

TERRY O'BANION LEGACY AWARD | 2024

Social Media Public Scholars

Reframing the Narrative From the Inside Out



Adrienne Provost

The League for Innovation in the Community College (League) is an international nonprofit organization with a mission to cultivate innovation in the community college environment. The League hosts conferences and institutes, develops resources, and leads projects and initiatives with hundreds of member colleges, strategic partners, and a host of other government and nonprofit agencies in a continuing effort to advance the community college field and make a positive difference for students and communities. Information about the League and its activities is available at www.league.org.

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The Terry O'Banion Legacy Award

In recognition of Terry O'Banion's many contributions to thought leadership and innovation in the community college field, the League for Innovation in the Community College has created the Terry O'Banion Legacy Award. Throughout his six decades in community college education, O'Banion has been a thought leader who pushes faculty, staff, and administrators to think differently about their work, their institutions, their students, and the communities they serve. With close to 300 publications, including 18 books, he is a long-time community college champion whose steadfast efforts to expand opportunities for current and prospective students have had a major influence on the field.

O'Banion has described himself as a provocateur in the field of education: someone who proposes what can enhance learning, exposes what reduces learning, and challenges *what is* to create *what can be*. As a provocateur, he is an advocate, reformer, provoker, proponent, and challenger.

In this provocateur spirit, the Terry O'Banion Legacy Award supports preparation of a paper that presents an innovative and thought-provoking examination of and response to a major issue or challenge facing community and technical colleges.



Foreword

The inaugural recipient of the Terry O'Banion Legacy Award, Adrienne Provost, doesn't hold back in the paper she has written. Her calls for disrupting the traditional order of community college discourse join the the many calls from the award's namesake to meaningfully transform our institutions to better serve our students and communities.

For Provost, the conversation about community colleges is pivotal. She charges community college professionals to use social media public scholarship to take the lead in telling the community college story. Acknowledging that traditional academic journals have long been and continue to be the purview of university scholars who dominate the higher education discussion, Provost argues that social media is well suited to practitioners who work in the community college world. Through social media, community college voices not only can be widely heard, but also can form – and lead – the narrative.

In the pages that follow, she reviews the historical context of the community college in academic publishing, including “false narratives” that result in part from “outsider bias and inequitable publishing practices.” She offers social media as an opportunity for community college practitioners to reframe the narrative, acknowledging social media's flaws but concluding that its benefits warrant a place for it in professional discourse. She also presents guidelines for implementing social media public scholarship, from time commitment and content to platform and modality.

Provost's call to action reflects her own championing of community colleges and the students they serve. Working in, and ultimately directing, the TRIO programs at Santa Fe College, she became an award-winning advocate for students. In her current position at the University of Florida, she develops pipeline programs to support transfer students from the Florida college system and grant programs to support transfer student initiatives in the university's College of Liberal Arts & Sciences.

The League's description of the Terry O'Banion Legacy Award immediately precedes this foreword, and clearly his legacy of innovation and thought leadership are carried on in Adrienne Provost's award paper. We at the League encourage you to read and share this paper with colleagues and to explore social media as an option for joining – and leading – the professional conversation about community colleges.

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Social Media Public Scholars

Reframing the Narrative From the Inside Out

Community colleges are one of the United States' greatest educational success stories. Since the turn of the 21st century, these institutions have grown to educate 41 percent of undergraduate students nationwide (Community College Research Center, n.d.). Accessible to nearly every community, these colleges are woven into the fabric of society. They serve the highest diversity of postsecondary students and offer an ambitious array of educational missions (Dembicki, 2022). Since the seminal report, *Higher Education for American Democracy* (President's Commission

on Higher Education, 1947), politicians have turned to community colleges to support the promise of equality and growth of the country's economy. Philanthropists have generously supported these institutions, publicly acknowledging their democratizing potential. Community leaders, activists, and think tanks have also embraced local colleges, championing their responsiveness and innovation. However, despite these longstanding and high-profile accolades, community colleges have long been subject to pervasive false narratives and enduring stigma.

A reciprocal relationship exists between misinformation and stigmatization. Faulty or exaggerated facts often taint individual perspectives, which perpetuate false narratives. Social media has compounded this issue. In an age where information and misinformation are available at the push of a button, the maligned cycle of rhetoric has expanded.

Social media's prevalence and impact on society is a divisive concept. For example, several studies have pointed to this medium as the catalyst for potentially detrimental mental health issues, including depression and anxiety (Allcott et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2016; Perlis et al., 2021). These concerns have spurred a range of legislative responses, including recent bills that have garnered some bipartisan support to ban minors' access to social media (Andrews, 2024). Others have cautioned that limiting social media consumption is unrealistic in our modern age. These authors argue that evidence may correlate social media with mental health issues but fail to prove causation (Miller et al., 2018). Many urge that an alternative to abstinence is education (Hsu, 2022; Wisniewski et al., 2022). Citing a growing number of reports about educators using social media as a tool, these authors argue that the ability to critique social media is essential and a critical life competency in our increasingly media-rich world (Hsu, 2022).

Other critics argue that social media is often the de facto source of information in times of uncertainty and that misinformation abounds in these circumstances (Muhammed & Mathew, 2022). Anxiety perpetuates the spread of fake news, as consumers often turn to a variety of social channels as a coping mechanism for this tension (Muhammed & Mathew, 2022). These authors argue that these platforms' structural designs and algorithms intensify the spread of false information. Closed networks, such as friending, designed to maximize user engagement, can result in echo chambers that further expand the circulation of rumors, faulty science, and inaccurate data.

Scholars have argued that the proliferation of this medium has elevated fake news and conspiracy theories to unprecedented levels (Harris, 2022). AI and other forms of deep fake technology blur the lines of reality, diminishing consumers' ability to discern between fact and fiction. Further, as one scholar explained, the sheer amount of fake news has led to "epistemic flooding," overwhelming individuals with more content than they can "diligently process" (Anderau, 2023, p. 206). Confronted by the endless stream of information, these authors hypothesize that even a diligent social media user struggles to retain epistemic agency (Anderau, 2023). With a limit to the amount of time available to fact-check, inaccuracies are often inadvertently accepted as truths.

Some researchers have pointed to the ways in which social media content impacts public perception, specifically in medical contexts. For example, Wilson and Wiysonge (2020) detailed the damaging impact foreign disinformation campaigns had on public views of vaccine safety, and McLaren et al. (2023) confirmed social media's role in stigmatizing addiction. Studies such as these underscore social media's undeniable influence on public confidence in institutions.

Yet, a counterargument has surfaced. While social media can exacerbate stigma, research demonstrates that it also has the power to mitigate its influence (Handfield, 2022; Li & Chang, 2022). For example, leaders in the medical industry have turned to social media to combat negative perceptions. These efforts have shown promise. Clark et al. (2021) documented the positive impact some social media campaigns had on reducing weight-related stigma; He et al. (2022) noted how public campaigns increased empathy for HIV patients; and Betton et al. (2015) marked a decrease in mental health discrimination. These researchers demonstrate the potential ways social media can address faulty assumptions and pernicious misinformation.

Some scholars assert that academia is responsible for engaging in social media as a public good (Handfield, 2022; Huber et al., 2019; Meylan, 2022). They fear avoiding these platforms further segregates epistemic systems by preventing a broad exchange of research and information from academic circles into the public sphere. To combat epistemic flooding, one study revealed that fact-checking posts disseminated across multiple channels could mediate the spread of misinformed beliefs and rumors (Li & Chang, 2022). These authors explain that it is imperative for experts to engage in correcting or confronting bias and misinformation. Rather than avoiding social media, scientists and academics can increase public awareness by sharing empirical evidence en masse to combat faulty science and fake news (Huber et al., 2019; Li & Chang, 2022).

Social media also provides an opportunity to address public skepticism of institutions in ways that were impossible before the advent of new technologies. These platforms remove traditional barriers that have imposed distance between parties. In the past, institutional knowledge was often distilled through mass media channels. Few members of the public received information directly from organizational insiders. Instead, journalists played a role in filtering data, facts, and figures into easily digestible headlines. Unfortunately, relevant information was sometimes lost in translation or sensationalized for impact.

Academia is particularly subject to challenges around information dissemination. Research is typically published within closed networks, viewed by small segments of readers who often share similar backgrounds and interests. High-interest studies can often seem to receive public attention only when the subject serves the interests of journalists or politicians and can offer eye-catching titles or newsreel teasers. As a result, as one critic quipped,

The news media and the government are entwined in a vicious circle of mutual manipulation, mythmaking, and self-interest. Journalists need crises to dramatize news, and government officials need to appear to be responding to crises. Too often, the crises are not really crises but joint fabrications.

