NAGAP 2012 Social Media Survey Report

NAGAP SOCIAL MEDIA SURVEY 2012

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the survey was to see how social media and online applications are being used in graduate admission offices and if FERPA plays a role in their usage and/or development. The growing use of social media is important on a global scale and is becoming a frequent topic of interest in national conferences and publications (i.e. International Educator, Diverse Issues in Higher Education). Free online tools like Google Apps are also of increased interest and concern as they can help offset high costs related to institutional IT support but also expose participant information to less secure and reliable servers with less institutional control over how that information is used by service providers (i.e., Educause). The FERPA implication regarding social media and online application software has also been discussed at the national level, as evidenced by a statement from the American Council of Education in 2008 about the proper use and implementation of social media sites into educational coursework.

II. METHODOLOGY

 The National Association of Graduate Admissions Professionals (NAGAP) invited its members to participate in an on line survey on these issues in the spring of 2012. Invitations to complete the survey were sent via email in April 2012 to all NAGAP members. One reminder was sent in early May and the survey was closed on May 5, 2012. A total of 267 participants completed the survey.

Results of the survey are provided within: the *n* varies, since respondents did not always answer all questions. To assure confidentiality, no detailed responses are reported in cases where the *n* is less than 3.

III. OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS

Institution Characteristics

Tables 1 – 3 highlight the institutional characteristics of respondents based on institutional type, enrollment size, and number of graduate/professional degree programs. The largest represented institution type was private institutions but there is also significant representation from the public universities. Responses represent institutions of all sizes, with the largest group of participants representing institutions with total enrollments 1,000 to 2,999 total graduate student enrollment. Participants come from institutions that offer a wide range of degree programs but the largest represented group had 10 – 24 graduate and professional degree programs currently offered. The other categories were fairly equally distributed on program offerings. Respondents did not

indicate if they were responsible for one particular degree program at their institution or worked with multiple departments.

Table 1: Responses by Institution Type

Institution Type	n	%
Public	104	39
Private (Non-Profit)	153	58
Proprietary (Private for-profit)	4	2
Other	4	2

Table 2: Responses by Size of Institution

Institution Total Enrollment	n	%
0 - 999	79	30
1,000 – 2,999	94	35
3,000 – 4,999	38	14
5,000 – 9,999	36	13
10,000 or more	21	8

Table 3: Responses by Number of Graduate/Professional Degree Programs

Institution Total Enrollment	n	%
1 – 9	56	21
10 – 24	73	28
25 – 49	52	20
50 – 99	44	17
100 or more	40	15

IV. SOCIAL NETWORKING

The use of social networking sites has grown nationwide for a variety of different fields and purposes but the extent to which it has affected graduate admission offices is still somewhat unclear. A portion of the survey was dedicated to understanding how many graduate admission professionals are currently using social networking sites and the ways in which they are integrating them into their communication strategies.

Use of Social Networking Sites

When asked how many of their offices utilize social networking sites, 80% of the respondents indicated sites of this type were currently being used. This overwhelming majority indicates a strong preference towards the use of social networking sites in graduate admission offices.

Those that indicated social networking sites were not currently in use were asked to identify any specific reasons these options were not being pursued. The predominant reason involved staff shortages and lack of office resources to support the upkeep of such sites, although there were also a number that were concerned with the suitability of these sites for office recruiting and possible privacy issues involving FERPA. The percentages following Figure 1 are based on comparisons with the 213 respondents that indicated social networking sites played a role in their office communications.

