

## **#NotAllBaptismByFire: The state of social media training at student-run communication organizations**

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### Abstract

Advisers (n=112) and student leaders (n=31) from North American collegiate student-run communication organizations reported on their social media training. Through a snowball sample, advisers and student leaders from campus newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations, advertising/public relations firms filled out an online questionnaire. As a state of social media training study, these findings provide a picture of student-run communication organizations today and their training experiences with social media. A little more than half included social media in their training, which focused on professionalism and content creation. Likewise, content creation and professionalism were the topics advisers reported students needed most. Advisers agreed or strongly agreed that students needed social media training and that social media usage is an integral part of their organizations. Researchers provide recommendations for future study and directions for training improvement.

*Keywords:* student-run media, student-run firms, social media training, campus media, social networking

## Introduction

Working for a campus news organization, radio station or public relations firm gives students an opportunity to learn a craft by practicing their craft, sometimes in a baptism by fire and experiential way. This is especially true when you add social media management to job descriptions. Professionals and paraprofessionals alike are having to navigate in real time, how to incorporate social media strategically as new platforms emerge and older ones evolve. Just like their professional counterparts, student-run radio stations, news organizations and public relations/advertising agencies are using social media to share news, promote their products and build brands. But how do these paraprofessionals learn strategic ways to use the myriad of tools and apps at their disposal?

Currently, the Poynter Institute, the top journalism training institute, offers several certificate programs to help train journalists, both professional and paraprofessional, including a Social Media Certificate. The social media monitoring software program Hootsuite also provides a certificate program to higher education for free through its Hootsuite University, which also addresses overall social media usage. Professional organizations such as the Society of Professional Journalists, the Public Relations Society of America, and the International Association of Business Communicators have also implemented a variety of training programs to reach their members. The Poynter Institute even named having social skills as one of its top 37 skills in its 2015 study of journalism faculty and professionals “Core Skills for the Future of Journalism” (Finberg & Klinger, 2014). While social media training occurs within the newsroom or in the office at professional organizations, we do not know how and if social media training has occurred in student-run communication organizations.

To our knowledge, this is the first study that will gauge training programs at the student-run communication organization level. To get a broader view of social media training at the paraprofessional college and university level, a broader use of the term “student-run communication organization” was used for this study. The term is used as a collective and inclusive term for campus newspapers, online news outlets, radio stations, TV news programs, public relations firms, advertising agencies and integrated marketing communication (IMC) firms that are run by students. Student-run media typically refers to learning labs related to the publication of news and would likely exclude advertising, public relations and IMC firms.

As the professional communication industry continues to reconfigure itself based on how audiences prefer to send and receive messages with a heavy emphasis on the use of social media for professional communication, it becomes imperative that the experience students receive in paraprofessional positions in student-run communication organizations reflect industry standards. This study is to help see if that is occurring in a specific realm of experience: social

media. The purpose of this study is to determine the state of social media training at student-run organizations, if there is training, who does it, how often it occurs, and how effective is it.

### **Literature Review**

The current literature is split in the area of social media training and student-run communication organizations with literature reviewing the operations of these organizations (Maben & Whitson, 2013, 2014; Bush, 2009; Bush & Miller, 2011; Haley, Ritsch, & Smith, 2016) or their student leaders (Filak, 2012; Filak, 2014; Filak & Pritchard, 2007; Filak & Reinardy, 2011). Until recently, studies about student-run communication organizations have largely been case studies (Gibson & Rowden, 1994-1995; Imagewest, 2005; Mogavero, 1982; Struthers, 2016; Swanson, 2008, 2011). To our knowledge, no research to date has touched on social media training programs for the paraprofessionals working at student-run firms. This study will build on the literature of experiential learning in communication programs, student-run communication organizations, and social media training programs.

### **Experiential Learning**

At their core, student-run outlets are labs for experiential learning. Experiential learning is “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). One way the traditions of experiential learning theory (ELT) are applied is through experiential education, such as internships, simulations, on-the-job training and learning (Kolb, 2014). Gibbons and Hopkins (1980) even created a scale of experientiality, where simulated experiences would be on the lower end, and planning, executing and leading a real experience would be on the more experiential end. In this study, the authors surmise that the more student-run the organization is, the more experiential and transformative the learning could be.

