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STARTING A NEW TWITTER ACCOUNT @CONNCOLLEGEIS: WITH A REPORT FROM #ALAMW14

Reporters: Andrew Lopez, Rebecca Parmer, Jessica McCullough, and Laura Little, Connecticut College

In October 2013, a small group of social media enthusiasts at Connecticut College met to discuss strategies and ideas for increasing Information Services' media presence, both on campus and beyond it. Connecticut College is a liberal arts college in southeastern Connecticut with a population of nearly 2,000 students. The Information Services (IS) department is an innovative blended organization of libraries, computing, and information services, supporting study, research, scholarship, and learning at Connecticut College (@ConnCollege).

Our original plan was to create a single Twitter feed to support all IS departments, to encourage collaboration, and to provide a central news source that would bring together and communicate IS-related events, activities, services, and resources. We began with a brief survey of currently existing social media platforms across IS divisions, and discovered that multiple efforts had been in place since 2008:

- Facebook pages:
    - Shain Library
    - Linda Lear Center for Special Collections & Archives
    - Greer Music Library

○ Language and Culture Center

● Blogs: *Engage: Instructional Technology at Connecticut College*

● Twitter: Language and Culture Center (@ConnColl_LCC)

Each platform was assessed for content and type of post, frequency of updates, and level of audience engagement. This preliminary assessment helped us formulate recommendations that we organized into a multi-part proposal:

1. Establish a single Twitter account for IS. Broadcast all Facebook and blog posts through the unified Twitter feed, creating a lively stream of information that would reflect the breadth and depth of IS daily activities.

2. Add a widget with the Twitter feed to the IS website, displaying the 5 most recent tweets.

3. Ensure that the Twitter feed is not "unidirectional," i.e. that IS is following other institutions on and off campus, and retweeting content of interest to our community.

4. Ensure that existing IS Facebook pages "like" and promote other division/departmental pages so that we may help each other attain greater visibility and reach.

5. Promote the Twitter feed across the College campus by working with College Relations (the College's public relations and communications department), and by including social media logos on all IS communications.

6. Maintain an active Twitter presence throughout the year.

   After some deliberation on the question of what to call our Twitter account, we finally created one in December 2013 (@ConnCollegeIS) with the advice of the Vice President for Information Services and Librarian of the College (@WLeeH). For the sake of consistency - and to minimize potential impact on time - each member of the social media committee volunteered to post one day a week, scanning various social media accounts for updates, highlighting events or

workshops taking place in the library, and creating original content for Twitter. We also created a shared document with the IS organization as a whole, encouraging the IS community to suggest topics for future posts.

So far, the numbers have been promising - in the nearly three months that the Twitter account has been active, each social media outlet has seen an increase in traffic and audience engagement. Tweets that link back to posts on Facebook pages have been especially successful; Shain Library's Facebook page saw a 96% increase in page "likes" in the span of 6 weeks, from December to January.

Despite this promising start, we recognize that sustainability is key to a successful program, that some planning and organization will help us maintain momentum, and minimize the risk of petering out too soon for lack of time, content, or creativity. So on January 24, 2014, we sent two delegates to the ALA Midwinter workshop in Philadelphia (#ALAMW14), "Strategic Social Media: Creating Library Community Online." This excellent all-day workshop was organized by a dynamic group of librarians from Montana State University (MSU) (@MSULibrary). Their social media efforts have been recognized on the LibraryScienceList of the 100 Most Social Media Friendly College and University Libraries for 2013.

After discussing recent Pew Research data on social networking use and the outstanding popularity of Facebook (Duggan, 2013), presenters outlined the importance of using social media in such a way that strikes a careful balance between creativity and control. A library's social media presence should not post on all topics without coherence, but should also avoid an overly controlled presence that stifles creative content.

Perhaps easier said than done, the MSU Librarians placed a strong emphasis on using social media to listen to your community, referencing Nancy Dowd's June 2013 *Library Journal* article

"Libraries are Posting, But Is Anyone Listening?" (Dowd, 2013). One prominent example of library listening that came up was the My Hunt Library project at North Carolina State University (@NCSULibraries), which encouraged visitors to document their library experience using the social media platform Instagram. Currently there are well over 4,000 posts on Instagram with the #HuntLibrary hashtag. The MSU librarians' emphasis on the importance of using social media for listening was borne out by some of the impressive statistics they compiled on the effectiveness of their own posts.

Accounting for a wide spectrum of post types - such as sharing archival photos, promoting books or databases, or highlighting library events - the MSU librarians found that posts promoting library services generated limited interest, while posts about the local community and student life were among the most popular. Learning about how they manage their social media sites, and seeing their data on the reach of different post types was exciting and insightful. Especially helpful were the handouts they provided to help other institutions pursue similar social media strategizing. One particularly useful handout lists a series of initiatives that provide opportunity for repeated engagement, such as From the Ref Desk, Meet the Staff, Weekend Reads, and Feedback Fridays.

Back at Connecticut College, the social media committee met to share this information and discuss our next steps. We will continue to meet monthly in order to assess our progress, identify and plan new Twitter campaigns, and explore new social media platforms to expand our reach. Our initial success is exciting, and we hope to continue expanding our audience and sharing the wide variety of events, services, and resources we contribute to our community.

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