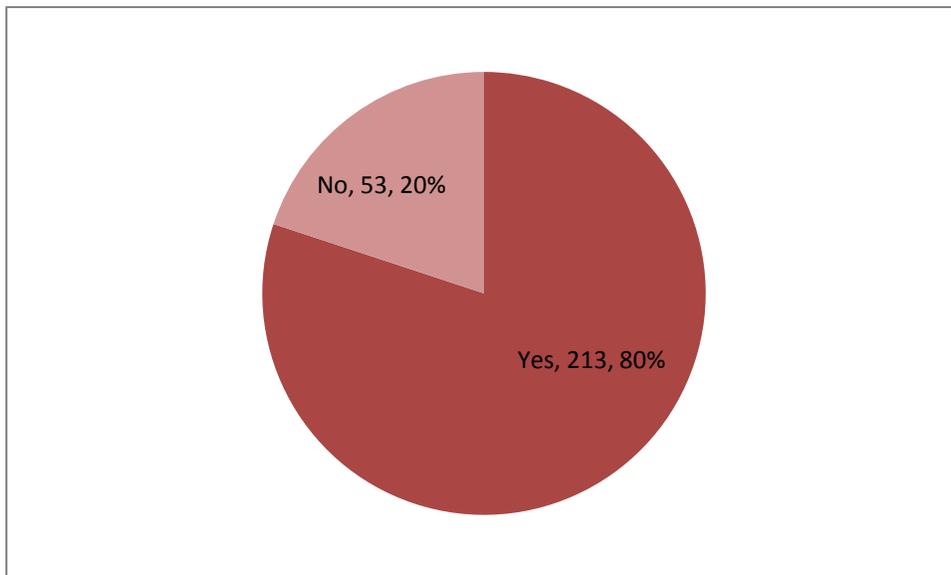**Figure 1: Respondents Who Use Social Networking Sites**

No, 53, 20%

Yes, 213, 80%

Table 4: Reasons for Not Using Social Networking Sites

Reason	Percentage of Respondents
Lack of Personnel/Resources	9%
Concerns Regarding Suitability and/or Privacy	5%
Filtered to General University Page	3%

Considering that lack of personnel is the primary reason many offices choose not to pursue social networking opportunities, we asked those that do to comment on how many people in their office help to manage the various sites and updates. Most graduate admission offices indicate they have at least 1 or 2 people managing social networking sites. Other reasons listed were sites in development, lack of institutional support, technological limitations, lack of interest, or using sites managed by individual programs.

Taking into account the predominance of smaller private universities among the respondents, offices are most likely asking staff to help with social networking in addition to their other duties rather than dedicating one person to social network marketing alone.

Table 5: Number of Staff Involved in Social Networking

Managing Sites	n	%
None	46	19
1	71	29
2	83	34
3	28	11
More than 3	18	7

Social Networking Sites and Target Audiences

From those that indicated social networking sites currently play a role in their office communications, we asked that they indicate what sites they currently use and their target audience for each platform. Unsurprisingly, Facebook and Twitter were the obvious leaders across all categories with LinkedIn as the closest runner up.

Table 6: Types of Social Networking In Use

Social Networking Site	*n*	Percentage of Total Respondents
Facebook	211	79%
Twitter	135	51%
LinkedIn	110	41%
Google Plus	19	7%
Other	14	5%

Taking into consideration the ever-changing scope of social networking opportunities available online, we also asked for respondents to indicate any other sites currently in use that were not listed. Other options currently in use by graduate admission offices include Flickr, Pinterest, Foursquare, RENREN, Tumblr, and Meebo.

Based on the social networking pages used most often, the survey then looked at what audiences were being targeted based on platform choices. Respondents that indicated social networking sites were currently in use for the communication strategies indicated that prospective and current students were their primary concern across all sites, except LinkedIn. The nature of LinkedIn lends itself to communications with alumni and current students more than prospective students or university staff/faculty.

**Table 7: Types of Social Networking Sites vs Target Audience**

Social Networking Site	Prospective Students	Current Students	University Faculty/Staff	Alumni	Other
Facebook	92%	84%	46%	62%	29%
Twitter	54%	49%	27%	35%	8%
LinkedIn	28%	36%	23%	34%	4%
Google Plus	4%	5%	5%	3%	-
Other	7%	4%	2%	3%	1%

Despite the audiences we may be targeting on social networking sites, we need to also understand if those are the audiences that are being attracted. Social networking presentations at recent NAGAP conferences have mentioned that they profile their followers to see who is accessing the sites. This way they can tell if their followers are prospect students, current students, alumni, staff, faculty, and/or community members.

