

Social Media Internships: A Case Study of a Student-run Social Media Institute

Sarah Maben

*Department of Communication Studies
Tarleton State University*

Jennifer Edwards

*Department of Communication Studies
Tarleton State University*

A one-of-a-kind social media institute is powered by student-interns, giving them valuable social media internship experiences. This case study explains the structure of the social media internships and the social media institute, with recommendations and assessment strategies. Faculty and staff from various disciplines mentor student interns, both undergraduate and graduate, in order to provide social media training to the university and community, research on social media, an annual academic conference and peer-reviewed journal.

In 2012, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated an increase of 12% for public relations specialist jobs over the next 10 years, with social media driving the growth. Students in communication programs may receive some knowledge and skills related to social media in various classes, but one university sought to create an intensive hands-on social media laboratory for its students. Research points to the conclusion that students are competent in social media usage for personal use but that knowledge does not transfer to professional or educational usage by sheer osmosis (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Maranto & Barton, 2010; McEachern, 2011). While gaining experience on a campus newspaper, radio station or TV studio, students learn the ropes of producing a news product. Students

seeking real-world social media management practice need a similar experiential learning lab.

A social media institute, the first of its kind in the state of Texas, is the focus of this case study. Student interns work alongside faculty members from various disciplines to provide training and research focused on communication technology and social media. The intern-driven effort is enhancing education by integrating applied learning experiences for undergraduate and graduate students. The social media institute has joined the college newspaper or campus radio station as a place for students to gain media experience. At the social media institute, faculty, staff and students work together to fulfill a mission of providing K-12 education, higher education, businesses, and nonprofit organizations

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Correspondence: Sarah Maben, Tarleton State University, maben@tarleton.edu

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social media training. Lessons learned from the cross-discipline faculty, staff and students offer a formula for experiential learning and internship successes at other campuses.

The internship experience provides students an opportunity to hone specific skills related to social media management and interpersonal skills. Literature supporting internships is found in many disciplines ranging from journalism to public relations to business to geology. Sublett and Mattingly (1995) said internships help fill in the gaps that “reveal themselves during the experience” and Swanson (2011) said a student-run firm is a good place to begin “plugging holes” in the curriculum. Internships expose students to a potential career (Amant, 2003; Fall, 2006) and help would-be professionals with the socialization process of entering a workplace and organizational culture (Basow & Byrne, 1993; Gaitens, 2000). Other benefits include higher GPA (Astin, 1993; English & Koeppen, 1993; Knouse, Tanner, & Harris, 1999) and better chances of securing full-time positions (Callanan & Benzinger, 2004; Neidorf, 2008). Internships, or practical experience, were the top reason cited for hiring entry-level practitioners in the 2006 Commission on Public Relations Education. Students report seeing the value of the internship experiences (Getz, 2002). Faculty members also report benefits of their students’ internships including: seeing student progress, networking with company executives and alumni, and gaining “fresh knowledge about what is going on in the industry” (Hurst, Thye, & Wise, 2014, p. 62).

More specific to this study, McEachern (2011) created a 3-credit (or fewer) “Facebook internship” in which two interns managed his academic department’s social media. He called the internship experience “very valuable” in part because of the experience with real readers: “As much as these two students learned in the classroom about Facebook and social media, it was only through their experience with real readers that they truly gained an understanding of how

Facebook affects professional writing in workplace settings” (p. 487).

Social networking and mobile technologies have created a new career path. An *Associated Press* finance reporter called social-media strategist one of the five fastest-growing jobs that would interest recent graduates (Carpenter, 2011). Positions with “social media” in the description on Indeed.com tripled from 2009 to 2010 (Grant, 2010). Since 2010, postings for social-media professionals on LinkedIn grew 1,357 percent (Bennett, 2013).

One communication department decided a student-powered social media institute would bolster digital media knowledge and skills, and provide student internships. A case study approach was selected because the descriptive investigative nature allows researchers to explore and explain one unique (Yin, 2003) or extreme (Gerring, 2007) case. The case study will show how a social media institute run by undergraduates offers hands-on learning opportunities to communication studies majors and generalists. The research question guiding the case study is what are characteristics found in a student-run social media enterprise?

UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY PROFILE

The social-media learning lab at the center of this case is situated at a four-year institution with an enrollment of just more than 10,000 students, located in semi-rural Texas. The university, more than 100 years old, is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the Commission on Colleges, and is a member of a university system. The university has more than 65 undergraduate majors, more than 20 graduate programs and one doctoral program. An emphasis for the university is real-world learning experiences for students, which is part of the overall quality enhancement program. Applied learning experiences (internships, leadership, study abroad, undergraduate research, and service learning) are registered with the university. Undergraduate students completing

three programs receive special recognition at commencement.

The communication studies department has been its own department for about six years; previously, communication courses were taught within the fine arts program. The department offers four areas of emphasis: journalism/broadcasting, public relations and event management, speech communication and teacher certification. Eleven faculty members teach in the department, with a handful also serving in administrative capacities for the university. The majority of the faculty teach communication studies courses like basic speech, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and organizational communication. In 2012, the department had 179 majors and was not ACEJMC accredited. Before 2011, students had the opportunity to work at a campus radio station, regional news wire and newspaper or event-planning firm. All are active in social media, but only as an ancillary function of the laboratory courses.

INTERNSHIP PROFILE

In 2011, two communication professors were trying to develop a hands-on learning exercise for students not involved in the campus radio station, newspaper or public relations-event planning firm. The communication generalists did not have a learning lab or on-campus internship program to call their own. They helped with an annual environmental communication week, but they wanted something more. The two communication studies professors wanted a cutting-edge topic for their undergraduates but also an area that tied to their research interests as well. A brainstorming session led to the institute. They wanted a mechanism where students could practice professional speaking, interpersonal communication, group decision-making, research, training, and event planning for a real endeavor. A loose concept was devised—a social media-focused think tank that would host training seminars for campus and the surrounding areas.

Then colleagues from other disciplines on campus were recruited to make the endeavor multi-disciplinary. These individuals were a reference librarian, curriculum and instruction professor/learning technologies director, and a third communication professor.

With the faculty and staff recruited, the institute issued an online application for interns, who would help run the institute one semester at a time. Students could participate as part of an internship class or simply for the experience. The semester-long experience was registered with a real-world learning initiative on campus so participating students received credit toward an applied learning notation on their diplomas and co-curricular transcripts. The social media institute kicked off with a planning retreat where the participating faculty, staff and students devised the group's mission and objectives. As a team, they devised the institute's mission—to provide research and training focused on communication technology and social media for K-12 education, higher education, businesses, and nonprofit organizations. Their objectives were:

- Providing research experience for undergraduate students at the university;
- Serving as a resource for university faculty and staff who are interested in conducting research on communication technology and social media;
- Facilitating training sessions for faculty, businesses, and nonprofit organizations;
- Disseminating communication technology and social media research to local, regional, and national media;
- Publishing and presenting communication technology and social media research on the local, regional, and national levels.

A planning retreat kicked off the first semester with the five founding board members and 12 inaugural interns, all communication majors. The group quickly established its own social media and web presence, and its first blog post was September 2011. A slate of training

seminars was devised while interns prepared to lead them and launch an inaugural conference.

Operating Structure

Interns run the institute with oversight from a board consisting of faculty and staff members. The board's structure is largely horizontal (see Appendix B), with the executive director over the board members (faculty and staff). The board selects one student as the head intern each semester. The head intern acts as a liaison between committees, students and board members. The organization is divided into committees led by interns with board member mentors. Interns are selected based on a competitive application and interview process for the semester-long appointment. Interns can choose to enroll in a problems course (three hours of credit) that one of the board members teaches, participate for Applied Learning Experience credit from the university, or participate just for the experience. Interns are placed by the board on a committee based on skills and strengths. The board members also try to honor a student's preferred committee placement when possible.

In the first semester, three committees were needed: conference planning, social media, and training and development. The conference planning committee handled the event coordination of hosting a 200-attendee conference; the social media committee managed the institute's own social media presence; and training and development conceived and delivered seminars about social media throughout the semester. In the second semester the conference planning committee added membership efforts to its domain. A committee devoted to launching an academic journal also emerged. The group met weekly and made time for committee meetings within the one-hour meeting. Students set goals for the week and committee chairs emailed accountability reports weekly to the head student intern, who reported to the executive director.

The institute exists on minimal funding—one renewable \$1,500 grant each semester, as part

of the university's applied learning experiences effort. Recently, the institute was praised for its economical ingenuity by a top-level administrator for creating and operating a research institute without fiscal funding from the university. Board members and students are not paid. The professor teaching the problems course used for academic credit typically does so as an overload with no additional pay. No fees are charged for the seminars offered on campus, and sponsors help underwrite the costs to host the annual conference. To sustain the project, institute memberships were developed and marketed to area businesses and nonprofit organizations. Sponsors for the conference were given one-year memberships to the institute, which provided them with webinar access, complimentary conference registrations, customized consulting, a newsletter and early access to an academic journal. The memberships are available in varying levels of investments and benefits.