(Vanderwicken, 1995, para. 2)

Even when researchers attempt to mitigate misinformation by releasing concise press releases, news reporting practices or political showmanship trend toward sensationalism (Dempster et al., 2022).

Community colleges are among the institutions impacted by media disinformation. These colleges have long been a source of snappy subheadings decrying sobering graduation and success statistics, a practice that has endured even after studies documented multiple flaws in reported data analysis (Carey, 2017). Social media, however, offers a solution to these issues. It places information in the hands of the public. Direct connection with audiences disrupts the cycle of disinformation and allows insider voices to lead conversations rather than being sidelined by overly dramatized sound bites.

Social media is certainly not a panacea. As an unregulated media source, these platforms can both inform and misinform their audiences. However, the characteristics that make social media ubiquitous can be leveraged for the greater good. This monograph explores the benefits of adopting social media as a new form of public scholarship. For too long, false assumptions about community colleges have remained embedded in public rhetoric, often perpetuated by researchers or journalists outside these institutions. Practitioners from inside community colleges can leverage social media to address faulty narratives by placing research, data, and information straight into public channels. After all, the best way to correct misinformation is with informed education.



Historical Context

This monograph begins by examining the history of community college false narratives and the structures that maintain them. It then provides a rationale and guide for establishing a community college social media public scholars network. The discussion concludes with an estimate of the investment and return of a yearlong campaign that directly challenges the prevailing false narratives that have plagued community colleges and their students for generations.

Stigmatization

Community colleges have battled stigmatization since their inception. In part, stigma resulted from university stakeholders. Many early 20th-century university presidents considered these institutions sub-colleges, offering alternative and subpar educational opportunities to students deemed unfit for university entry (Provost, 2023). These academics publicly perpetuated the myth that two-year institutions were not *real* colleges but institutions that served as consolation prizes for students unprepared or undesired for university admission. Further, scholars outside community colleges often misinterpreted institutional policies and practices. Guided by neoliberal assumptions, these researchers

failed to account for the diverse missions of the community college. Unfortunately, many early critiques of community colleges became standard in the academic canon, engendering false narratives into the pathos of higher education rhetoric.

Examining Burton Clark's landmark study is an excellent illustration of this issue. In 1960, Clark conducted a single case study of one California community college. During his investigation, he documented the cooling-out function of advising, describing what he believed was a purposeful and systematic act of social engineering (Provost, 2023). His case study alleged that the administration and staff of the community college he investigated devised systems to divert student baccalaureate transfer aspirations toward vocational studies (Clark, 1960). This provocative theory took hold, and late 20th-century sociologists eagerly adopted the premise. Clark's argument gained popularity among university scholars who produced a seemingly endless stream of highly critical texts and articles, including Stephen Brint and Jermone Karabel's *The Diverted Dream* and Steven Zwerling's *Second Best: The Crisis of the Community College*. These new staples of community college critique widened the reach of Clark's scholarship.

The pervasiveness of the cooling-out theory is particularly alarming considering the limitations of Clark's investigation. Scholars generalized Clark's lone case study of a newly organized California institution to represent the entire community college enterprise. This practice persisted even when Clark himself questioned the legitimacy of these efforts. In 1980, Clark argued that academic scholars had widely used and sometimes "abused" his research. Among the misuses, he noted that many of these authors added "a little suspiciousness" and "a strong suggestion of a conspiracy" to distort his original findings (pp. 25-26). Unfortunately, Clark's pushback did little to slow the appropriation of his theory. For example, a recent Google Scholar search of the phrase "cooling-out" paired with "community college" yielded 2,690 results, including 440 since 2019. This staying power is troubling, given the study's limited scope and intended purpose (Provost, 2023).

Moreover, Clark's study has persisted despite decades of research and counterclaims by community college practitioners. These practitioners have struggled to dislodge faulty assessments of the community college that endured despite the unprecedented expansion and growth these institutions experienced in the mid-20th century. False narratives, partly resulting from outsider bias and inequitable publishing practices, sustain their hold in the literature. These myths wield considerable sway, seeping from academia into political, policy, and social sectors. Hegemonic media mechanisms insulate outsider research, weaving many flawed assumptions into the fabric of the United States' consciousness.

Outsider Bias

Outsider bias has driven community college stigma. Those not affiliated with two-year colleges repeated and reinforced faulty perceptions ingrained in academic rhetoric. At the turn of the 20th century, bias took hold in

the canon as university presidents looked to newly forming junior colleges to insulate their institutions. In the 1930s, University of California President Robert Sproul famously declared, "The university is primarily designed for one type of mind and the junior college for another" (1953, as cited in Beach, 2010, p. 37). Throughout the ensuing decades, numerous university academics have made similar claims (Provost, 2023). For example, in 2022, former president of Yale University and economist Richard Levin suggested that community colleges should "give up the myth" that they prepare students for university transfer and instead focus on

False narratives, partly resulting from outsider bias and inequitable publishing practices, sustain their hold in the literature.

providing practical vocational training (as cited in Horn, 2022, Subheading). Levin's comment occurred in the same year that nearly half a million students successfully transferred from two-year colleges to universities (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2023). Levin's and other outsiders' biases proliferated through mass media, shaping public perception. Despite decades of evidence directly refuting these faulty assumptions, scholars have repeatedly painted community colleges as second-class institutions.

Bias has also shaped outsider beliefs about community college faculty and staff. In many ways, flawed perceptions resulted from the dichotomous institutional culture and reward

systems between institutions. Community colleges' focus on teaching, a secondary activity at many top-tier universities, is often viewed as less intellectually demanding than academic research. In a rather telling statement, one scholar questioned whether the "relatively undereducated and academically inexperienced community college faculty had the intellectual capacity" (Beach, 2010, p. 37) to address serious concerns in higher education. Ripple effects of this type of rhetoric translate across academic and political circles.

University scholars are increasingly participating in public scholarship, leveraging political influence. The Scholars Strategy Network (SSN) is an example of these activities. Established in 2011, SSN (n.d.) aims to "connect journalists, policymakers, and civic leaders with America's top researchers to improve policy and strengthen democracy" (Scholars Strategy Network, n.d., Heading). Its collection of 1,400 researchers includes 179 scholars listed as educational experts. None of the listed scholars are from a community college (Provost, 2023).

SSN achieves influence by equipping university scholars with the tools to wield vast influence, offering training in media and communications, including op-ed writing, media interviews, relationship building, and on-camera interview skills (Scholars Strategy Network, n.d.). The network also offers its expertise on issues related to the community college. A query of SSN's published articles returns 154 reports related to the community college written exclusively by university scholars (Provost, 2023). This group is, therefore, maintaining considerable influence in matters related to two-year institutions.

It is not only organized groups, such as SSN, that offer expertise in higher education matters. Increasingly, academic researchers are turning to high-profile newspapers. A recent review of *The New York Times* found

that 24 percent of articles published in one year included "one or more of the terms: university, professor, or study" (Hicks & Wang, 2013, p. 11). The increasing uptick in scholarly contributions to newspapers such as *The New York Times* directly results from the university's emphasis on publication. Driven by quantified and formalized impact factor scores, academic scholars seek opportunities to promote their research in highly coveted publications. This practice places their opinions and assumptions squarely in the middle of political and social circles.

Academic scholars' effectiveness in marketing their expertise is pronounced among legislative initiatives. For example, during nine years of congressional hearings on reauthorizing the Higher Education Act, legislators called for 247 testimonials (Perna et al., 2019). Community college leaders made less than one-half of one percent of these appearances, while 73 university representatives provided 30 percent of the witness testimonials during the hearings. Given the significance of the Higher Education Act on community colleges and the wealth of knowledge its practitioners hold, this imbalance is concerning. Further, considering the longstanding bias wielded by many university scholars against two-year institutions, this polarity is alarming.

Outsider bias has shaped public policy and perpetuated inequitable funding metrics. These long-held false assumptions have had severe consequences. They have marginalized students and threatened institutions when misguided legislative policies and reform initiatives respond to rhetoric over reason.