The majority of the survey respondents indicated that they do not currently profile their followers (55% of the overall respondents, 69% of those that indicated they are currently using social networking sites).

<div align="center">Figure 2: Respondents Who Profile Social Networking Followers</div>
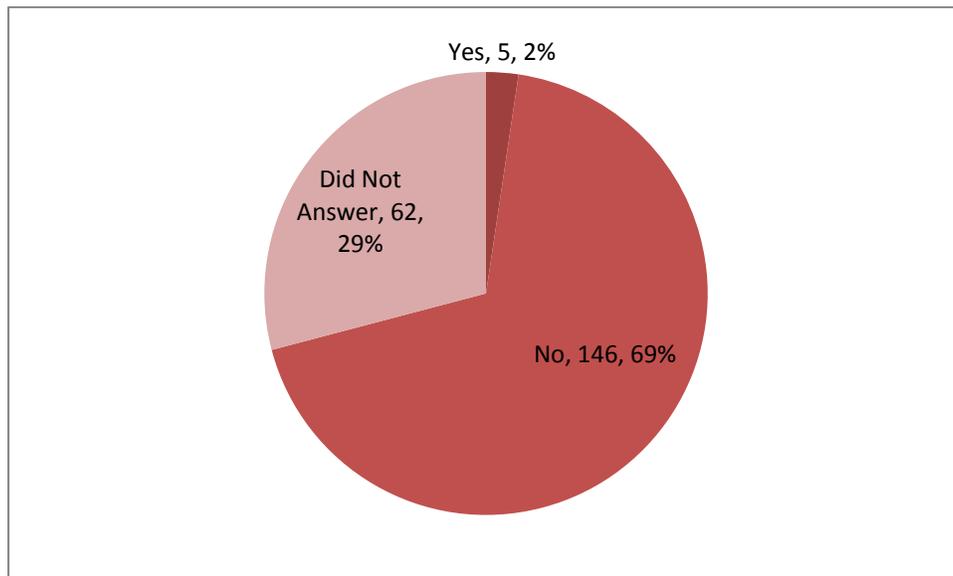
Types of Postings

After we've chosen the social networking sites for our marketing strategies, the next step is to decide what information to share. Most graduate admission offices use a variety of different postings but the most common were news updates and event postings. Since many offices use social networking sites to primarily communicate with prospective and current students, this preference is understandable. Percentages are based on comparisons with the 213 respondents that indicated social networking sites played a role in their office communications.

Table 8: Types of Postings

Postings	n	Percentage
News Updates	181	85%
Event Postings	179	84%
Student Profiles	103	48%
Alumni Profiles	94	44%
Open Messaging	136	64%

Monitoring Platforms

Once an office chooses to pursue the use of social networking sites, the management of these sites can be much easier for overburdened staff through the use of monitoring platforms such as Hootsuite or Tweetdeck. These platforms allow an office to manage all of their social networking communications from one module without having to log in and out of different sites. Users can also schedule postings ahead of time, in preparation for busy schedules, so that postings stay current without daily attention.

Of those graduate admission offices that currently use social networking sites, only 31% (68 respondents) indicated that monitoring platforms play a role in their management strategies, as shown in Table 9. Of those, Hootsuite was the most common followed closely by Tweetdeck. Some offices indicated the use of monitoring platforms not listed, such as Crowdbooster, StatCounter, and Meebo.

Table 9: Monitoring Platforms

Platform	n	Response Average
Hootsuite	42	62%
Tweetdeck	20	29%
Radian6	6	9%
Sprout Social	3	4%
Other	12	18%

V.   FREE ONLINE APPLICATIONS

In addition to social networking, the survey also looked at how many graduate admission offices are using free online applications for admission and recruiting communications. The current economic climate has required many admission offices to reconsider their methods in an attempt to find less expensive means of reaching their target audiences and working with them in electronic environments. Free online applications like GoogleDocs provide a cost effective means of supplementing office communication software.