The institute maintains office space vacated by a faculty member and uses common university space for meetings and seminars. An operations/policy manual was started and is updated every semester to accommodate lessons learned. The group used Google Documents/Google Drive to keep an archive of its documents and a historical record. Faculty and staff members volunteer their time to help the institute, with tenure-track faculty using the experience to satisfy service expectations. Faculty and staff try to connect their institute efforts to research projects and collaborate on social media-related research to maximize their efficiency.

Graduate students and other majors on campus have joined the institute. The original team of student interns included only communication majors, probably because much of the advertisement for the opportunity was through the communication department classes and social media. Now, agricultural communications, education and other majors are applying.

With the addition of four new board members after the first year, partnership development,

external relations and other areas received more attention. Nonprofit organizations and campus departments began requesting the institute's interns to handle their social media. Institute interns with experience interview with the requesting agency and are placed in an externship. They meet with the institute once a month and spend the rest of their internship hours with the nonprofit agency. This part of the institute is still a pilot project, with a long-term goal of securing payment or scholarships for the student externs.

Conference, Journal and Student Responsibilities

Interns are responsible for planning and executing an annual social media conference with tracks for academic research and practical applications. They handle all of the event management, from issuing the call for proposals to procuring sessions on the day of the conference. Two interns helped launch a peer-reviewed academic journal devoted to social media research. One intern conducted research on creating journal bylaws, open access listings and filing for ISBN numbers, while another found an online journal system and designed the journal's logo and cover art. A graduate student is slated to help with initial review of manuscripts in future semesters. Other student responsibilities include creating and curating content for the institute's various social media platforms. They use a content calendar and scheduling application (i.e. Buffer) to feed Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and the institute's blog. Students also plan and teach campus social media seminars. Recently, the institute landed a corporate client, and students provide content and social media strategies.

Student Outcome Goals

The outcome goals were developed prior to the recruitment of interns as part of the university's applied learning experience project. Seven student learning outcomes were developed with the overarching theme of real-world experience and

hands-on demonstration of skills and concept understanding.

1. Define social media and how the term relates to communication. Interns managed the social media efforts of the institute through a blog, Pinterest, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and other media as necessary. Currently, the institute maintains nine social media outlets. Interns further researched particular outlets in preparation for campus-wide presentations and seminars. Through end-of-the-semester reflection papers (see Appendix D), students report leaving the internship with a broader concept of social media; they understand that it is more than just Facebook.
2. Recognize the importance of content generation on social networking websites/applications. Each intern, regardless of committee assignment, was responsible for writing a blog post and submitted a video blog, both artifacts showing content creation, for the institute's blog. Students on the social media committee are the main content creators, but everyone, including board members, is expected to contribute quality content.
3. Recognize appropriate communication behavior on social networking websites/applications. Interns developed an operations and policy manual (see Appendix C) for the institute's code of conduct when in social media. One area of special concern was plagiarism and copyright. Interns learn about Creative Commons licensing and legal ways to share communication and graphics. In the past three semesters, three instances of poor judgment occurred. One student did not correctly attribute her ideas, and two others posted tasteless comments on their personal social media accounts. In the syllabus and first meeting of the semester, board members impress on the interns that their personal social media behavior reflects on the larger institute. As interns for the institute, they are considered role models for other students on

campus, and they must keep a professional personal social media presence.

4. Recognize the difference between 15 social media categories (social networking, publishing, photosharing, audio, video, micro-blogging, livecasting, virtual worlds, gaming, productivity applications, aggregators, RSS, searches, mobile, and interpersonal). Interns become conversant in many types of social media and when particular categories might be selected for certain types of communication. The social media technology landscape is always changing, and interns learn ways to watch for emerging technology. Most of the interns were well-versed in Facebook for personal use, some were active on Twitter and Pinterest and only two interns have been regular bloggers. Video-based social media was one of the weaker knowledge areas. In weekly meetings, interns and board members exchanged news about the latest social media and apps. Extra enrichment was shared through the private “behind-the-scenes” Facebook group the institute’s board and interns share.
5. Demonstrate intermediate/advanced level mastery of at least one social media technology. Interns become conversant in all social media but take a lead in one particular technology. They become experts in that technology and share during a university-wide seminar or at the annual social media conference. One example is an educational debate the interns showcased between Facebook and GooglePlus. The interns became masters of the outlet in order to help illustrate the pros and cons for the audience.
6. Cite examples of effective and ineffective communication messages on social networking websites/applications. Through discussions and planning for the conference, effective and ineffective messages are showcased by board members and interns. This is also part of the content that interns create to post on the institute’s behalf. The interns received

guest blog submissions from a public relations class, and decided which submissions to accept for publication on their blog.