Hands-on learning has been a cornerstone of communication programs. As the first journalism school launched, so did its student-run newspaper, the *University Missourian* in 1908 (English, 1988). Calls for curricular reform in the communication field have historically included additional experiential and hands-on learning. For example, Blanchard and Christ’s *New Professionalism* of 1993 called for on-campus apprenticeships (Dickson, 2000).

Studies of what employers are looking for have also lauded experience both through internships and apprenticeships (see PRSA’s Commission on the Port of Entry study from 1999 and 2006 and the Poynter Institute’s Core Skills for the Future of Journalism study from 2014). In 2012, financial supporters and grantors for journalism programs wrote an open letter calling for a teaching hospital model for journalism instruction (Open Letter, 2012). While the teaching hospital model for journalism instruction has been debated among academics (Mensing & Ryfe, 2013), we see how student-run communication organizations, like internships, can fill curriculum gaps in response to this model in addition to others that focus on experiential learning. Sublett and Mattingly (2005) said internships can reveal skills that are needed, and maybe not yet

learned. Industry types from news and advertising/public relations have been consulted for academic studies on what skills they want graduates to bring to the workplace; writing skills critical thinking and problem-solving skills, practical experience, an ability to communicate publicly and interpersonal skills topped the 2006 list (DiStaso, Stacks, & Botan, 2009). One such skill set needed in today's communication landscape is an understanding and working knowledge of social media (Finberg & Klinger, 2014).

### **Social Media Experiences and Skills**

Strategic use of social media outlets is a skill. "Educators would do well to get ahead of the industry need by preparing students who are ready to step into leadership roles in the area of social media and mobile delivery" (Wenger & Owens, 2012, p. 23).

Neill and Schauster (2015), in interviewing public relations and advertising executives, found that some skills needed in today's workforce are related to social media. In addition to the traditionally requested skills, (writing, business acumen, presentations, and interpersonal attributes), their participants called for stronger math skills, which are necessary for social media analytics. New services that professional firms now offer, and ones that new hires would need to know, include social listening, handling negative comments, content amplification and social media analytics--Gillmor (2016) envisioned journalism education that would teach students about "advertising, marketing, social networking, and search engine optimization, among many other elements" (p. 2). Todd (2009) found that public relations professionals wanted universities to teach undergraduates new media communication techniques. Bor (2014) focused on social media reporting instruction, which she said "should emphasize the importance of ethics in an online environment, opportunities for career development, differences between personal and professional social media use, and instruction of technical skills" (p. 248). What one technical skill should a public relations graduate have? Seventy-seven percent of respondents listed social media, 42.5% microblogging, 40.6% blogging/blogger relations, and 36.8% listed search engine optimization (Peskin, 2013).

After completing outsourced social media training (via Hootsuite) as part of a public relations course, students reported being more confident in their skills (Kinsky, Freberg, Kim, Kushin, & Ward, 2016). "Students not only felt they knew what the social media tools were, but also how to apply them strategically, which empowered them with confidence in knowing they were ahead of the game," the authors wrote. (p. 14).

### **Student-run Organizations**

From newspapers to advertising agencies to social media firms, communication programs are providing students with hands-on, experiential education. Newspapers and yearbooks, radio stations, TV stations, public relations firms, advertising agencies (Avery & Marra, 1992), integrated marketing firms, and social media firms (Maben & Edwards, 2015) are giving

paraprofessionals a taste of their future careers and a place to hone skills needed. In today's communication world, social media usage is one of the skills needed by paraprofessionals and professionals for their own news and marketing work, as well as jobs after graduation. Bush and Miller (2011) found that the service most frequently provided for clients of the student-run public relations firms responding was social media (89.6%). Jacobson (2015) reflects on her days at the campus newspaper and how in the 2011-12 academic year, when the student newspaper created a social media policy and plan, the paper doubled its social media presence. Training is essential if a radio station, news outlet, TV station or Ad/PR firm is truly student-run. This begs the question: How student-run are student-run organizations? Raymond (2013) found that students at student-run radio stations are primarily responsible for the day-to-day operations, but adviser-types are responsible for tasks such as discipline, compliance, and equipment/technical assistance. A 2010 study showed that the majority of student-run public relations firms were student-run (Maben, 2010). This would imply that students are managing the social media accounts for their organizations and clients, and need training on the strategic uses of social media.