Of those surveyed, 35% (n=93) of the respondents indicated that their office currently uses free online application software for admission and recruiting communications. The percentages starting with Table 10 are based on comparisons with the 93 respondents that indicated free online application sites played a role in their office communications.

YouTube was by far the most popular with 74% (n=69) of the free online application options, helping offices to manage video communication and marketing strategies easily and cost-effectively. Other options listed by respondents included CollegePro, Flickr, Vimeo, Meebo and WordPress.

Table 10: Types of Free Online Application Software In Use

Postings	n	Percentage
YouTube	69	74%
GoogleDocs	36	33%
Blogger	15	16%
Foursquare	13	30%
Flikster	10	11%
Zoho	5	5%
GoogleVoice	3	3%
Other	8	9%

The ways in which free online application software can be used is much more varied than what is available through social networking sites. As shown in Table 11, survey responses indicate graduate admission professionals are using these sites for basically the same things: general recruiting/marketing and communication with students. The difference lies in the methods used

by such sites as YouTube and GoogleDocs to engage their audiences in the material. Respondents also mentioned using blog websites and online chat rooms to supplement their communication methods.

Table 11: Uses for Free Online Application Software

Postings	*n*	Percentage
Communications with Prospective Students	79	85%
Communications with Current Students	50	54%
General Recruiting/Marketing	72	77%
Event Postings	45	48%
Sharing/Editing Documents	28	30%
Shared Calendars	23	25%
Other	4	4%

VI.   UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND FERPA IMPLICATIONS

As shown in the previous sections, social networking sites and free online application software are making an impact on graduate admission office communication methods. The next step is to consider the possible complications or privacy issues involved with these sites and evaluate the need for standard policies of use, particularly in regards to information that may involve FERPA regulations.

University Policies

Respondents were asked if their university had an official policy regarding the proper use of social networking and free online application sites. Standard policies were much more common for social networking sites (42%) than free online applications (20%) but most universities did not currently have policies or procedures in place for either category.

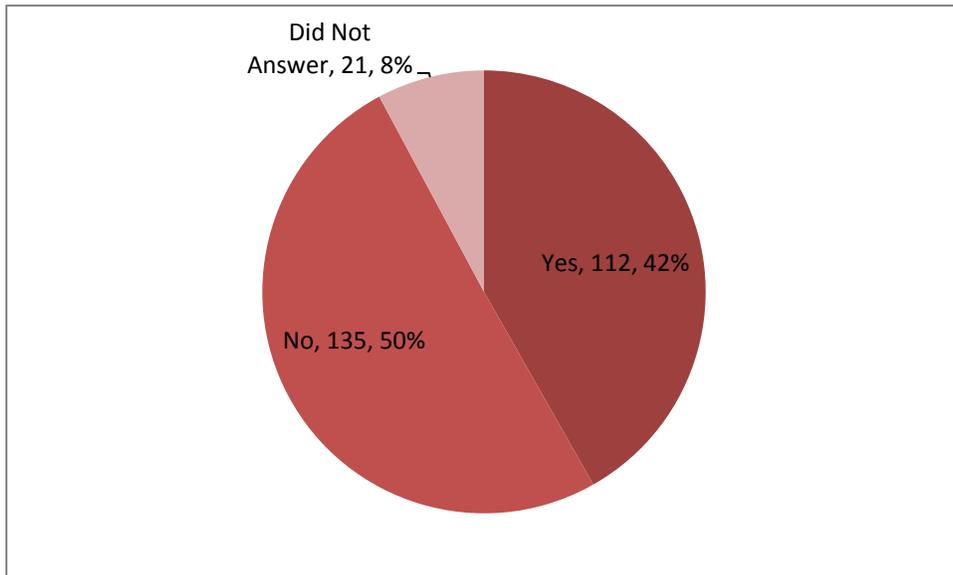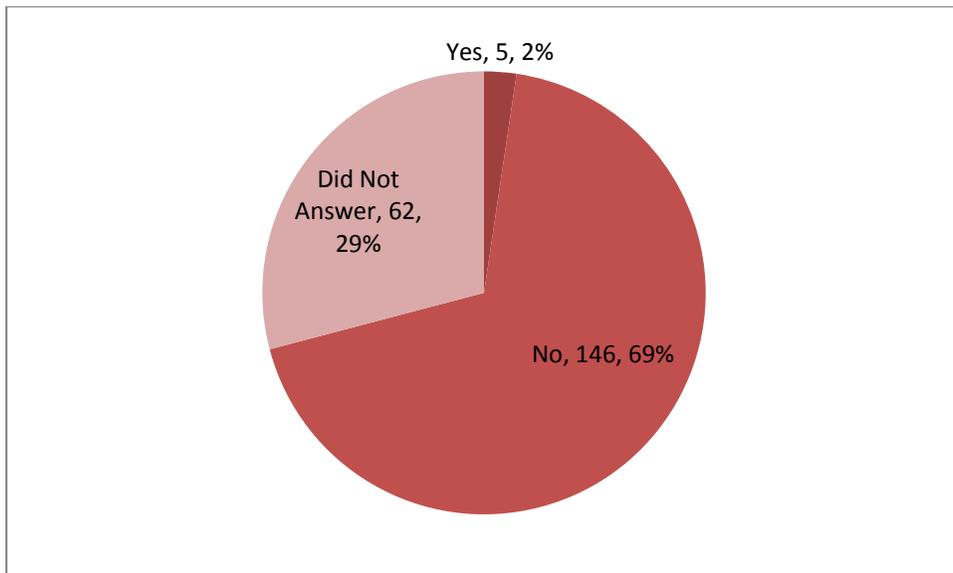**Figure 3:** **Standard Policy for Use of Social Networking Sites**