7. Analyze positive and negative communication techniques in the virtual environment. Interns review the institute’s social media analytics to develop a sense of what worked and what did not. It is expected that they will help the institute’s members conduct similar analyses of the client’s social media usage. The interns receive feedback on their own posts to show ways to strengthen the positive communication techniques in a virtual environment.

Assessment

Interns must complete reflection papers at the end of each term, explaining 1) connections between the internship and the skills they learned in upper-level courses in their discipline; 2) connections with their core curriculum courses; 3) connections with their other student involvement; 4) the interconnectedness between previous three prompts; 5) how the experience impacted their viewpoints on cultural and global awareness; and 6) implications on their field.

Interns who are registered for course credit receive a course grade based on attendance, committee tasks, a final reflection paper, assignments, and idea generation/special projects. Board members meet at the end of the semester to assess each intern’s progress and assign a letter grade. The board member most directly mentoring the student typically has the most weight in the overall assessment of the student’s performance. This is usually the board member mentoring the committee on which the intern serves. In addition to the internal assessment within the institute, the students write reflections of their internship experience as part of the university’s quality enhancement plan program assessment. The students’ reflections (see Appendix D) are assessed by the instructor of the applied learning experience and the director of the quality enhancement

plan assesses the impact of program (from the students' reflections).

Another measure of effectiveness is how the graduating interns fare in the job market post-graduation. All institute interns who have graduated have successfully secured employment or graduate school admission. Most have landed in a full-time position within one month of graduation and many lined up their employment prior to commencement, consistent with research comparing those with and without internship experience (Callanan & Benzing, 2004; Fang & Lee, 2005; Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000). All of the seniors who graduated from their internships (and the university) work in the communications industry and most of them work with social-media technologies.

Assessment by its clients is next for the institute. In 2013, the research institute gained its first non-university clients: a regional animal conservation society and a Keep Texas Beautiful affiliate organization. The board members and the institute interns plan to distribute a client satisfaction survey to each client every six months. In addition, the board members of the institute visit each client once a semester.

Student Perceptions

For this study, student perceptions were extracted from the reflection papers students are required to write for the internship. In four semesters, 48 students have served as interns. Institutional Review Board approval to study the reflection papers was secured. All reflection papers were reviewed for themes used a grounded theory approach (Schram, 2006). In their papers, students are asked to reflect on how the internship connects their core curriculum courses and upper-level courses, other student involvement, their industry/discipline and global understanding (see Appendix D). Students' papers show themes such as: broadening of their definition of communication, learning and connecting with professors and staff outside of the classroom, building a larger network on campus, practicing

teamwork, being proud of the overall accomplishments of the group, seeing value of social media beyond personal use, and growing personally with professionalism and leadership. A few comments from the reflections are shared to highlight such themes.

Broadening of definition of communication.

The interns referred to material learned in persuasion, speech, and broadcasting that helped with their presentations of social media concepts or training sessions about social media on campus. Others talked about the realization of how communication is connected to every class and how large the communication field is. Some explained a broader understanding of social media, "In today's society you must know how to implement social media and networking into your personal life."

Connecting with professors and staff.

Interns mentioned having a closer relationship with professors and staff. "My internship has allowed me to work closely with professors who I greatly admire and strive to be more like." The traditional roles of the classroom blur in the internship—the students lead and the professors guide. Everyone is on equal footing, especially at the conference, where rank does not matter; it is all hands on deck.

Building a larger network.

One intern talked about being a transfer student who wasn't very involved on campus except for playing on an intramural softball team: "I was on the training and development team, which got me more involved with the campus than I have ever been before. This organization has helped with my team-building skills and I have gained additional knowledge in social-media networks."

Practicing teamwork.