### **Social Media Training and Social Media for Strategic Uses**

Even students who are digital natives need help transitioning personal social media usage to using the platforms for educational, strategic and business purposes (DiPalma & Gouge, 2013; Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Maranto & Barton, 2010; McEachern, 2011). Researchers have found this to be true for student journalists and public relations practitioners. Haley et al. (2016) said that although their research on student participants of student-run public relations firms suggested firms provide "above-average experiential learning in writing, production, new media and businesses practices," those skills received the lowest ratings (p. 30).

For student journalists, Filak (2014) found that they saw the value of social media outlets (defined as Facebook and Twitter) for their own benefit of keeping up-to-date on current events, but did not see the value of social media outlets to share breaking news for their jobs. He said using social media to distribute breaking news should be second nature. "First, it is clear that advisers have active and engaged digital natives with an interest in social media. That said, these students seem to lack a clear sense of how best to use it as a tool to further their journalistic endeavors" (p. 11-12).

Interestingly, social media usage is part of the journalism and mass communication curriculum. In 2011, 89 percent of programs were teaching social media skills, and 81 percent were teaching creating and using blogs (Becker, Vlad, & Kalpen, 2012). It would appear that more needs to be done to move knowledge from the classroom to actual practice at student-run organizations. Both Filak and Haley et al. called for advisers to help students with their new technology and social media skills, as have researchers before them (see also Royal, 2005; Weisgerber, 2009).

Staff training is one way for advisers to bring students up to speed on skills needed to best perform their roles at a student-run communication organization. In a roundup of training programs, Ascarelli, Huckins, and Collopy (2013) identify characteristics of news, radio and TV organizations on U.S. college campuses. While varied, most training sessions touch on policies, technical skills, journalism refreshers, and other need-to-know-now skills to produce content for a back-to-school product. Only one person interviewed, a student general manager from Kent State in charge of her TV station's training, specifically mentioned social media as a topic to be covered.

The purpose of this study is to better understand training that assists students in social media skills needed and exercised at the student-run organization, and addresses the following research questions:

1. According to advisers, how are student-run communication organizations primarily using social media?
2. How are student-run organizations training students for the strategic use of social media in their paraprofessional positions? Or more plainly stated, what are the characteristics of the designated training programs offered?
3. How effective is the training, according to advisers?
4. How do advisers rate their organization's current social media efforts for the student-run organization?
5. What social media training do advisers say students at student-run communication organizations need most?

### **Methods**

A survey instrument was developed and reviewed by a panel of experts to determine content validity. Researchers sought and received institutional review board approval, which is on file with one investigator's university. Using Psychdata, the survey was electronically sent to members of College Media Association, the Associated Collegiate Press, College Broadcasters, Inc., College Media Business and Advertising Managers, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Small Programs Interest Group via each organization's listserv, with three reminders sent during a six-week period of data collection. A list of 133 advisers of public relations student-run agency advisers created by one of the researchers was also used. In the emails sent to these groups, instructions were included asking the adviser to take the survey, as well as to forward the survey to the primary student leader of the student-run communication organization. These organizations were chosen because they are the dominant professional associations for advisers of student-run entities. Researchers also used their own social media accounts to solicit response from advisers of student-run communication organizations. The number of individuals on each listserv included 700 on College Media Association, 183 on College Broadcasters, Inc., 196 on College Media Business and Advertising Managers, and 178 on the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Small Programs Interest Group.

Investigators collected data using the survey for a six-week period during the summer. A mixed methods approach for data analysis was used. After the dataset was cleaned, researchers ran frequencies for descriptive data, and chi-square, Mann-Whitney U, and Kruskal-Wallis H test for comparisons, using SPSS. Each researcher reviewed qualitative data twice using open coding methods to determine themes regarding the types of training that respondents said they needed and explanations of how respondents rated their social media efforts (Schram, 2006). From this open coding process, researchers agreed on themes, which were then coded in a closed coding process. Each researcher coded data separately, and the coding was compared to establish intercoder reliability; Cohen's kappa was computed as .84 and .85 for the two questions handled in this manner.

### Findings

The snowball sampling technique created a dataset with 112 advisers and 31 students. The most represented type of student-run organization was the campus newspaper (see Table 1). For advisers, radio stations and public relations firms followed; for students, public relations firms were next and then radio stations. Respondents were asked to mark the one student-run organization that receives the largest percentage of their time and focus all survey answers to that organization. In instances where multiple outlets were given, the first mentioned was used.

