

Albright COLLEGE

Social Media Alumni Engagement Conference - Report

- Thursday, August 10, 2017 9:30 am – 3:30 pm
- Guest speakers: Andrew Gossen, Senior Director of Social Media Strategy for Alumni Affairs at Cornell University and Jennifer Cunningham, Assistant Vice President, Alumni Relations at Lehigh University.

Thanks to the generosity of the National Educational Alumni Trust, I was able to host this conference at Albright College this summer. There was such a great response from my colleagues at the other institutions, I hope to apply for a grant again next year to follow up on our discussion, keeping up on the changes in technology and trends. Here is a list of the attendees:

Kandace	Kohr	Social Media Coordinator/Web Writer	Dickinson College
MaryAlice	Bitts-Jackson	Writer/editor, Marketing & Communications	Dickinson College
Lesley	Larson	Director of Annual Giving	Lycoming College
Jeanne	Bortulin	Assistant Director of Alumni Relations	Immaculata College
Nicole	Howarth	Associate Director of Annual Giving, Young Alumni Liaison	Haverford College
Tom	Durso	Associate VP for Communications	Albright College
Marla	Kramer	Associate Director, Advancement Communications	Lycoming College
Alex	Ogeka	Senior Director of Development and Alumni Relations	Kutztown University
Mark	Clapper	Executive Director of College Engagement Opportunities	Elizabethtown College
Andrew	Calnon	Assistant Director of Alumni Relations	Elizabethtown College
Drew	Boyles	Assistant Director of Alumni Relations	Lycoming College
Amy	Reyes	Director of Alumni Relations & Special Events	Lycoming College
Ryan	Shannon	Alumni & Parent Coordinator	Alvernia University
Mary	Neuenschwander	Associate Director for Alumni Relations	Kutztown University
Hilary	Bentman	Manager of News & New Media	Albright College
Deborah	McCreery	Vice President for Advancement	Albright College
Emily	Garb	Assistant Director of Alumni Relations	Albright College
Tracy	Gray-Hayes	Assistant Director of ADP Program	Albright College
Loreal	Maguire	Director of Volunteer Programs, Cornell Alumni Affairs & Development	Cornell University
Shawna	Sherrell	Associate Director of Creative Services, Communications and Marketing	Gettysburg College
Andrew	Gossen	Executive Director, Digital, Alumni Affairs & Development	Cornell University
Jennifer	Cunningham	Assistant Vice President for Alumni Relations	Lehigh University

The purpose of this conference was to discover best practices in social media alumni engagement for small colleges and universities. Small alumni relations offices lack resources to exploit all the opportunities social media offers. Where should we focus, how do we measure our success and how do we speak to our Vice Presidents about alumni engagement in this new and ever changing world?

I purposely invited vice presidents to join us, however only the Vice President for Advancement from Albright College attended. This was incredibly beneficial to our college, as she spent one hour alone with Andrew and Jennifer to talk about our challenges here.

Mr. Gossen started the conference by examining the various platforms and their weight in terms of engagement. He characterized each platform including its benefits and drawbacks, which was beneficial in determining how much time to focus on each. Facebook easily won as the most used tool, citing the Pew Research Center for statistics. This chart clearly shows the usage by segment:

	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	LinkedIn	Pinterest
Age: 18-29	88	36	88	34	36
College +	79	29	79	50	34
\$75K +	77	30	77	45	35

A proponent of boosting posts, Andrew feels the minimal costs are worth the return on investment.

His second preferred platform is Instagram for its ease of use and wide audience. A beautiful photo of campus allows alumni to reminisce. Here again is an opportunity for philanthropy. *Do you remember taking classes in this building? Did you ever sit under this tree? Participate in the campaign to repaint this building, plant more trees*, then add a link to the Fund for Albright.

Third on Andrew's platform list is Twitter, as he finds that to be politically based and negative. I had asked him to include LinkedIn, as that is the platform preferred by our new President and he did not advise us to focus much time there. He said its best use is in networking for job replacement.

LinkedIn

Advantages

- Large
- Dominant professional networking platform

Disadvantages

- Groups aren't very user-friendly.
- Less frequent engagement.
- Users can be very self-promotional.
- TOS limit what you can do with data.

Actually, he graded Snap as the least useful saying it is more popular with people younger than college age, there are no usage statistics available and Instagram is really trying to win that market.

He talked about analytics, how to find the number of alumni who are connected and how many are not. He talked about how to find out if you are successful with your posts by studying post analytics like this:

The screenshot shows the 'Post Details' for a post from the Cornell Alumni Association. The post text reads: 'Weill Cornell Medicine researchers have discovered a new link that may contribute to Alzheimer's disease.' Below the text is a photograph of red and yellow neurons. The post title is 'Missing link identified between immune cells and Alzheimer's' and the description continues: 'By studying the effects of immune cells that surround blood vessels in the brain, Weill Cornell Medicine researchers have discovered a new pathway involving ...' The source is cited as 'NEWS.CORNELL.EDU'. On the right side, the analytics are displayed in a grid: 9,272 People Reached; 192 Reactions, Comments & Shares; 149 Likes (115 On Post, 34 On Shares); 5 Loves (6 On Post, 0 On Shares); 6 Wows (5 On Post, 1 On Shares); 4 Comments (3 On Post, 1 On Shares); 28 Shares (27 On Post, 1 On Shares); 465 Post Clicks (0 Photo Views, 348 Link Clicks, 117 Other Clicks). Under 'NEGATIVE FEEDBACK', there are 3 Hide Post, 1 Hide All Posts, 0 Report as Spam, and 0 Unlike Page. At the bottom, it shows '9,272 people reached' and a 'Boost Post' button.