Most interns mentioned growth in their ability to work as a team. One said, "We were also able to blend and create ideas as a team to get more

people involved with events and the best ways to reach all of our audience members. I highly value this experience because it showed me that I never want to work with like-minded individuals. I want to be in a group or job that enlightens me and that can build on top of new ideas.”

Growing personally.

Students have used the internship to reflect on cultural communication and implications. For example, one student wrote, “This experience has opened my eyes to the differences in generational gaps, cultural gaps, and even gender issues. Social media is not a luxury that everyone is afforded. The generation gaps are now easily seen in the way that we communicate.” Weekly meetings begin with a team-building question. One student said, “These questions helped us to just start conversing with one another and helped show we really are similar.” Another wrote, “We are all a part of different cultures, some may overlap in areas, but we probably would not be friends without this internship.”

Faculty, Staff and University Perceptions

Faculty and staff have not formally recorded their reflections, like the student interns, but discuss the institute and intern development at board retreats. Informal reflections emerge in a social media format on a board-only, secret group on Facebook. In this group, the board members converse about pertinent issues involving students and external partners. In addition, these conversations usually occur after a large event (like the annual conference) and board members reflect on the event and the aspects of the event that they would change for next time the event is held. Much brainstorming and idea generation takes place in this virtual discussion board.

In many cases the faculty and staff members of the board learn as much as the interns each semester. Board members have been able to improve their own social media efforts for departments and programs based on their exposure to the interns and their ideas. Junior faculty

members have a built-in support team from the other board members and instant partners for research projects. One board member was new to campus and serving on the board helped her meet faculty and staff outside of her department more quickly than would have happened organically. In addition to the individual promotion efforts, the group members worked toward and received recognition for the group as an official entity of the university structure. The executive director filed paperwork with the university system.

Staff members said they enjoyed working with the students in a learning situation that was different from their typical university role. Their interactions with students had been limited by their staff roles. In the internship, staff members can directly mentor and see the student react. The opportunity for staff members to teach was identified as a positive from one board member.

The board members report student growth, especially for those who have interned for two semesters. Board members see increased leadership abilities and self-confidence from interns. The expectation and responsibility placed on the interns to run the institute is high. Interns rise to the challenge.

The institute is considering an assessment of the university’s perception of the social media internships and the institute. No formal research has been conducted on how the university perceives the institute, but board members hear from departments that would like social media interns and seek assistance from the institute. There is concern that the research part of the institute is not as well known as the training opportunities and annual conference.

Growing and the Next Internship Chapter

Only in its second year, the institute has grown from one department’s internship program to a university-wide entity. The pace of growth has led to the need to make adjustments along the way.

Organizational structure.

Calling the internship program an “institute” required additional paperwork, which the executive director handled. The group was unaware of system requirements to be called such and rectified the situation. Another organizational factor was how the ebb and flow of the number of applicants and selected interns affects the structure. What worked the first semester had to expand the next semester to keep up with additional interns and new projects the institute adopted (like an academic journal). The committee structure was taxed in the third semester when more interns applied and were accepted. Committees really needed subcommittees. In 2013, a large graduating class and the new externships left the pool of participating interns smaller than previous years. If more students are to be shared with industry partners as externs, a larger intern class is needed to handle the institute’s business. Adding more interns and tackling additional projects means more board members are necessary, too, to help guide the interns. Four additional board members were added in 2012, and two served additional terms in 2013.

Policies.

Each semester, the interns and board members add to the institute’s policy and operations manual. The document has been slow to come together and the board members expect to formalize it more this summer. The pace of growth has been so fast that the manual will need to be periodically reviewed as the institute solidifies its identity. As part of the policy manual, interns wrote a social media policy. One discussion now is how to balance interns’ First Amendment rights to post on their individual social media outlets with professionalism while attached to the institute. When an intern posts an unsavory comment (according to the board members) in his or her own social media presence, how should and can the institute react? To date, board members have used the instances as teachable moments with suggestions rather than mandates.

Internal communication.

For a group with a large contingent of communication professionals, the institute’s internal communication is ripe for future study. In previous semesters, weekly meetings with accountability emails worked. As the group grew, more communication moved to a shared Facebook group. For some board members and interns, the variety of communication methods was overwhelming. They were not certain where to look and were receiving requests for response everywhere they turned. Interns and board members expressed concerns about the internal communication at the end-of-the-semester meeting and suggested adopting a primary communication tool.

Technology is the silent partner for the institute. The institute relies on Google Documents for collaborative efforts. Some board members and interns were unfamiliar with the product. Additional training and more explanation will be implemented in future semesters. Also, the number of documents collected over the past year was overwhelming for some, and better organization will help alleviate those concerns.

