

## **Tweet, Tweet, Tweet: Student Affairs is on Twitter**

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A microblogging phenomenon known as Twitter has recently rocketed into popular consciousness. In existence for 3 years, Twitter is not exactly the newest social networking site. However, it was in 2009 that Twitter's mainstream notoriety occurred. Twitter users in Iran produced thousands of microblog posts informing the world of post-election protests. Ashton Kutcher and CNN held a contest to see which of their popular accounts could garner the most followers. Oprah and Ellen began tweeting this year. Even President Obama utilized Twitter as part of a successful election communications strategy. Twitter provides a content platform that can be used for personal tweets, organizing, event updates, networking, content syndication and research.

### **What Does Twitter Have to Do with Student Affairs and Its Practitioners?**

The answer to how Twitter is relevant to Student Affairs practitioners is stunningly simple: communication. Hundreds of higher education institutions, senior leaders within those organizations, and social media savvy faculty/staff/students are posting 140 character microblog updates to Twitter on a daily basis. Twitter provides a conduit for a wide variety of communication-based applications that Student Affairs professionals can utilize.

### **But We Don't Have Any Followers. . .**

Sometimes I hear comments from Student Affairs practitioners that our students are not on Twitter and/or that we don't have enough followers. If you focus on those particular metrics, then yes, Twitter might not be for you. However, Twitter is not just about follower demographics and follower numbers. Of the Twitter accounts that I manage, only my personal account has a significant number of followers. My work-based accounts have fewer than 100 followers and I am okay with that due to two very specific reasons: content repurposing and professional networking.

#### *Content Repurposing*

One of the most useful and non-networking ways in which I currently use Twitter is to repurpose my professional tweets. Twitter provides an RSS feed for every user account. A post on your Twitter account may only be read by a few readers. However, that same tweet can be syndicated via RSS to your website and/or a Facebook page where you have a larger readership. A single piece of microblog content can be sent out to several sites all with the push of a single "update" button on Twitter. In an instant, you can provide quick bursts of content to multiple constituencies. Your content can literally reach students where they are . . . on your website, via your Facebook page or perhaps even on your Twitter account. Through frequent Twitter updates, you can give your students important information without them ever having to be on Twitter. Your tweets have value because you've sent them where your readership is located. Tweet about your office's next workshop. Post quick updates about your service offerings or that a summer orientation program is in progress. The possibilities for worthwhile

content updates are numerous.

### *Professional Networking*

There are currently over 950 followers on my personal Twitter account. I'm following about 370 accounts. This follower/following connects me to Student Affairs administrators, Academic Advisors, Professional Associations, Librarians, Teaching faculty, Higher Education Web Personnel, and more. I can post a tweet on Twitter asking a question and within minutes, I will receive several reliable answers. I have virtually met a myriad of higher education professionals using Twitter as the base for a microblogging professional network. It may take a little bit of time to accumulate a following as well as finding folks who you wish to follow, but it's worth it. I am more connected to higher education as a result of my involvement on Twitter.

#### Where do I go? How do I begin?

The first thing that non-Twitterer needs to do is to visit [Twitter.com](http://twitter.com) and sign up for a username. Feel free to use your real name or come up with an identity that you feel comfortable with using. However, I would note that while nicknames are convenient for maintaining anonymity, they do not provide potential followers with a real name. This could limit your ability for professional networking opportunities. I tend to follow people who have complete Twitter profiles. An informational personal bio, a photograph and a few updates make an account more legitimate and thus easier to follow. Finding people to follow on Twitter is a breeze thanks to sites like [WeFollow.com](http://wefollow.com) (e.g.: <http://wefollow.com/twitter/studentaffairs/>). Another quick way to find useful Twitterers is to use a custom Twitter search query: <http://search.twitter.com/search?q="student+affairs"/>. You can input any search string that you want into the Twitter search engine and it usually will result in a multitude of tweets relating to your search.

After you have set up your Twitter account and logged in, notice the RSS feed icon and link on the bottom right sidebar of your profile (e.g.: <http://twitter.com/ericstoller/>). This RSS web address can be used to import your tweets into your blog and/or Facebook page. Note that most web site content management systems provide functionality for importing RSS feeds. A simple search for RSS applications within Facebook will result in several possible RSS applications for your Facebook page. I prefer a Facebook application called "Social RSS." I use it to take my professional tweets and import them into the Facebook pages that I manage. In less than a full work day, you can sign up for a Twitter account and begin sending your tweets to various web sites. You can begin following professionals that add value to your knowledge base and form a community of Twitterers.

#### Two Years Ago

When I signed up for Twitter in 2007 I had no idea what I was going to do with it. It took a year of using Twitter off and on before I realized that it was a unique social networking site. Twitter is a communications multi-tool. It is limited to 140 character microblog posts and the creative ways in which you use it. Twitter may have a silly name, but its usefulness is quite serious.

#### For More Information

Check out <http://business.twitter.com/twitter101>. It's a great FAQ on Twitter by Twitter on the use of Twitter for businesses and it translates well to how higher education could/can use Twitter.