Inequitable Publishing Practices

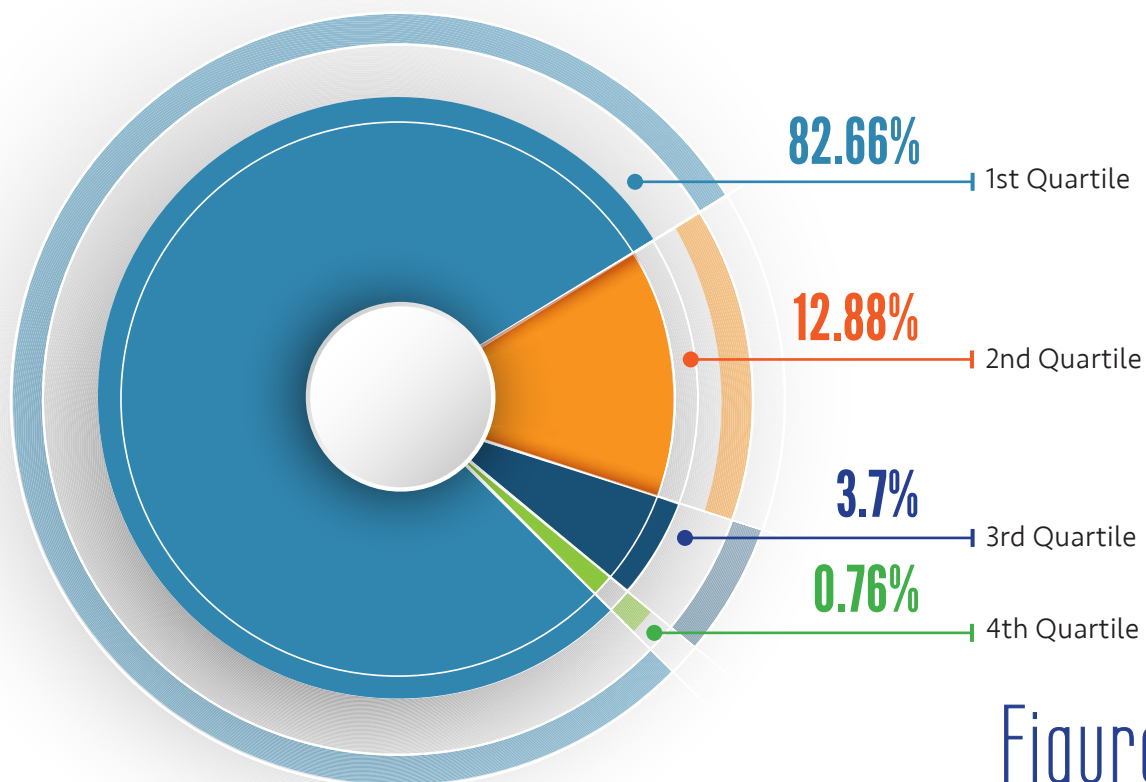
Overrepresentation of academic scholarship in legislative and policy matters may also result from inequitable publishing practices—a dichotomous system that segments higher

education publications between peer-reviewed and practitioner journals. Under the mantra of publish or perish, academic scholars often seek the highest-ranked, most widely distributed peer-reviewed outlets for their work. Some politicians turn to these channels for research that validates or confirms their political agendas, couched under the umbrella of academic rigor and reliability (Provost, 2023). As a result, a narrow body of research provides the majority of “expertise.”

Community college practitioners often seek timely field-based publications rather than top-tier quartile research journals. Whereas peer review is time-consuming, subjective, and layered with stages of production, practitioners

seek immediate solutions to pressing issues. They are often motivated to research and read studies that offer practical or innovative practices in higher education. Therefore, practitioner goals are often not congruent with most top-quartile publication practices.


These differences in goals and priorities between practitioner and peer-reviewed journals affect the transmission of research into public and legislative circles. For some, practitioner journals, due to their absence of peer review, erode the perceived rigor of these studies, making them less appealing to politicians who are looking to buttress their initiatives and, therefore, less present in mass media. Further limiting the articulation



Citations by Quartile, *The Journal of Higher Education*

Note. Data are from “Citation Metrics for *The Journal of Higher Education*,” by SCImago Journal & Country Rank, 2024 ([https://www.scimagojr.com/comparejournals.php?ids\[\]=19490](https://www.scimagojr.com/comparejournals.php?ids[]=19490)).

of practitioner research into the public sphere is the stratified journal ranking system that prioritizes a small number of elite journals, limiting intersectional citations and encouraging academic echo chambers.



There is little opportunity for inclusiveness when citations are limited to a small selection of authors.

Further, because practitioners and academic scholars often publish in different arenas, they miss the opportunity to engage with or address false narratives. There is minimal crossover between the two audiences, even when considering the same topics. Journal rankings function through a “prestige economy” mediated by the “scarcity” of top-ranked publications (Kwiek, 2021, p. 494). Comparatively, there are relatively few community college-specific publications and even fewer quantified by journal standings. According to a recent SCImago Journal & Country Rank (SJR) query (2024c), only *Community College Review* ranked among leading community college journal titles in the top quartile of educational publications. Most academic scholars prioritize top-tier publications, so the lack of highly ranked community college journals reduces the likelihood of engagement.

Further complicating the matter, top-tiered publications frequently refer to other highly ranked journals. A 2024 journal ranking query revealed that almost 83 percent of all citations in one of the leading higher education journals came from other tier-one quartile publications (SCImago Journal & Country Rank, 2024a) (Figure 1). Since most community college research journals are not ranked in the top quartile, the opportunities for academic scholars to engage with two-year college research are diminished (Provost, 2023).

Community college research most often appears in journals specifically written for two-year institutions. One researcher noted that 65 percent of all articles published about community colleges in 2016 appeared in only two journals: *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* and *Community College Review* (Crisp et al., 2016).

Even when controlling for similar rank, there is little crossover between community college- and university-based research. In comparing two tier-one journals, *The Journal of Higher Education* referenced only 6.84 percent of articles from *Community College Review* (SCImago Journal & Country Rank, 2024b). Yet, it cited articles previously published in *The Journal of Higher Education* 54.89 percent of the time. This statistic is troubling because *Community College Review* is the only tier-one-ranked academic community college journal and *The Journal of Higher Education* typically refers only to tier-one academic journals (Provost, 2023). Therefore, even among the highest-ranked titles, self-citation limits breadth. As these statistics suggest, scholars publishing in the leading higher education journals exclusively perpetuate the limited exposure to research produced by community college practitioners.

The lack of intersectionality between these publications illustrates the flaws inherent in academic impact factor databases. There is little opportunity for inclusiveness when citations are limited to a small selection of authors. This practice also insulates false narratives and misconceptions. Community college outsiders are not in conversation with insider practitioners within peer-reviewed journals, allowing outsider interpretations to remain neither challenged nor confirmed. Burton Clark's cooling-out theory illustrates this point. While Clark's theory was published before the advent of journal rankings, his article appeared in an outlet that would become a leading tier-one quartile publication. As the circle of citation within publications began, Clark's theory was sustained in the academic echo chamber.

Due to the distribution of academic scholarship, echo chamber rhetoric often transfers into the public sphere. Whether bolstered by researchers' participation in newspaper op-eds or politicians' selective appropriation, academic scholarship has a

greater opportunity to filter into mass media channels than practitioners' work. Academic participation in mass media influences public opinion, as this venue is the primary source to which many turn for information (Santos et al., 2022). It is important to note that peer review and journal rankings have become a proxy for reliability and rigor, despite little evidence to support such claims (Jefferson et al., 2002; Paulus et al., 2018; Smith, 2006). Some suggest that this represents an ecological fallacy, where faulty logic and inconsistencies are entwined in journal ranking calculations (Paulus et al., 2018).

Moreover, no evidence suggests that the impact rankings indicate research quality (Paulus et al., 2018, p. 4). As one critic of the ranking system argued, "It should be clear that those [ranking] decisions are not based on the *quality* of the scientific contribution per se, but optimistically, somehow integrate the *availability* of information about the quality" (Paulus et al., 2018, p. 5). Therefore, the reinforcing academic publication system shields faulty assumptions and proliferates misconceptions.



Changes to Mass Media

Sources of Public Information

Fortunately, the proliferation of new forms of media in the past few decades has escalated the availability and variety of options available to the public (Provost, 2023). As new mediums arise, traditional models, like newspapers, radio, and television, are less often society's sole source of news and information (Vorhaus, 2020). A recent Pew Research Center (2023) survey found that over 80 percent of adult U.S. citizens turn to social media channels for news and information. Digital news consumption has steadily risen, with only 5 percent of Americans stating that they prefer print news and information sources (Shearer, 2021). News and information consumption appears across a variety of mediums. Facebook, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram are among the most popular sites, at 30 percent, 26 percent, 16 percent, and 14 percent, respectively (Figure 2), but other venues, such as blogs and podcasts, continue to gain favor. Research also points to society's growing comfort with

accessing websites or internet searches when seeking information on specific subjects. The pervasiveness of options available to the general public has changed the nature of mass media, placing increased control of content in the hands of consumers.

