ADVISING THE VIRTUAL STUDENT LEADER

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• As student organizations continue to operate more and more virtually, the characteristics and competencies of our student leaders are undergoing significant changes.

As advisors, we are charged with the mission of meeting students “where they are,” which means catering our leadership development training to a new type of digital-age student leader. This roundtable will discuss current trends in evolving student leaders and ideas on how student affairs professionals can stay one step ahead.
Rationale for this Roundtable

• Is your campus activities job today anything like you would have imagined it 5 or 10 years ago?
• How much more time do you spend behind a computer than you used to?
• How often do you interact face-to-face with the student leaders which you advise?
• How much has technology impacted your day-to-day job?
What we know about today’s students

- Many consider social media an “addiction”
- They do group projects on g-chat
- They run businesses on Facebook
- 99% of college students have Facebook profiles
- 43% have a Smartphone
- 41% use only a cell phone (18 to 29 year olds)
As a result...

• Facebook is “the new student union”
• 41% of college admissions offices have blogs
• 77% of college marketers engage in social networking (2008)
• Online classes are expanding
• With instant documentation, fewer students are printing yearbooks
• Colleges are accepting YouTube videos as part of application process
As a result, continued

- Mapping games are covering campuses with virtual graffiti
- Schools are buying land in Second Life
- Avatars are being used to train teachers
- Students can register for classes through phone apps
- Theta Omega Gamma – an online service fraternity
- Facebook rants are resulting in inconsistent rulings
- Some professors are banning laptops in classrooms
As a result, continued

• Apple’s iTunes University ([http://www.apple.com/education/itunes-u/](http://www.apple.com/education/itunes-u/)) allows students to download lectures onto an MP3 player to listen to as they walk to class or ride public transportation.

• The number of on-line enrollments jumped 21% in 2010 and 17% in 2009. 5.6 million total number of online enrollments.

• The virtual student leader struggles to balance the efficiency promised by technology to facilitate work and the necessity for face-to-face connections to build engagement.
# Examples of Social Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Tool</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook and MySpace</td>
<td>Global social networking sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>Business-oriented social networking site</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>Social networking a micro-blogging service</td>
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<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>Video sharing website</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flickr</td>
<td>Image and video hosting website</td>
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<td>Skype</td>
<td>Voice and video communication service</td>
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<td>foursquare</td>
<td>Location-based social networking game</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doodle</td>
<td>Meeting scheduler</td>
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<td>Google Chat (Gchat)</td>
<td>Online instant messaging service</td>
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<td>Google Documents (GoogleDocs) and SharePoint</td>
<td>Create, store and share documents online</td>
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Big Question #1

• How has technology changed the way we interact with our student leaders?
What the students are saying

• Technology is an obligation
  – “If you don’t check your email now, people think that you’re just lazy and for some reason don’t want to get back to them on time, because everyone knows that you can check your email instantly no matter where you are, especially with smart phones these days.”
  
  – “If someone posts on your [Facebook] wall, you almost feel like you’re obligated to write back, otherwise they’re going to ask you what’s wrong, or something like that.”
What the students are saying

• Their attention is divided
  – “You’re really fighting for people’s attention. Even with guys on my own team – there’s only 15 of us, and everybody wants to come to everything – but they get a million emails, so it’s my job to bold, italic, underline...whatever it takes so that the quickest read gives them exactly what they need to know and then maybe they’ll figure out the rest at practice or whatever.”
  – “You get so many invites for events on Facebook, so many messages. We talked to the students, and they’re like, “Oh yeah, we got the message on Facebook but we really didn’t look at it.”
What the students are saying

• Commitments are not binding
  – “If I say we’re going to have a meeting, it doesn’t really mean anything until I put it in writing and get it to everyone.”
  – “You’ll try to plan an event based on how many people are coming, and it’s like, 500 people are coming, and there are really 100 people coming.”
Big Question #2

• What professional competencies do we need to reevaluate?
## Digital Age Leadership Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>“A lot of people are saying if you get 500 Facebook events, how is yours going to stand out?”</td>
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<td>Consistency</td>
<td>“People come to expect that you’re gonna get a Twitter update, and if it’s not there, they’re going to forget.”</td>
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<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>“You’re gonna get responses that don’t show up, you’re gonna get people that show up that don’t respond – so you need to understand that going in.”</td>
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<td>Focus</td>
<td>“Instead of while you’re on Facebook planning your party for next Friday, maybe you could also plan a study group with friends from some of your other classmates or whatever, so just using these technologies to your advantage and applying them to your school work.”</td>
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<td>Organization</td>
<td>“We’ve converted from binders to everything computerized, so having folders on your desktop for every club, keeping track of all your emails in different folders in your inbox – because you get a bunch of emails from everyone in your club, and you have to respond to them and make sure you keep track of attendance, and you’re just really organized with your stuff.”</td>
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<td>Persistence</td>
<td>“Once someone gives you responses by Facebook, then get them on email, and now you’ve got two different venues that this person responded to you, and there’s probably a good chance that they’re going to call – or that they’re going to come.”</td>
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<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>“Technology adds another layer of responsibility. Gchat, Gmail – it’s another place where we’re held accountable. We have a lot of emails and stuff. We’re seen as responsible when we get to emails, so we have to – it’s another thing we have to manage, to balance our work-lives with our student lives.”</td>
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Big Question #3

• What adjustments do we need to make to our advising styles?
Tips for Working with Virtual Leaders

• Develop special training for virtual leaders
  – Create virtual or live blogging lecture series
  – Teach skills associated with videoconferencing, online chats, instant messaging, polling, creating avatars

• Enhance leadership development programs with virtual skills

• Define whether campus policies extend into the virtual world

• Encourage students to use Twitter and other technologies during student organization brainstorming or discussion.
Tips, continued

• Establish effective advisor/student leader relationships with technology.
• Social media and technology should be critical in establishing identity and brand of student organizations.
• Be sure to establish boundaries for social networks – advisor vs. friend vs. student.
• Set up technology expectation with student leaders – when/how often will you and the student check email, Facebook, texts, etc.
• Don’t try to manage difficult situations on-line – some advising challenges still require face to face time.
Resources

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