Intern recruitment and alumni development.

Intern recruitment has been largely word of mouth or through social media outlets connected to the board members and current interns. Campus-wide emails have been sent as well as a posting on the career services database. To date, no male students have accepted internships. Two have applied, but they have accepted other offers. A senior administrator asked the board members why the institute was an all-female group. This gender makeup was not intentional, and the group is seeking ways to encourage participation in the internships from a more diverse group of students (gender, major, ethnicity, etc.). The all-female board added new board members to diversify as well. Former interns remain connected to the institute through its social media hubs and the current team of interns is planning an alumni event during homecoming week to continue the

institute's relationship with interns after graduation. They are also working on other semi-annual events where institute alumni could meet the current interns and catch up with their board member mentors.

Branding.

Still in its infancy, the internship program must continue to craft and market its brand. Being the first of its kind, the interns and board members must educate their audiences about the internship program and its value. For those who believe social media is simply the reporting of what one had for dinner in Facebook, a social media internship program might seem trivial.

Board member fatigue.

The commitment from faculty and staff can be cumbersome because it is on top of all other responsibilities. Course release or monetary incentives have not been incorporated. The institute is student-powered, but some areas have required more board member oversight in the start-up years. Interns helped to launch the institute's social media journal, but the day-to-day manuscript management is in the hands of two board members. Staff members are allotted some time to help the interns, but other time must be outside of the staff member's 40 hours. The board members are passionate about the institute and proud of all that has been accomplished. In semesters with fewer interns and the summer months, the board members are working harder. They long for the intern-powered nature of the institute to return. As the institute becomes more established, the demands on board members should lessen. The relationships between the mentoring board members and the interns are valued by the university, which is seeking deeper engagement for its students. Some students might not have an opportunity to work with a faculty member on a research project or event, like the institute's interns. The interns also interact with board members outside of their

disciplines, which adds a dynamic layer to the institute.

Externships.

Sending the interns to other outfits to help with social media was an area of growth this year. Four of the students who applied to be institute interns were asked to interview with community partners that sought the institute's help to find social media interns. All four were successfully placed. The expansion gives the institute a larger area of impact and gives the interns additional real-world experience. Setting expectations for the community partner hosting the extern was a major concern. While interning at the institute, the board members can make sure the intern is working toward the student outcome goals. Outsourcing the students changes how the board members have oversight of the student's learning and overall experience. Another concern was if the institute wanted to become a placement agency for social media interns.

Grants, funding and research.

Board members are seeking grant funds to help support the internship program. A long-term goal is to provide stipends or scholarships to the students and support student/faculty research and travel. Engaging students more formally in the research part of the institute is a goal for the next semesters. This semester, the interns helped with a content analysis of state agencies and their social media presence. As it grows, the institute must decide how it wants to balance research and the practical hands-on learning for interns.

Keeping up and moving forward.

Interns and board members must be the social media leaders on campus and keep a step ahead. Previous training offerings have been at the beginner and intermediate level. More advanced social media offerings like analytics and app programming are the next step. The interns and board members have ideas for the institute's future every semester. Deciding on the future direction

of the institute and keeping to its core mission have been issues. The interns and board members show excitement for a particular endeavor, which is a positive. This sometimes derails the group from the institute's core mission. The board members plan to solidify the operations manual, which should add continuity to the young organization.

CONCLUSION

Launching the social media internship as a multidisciplinary effort required more coordination than an intra-departmental effort, but the diversified group provided more ideas, connections and opportunities. Students have tackled large tasks like launching a conference drawing attendees from multiple states, creating an entire institute and crafting an academic journal devoted to social networking and mobile technologies. The university has benefited with additional seminars and training related to social media and increased exposure as a leader in social media. External groups have improved their social media prowess through intern-powered platforms. In addition to the advantages for students and external groups, faculty and staff benefit from this diverse experience, too. Professors can work on numerous research projects while gaining support from like-minded researchers. Through the institute, researchers can apply for larger research grants as a team.

This article presented one case study of a unique internship program. Future research could look at how a social media internship compares to more traditional internships, or analyze the assessment measures focused on the level of involvement, engagement, and influence the interns have on the internal and external functions of the institute. Researchers could measure how "student-run" the institute is (Maben, 2013) or look at measures of student success between the interns and non-interns. Researchers could measure the "experientiality" of the intern experience (Gibbons & Hopkins, 1980) or the informal learning that occurs.