Social media, however, is not immune from misinformation. Many researchers have raised concerns regarding these platforms' reliability, bias, and selectivity. As one researcher noted, the nature of social media as a public sharing platform increases the spread of fake news (Madrid, 2023). Users who frequently forward messages shared nearly six times the amount of faulty information than occasional users. Platforms build upon participant social connections, increasing users' likelihood of being exposed to limited perspectives. This tendency is particularly concerning when bias and false information circulate. As users' views are confirmed through repetition in social circles, the popularity of a post, rather than its reliability, holds significant sway (Baker, 2020).

Research also suggests that social media platform algorithms purposefully generate content for users based on data these machines have gathered on prior user selections. The machine narrows exposure due to selectivity, and corporate entities also wield considerable power over content. For example, Google rigorously controls the articles available to users' newsfeeds. Since individuals click links from Google News outlets a staggering 24 billion times monthly (Gingras, 2020), this platform virtually governs media. When questioned, Google representatives explained that they prioritize news articles using "what we know is important based on academic research, journalism industry best practices, and our own user testing" (Bhattacharjee, n.d., para. 7). The type of academic research, however, is not disclosed. As one media watchdog warned, this lack of transparency can obscure how business practices influence

public opinion (Solon, 2017). The power that social media platforms maintain rests partly in their invisible networks. What is published, referenced, and disseminated is decided by the few and distributed to the many, ultimately influencing public opinion and public policy (Provost, 2023).

Despite its shortcomings, social media exposes individuals to new information. Research confirms that social media platforms have aided many U.S. teens and adults in seeing alternative perspectives about social, political, and economic issues (Bialik, 2018). This trend is prevalent among frequent social media users. Social media, therefore, offers opportunities to correct faulty narratives and address misinformation. If scholars regularly engage in social media as a form of public scholarship, they can disrupt cycles of false information. Recently, some researchers have argued that

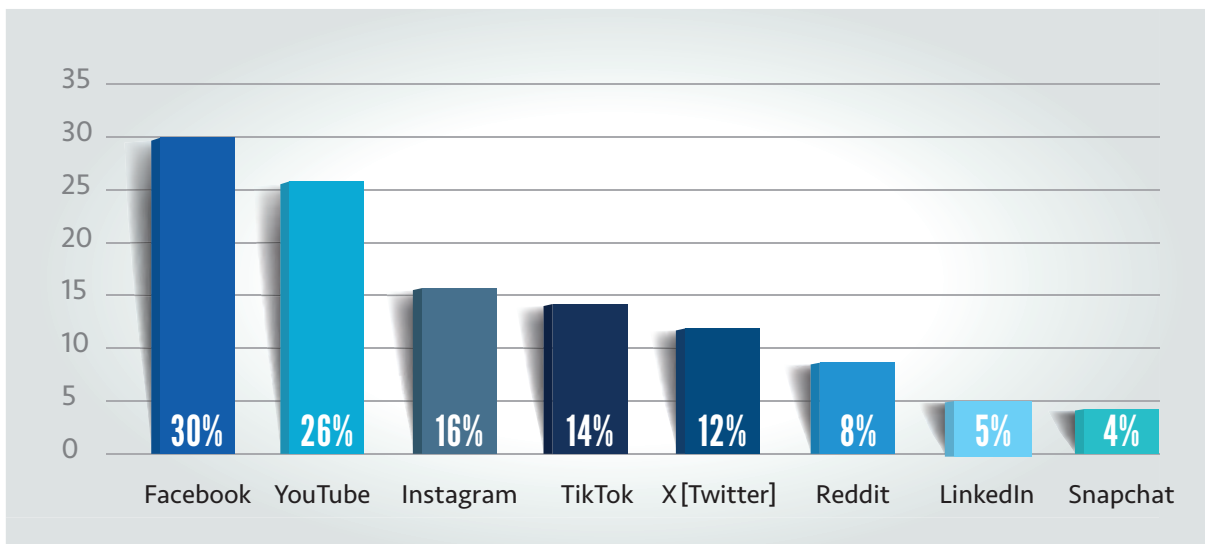


Figure 2

U.S. Adult Social Media Use for News

Note. Adapted from "Social Media and News Fact Sheet," by Pew Research Center, 2023 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/social-media-and-news-fact-sheet>).

academics should utilize social media for these purposes (Allen et al., 2023; Jones, 2021; Jordan, 2023; Riley, 2023). While many scholars have turned to social media platforms to promote their research, few have fully embraced the opportunity this new medium offers.

The Decline of Public Scholarship

Almost since the beginning of academe, university faculty and administrators have served as public intellectuals. Well into the mid-20th century, these scholars actively wrote to inform and advise society at large. Specialization and the narrowing of subject expertise slowly fragmented the role of the public intellectual. However, scholars continued the practice with op-eds and trade books written for the public. The value of these efforts has slowly diminished as the push for peer-reviewed publication increased. As one scholar noted, “tenure and promotion” in academia are driven mainly through “specialized scholarship,” and academics who still engage in public scholarship are “engaging in unnatural acts” of the modern university (Schmuhl, 2002, para. 17). While various scholars still engage in public

scholarship, the pressures of the modern university value and reward system do not align with the practice.

For the public intellectual, social media offers fertile ground. Unfortunately, it is not currently highly regarded in academic circles. Tenure and promotion at large research universities frequently rely on a scholar’s impact factor. This metric is calculated based on an author’s publication and citation in top-tier quartile research journals. Nearly 80 percent of research-focused universities consider impact factors during tenure review (Else, 2019). Scholars have questioned the value of this arbitrary metric (Curry, 2018). They suggest that an author’s engagement in public scholarship would better assess the researcher’s impact, and recognize social media’s potential for this practice (Jordan, 2023). As one researcher wondered, “What would it look like to calculate the impact factor of public scholarship based on the number of times a post is shared?” (Jones, 2021, para. 8). This question is worthy of consideration. Social media presents a new paradigm for public scholarship—an opportunity that should not be ignored.



Rationale for Social Media Public Scholars

While university scholars struggle to balance social scholarship with publishing demands, community college scholars are uniquely positioned to step into this role. Practitioners have the expertise and knowledge to inform society of the realities of the community college and the flexibility to choose their publishing channels. Institutions reward community college faculty for excellent teaching, not necessarily for their publication metrics. This focus makes public scholarship a natural avenue for the practitioner-scholar. Further, the power of social media transcends levels of discourse and has the potential to challenge false narratives and faulty assumptions. Social media also offers a solution to inequitable readership, disrupting circuitous academic citations.

Disrupting the Academic Echo Chamber

Social media platforms can suspend the academic echo chamber. These channels provide a diverse amount of news and information to the public, increasing the likelihood that users will be exposed to new content. A recent survey found that nearly 25 percent of social media users engage with media across various channels (Grieco, 2017). Whereas traditional public scholarship is often relegated to a single channel (i.e., op-ed appearing in one newspaper), the sharing feature of social media advances the distribution of content across platforms. Authors can easily share information across multiple networks, and readers further this cycle by forwarding content.

Research on echo chambers points to their tendency to silence outside perspectives through closed publication practices (Streeter, 2020). Top-tier quartile academic publications are exclusionary in this way. Many scholars gain traction in academic journals that favor internal citation. Social media platforms offer loopholes to closed networks when users who engage in multiple channels forward content from outside one platform into another. As noted earlier, some scholars have pointed to the potential for echo chambers to develop in the closed system of social media (Muhammed & Mathew, 2022). However, new research suggests that these structures

are more influential than previously reported (Li & Chang, 2022). Many times, users will forward messages with the intent of reframing information. These avenues bring in new perspectives and broaden awareness of contradictory viewpoints.

Social media also troubles echo chambers by encouraging immediate feedback. Users create posts to receive timely feedback from others. Traditional book reviews or dissenting journal article submissions appear months after an initial publication, whereas social media posts receive nearly instant commentary. The ease and availability of counterclaims break the cycle of repetition and encourage diverse perspectives.