No identifying information that could match adviser and student was collected; therefore, adviser-only responses are included here. Student responses were analyzed separately and are included for comparison. Advisers who responded represented organizations with 20+ students (59.8%), 16-20 students (22%), 11-15 students (13%) and 6-10 students (8.9%). The organizations represented small (45%), mid-size (33%) and large (22%) programs. The sample included an equal number of doctoral and master's level Carnegie Classified universities (27.7%), 16.1% baccalaureate, 2.7% community college and technical institutes, and 4.5% that did not know their classification, nor provided a university name for researchers to look up.

Table 1  
*Student-run Communication Organizations Represented in Sample*

	<u>Advisers</u>		<u>Students</u>	
	n	%	n	%
Newspaper and online	49	43.8	13	41.9

Radio station	29	25.9	6	19.4
Public relations agency/firm	14	12.8	9	29
TV station	7	6.3	2	6.5
Online news portal, no print edition	6	5.4	0	0
Specialty firms (focusing on a particular service like audio production or social media)	2	1.8	0	0
Magazine	2	1.8	1	3.2
Advertising firm	2	1.8	0	0
Yearbook	1	0.9	0	0
Totals	112	100	31	100

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More times than not, students are running their organizations. Sixty-seven percent of advisers responded that students share in “all” of the decision-making processes at their organization, followed by 28% who said student share “some” and 5% who said “little.”

Advisers generally agree that students at the organizations need training and that social media usage is an integral part of their organizations (Table 2).

Table 2

*Adviser Beliefs about Social Media and Training*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
Students need little training on how to use social media strategically. (n=89)	27%	<b>46.1%</b>	4.5%	12.4%	10.1%	0
Social media is an integral part of our organization. (n=89)	2.2%	9%	15.7%	<b>41.6%</b>	30.3%	1.1%
Social media takes too much effort. (n=89)	14.6%	<b>53.9%</b>	22.5%	6.7%	2.2%	0
Social media is an afterthought at our organization. (n=89)	19.1%	<b>33.7%</b>	21.3%	24.7%	1.1%	0

Organizations are using social media for purposes that align with their professional counterparts. To answer RQ1: Advisers said organizations were primarily using social media as an extension of a news/media product (33.9%), a way to connect with readers/viewers (15.2%), an additional distribution option (8.9%), sales and promotional tool (8.0%), a main distribution option (6.3%), and other (6.3%), which included serving clients (from a PR firm), connecting with volunteers, and internal communication. Soliciting story ideas and cultivating new clients were the least reported primary reasons for social media usage, with 1.8 and 0.9%, respectively.

Organizations are using a multitude of platforms with Facebook (99%) and Twitter (97%) leading the pack, followed by Instagram (76%), YouTube (67%), SnapChat (36%), blogs (25%),

LinkedIn (17.5%), Pinterest (12%), and other platforms (12%). The mean number of outlets for each organization was 4.69 (n=97, Std. Dev. = 1.8). Other platforms mentioned included collaboration systems such as Slack, Podio and Airtable, platforms as determined by client, Periscope, Pokemon Go and Cymbal.

Advisers report that analytics for social media outlets are reviewed weekly by 27.8% of organizations, 24.4% monthly, 9% once a semester/quarter, 5.6% annually and 4.4% daily. Thirteen percent never analyze social media statistics, and 15.6% of advisers did not know if analytics are reviewed. In almost 70% of organizations, students review the social media analytics, and in almost 50% of organizations advisers review.

RQ2 asked about the characteristics of social media training for students at student-run communication organizations. The majority of advisers said their organizations conduct staff training (82.1%) and a little more than half (53.6%) incorporate social media as part of that training. More than a quarter of advisers (26.8%) said their organization conducted training once a semester or quarter, 15.2% as needed, 12.5% with every new hire, 8.9% once a year, 6.3% weekly, 6.3% monthly. Four percent said “other,” which accounted for a mixture of training options. Training is planned jointly by students and advisers for 50.5% of organizations, planned by the adviser/instructor/supervisor for 35.2% of organizations, and solely by students for 12.1%. “Other” received 2.2%. Of the joint planning, 37% of advisers who marked a mixture said it was a 50-50 effort between students and advisers; 21.7% attributed more of the planning in the mix to the students, and 23.9% said the adviser handled more of the planning in the partnership. Seventeen percent marked that planning was a mixture, but did not specify who had the larger responsibility.

