence

Peer Connections
at
University of
California Riverside


Peer Connections
ONLINE PEER CHAT AND MENTORING PROGRAM

Creating Anonymous Online Safe Spaces

Peer Connections, an online peer chat and mentoring program, is overseen by one of the Program Coordinators at the LGBT Resource Center at the University of California Riverside. Every Monday night during the academic quarter, Program Coordinator Toi Thibodeaux and volunteer trained Peer Mentors gather around a table to answer questions in an online chat room regarding sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. The anonymous online chat room, hosted by ChatBlazer, provides anonymous support to the LGBT community on the UCR campus.



To enter into a chat room, students choose their screen names and remain anonymous. Students must provide their student identification number to the Program Coordinator. No one in the chat room will know the students' identity, only the Program Coordinator for safety reasons. It is up to the student to self-disclose any information in the chat room.

Coming Out Online

According to Randal Woodland from *Computers and Composition*, LGBT individuals have many more resources online to help them come out while also, "maintaining a safe level of disclosure." Peer Connections does exactly this. Students enter online chat rooms with a greater sense of safety and comfort than entering an actual classroom or social space. Woodland interviewed a few individuals that discussed how the Internet sped up their coming out process. Overall, interview participants felt a sense of belonging with the larger LGBT community.

"I think the conversations sped up my process... it showed me that there were people who lived happily 'out'".

- Interviewee from study "I Plan to be a 10", *Computers and Composition* discussing coming out online.

For more information about creating online safe spaces and Peer Connections, contact:

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University of California Riverside. out.ucr.edu/programs/pages/peerconnections.aspx