Equity in Publishing

Social media provides publication equity. Authors may disseminate their content as an open media source (Allen et al., 2023). Journal hierarchy is irrelevant on platforms that are driven by user participation. A recent article investigated the inequity of top-tiered journal practices, noting that scholars from underrepresented groups receive fewer citations, lack editorial board representation, and face protracted publication timelines (Heidt, 2023). Younger scholars and women also struggle to break into some highly coveted titles. Social media avoids these trappings. In a review of posts on the platform X, then known as Twitter, researchers found little correlation between demographics and retweet rates of academic posts (Klar et al., 2020). Therefore, practitioners of all backgrounds have an increased opportunity to engage with public scholarship.

Studies have also noted increased readership of articles published in non-peer-reviewed or lower-tier journals when accompanied by social media posts. This data confirms that these articles receive a wider reach, breaking beyond disciplinary and educational boundaries (Klar et al., 2020). Social media can level the

Traditional book reviews or dissenting journal article submissions appear months after an initial publication, whereas social media posts receive nearly instant commentary.

are more susceptible to mediation than traditional media sources (Handfield, 2022; Li & Chang, 2022). It is established that when presented with fact-checked content, people often filter based on confirmation bias, engaging only when information confirms or supports previously held beliefs (Modgil et al., 2021). Yet, an investigation of retweets demonstrated that fact-checking posted virally is more often forwarded than similar messaging posted through more traditional channels (Li & Chang, 2022). Further, studies demonstrate that even weak social network

playing field for practitioners publishing in trade journals, raising awareness and increasing circulation. Further, articles tagged in social media are more likely to reach journalists, nearly 94 percent of whom indicate they regularly turn to social media platforms to pursue news and information (Jurkowitz & Gottfried, 2022). Undoubtedly, this practice will ultimately translate into a more diverse representation of community college practitioners' research in mass media.

Accessibility also increases equity and strengthens the relationship between researchers and their subjects. As one scholar declared,

Too often scholars talk at or *about* [students] rather than *with* them. But social media has allowed me to communicate concepts in a manner that doesn't require a doctoral degree to understand – and that encourages engagement rather than discouraging it by using too much academic jargon.

(Jones, 2021, para. 10)

Community college practitioners are especially attuned to this type of student engagement. Social media can serve as an extension of the classroom, taking the power and rigor of community colleges to the public. Having a dialogue directly with an audience increases transparency and reliability and serves to correct faulty interpretations of data.

Social Media and Practitioner Goals

Social media platforms meet the goals of community college practitioner research. Authors participating in these platforms can address timely concerns or innovations. Often, traditional publication methods take too long to offer solutions to pressing issues. Social media channels allow community college stakeholders to wrestle with issues in higher education in real time.

Most importantly, social media encourages engagement. It is well known that a large majority of research is penned by academics for academics. Even practitioner publications seldom reach beyond institutional barriers. Social media, however, upends boundaries, allowing practitioners to connect directly with stakeholders and students. These channels encourage dialogue, invite challenges, and promote lifetime learning. These are many of the primary goals of the community college.

The breadth of social media options offers vast opportunities for the public scholar. Community college insiders can engage in multiple platforms, bringing timely information to all sectors of society. Numerous channels are at a public scholar's fingertips, from lengthier podcasts to single-sentence X and Instagram posts. Social media avoids the protracted timelines of peer review and combats a publication system often limited to inside networks. Community college practitioners can gain agency by participating and furthering the reach of their work and expertise through social media channels. Participation in social media scholarship encourages practitioners to speak to the realities of community college policies and practices. These platforms allow community college scholars to engage with outside perspectives and combat institutional misinformation. Social media is a vehicle to erase community college stigma, one hashtag at a time.

From Theory to Practice

Community college practitioners are well-equipped to move transformative solutions from theory to practice. As innovators, these leaders can offer solutions for community and educational issues—a concept far from novel. At the turn of the 20th century, John Dewey called for scholars to devote their intellectual energies to social problems by engaging through public inquiry (Chapman & Greenhow, 2019). For Dewey, scholarship was a public

good, a responsibility to democracy, and the key to an informed citizenry. Social media, with its unprecedented accessibility, brings these goals within reach.

Community college practitioners are positioned to embrace social media. Long recognized as leaders in technology, community colleges are nimble, inventive, and responsive. Community colleges' goals, values, and reward systems align with platform practices. Accessibility, immediacy, and engagement are the hallmarks of social media, and practitioners have long invited these traits into their scholarship. Further, these channels allow practitioners to address prolonged false narratives and stigma that have plagued two-year institutions for decades. Now is the time and this is the method to address inaccuracies and herald the voices of practitioners to the forefront of higher education policy.

Considerations

It is important to note that social media public scholarship is not the same as social media marketing. Community colleges have long utilized social media channels to promote admissions, programs, and activities. The aim of a public scholar differs from these practices. "Building on the central ideas of open science and public scholarship," one scholar explained,

"social scholarship seeks to take advantage of social media affordances (i.e., user-generated content and promotion of users and their interrelationships) and values (i.e., knowledge as accessible, co-constructed, decentralized, and connective) to evolve the ways scholarship is performed in academia" (Chapman & Greenhow, 2019, p. 4). Providing study findings to the public at large is not only a democratic goal; it also reduces inaccuracies by promoting academic visibility, especially for those scholars frequently left out of elite publishing pipelines.

While marketing is not the goal of a social media public scholar, it is undoubtedly a side effect. When community college researchers showcase their work on social media, they represent the institution. Simultaneously, practitioner research can reframe public perceptions of community colleges and their faculty. As researchers promote their scholarship, they speak to the innovation, rigor, and intellectual climate often omitted from outsider representations of these institutions. Practitioners also gain personal status as leaders in their respective fields. The institutional benefits of public social media scholarship justify the investment. These platforms promise a new direction in academia, and community college faculty and leaders can pave the way.



Guidelines for Implementation

When engaging in social media scholarship, a practitioner must consider various factors, including defining their intention, time commitment, platform, modality, and connection (Allen et al., 2023). While one of the benefits of social media is its variety, its amorphous nature can also sideline effectiveness. A little planning goes a long way in ensuring success.

These guidelines for implementation provide practical suggestions for engaging in this type of public scholarship. Even the

most well-versed social media user must reframe their actions when embarking on an informational campaign. Practitioners are responsible to their fields and the public, serving as informed experts in an age marred by fake news and media sensationalism. As one leading researcher suggested, “Now more than any time in history, [scholars] have an obligation and an opportunity to utilize powerful, ubiquitous social media platforms to engage the public in science and collective, civic action” (Chapman & Greenhow, 2019, p. 7). This type of media stretches far beyond the confines of academia. It is a medium driven by public engagement. What could be more fertile ground for community college practitioners—the leaders of the people’s college?

Setting the Intention

Preparing to launch a public media social scholarship campaign resembles many of the traditional steps of academic scholarship.

Intention

1. Become acquainted with the content and design of various social media platforms.
2. Set realistic engagement expectations.
3. Search out other scholars on social media channels.

When scholars embark on their graduate journeys, they often spend considerable mental energy deciding on their research agenda. This is an understandable practice, as the direction selected often defines their academic identity for many years. Selecting a concentration for social media public scholarship requires the same amount of thought and consideration (Smith & Hayman, 2022). Practitioners can begin by asking themselves:

- What are my goals for social media scholarship?
- Am I positioning myself as a thought leader in a specific domain?
- Am I excited to share innovation in teaching and learning?
- Am I looking to build a network of scholars interested in collaboration?
- Am I hoping to solve an issue in higher education?

The answers to these questions drive the design of a scholarship campaign.

As with other forms of scholarship, conducting a literature review is standard. In social media, this means learning what conversations are currently in play on various social media

channels (University of Oxford, n.d.).

Prospective authors note the cultures and styles of various channels, paying particular attention to prominent voices doing work in similar domains. Taking this initial time will be a helpful step when building connections with other scholars across media channels.

Setting intention also means setting personal expectations. Anyone who has experienced the discouragement of tracking their recently published journal article metrics (sometimes recognizing that the only likely readers of their work were close colleagues) knows that garnering readership is a slow process. Expect the same in social media. The academic post that goes viral is a rare phenomenon (Strain, 2018). As platforms merge, evolve, and rebrand themselves, audiences come and go, and so do followers. The heart of social media is socialization. Connecting with audiences, expanding public knowledge, or contradicting stigma are noble aims, regardless of the number of likes that follow.