The shared responsibility then extends to conducting the training for 31% of adviser respondents’ organizations. Advisers conduct the training for 25.9% of organizations, students 24.1%, outside professionals or alumni 12.1%, other campus professors 3.4%, online modules 1.7%, and not known for 1.7%.

The primary social media topics covered in training were professionalism of the organization’s account (90.7% of advisers marked this option in a multiple response question), creating and posting content (88.9%), professionalism of individual social media accounts (72.2%), platform-specific how-to’s (66.7%), handling negative comments (57.4%), social media analytics (51.9%), log-in and security (33.3%), and search engine optimization (29.6%). Six respondents marked other, which included reviewing the social media policies of the organization and analytics for the platforms.

RQ3 asked advisers about the effectiveness of training. The most frequent response was somewhat effective 46.2%, followed by neither ineffective nor effective, 28.8%. Eleven percent said effective, 8.7% somewhat ineffective and 4.8% ineffective. But most organizations would be reluctant to seek an outsourced training product, with 67% saying it would be extremely

unlikely and unlikely; 20% were neutral. For those organizations that do not incorporate social media into their training, advisers cited reliance on informal and on-the-job experience (23 respondents), an already full curriculum (10), no perceived need (9), and no qualified instructor (1). Fifty-six percent of those without social media training have considered it, 26% have not, and 18% don't know.

RQ4 asked how advisers rated their organization's current social media efforts. Few advisers and students rated their efforts as well, and the bulk of respondents opted for an average rating (see Table 3). A quarter of advisers rated their organization's social media efforts as the lowest rating.

Table 3

*How Advisers and Students Rate Their Organization's Social Media Efforts*

	Advisers (n=90)	Students (n=22)
Not well	25.6%	13.6%
Poorly	10.0%	9.1%
Average	43.3%	45.5%
Better than average	17.8%	27.3%
Well	3.3%	4.5%

*Note.* Not statistically significantly different, as measured by Mann-Whitney U test. Advisers (Mdn = 4) and students (Mdn = 4),  $U = 813$ ,  $z = -1.370$ ,  $p = .171$ , using an exact sampling distribution for U (Dineen & Blakesley, 1973).

Table 4 shows how the types of student-run organizations rated their social media use. The small n for some types makes a true comparison unwise, but 60% of the TV stations rated their social media with the lowest category.

Table 4

*How Different Organization Types Rated Their Social Media Usage*

	Not well	Poo rly	Aver age	Better than average	Well
Newspaper and Online (n=40)	30 %	17.5 %	<b>45%</b>	5%	2.5%
Online news portal, no print (n=5)	0	0	40%	<b>60%</b>	0
Magazine (n=1)	0	0	<b>100 %</b>	0	0
Public relations agency (n=10)	30 %	0	<b>50%</b>	20%	0
Advertising firm (n=2)	0	0	50%	50%	0
Radio station (n=24)	21 %	4%	<b>42%</b>	25%	8%
TV station (n=5)	<b>60 %</b>	0	20%	20%	0
Specialty firms (n=2)	0	0	50%	50%	0
Yearbook (n=1)	0	<b>100</b>	0	0	0

	%				
Total (n=90)	26 %	10 %	<b>43%</b>	18%	3%

Advisers and students were also asked to explain their assessment rating (Table 5). Open coding was used to develop the following categories: some successes, improvements needed/desired, lack of strategy, limited focus and sophistication, and lack of resources. Cohen's  $\kappa$  was run to determine if there was agreement between coders. Agreement,  $\kappa = .85$ ,  $p < .0005$ , falls into the top tier of reliability (Altman, 1999). Closed coding determined that about 62% of advisers mentioned improvements students were making, needed to make or were planning to make. Forty percent mentioned some successes, and 28% mentioned a lack of strategy, 25% cited a limited focus and sophistication and likewise a quarter cited a lack of resources.