Like the campus newspaper or public relations firms, a social media institute can give students real-world experience while providing a service for the university and external groups. A student social media internship experience can help students from all disciplines with public speaking, strategic writing, planning, collaboration, and content creation. Some programs may house social media experience within another lab, like an on-campus public relations firm or advertising agency. By having a stand-alone institute for social media, students of any major could better their presentation and communication abilities, connect with a more diverse group of students and hone their social media skills.

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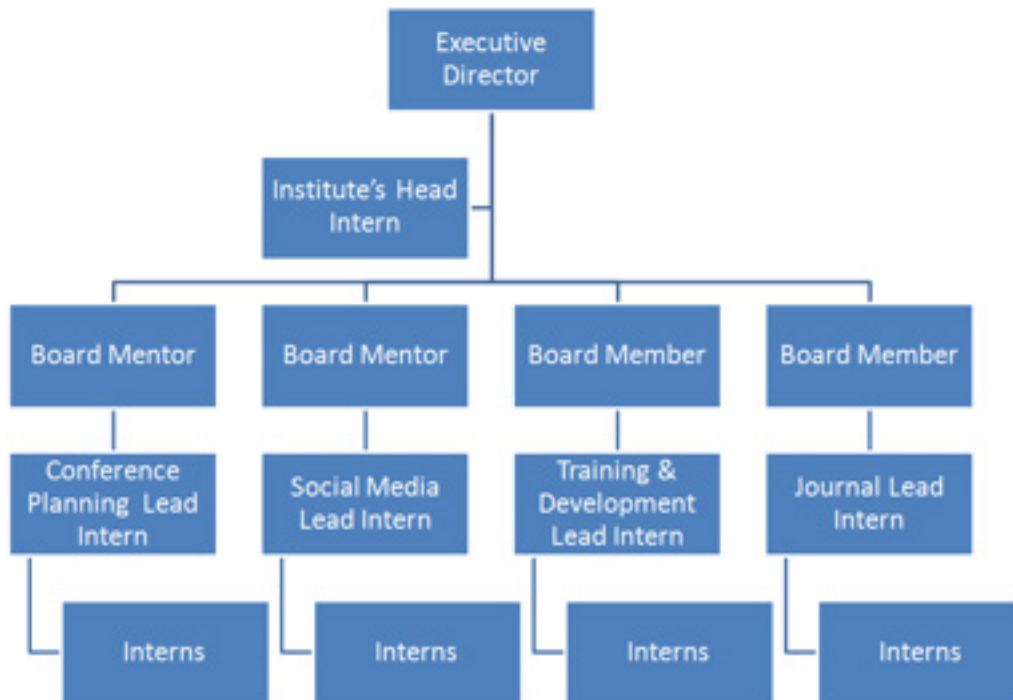
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APPENDIX A

Intern application available at <http://www.tinyurl.com/tsmriinternship>

APPENDIX B ORIGINAL ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



APPENDIX C

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Interns' personal social media outlets

During your tenure with TSMRI, we encourage you to practice professional communication in your personal accounts because you are identified as being connected to TSMRI. Social media handles used during your connection with TSMRI should also be professional. As examples for social media practice on campus, it is important to uphold professional communication standards, even in personal social media accounts.

TSMRI social media outlets

TSMRI utilizes a variety of social media networks, including Facebook, Twitter, Blogger, Pinterest, and Storify. Please keep in mind that different social networks have different audiences and types of content. For more information on what types of content to post to various networks, please consult the Social Media Committee Toolbox in Google Documents.

Access (passwords)

Protect TSMRI passwords by not sharing or posting them where someone could find them. Board members must change passwords every semester and will decide which passwords will be shared with TSMRI interns.

Accessibility for people with disabilities

Video: When posting on YouTube, include transcripts or captions to make content more accessible for the hearing-impaired or those without access to speakers (public computers, for example).

Images: Please caption all images and fill out the alt link tag where applicable. "Alt link" tags read text aloud to people with visual impairments, so that they know what the image represents.

Administrators

Members of the social media committee will maintain content creator and administrator status for TSMRI's outlets for the semester they are in the committee.

Blog posts

All work must be original, accurate and material/artwork must be properly attributed (for more information on this, please see Copyright). Blog posts will be given an author byline unless an individual author prefers otherwise.

