

Going Social

SOCIAL MEDIA—
FROM FACEBOOK
TO BLOGS—CHANGES
COMMUNICATIONS
AT WILKES

By Donna Talarico '00, MFA '10





WALKING THROUGH THE GREENWAY, JUST TO see who is hanging around. Strolling to Public Square to check out events on the Kirby Center marquee. Calling a classmate—from the dorm room telephone.

That's the social life of Wilkes University past. First instant messaging and cell phones revolutionized college-age communication. Now social networks like Facebook reign. Web 2.0 allowed everyday users to share content and interact online; social networking sites opened the floodgates for the user-generated content and two-way interaction first seen on blogs, wikis, forums and media-sharing sites.

According to Facebook, there are now over 400 million active users on the social networking site. Twitter boasts 50 million tweets per day. But social networking is not just to keep people connected. Organizations can use it to build community and reach a new audience. Wilkes University is among the social media savvy. Print and broadcast media are adapting how content is created and distributed, and the communication studies department at Wilkes is preparing students for this rapidly changing industry.

"We've recognized that social media is a very clear part of the professional communication landscape," says Mark Stine, assistant professor and chair of the communication studies department.

A new course in social media and public relations was added and existing classes and co-curricular activities are adapting. Blogs are used for class assignments, a social media presence exists for *The Beacon* and WCLH, and TV show *Wilkes World* broadens its reach through YouTube.

"Instead of 35,000 households, the audience can now include anyone, including alumni who would like to see what is happening on campus," says Stine.

Student-run public relations agency Zebra Communications embraces social media to benefit clients. A Facebook fan page for the Polish Room has over 100 fans. A fundraiser for the Victim's Resource Center was heavily promoted on Facebook and Twitter.

"We knew (Facebook) would help get the word out quickly about events," says Zebra account manager Breanne Ralston, a junior from Mountain Top, Pa., adding that social media sites such as LinkedIn can also aid in the career search.

Jane Elmes-Crahall, professor of communication studies and Zebra advisor, enjoys seeing students make connections between social media and traditional public relations. A few of her advisees have pioneered social media efforts during internships. "In fact, the students are constantly training and updating me," she says. They

include savvy students like senior Amanda Gunther of Boyertown, Pa., who took the new social media and public relations class.

"(Social media) is something that we, as growing PR professionals, should really make an effort to learn. When it comes time for us to enter the professional world, being proficient in social media will be something that will definitely be attractive to a potential employer," says Gunther.

The Alumni Association uses Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter to complement existing outreach efforts such as the alumni community Web site, The Colonel Connection.

"Social media has created an opportunity for us to maintain and strengthen our relationship with current students and recent alumni, since these forms of communication have become the norm for this demographic. These tools allow the Alumni Association to create a presence in the daily lives of our alumni," says Director of Alumni Relations Mirko Widenhorn.

Bridget Giunta '05, associate director for alumni relations, finds Facebook is a great place for alumni to interact. "We encourage conversations among alumni by asking questions and posting photos, which often spurs a series of comments," she says.

Members of the graduate creative writing program effectively use Twitter to stay in touch between residencies and promote each other's works, most notably creating buzz for faculty member Kaylie Jones' memoir, *Lies My Mother Never Told Me*.

"Her students aided with the release by posting and re-tweeting info and as a result, Kaylie was able to cast a wider net for promoting her book," says assistant program director Jim Warner '01, MFA '09. Warner, a poet, encourages students to use social media to develop a personal brand; his own efforts have landed him new poetry gigs.

The changing nature of technology inspired Kenneth Klemow, professor of biology, to develop podcast interactive trail guides. Students produced an image-enhanced podcast series for three local trails in Kirby Park, with episodes exploring local plants and wildlife around each trail marker. The guides are free to download via Wilkes iTunes (itunes.wilkes.edu).

All around campus, people are using social media to communicate, educate and inspire in new and unique ways. As technology evolves, the Colonel community is sure to keep up, thanks in part to the newest generation of Wilkes students and alumni.

"I'm glad I have grown up around (social media) and know how to use most of them," says Ralston.



More on the Web:

Want to learn more about using social media? Donna Talarico '00, MFA '10 and Steve Moyer '09 presented a workshop to Wilkes alumni in February on the professional uses of social media. You can still catch it by watching a video of the presentation. Log

on to <http://community.wilkes.edu/socialmedia>.

You can also stay up-to-date with Wilkes on social media: facebook.com/WilkesUniversity twitter.com/wilkesalumni and at Wilkes Alumni on LinkedIn: linkedin.com/wilkesalumni