Time Commitment

Social media production can be an overwhelming prospect. Embarking on this undertaking requires a new way of thinking about daily practices. Increasingly, social media platforms are becoming a part of our day-to-day lives. Rather than adding to burgeoning to-do lists, successful public scholars find ways to integrate social media into their everyday routines (Allen et al., 2023). Fortunately, technology presents opportunities to connect. Many applications have integrated social media posting into their interfaces, from photo sharing to linking journal publications. Instead of simply reading an interesting journal article, social media scholars repost them. Tagging an

Time Commitment

1. Capitalize on built-in social media links during daily activities.
2. Build networks to further engagement and reach.
3. Commit to realistic production timelines.

author and commenting furthers academic discussions and broadens research networks (Allen et al., 2023). These researchers utilize blogs or websites rather than writing research reflections in a notebook. When attending a conference, social scholars post critical take-aways from sessions they attend and presentations they lead. Forming social media posts as part of a routine can be as easy as clicking a button.

New advances in social media management tools also reduce time commitment. These applications assist authors through cross-platform publication. From one dashboard, practitioners can utilize a post to fit the parameters of multiple channels. In addition, these tools can schedule posts for future dissemination or alert a scholar about relevant engagement metrics. Buffer, Hootsuite, and Zoho Social are popular management tools, and the landscape of platforms is expanding.

Regardless of how easily scholars can integrate social media into their daily routines, they must maintain realistic expectations. Just as with traditional publications, content production varies (Allen et al., 2023). On average, 30 minutes a day, three to four days a week, is sufficient to build a solid social media following (Knight, 2018). However, some scholars invest as little as an hour a month. Whatever the time frame selected, splitting efforts between reading, connecting with others, and posting original content is good practice (Knight, 2018). Building networks reduces the load on any one researcher, and it is essential to recognize that any scholarly activity in social media, regardless of time, benefits the public and practitioner.

Platform

1. Know your audience.
2. Think about platform crossover.
3. Consider readers' motivations.

Platform

In the United States, individuals spend around 2.5 hours daily on an average of eight social media accounts (Wong, 2023; Chen & Lin, 2022). Users filter and select among their platforms depending on their purpose. As discussed, some channels give users more social engagement, while others are more regularly used for informational purposes. Selecting an appropriate platform requires not only an understanding of the audience's motivations but also a consideration of how these channels appeal to differing segments of society (Allen et al., 2023). The following data provides some broad demographic averages that will aid new social media public scholars with their platform selection.

According to the Pew Research Center (2023), Facebook and YouTube remain the most popular networks to which U.S. adults turn for news and information, regardless of age, gender, race, or educational background. While these channels receive the highest percentage overall, individual sites demonstrate varying usage depending on demographic categories. For example, 48 percent of 18- to 29-year-old Reddit users regularly seek this forum to access news and information. However, only 11 percent of Reddit users aged 50 or older regularly turn to this channel for news (Pew Research Center, 2023).

On average, users under 30 engage with multiple platforms (Pew Research Center, 2023), while multi-platform engagement is less frequent among adults over 50. Social media scholars looking to reach diverse political perspectives may find platforms with a more bipartisan user community advantageous.

Most of the leading social media platforms attract college-educated users (Pew Research Center, 2024). It is worth noting, however, that X has recently begun to fall out of favor in academia, at least for researchers who utilized the platform to gather data (Coffey, 2023). That aside, scholars continue to use the channel to build academic networks, share studies, and receive feedback. Many researchers note that X yields a broad audience that includes journalists, politicians, editors, philanthropists, and think tanks (Stecuła, 2022).

LinkedIn has a reputation as a business or employment resource, but many scholars have found the channel a valuable way to build scholarly networks. Current metrics reveal that over 850 million LinkedIn users are engaged in the platform (Ennis-O'Connor, 2022). Showcasing research on this site increases the likelihood of studies expanding into audiences not typically exposed to academic research. For scholars looking for research feedback or staying abreast of recent trends, the channel's group function is an easy way to build relevant interest groups. While other channels offer similar features, X and LinkedIn are excellent applications for launching a social media scholarship campaign that builds academic networks.

As media moguls have long understood, audience is everything. Understanding demographics, as well as why users chose

some platforms over others, can help social media scholars find their audience. Knowing the motivation behind an audience's clicks helps authors design their content. Delving into user motivation helps predict how audiences frame and navigate these channels. Literature documents five distinct categories of user motivation, including "social interaction, expression and exhibition, information seeking and sharing (ISS), escapism and relaxation, and norm and trend following (NTF)" (Chen & Lin, 2022, p. 333). As users engage with platforms, they seek feedback or responses related to their actions. For example, on Facebook, the feedback options activated by a user's post are likes, comments, or forwarding. This feedback drives the motivation of the user.

Social media channels offer a variety of feedback mechanisms; researchers have categorized these functions, or affordances, based on the structure of the media channel. Most social media platforms utilize multiple feedback mechanisms and are prone to evolve and change with the market. A general set of characteristics for channel affordances includes information richness, network associations, persistence, privacy, and anonymity.

Scholars define information richness as platforms that provide a deep level of detail and context. Network associations are platforms focused on connection between parties. Persistence refers to the time content is accessible, and anonymity is the degree of user identity privacy. Interestingly, personality rather than demographics predict an audience's motivation for social media usage and correlate to individual platform choice. By understanding the motivation of an audience, a social media public scholar is better equipped to select appropriate channels for their work.

Research confirmed that individuals who use social media for social interactions select platforms offering higher network associations (Chen & Lin, 2022). A high network association's side effect is often correlated with a lower information richness rate. Users are often motivated by direct audience exchanges and less interested in the one-way communication that most information-rich media involve. Privacy is also less of a concern for these audiences, as the appeal of this affordance is the conversation between parties. Facebook and LinkedIn are popular choices for these users. Scholars employing these platforms will find audiences that are interested in two-way communication. This is an excellent audience for practitioners seeking platforms to develop academic networks and receive feedback on their scholarship.

Users motivated by expression and exhibition value information richness, emphasizing video and audio content. These users seek content that informs, includes specific details, and offers rich visual stimulation. Anonymity is more closely associated with these platforms. TikTok, Pinterest, and Instagram align with these functions. Social media scholars interested in explaining academic topics or examining false narratives will find this audience receptive to their content.

Audiences interested in ISS engage with platforms offering information richness and persistence. These audiences value social media for its "utilitarian value and cognitive stimulation" rather than its social components (Chen & Lin, 2022, p. 344). These users gravitate toward news and information platforms with higher levels of privacy. This audience would best suit social media public scholarship that disseminates research findings or promotes an author's expertise. Many of these users gravitate toward LinkedIn, YouTube, and Reddit.

Users motivated by escapism seek out platforms with information richness, persistence, and anonymity. Instagram is usually a popular app for this purpose. Photos, video, and dynamic visuals are a driving factor for this user group. This group will resonate with public media scholars who frequently post content, including those that illustrate complex topics or provide instructive videos.

A general set of characteristics for channel affordances includes information richness, network associations, persistence, privacy, and anonymity.

NTF users tend to select platforms offering network association with less concern over content persistence. As trends phase in and out, these users look for new content, frequent postings, and high-level engagement. This group is receptive to scholars highlighting innovation and trends in higher education or discipline-specific fields.

While understanding user motivation helps plan a social media public scholarship campaign, it is essential to note that platforms frequently adopt or change affordances. Further, many users jump between social media channels, seeking information for various reasons. Nonetheless, the opportunity to peel back the connection between affordance and motivation unveils associations forged by various platforms, allowing a scholar to take advantage of the network most aligned with their scholarship and goals.

Prospective social media scholars can also look beyond traditional channels. Developing personal websites, blogs, and podcasts offers alternative approaches to garnering audiences. While not social media per se, these options are very well suited for public scholarship. The resources are effective independently, but also complement a traditional social media approach. Posting a short excerpt that links to a website, blog, or podcast strengthens audience engagement. These options can serve as a home base for scholars, preserving



This form of media [podcast] humanizes academia and removes geographical boundaries.

content in ways social media feeds cannot. Posts get buried quickly in social media, but websites, blogs, and podcasts are immune to these mechanisms. These sources are also less demanding for researchers who wish to engage with audiences less frequently than traditional platforms demand.

Thanks to technological advances, designing these channels is relatively user-friendly. Companies such as Wix, WordPress, Squarespace, and Weebly are just a few of the robust options that simplify website design. These platforms offer click-and-publish templates, hosting services, and user support. Many of the sites allow users to publish for free, but with embedded company advertisements. For scholars open to paying a small fee, companies often provide customizable domain names and ad-free

hosting. When considering domain names, academic websites are most accessible when the name is simple, memorable, and descriptive. Setting up a website is an excellent way to sustain social media campaigns, creating a space to organize, reflect, and promote scholarship.