Table 5  
*Closed Coding for How Advisers Explained the Rating They Gave to Their Organization's Social Media*

	n	% of Cases
<b>Improvements needed/desired</b>	50	61.7%
—“We need to do more to recruit more followers.”		
—“We are currently in the process of making social media a larger priority for the newspaper; so at the moment, it isn't great. But will quickly improve in the time ahead.”		
—“The students need to be more attentive to analytics as a means of adjusting approach to audience and topic.”		
<b>Some success</b>	33	40.7%
—“Over the past year we've greatly increased our use of social media		

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and are continuing to add new components to increase engagement. This year we are adding a video component for the first time and hope to continue the growth we experienced last year. Those analytics were invaluable during our request for student service fee funds which is our main budget source.”

—“Recently won a national award...”

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**Lack of strategy**

23 28.4%

—“Students tend to jump to their personal social media before the station's even when covering an event. It is a constant struggle to get them to use the station social media FIRST.”

—“It's not coordinated for the newspaper; just individuals posting random stuff.”

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**Limited focus and sophistication**

20 24.7%

—“They're young. They have not fully seen social media for their professional advancement.”

—“The students don't seem to understand its importance.”

—“We don't have a lot of sophistication on social media. It took our organization a long time to recognize the value of social media, but now they are getting more familiar with it...”

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**Lack of resources**

20 24.7%

—“We just don't have staff to do a good job.”

—“We have very little resources for the firm. It is run as a class, and therefore there is turnover every semester. Almost no continuity.”

—“No one is assigned to it specifically so it slips through the cracks.”

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Total (multiple responses possible)	14 6	180.2 %
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RQ5 asked what social media training do advisers say students at student-run communication organizations need most. Six major themes emerged from open coding conducted by two researchers: 1) professionalism/appropriateness; 2) platform-specific training; 3) analytics and SEO; 4) content creation; 5) brand management; and 6) audience engagement/interaction. Cohen's  $\kappa$  was run to determine if there was agreement between coders. Agreement,  $\kappa = .84$ ,  $p < .0005$ , falls into the top tier of reliability (Altman, 1999). Closed coding using the categories above then determined that 40% of advisers cited student training needs related to content creation as their top concern, and right behind that was professionalism and appropriateness at 39% (Table 6).

Table 6

*Closed Coding for Training Advisers Think Students Need Most*


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	n	% of Cases
<b>Content creation</b>	37	40.2 %
—“Writing engaging posts...”		
—“What to post, when to post...”		
—“Writing.”		

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—“Better understanding of lead-writing, headline-writing and use of photos and video...”

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<b>Professionalism/Appropriateness</b>	36	39.1 %
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—“Using it smartly as an individual.”

—“Ethical training on the ramifications of posting. Considering accuracy before being first.”

—“We need more concentrated effort on professionalism and law and ethics.”

—“Sharing and copyright.”

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<b>Platform-specific training</b>	25	27.2 %
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—“Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, podcasting...”

—“SnapChat”

—“Stay current with evolving trends: ie Facebook Live.”

—“Going beyond Facebook, Twitter and how to maintain up to date information.”

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<b>Analytics</b>	18	19.6 %
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—“SEO and analytics training.”

—“Understanding of analytics.”

—“In-depth analytics, not just the number of followers or re-tweets.”

—“How to operate our social media monitoring tool (NUVI)...”

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<b>Audience engagement/interaction</b>	18	19.6 %
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—“Understanding audience engagement.”

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—“Recruiting news students to follow the organization...”

—“How to engage audiences.”

—“Social media as a way to connect with listeners.”

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**Brand management**

14 15.2  
%

—“Instruction on how to create a cohesive social media brand. Currently their logos, voice, and all aspects of social media are handled by whomever feels like taking it on.”

—“Using social media to market and update content and tell the story.”

—“...crosspromoting with other media products.”

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Total (multiple responses possible)

148 160.9  
%

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**Discussion and Limitations**

The positive take-away is that half of organizations in this particular sample are incorporating social media into their training. An alarming discovery is that half are not. Advisers in the snowball sample largely (73%) believe students need training in social media usage, and that social media are integral to their organizations (72%). A disconnect is happening between what advisers believe and what is occurring in student-run communication organizations in terms of training on the use of social media.

A third of student-run communication organizations are primarily using social media as an extension of a news/media product. Connecting with readers/viewers/listeners was reported as a primary use by 15.2% of advisers. Johnson (2015) suggested the effective functions of social media for college media would be engagement, reaching new audiences, story dissemination and promotion, crowdsourcing, providing additional value and showing expertise, and story-mining or listening to clients, readers, etc. Within that list, soliciting story ideas and cultivating new clients were the lowest ranked by advisers in the current study. Not using social media to its full potential was a theme (labeled “limited focus and sophistication”) found in open-ended questions to advisers as well.