Figure 4: **Standard Policy for Use of Free Online Application Sites**

FERPA Policies

From those respondents that indicated their universities did have policies in place regarding social networking sites and free online application software, the survey also asked if FERPA played a role in any of the standard procedures. Over 90% of the respondents that have standard university policies in both categories agreed that FERPA played a role in their procedures regarding personal student information and how it is shared online.

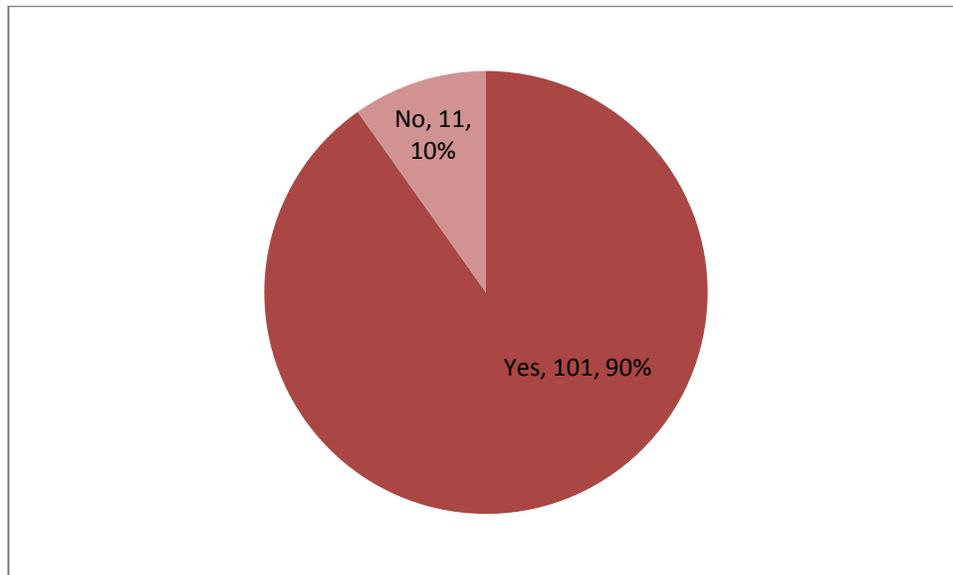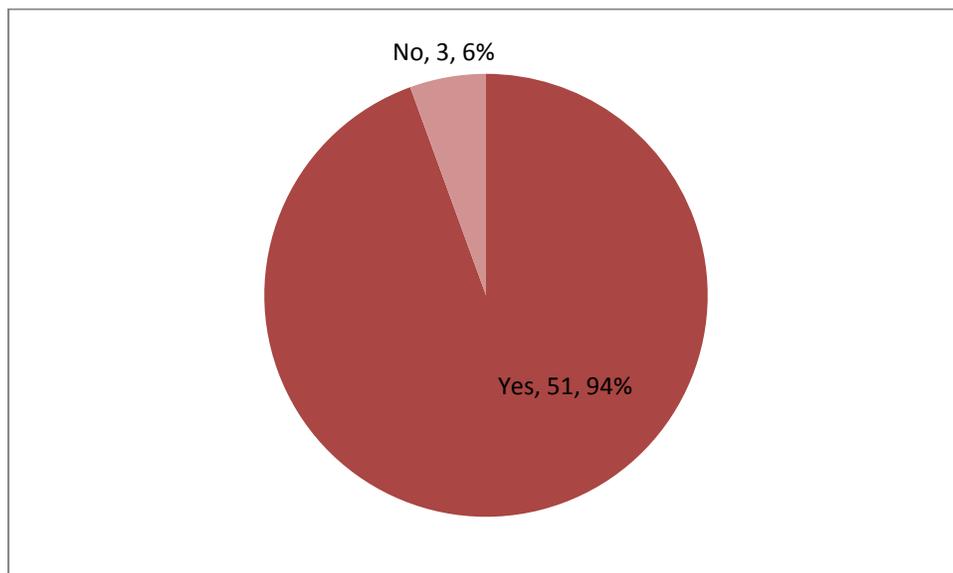**Figure 5:** **FERPA Component in University Policy for Social Networking Sites**

Figure 6: **FERPA Component in University Policy for Free Online Application Sites**

FERPA Violations

Since it is apparent that FERPA plays a major role in the university policies for social networking and free online applications, the question then becomes whether or not an incident ever arose that could have conflicted with University guidelines. The survey asked respondents if their office/university had ever had a situation where FERPA became an issue for information that was being shared through these external sites.

Whether you consider social networking sites or free online applications, it seems most universities have not had problems adhering to FERPA guidelines. Only 9 respondents indicated issues with information on social networking sites and free online application sites only had 5 respondents comment on past problems.

Because privacy issues have been of particular concern for social networking sites, respondents were asked to explain problems they encountered that violated university policies or FERPA regulations. When asked the nature of the violations, several respondents indicated some issues with too much information that had been attached to student profiles, requiring the student's permission before posting. Another group indicated that students were using Facebook to contact each other before they had been given permission by the university to start a university affiliated Facebook page.

Respondents were also asked to comment on whether or not they had modified the use of social networking sites or stopped using them entirely as a result of FERPA concerns. From those currently active in social networking, only 6 indicated that FERPA issues affected the use of the sites.

VII. SUMMARY

Social networking sites were far more common among respondents (80%) than the use of free online application sites (35%) for communications tasks in graduate admission offices. Those respondents not currently using either option indicated staff shortages and lack of office resources as the predominant reasons for not pursuing these online resources.

Offices currently using social networking sites usually had at least 1 person (29%) or 2 people (34%) managing/monitoring posts and feedback.

For social networking sites, Facebook was the most popular across all categories with Twitter as the next closest site, as shown in Tables 6 and 7. These sites are typically used for communications with prospective and current students, although LinkedIn lends itself to communications with alumni and current students more than prospective students, differentiating

its usage from Facebook and Twitter. The efficacy of these communication strategies to reach their target audiences are somewhat unclear as most respondents indicated they do not currently profile their followers (55% of the overall respondents, 69% of those that indicated they are currently using social networking sites).

Information shared through social networking sites are most often news updates (85%) and event postings (84%). Since prospective and current students are the primary target audiences for most respondents, this trend is understandable.