Copyright

A. Images

When representing TSMRI, do not post images online without asking permission from the creator. Exceptions to this rule:

- 1) Images you have created or taken yourself.
- 2) Images that are freely available on a site such as Wikimedia Commons or morguefile.com that explicitly state that permission is not required. You should still state (and link back to) your source in this case.
- 3) Images that are available on a limited basis through a website such as Creative Commons. In

this case you must check and follow the licensing requirements, which will vary, and give attribution (list and hyperlink your source).

B. Ideas/text

- 1) Always put quotation marks around direct quotes from other sources, and credit your source by including the name of the speaker and hyperlinking back to the original online source. If the quote is more than a few lines long, you will need to use block quotes (see APA manual for more information).
- 2) Always give credit when including ideas that are not your own, even if they are reworded. Do this by identifying the organization or person who originated the thought or idea, and hyperlinking back to the source if it is online.

Professionalism

All official TSMRI posts must be of the highest professionalism and taste. If there is ever a question, please ask a board member before posting. Comments on the site from outsiders must also fit adhere to these standards. Offensive, inappropriate, libelous or illegal content will not be tolerated. This includes profane or unprofessional language, or discriminatory or sexual remarks. Solicitations should be deleted and chronic abusers should be blocked. Comments violating privacy should be avoided. This includes video and written presentations. Members of the Social Media Committee will be asked to post using the TSMRI Buffer account the first time they have access to our social networks. See Buffer tab in Social Media Committee toolbox for more details.

Response time and updates

Please respond to questions or posts within a 48-hour period. For posts of a controversial nature, please seek advice from a board member. Some responses will be best handled in direct correspondence and not on the public wall. Regular updates should be delivered on each platform consistent with the platform.

Proofreading

Proof your posts beforehand for accuracy, clarity and grammar. An easy way to check spelling is to type your post into the Google search box to see if your post is corrected.

Social media Icons

Use the proper social media icons by checking each site's brand page.

Source variety

Resorting to one source for ideas will not benefit our readers and gives one perspective. Be wary of sources with an agenda or political slant.

Corrections

As soon as erroneous material is identified, a correction will be made.

Retweets and shares

You are welcome to retweet and share TSMRI social media posts in your personal outlets, with proper attribution.

On-message

TSMRI posts need to promote or coincide with our mission: to provide research and training focused on communication technology and social media for K-12 education, higher education, businesses, and nonprofit organizations.

APPENDIX D APPLIED LEARNING EXPERIENCE (ALE)

Writing prompt for end-of-the-semester reflection paper
(Required of students enrolled in a problems course and those
seeking ALE recognition from university.)

Please address the elements below:

Section 1 - OTHER UPPER-LEVEL COURSES IN YOUR DISCIPLINE

*What skills did you learn in OTHER UPPER-LEVEL COURSES IN YOUR DISCIPLINE that helped you with this **experience**? (please explain in 1-2 paragraphs)*

This prompt helps students analyze the essential knowledge and skills acquired in various college courses **within** his/her discipline which were utilized in this experience.

Section 2 - CORE COURSES

*What skills did you learn in your 1000 or 2000 level courses that helped you with this **experience**? (please explain in 1-2 paragraphs)*

This prompt helps students analyze the essential knowledge and skills acquired in courses **outside** his/her discipline in core curriculum which were utilized in this experience.

Section 3 - STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

*What skills did you learn in your student organization, internship, etc. that helped you with this **experience**? (please explain in 1-2 paragraphs)*

This prompt helps students analyze the essential knowledge and skills acquired in experiences **outside** the classroom which were utilized in this experience.

Section 4 -INTERCONNECTEDNESS

How are these three areas (major courses, core, student organizations) connected? (please explain in 1-2 paragraphs)

This prompt helps students analyze the **interconnected-ness** of knowledge and skills developed within your discipline, in your general education courses, and in extracurricular experiences.

Section 5 - GLOBAL AWARENESS

How did this experience impact your viewpoint of cultures? (please explain in 1-2 paragraphs)

This prompt helps assess the impact of the applied learning experience on the development of his/her **global awareness** in the context of academic, political, social, cultural, and/or economic environments.

Section 6 - IMPLICATIONS

How did this experience impact your viewpoint of the communication field? (please explain in 1-2 paragraphs)

This prompt helps assess the experience and ascertain the **larger implications** as they apply to the discipline and beyond. Potentially an action plan for their next steps. Do you plan to add to this resume or to your e-portfolio?