A little more than half of advisers believe that the training offered at their organization is somewhat effective (46%) or effective (11%). Even with 43% marking neither effective nor ineffective, somewhat ineffective or ineffective, only 13% of advisers would seek (extremely likely and likely) an outsourced training product. Training frequency was diverse with more than a quarter using a once-a-semester approach. There seems to be a disconnect between needs as assessed by advisers and training practices.

Training efforts for most organizations included professionalism and content creation. On a positive note, those topics were also the two advisers believed students needed most. For some respondents, content creation might have included an assumption of engagement and interactivity. Advisers believe students need more direction on engagement with audiences, with a goal of increasing reach. A few mentioned tapping new audiences as an additional training need. In their assessment of how the organization uses social media, advisers consistently mentioned areas of improvement. This may be in the educators' natures, to always look for how to move students to the next tier. A bright spot was that 40% mentioned some successes, such as increased followers, better messaging, etc.

The vast majority of advisers (95.5%) reported their age as 30 or older, meaning they likely graduated with little or no social media training while students themselves. One adviser wrote: "We could be doing so much more. The adviser (me) is of another generation and not much help." The yearly national survey of advisers conducted by Kopenhaver (2015) affirms the finding in this study with her most recent study indicating that at least one-third of advisers have been in their current position more than 15 years, indicating that these advisers were students when social media did not exist. Limited training from professional associations such as College Media Association and the Associated Collegiate Press is directed more toward students rather than advisers, so the sentiments reflected by the respondent who saw a generation gap as a hindrance to training may be shared.

Limitations for this study include the snowball sampling technique, which gathered responses from members of associations and is not a random sample. A few respondents also noted that some survey questions were more geared toward news agencies and were hard for other organizations to therefore answer. More newspapers are represented in the sample than radio, TV and public relations firm counterparts. The survey also did not include information about the comfort level of advisers with social media or their own training in and use of social media, which was raised as an issue by at least one adviser. Defining social media brings issues as well; we envisioned mostly external communication platforms when devising the study, but some respondents added platforms for internal communication. Students working at the student-run firms may have come from a variety of majors, and their programs would have varied levels of social media exposure in their course curriculum, outside of training offered at the student-run organization.

Future research needs to expand on this study, to further investigate financial and other roadblocks to training opportunities for students. The social media curriculum woven into courses could be added to investigations. Questions should be asked about decentralized and centralized responsibilities for the organization's social media. Consistency, and a lack thereof, was mentioned by advisers when it comes to training; more specific information needs to be gathered, and best practices collected. An analysis of the organization's actual social media feeds could be compared to the adviser's self-assessment data. How training within student-run communication organizations is related to or not related to curriculum may also be helpful.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Like anything else about student communication organizations, social media training is all over the map. Employers will expect students working in these paraprofessional roles to gain social media experience. More can and should be done to help students bridge from personal and haphazard social media usage to strategic messaging for an organization. We offer the following suggestions:

1. Create a clearinghouse of free social media training resources that can be accessed by advisers, returning students and new students alike.
2. Focus more attention on specific ways students can use social listening and monitoring to meet organization goals. Incorporate these advanced sessions at conferences and add resources to a clearinghouse.
3. Consider outsourcing basic training on the importance of social media and its reach to save time for more industry-specific training at organizational training sessions. See Poynter Institute's News University offerings, or read Kinsky et al.'s 2016 article about Hootsuite University.
4. Make training for advisers available separate from training for students. This could help advisers close the perceived gap in knowledge between themselves and students.

The state of social media training at student-run communication organizations is average, with only half of the sample in this study even offering training for the organization. It is not all baptism by fire, and some organizations are trying to keep students' skills competitive with social media savvy. The purpose of this study was to provide a glimpse into the student-run communication organizations and their training efforts related to social media. With this information, students and advisers can see where they fit on the continuum of training, and further develop and tailor their own organization's social media training. Associations and conferences can offer social media sessions student-run organizations most need and want. The industry is expecting students to be proficient in skills needed for today's communication environment. Students will need strategic social media skills in their transition from paraprofessional to professional.

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