Another benefit to websites is that predesigned templates often include blogging and podcast plugins, further aiding in the ease of production. Due in part to this accessibility, blogging and websites often go hand in hand. A 2021 survey documented roughly 1.7 billion websites worldwide, of which 600 million included blogs (Chakarov, 2023). Over 77 percent of U.S. Internet users read blogs at least once per month, with WordPress alone reporting over 409 million users viewing over 21.1 billion blog pages monthly. Blog sites also enjoy more user confidence than social media posts. In a recent review of blog readers, over 81 percent reported high trust in the content sourced from these channels (Chakarov, 2023). Therefore, blog sites are a strategic way for authors to gain authority as experts and thought leaders.

Podcasts are also a growing market. Over 500 million people listen to podcasts globally; in the U.S., nearly one-third of people tune in regularly (Howarth, 2024). Of these users, roughly a quarter of U.S. adults report using podcasts as a news outlet source (Walker, 2022). Notably, research confirms that podcasts enhance society's positive views of academia (Cox et al., 2023). This form of media humanizes academia and removes geographical boundaries. Podcasts are mobile-friendly and accessible, making this medium an excellent choice for a practitioner looking to share research or dispel myths. This platform requires more technological savvy than producing a website or blog, but multiple hosting platforms are increasingly making podcasting available to even the most modest producers.

Modality

Social media provides practitioners various content modalities, including text, pictures, and videos, each offering distinct advantages for effective communication and audience engagement. Using text in academic social media posts offers several notable benefits for scholars and researchers aiming to communicate their work. This format works well to disseminate complex ideas and concepts. Scholars can provide in-depth explanations, share detailed research findings, and clearly articulate their thoughts. This clarity is essential for academic discourse and knowledge dissemination.

Moreover, text content enables scholars to present comprehensive information, delving into the nuances of research, presenting detailed methodologies, and providing context that may be challenging to convey through other media forms. Additionally, this modality is highly accessible and searchable, making it easily understood by a broad audience, including those with visual or hearing impairments. Furthermore, search engines can index text content, making it discoverable to individuals searching for specific topics or keywords.

Text-based posts often encourage thoughtful discussions and exchanges of ideas among scholars and the broader academic community. Comment sections on social media posts can serve as forums for constructive dialogue, enhancing the depth of engagement with the content. Furthermore, text allows scholars to infuse their voice and style into their posts, building a stronger connection with the audience and making the content more relatable and engaging.

Technological advances break down text-related language barriers. Scholars can embed translation tools into posts, making

Modality

1. Text allows for precise communication and is key to Search Engine Optimization.
2. Photos ensure inclusivity and increase engagement.
3. Videos aid in viewer retention and connection.

content accessible to international audiences. Moreover, text-based posts can serve as concise summaries of more extensive research projects or publications, piquing readers' interest and encouraging further inquiry. Scholars can use text to create educational content, such as explaining complex theories or outlining step-by-step guides.

Text content is the bedrock of search engine optimization (SEO), which determines visibility. SEO involves optimizing content to rank higher in search engine results. For social media public scholars, SEO practices can be applied to textual content to improve the chances of appearing in Internet searches. This might include using relevant keywords, optimizing meta descriptions, and ensuring that content is linked appropriately. In developing text content, considering keywords and bite-sized snippets as vital components can strengthen a campaign. Keeping text concise is essential, as one study revealed that 81 percent of educated people skim online text (Bynder, 2018). In addition, small slices of text make excellent cross-platform connections. For example, a quote from an academic paper posted on Instagram or X can link to the full journal article. Snippets are a goldmine of opportunity; one paper can provide a steady stream of content.

In addition, using photos in academic social media posts offers several valuable benefits for practitioner researchers. Photos add a layer of visual appeal, making posts more noticeable amidst platforms that are predominantly text-based. Industry experts estimate that adding visuals to social media posts increases engagement by 650 percent (Bynder, 2018). Photos also facilitate storytelling. They allow scholars to convey compelling narratives about their research or academic activities. Images can provide context, showcase research processes, or illustrate key findings, making work more relatable and memorable to audiences.

Social media algorithms often favor posts with images. Therefore, including photos in posted content leads to more likes, shares, and comments (AIContentfy, 2023). This



Comment sections on social media posts can serve as forums for constructive dialogue, enhancing the depth of engagement with the content.

increased engagement expands a public social media scholar's reach and enhances their influence within academic circles. Consistently using photos in academic social media posts can contribute to personal or institutional branding. Over time, an audience may associate specific types of images with a practitioner's work, making their content more recognizable and memorable.

Replacing images with videos further boosts scholarship. Video content allows for the dynamic presentation of complex ideas and research findings. Practitioners can use visual aids, animations, and real-world demonstrations to illustrate and simplify intricate concepts, making it easier for viewers to grasp the material. Video allows scholars to bring their research to life. Whether through lab tours, fieldwork documentation, or expert interviews, video provides a richer, multi-dimensional perspective. This can make academic content more engaging and accessible to a broader audience, including those who may not have a background in the field (Allen et al., 2023).

Furthermore, video offers the unique benefit of real-time interaction. Scholars can use live video streams to engage with their audience to answer questions and receive immediate feedback. This interactive element can foster community and viewer collaboration, deepening involvement with posted academic content (Allen et al., 2023). Video also aids in information retention. Researchers noted that content viewers retained 85 percent more of the information shared via video over text alone (Wertz, 2022).

Video content fosters a personal connection between the scholar and the audience. Through video, practitioners can showcase their personality, body language, and vocal tone, potentially creating a more engaging and relatable presence on social media. This personal touch can help build stronger connections with viewers, enhancing engagement and trust in the practitioner's expertise.

Well-produced videos have the potential to go viral, reaching a broader audience and increasing a practitioner's reputation. One study documented that videos translate to a 1200 percent increase in post shares over text

and photo content alone (Wertz, 2022). The shareability of video content can also facilitate cross-promotion and collaboration with other scholars and institutions. From a platform perspective, many social media algorithms prioritize video content, giving it increased visibility in users' feeds (AIContentfy, 2023).

For prospective social media scholars, choosing a modality that fits their personality and strengths is vital. Viewer and reader impressions form within the first 50 milliseconds of social media engagement (Bynder, 2018). Images and videos can harm social media scholarship if authors provide poorly rendered content. For practitioners employed on college campuses, using open video and image production resources can add an additional layer of professionalism to posts.

Content

There are a multitude of content avenues for a social media public scholar. Academic social media is most effective when it aligns with a practitioner's genuine interests and passions. When a scholar's online presence revolves around topics that truly matter to them, it creates authenticity, crucial in building trust and connections within an academic community. This fuels motivation and consistency in posting and engagement, a vital aspect of growing an academic network. Moreover, focusing on subjects that scholars are deeply passionate about enables them to develop expertise and authority in those areas over time, garnering recognition and respect from peers (Allen et al., 2023). It also facilitates networking with like-minded individuals, fostering collaborations, research opportunities, and idea exchange. Content rooted in genuine enthusiasm tends to be more engaging and impactful, making a practitioner's online presence more meaningful. Pursuing topics that scholars

Content

1. Stick to your genuine interests.
2. Know your institutional and federal social media policies.
3. Refrain from debating with Internet trolls.

genuinely care about on academic social media offers personal satisfaction and long-term commitment, creating a fulfilling online experience that contributes to both personal growth and professional development. A social media public scholar who learns to balance passion with openness to diverse perspectives enhances the prestige of the community college and fosters the critical thinking two-year institutions promote.

When posting social media content, it is crucial to be mindful of legalities and individual rights. In the U.S., for example, the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects student privacy rights. This includes avoiding disclosure of personally identifiable information about students, such as names, ID numbers, or grades (Perry, 2014). It is also vital for practitioners to follow college rules and regulations related to social media posts (Zakharov et al, 2016). Many communications departments provide practitioners with policy guidelines. For instance, typically practitioners must obtain written consent from students before sharing their work. Practitioners must be cautious when posting photographs or videos to ensure they do not reveal sensitive information or academic performance. A scholar must vigilantly monitor discussions and comments

Connection

1. Utilize between 15-30 hashtags on posts.
2. Share hashtags with other scholars in your content area.
3. Consider a branded hashtag.

on their posts to prevent inadvertent information disclosures (Perry, 2014). Many community colleges are small networks, so these spaces require increased efforts to maintain anonymity.