Category	On Post	On Shares
Like	115	34
Love	6	0
Wow	5	1
Comments	3	1
Shares	27	1

Category	Count
Photo Views	0
Link Clicks	348
Other Clicks	117

This provides insight as to what your alumni want to read, see and learn about the institution. There is so much noise on social media, the question is - how do you break through and engage the alumni?

Measuring all posts against each other, you can see which are most popular, and from there determine a donation opportunity.

All Posts Published

Reach: Organic / Paid Post Clicks Reactions, Comments & Shares

Published	Post	Type	Targeting	Reach	Engagement	Promote
08/01/2017 7:00 pm	We kicked off the first day of August with some beautiful weather o			3.9K	43 83	Boost Post
07/31/2017 12:36 pm	Cornell University's Cisunar Explorers will not only send their spac			5.7K	109 101	Boost Post
07/27/2017 11:37 am	If you're interested in seeing this unique event, just follow your nos			5K	129 55	Boost Post
07/25/2017 7:00 pm	Join us on August 16 for an exclusive event to see Cornell Universi			4.7K	79 67	Boost Post
07/24/2017 12:00 pm	There's still time to name Cornell University's newest grape and th			5.7K	197 51	Boost Post
07/21/2017 4:00 pm	Twitter says they're winning the war on harassment but James Gn			3.4K	36 6	Boost Post
07/20/2017 1:00 pm	This week has brought a welcome reprieve from all the rain we've			7.5K	235 295	Boost Post
07/19/2017 3:46 pm	This really cool time lapse shows how the new MoMA PS1 exhibit			2.5K	37 12	Boost Post
07/18/2017 12:00 pm	Well! Cornell Medicine researchers have discovered a new link that			9.3K	455 192	Boost Post

This is how engagement grows. Give the alumni what they want, and then make a donation request. Their preferences lead us to decide what we post which then further engages them. This post about Alzheimer's can contain a link to a giving page at the bottom. The importance of faculty work creates an emotional pull and a philanthropic opportunity. A well-timed mailing also plays on this post, creating a bond between social media and traditional mailings.

He left us with some real guidance:

- Know your goals.
- Empower your web/digital teams to configure your ecosystem in such a way that you can track relevant activity.
- Focus on metrics that display action and purpose.
- Metrics may be different at different phases of campaigns.
- Commit time to looking at analytics so that you can learn from them and align your tactics and resources better against strategic goals.

Jennifer Cunningham spoke of the potential loss from other alternatives when only one platform is chosen, as one reason to invest in social media. The other is basic math.

She compared our analogue world vs. the digital opportunities in terms of alumni engagement. Staff time, finances and the return on investment drastically change in this new model. Compare thirty hours of planning an event:

- \$1,000
- 100 attendees x 3 hours engagement = 300 engagement hours
- \$3.30/engagement hour
- \$10/attendee
- 40% are donors

Vs. thirty hours of social media outreach:

- \$10 (boosted posts)
- 2,000 engagers X 10 seconds = 333 engagement hours
- \$.03/engagement hour
- \$.005/engager
- 46% are donors

Kandace Kohr from Dickinson College felt she benefitted from the conference:

- The conversation surrounding how we can really optimize our successes on social really stuck with me, especially the part about physical vs. digital events. The numbers pointing to how little attendance is vs. how much time, effort and money is put into these events is staggering, and I think that's something that could really set us apart from others.

It doesn't get any clearer than that! Jennifer spoke on how to relate this necessary change to our vice presidents; show them the numbers, the places all around the world we can reach using social media, and examples of interactions to prove it works.

Drew Boyles from Lycoming College said:

“I really enjoyed having the opportunity to speak with other alumni relations colleagues who are facing the same challenges of balancing our “traditional” roles of engagement, event planning, communication and collaboration with the “new” responsibilities of social media outreach. . . One of the areas we currently face is how to best synthesize institutional efforts of social media engagement.”

Mark Clapper of Elizabethtown College said his biggest take-away was:

“In my opinion, learning about the present and future directions of social media-related communication and hearing about ideas and approaches utilized by other colleges/universities made the event worthwhile.”

MaryAlice Bitts Jackson from Dickinson College said the most important information she learned was from the standpoint of a Communications Professional:

- Thoughts on promoted advertising on Facebook
- References: 2014 *New York Times* Digital Innovation Report, M. Stoner Whitepaper and colleges/universities that are doing social media well.

All attendees agreed that this conference was beneficial to their work and would like to get together again next year. The timeliness and relevance of this subject matter is evident in my inbox. MStoner, EverTrue, Buffer, Canva, and Higher Ed Live send multiple emails daily with information on how to create better posts, how to track social media trends, and analytics, and how to gain more followers. This is the topic of the moment.

This topic is on all Alumni Relations and Development Officers’ minds. How are we using social media to direct our work? How is this changing the landscape in Development and Marketing, and what recourses are necessary going forward? We are all students of social media. There will always be a need to study the trends and learn from each other’s experiences. Andrew Gossen and Jennifer Cunningham are the avatars in this field and it was incredibly informative and helpful to get their perspective.