Only 31% of those respondents that currently manage social networking sites indicated that monitoring platforms assist with their management and monitoring tasks. Of those that do utilize monitoring platforms, Hootsuite was the most common (62%).

While free online application sites were less common among respondents, YouTube was the most popular option in this category with 74% of the related respondents. These sites were used for general recruiting/marketing and student communications much like the social networking sites.

Standard university policies were much more common for social networking sites (42%) than free online applications (20%) but most universities did not currently have policies or procedures in place for either category. Over 90% of the respondents that have standard university policies in both categories agreed that FERPA played a role in their procedures regarding personal student information and how it is shared online. Conversely, few indicated any serious issues adhering to FERPA guidelines when using these sites.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this survey suggest that institutions are more actively pursuing the use of social networking sites over free online applications for communications with prospective and current students. What remains unclear is whether or not these sites are reaching their intended audiences since many respondents do not track their followers' affiliation status with their university.

University policies regarding the use of these sites are not common; however FERPA plays a major role in standard procedures when present. While there have been few incidents to date among respondents that involved FERPA violations, addressing these concerns at the university level can forestall any problems once an office embarks into the world of social networking and online application software.

APPENDIX A: SUGGESTIONS AND EXAMPLES

Suggestions

Respondents had a number of helpful tips and suggestions for those graduate admission office that may considering the use of social networking sites and free online applications. Whether an office is starting from scratch or looking to review their current strategies, here are some suggestions to help with managing the sites and respecting FERPA concerns in regards to student information.

- Keep it clean and professional.
- Be careful and when in doubt, do not post it.
- Avoid identifying individual students online unless you have been given permission by a student and have them choose what information may be shared.
- Always monitor the information that is being posted to make sure the information provided stays true to the purpose of the site.
- Engage students using questions and/or contests. (ex., Online photo competition for current students voted on through Facebook page)
- Make regular updates to your content.
- Be responsive to your audience.
- Try to maintain a balance between information about admissions, registration, graduation, campus events, etc

Examples

Some of the respondents offered to have their current social networking sites listed so NAGAP members could visit live sites for real-time examples. Below is a list of universities that requested to be profiled.

Boston University, College of Communication Graduate Programs
www.twitter.com/bucomgrad
www.youtube.com/bucomgrad
www.facebook.com/bucomgrad

Brenau Graduate Studies (Sidney O. Smith Graduate School at Brenau University)
www.facebook.com/BrenauGraduateSchool

California School of Professional Psychology
www.facebook.com/cspp.alliant
www.twitter.com/CSPPwire
www.linkedin.com/csppalumni

College of Charleston Graduate School
www.twitter.com/thegraddean
www.facebook.com/cofcgradschool
www.twitter.com/gradschool

Des Moines University
www.facebook.com/DesMoinesUniversity
www.twitter.com/desmoinesuniv
www.dmu.edu/doseofdmu

Fordham University Graduate School of Education
www.fordhamgraded.blogspot.com

High Point University – Norcross Graduate School
www.twitter.com/hpugradschool

McColl School of Business
www.facebook.com/mccollschool
www.twitter.com/mccollschool

Nazarath College
www.facebook.com/NazarethCollege
www.youtube.com/NazarethCollege

Northern Arizona University Graduate College
www.facebook.com/naugradcollege

Radford University College of Graduate and Professional Studies
www.facebook.com/RUGraduateCollege

SUNY New Paltz
www.facebook.com/newpaltz

University of Denver:
http://pinterest.com/dugrad
www.facebook.com/DUgrad
www.linkedin.com/groups/University-Denver-Graduate-Studies-3668953
www.twitter.com/DUGradStudies

University of Mary Washington
www.facebook.com/UniversityofMaryWashington

University of Pennsylvania School of Design
www.facebook.com/PennDesign

University of St. Thomas, Opus College of Business
www.twitter.com/ustbusiness
https://blogs.stthomas.edu/opusmagnum
www.facebook.com/ustbusiness