A social media public scholar must refrain from debating with individuals who post inflammatory comments. Often referred to as Internet trolls, these online aggressors intentionally attempt to offend or distract from posted content. A few thoughtful practices can help lessen the impact of these posts:

- Keep responses impersonal and measured.
- Maintain a commitment to pursuing knowledge and reasoned discourse.
- Calmly and politely correct any misinformation or misconceptions with well-supported evidence and sources.
- Engage in constructive dialogue with those genuinely interested in learning to help turn a negative encounter into an opportunity for education.
- Disengage from interactions when a troll is not open to reasoned discussion.

Ultimately, the academic scholar's response should exemplify the values of intellectual

integrity, respect, and a commitment to the free exchange of ideas, even in the face of online negativity.

Sharing research content online provides scholars with a network of colleagues. Engaging with peers is a valuable practice in academia. Previously, a network might be limited by geography or familiarity. Social media expands beyond physical boundaries, allowing scholars to receive feedback from other academics worldwide. Organizations, societies, industries, and nonprofits are among the potential online communities open to social media scholars (Murdak, 2018). By following, liking, and sharing hashtags, researchers can foster robust online intellectual communities and find new ways to collaborate with a wide range of audiences.

Connection

Connection is vital to the success of any social media campaign. Making social media connections requires a multifaceted approach, particularly for public scholars. The process can begin when practitioners research their channels. As public scholars follow and engage with others posting about community college research, they build their network.

One of the most effective techniques to build social media connections is to employ appropriate hashtags. A hashtag is a social media tool that uses the # symbol followed by a word or phrase to categorize and organize content. It helps users quickly discover and engage with posts related to specific topics or themes (Mudrak, 2018). Creating a post with a hashtag categorizes the content and makes it discoverable to a broader audience that extends beyond followers. People interested in a particular topic can search for or click on a hashtag to

see all related posts. Hashtags also facilitate engagement and interaction as users join conversations and share their thoughts on specific subjects.

There are several strategies for using hashtags. First, an effective way to generate a preliminary list of hashtags is to note what other scholars have tagged (Allen et al., 2023). Most will use 15 to 30 tags regularly. Authors often customize tags by linking to their affiliated colleges. Most colleges have established social networks and incorporating their institutional hashtags is appropriate for social media scholars if that is an accepted college policy. In addition, mixing a range of general-to-specific hashtags can build a network and a scholar's brand (Mudrak, 2018). For example, if a hypothetical social media public scholar posts about community college transfer, incorporating #communitycollege will reach a broader audience than #communitycollegetransfer. However, both tags should be used.

Another effective practice is for scholars to

incorporate hashtags related to keywords from their research, and to do so in both singular (e.g., #communitycollege) and plural (e.g., #communitycolleges) forms. This process showcases the relative popularity of their selected tags. Other standard practices include listing relevant hashtags before posting and ensuring that selected hashtags are not banned. To check, a user can type the hashtag into the platform search. If a channel bans a hashtag, messaging from the company will appear after a search query.

Many public media social scholars create a branded hashtag or a set of key phrases specific to their scholarship and establish these branded tags with keywords related to their primary academic focus. Using one custom tag consistently on each social media channel is good practice (Mudrak, 2018). A general rule of thumb for practitioners looking to establish a branded hashtag is considering what keywords a user would type into a search query. Just as keywords in traditional journal publications help readers locate research, hashtags help audiences locate posts.



Return on Investment

Social media is an attractive platform for academic scholarship. The accessibility of this media breaks down barriers, allowing researchers to share their work and research in new ways (Rayo, 2022). In an age of misinformation, scholars must act as knowledge agents to guide, correct, or mediate inaccuracies. Community college scholars are uniquely positioned to take the lead in this initiative. These practitioners educate almost half of all undergraduate students in the U.S. and commit to providing exceptional instruction. They are connected to the community, responsive to local needs, and in touch with county and state legislation. Community college practitioners are ideal representatives for academia in the public sphere.

For these scholars, social media also offers something formerly elusive—the opportunity to address false assumptions about the rigor of community college coursework and the credentials of their faculty. Through social media public scholarship, it is possible to disrupt the academic echo chamber by guiding the rhetoric around these institutions rather than simply responding to it.

Call to Action

In closing, this monograph urges participation. Public scholarship is a significant responsibility that is best implemented through collaboration and coordination. Joining together, community college public scholars can take the stage as information brokers and educational authorities. This service not only upholds the tenets of democracy, but also places community college practitioners in control of their own narrative. For too long, community colleges have battled against a history penned by outsiders, many of whom have grandly misunderstood the mission of these institutions. Through this new form of media, a new story can unfold.

Social media scholarship is a growing trend in higher education (Belikov, 2022; Jones, 2021). As a new medium, it offers relatively easy entry. Unlike traditional journal-based publication systems, those engaging in academic conversations online will find it much easier to disseminate information to a broad audience. Moreover, if social media public scholars work

collaboratively, utilizing the same hashtag, they can hold considerable sway over the content that appears in these social environments.

Imagine the impact community college scholars can have on public perception. A recent survey of hashtags across three platforms—Instagram, X, and LinkedIn—illustrates this point. Utilizing free tools, such as Engage AI for LinkedIn, Tweetbinder¹ for X, and hashtag counts for Instagram, demonstrates that even a small number of contributions to these sites can be significant. As evident from the current data set of hashtag usage surrounding community college topics, there is ample opportunity to amplify insider scholarship (Figure 3).

For example, if one representative from each of the hundreds of League Alliance member colleges posted on these platforms once a month for a year with #communitycollegetransfer, these posts would shepherd the discussion topic. Moreover, if only one member of each of the approximately 1,000 public community colleges in the U.S. were to post once a month for a year with #communitycollege

and #highereducationresearch, these scholars would lead the exchange of information surrounding community colleges entirely.

Community college practitioners and administrators are vibrant scholars engaging in highly effective teaching and learning practices. Through social media public scholarship, practitioners writing inside these institutions can highlight the community college classroom’s innovative nature and students’ diversity and aptitude. As experts in higher education instruction, faculty can bring to light new experiential teaching methods, displaying the academic talent of their students. Administrators can publicize the achievements of their dedicated faculty and staff, helping to dispel myths about the quality of community college education. The unique role that community colleges play in higher education is a story best told by those who work within these transformative institutions. For too long, outsiders have dominated the rhetoric. Community college public scholars must seize this moment and this medium to help turn long-overused false narratives inside out.

¹ The Tweetbinder application offers one-week hashtag usage metrics for free and offers historical metrics for a subscription fee.

	Instagram	LinkedIn	X [Twitter]
#communitycollegestigma	18	0	0
#communitycollegeresearch	21	4	0
#highereducationresearch	835	910	0
#communitycollegetransfer	237	44	0
#communitycollege	246,563	7,187	175

Figure 3

Social Media Posts by Hashtag

Note. Note: Data downloaded on 2/4/2024 utilizing Engage AI, Tweetbinder, and Instagram counts.

* Tweetbinder metrics based on one-week posts from 1/28/2024-2/4/2024; Instagram and LinkedIn numbers are cumulative historically through 2/4/2024



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Adrienne Provost holds a B.S. in Education, an M.A. in English, and a Ph.D. with a specialization in the Social Foundations of Education from the University of Florida. Nationally recognized for her work in innovative programming, Provost received the 2022 Santa Fe College Advocacy Leadership Award, the 2020 Association of Florida Colleges Student Development Exemplary Practice Award, the 2020 Workforce Adult and Continuing Education Commission Exemplary Practice Award, the 2019 Santa Fe College Innovation Award, and the 2018 Robert B. Primack Memorial Foundations of Education Endowment. She is a graduate of the Association of Florida Colleges Certified College Professional program and the Association of Florida Colleges Next Level Leadership inaugural class. Her passion for expanding higher education access and equity are the cornerstones of her professional career. Provost's academic interests include the history of higher education, community colleges, humanistic education, general education, and higher education policy & legislation. Her current research concerns the ideological influences undergirding the founding mission and purpose of the community college in the United States and the resulting political, social, and economic tensions that arose during a national shift toward neoliberalism.

Provost has served as a faculty member at a rural middle/high school, and she spent nine years working with the TRIO programs at Santa Fe College, ultimately as Director/Manager of TRIO and The College Achievement Program. She continues to champion community college students in her current position as Director of Student Strategic Initiatives, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, at the University of Florida, where her work focuses on supporting transfer students.



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