AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF STUDENTS’ USE OF FACEBOOK AND OTHER COMMUNICATION MODALITIES IN ORDER TO RECEIVE STUDENT AFFAIRS INFORMATION

Alicia Huppe, B.A., M.Ed.

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APPROVED:

Ron Newsom, Major Professor
Demetria Ennis-Cole, Minor Professor
Bontia C. Jacobs, Committee Member
Kathleen Whitson, Program Coordinator for Higher Education
Jan Holden, Chair of the Department of Counseling and Higher Education
Jerry R. Thomas, Dean of the College of Education
James D. Meernik, Acting Dean of the Toulouse Graduate School
This qualitative study explored Facebook as a communication tool for student affairs and compared it as a source with other communication modalities to describe the 18-24 year old student preference on receiving information about student affairs departments and activities. The research questions were designed to provide feedback on the current purpose[s] of student use of Facebook for student affairs services as well as reporting additional services and activities that would be considered through the use of Facebook. Differences in use among institutional types were also explored. The results of 395 online survey responses were compared to focus groups consisting of student ambassadors at a two-year public, four-year private, and four-year public institution. The online survey participants were asked to respond to specific modes of communication based upon each service or activity. The focus groups were asked the same questions in an open-ended format and the results were compared to the online results.

The results indicate that depending on the event or activity, the students preferred a different method of communication, not necessarily Facebook for information on student affairs programming. These results also differed among institutional types. Two-year institutions have the greatest potential to increase their presence on Facebook. One theme that emerged from the open-ended response question in the online survey was that institutions participating on Facebook should limit content so that it is more social in nature and leave academically related issues to
institutionally driven communication modalities. There are numerous options to communicate information to students and finding the best one may be more challenging than actually disseminating the information. With the administrative challenges and lack of student responses encouraging Facebook usage, institutions of higher education are not encouraged to spend enormous resources in this one particular communication modality. Given the high number of responses from the online survey combined with feedback from the focus groups, enhanced email options or web portal content might serve the current needs.
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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW

Student affairs professionals at institutions of higher education have a responsibility to understand emerging trends and find ways to reach students “where they are” through environmental scanning, surveys, and innovative programming. One of the technological impacts on higher education in the 21st century is social networking, including the Facebook platform. With more than 500 million users and the presence of 2,900 colleges and universities utilizing the platform (Facebook, n.d.-a), the potential for reaching students is seemingly limitless.

One of the attractions of Facebook for those in student affairs is the ease in which online groups can be established. Anyone who has a Facebook profile can establish a group and the group subjects can be wide-ranging. Student organizations, residence life, and alumni relations are just a few of the student affairs areas that have benefited by establishing groups in Facebook (Aleman & Wartman, 2009). A January 2010 poll by Intellliworks questioned 18-24 year olds to determine their preferred communications channel from colleges and universities for receiving admissions information; email and Facebook were the top two responses (Intelleworks, 2010). “Because Facebook is privileged over e-mail as a form of communication, students tend to take the messages that they get through Facebook more seriously” (Aleman & Wartman, 2009, p. 101). At a departmental or student organizational level this is a convenient medium to communicate with members of a particular cohort. However, for institutions of higher education as a whole, it is a challenge to monitor the content and information being communicated as anyone can create a fan page to resemble an
official college or university site. Much research has been conducted on students using Facebook (Anderson, 2001; boyd, 2007; Hargittai, 2007; Li, 2007; Rosenbloom, 2007; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2008; Salaway, Katz, Caruso, Kvavik, & Nelson, 2007; Selwyn, 2009; Silverman, 2007; Stutzman, 2006); however, limited feedback is available for student affairs professionals as to the most effective use of the Facebook platform for their specific department.

Colleges and universities need to become aware of the information being posted on Facebook, especially since establishing a group can be done with ease and be made to resemble an officially sanctioned site. Unlike internally controlled college and university home pages or websites, Facebook is an external personal home page that could be shut down with little or no warning by either the page administrator or the Facebook organization. Even with the enormous popularity of the site, the use of Facebook is voluntary. The justification for using Facebook as a pseudo-official communication tool on behalf of institutions of higher education needs to be given more attention than previous research provides.

The mission statement of Facebook is “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected” (Facebook, n.d.-b). Launched in February 2004, the original users were those with a harvard.edu email address. The website’s membership expanded to include other Boston area colleges within two months of its initial launching and then later in 2004 to most universities in the United States. In September 2005 Facebook launched a high school version. On September 26, 2006 Facebook was made available to anyone 13 years of age or older with a valid email address.
In August 2010 Facebook had 500 million active users—defined on the Facebook homepage as those who have returned to the site in the last 30 days (Facebook, n.d.-a). This website is one of the most-trafficked personal home page sites in the world (Facebook, n.d.-c). According to Alexa, a web information company, Facebook is the second highest trafficked site overall on the web and the number one social networking site both in the United States and globally (Alexa, n.d.-a).

It is no secret that institutions of higher education are utilizing the site. The first longitudinal study of social media and college admissions conducted by Nora Barnes and Eric Mattson (2009) discovered that “85% of college admissions offices are using at least one form of social media” (p. 3). This study included all four-year accredited institutions in the United States. Facebook has become so prevalent in admissions that companies like Inigral, Intelliworks, and Bluefuego were founded to help institutions develop applications that assist colleges in creating central Facebook sites where students can post pictures, track on-campus activities, and ask questions. Texas A&M University in 2009 launched a social media campaign which attempted to best utilize the unique features of the different social networking sites including creating a cohesive “look” to all of the official university Facebook pages. In addition to this, Texas A&M University is utilizing Twitter, YouTube, and developed an iPhone application for sports scores and general directory information.

A recent search for “University of North Texas” on Facebook yielded more than 25 pages and 157 groups appear (Facebook, n.d.-d). Sites included the official university page and pages for student organizations, alumni associations, groups with
political affiliations, and others. Memberships range from as few as three individuals up to several thousand participants.

The Facebook platform permits the creation of multiple features including personal profiles, applications, groups, and public profiles. Personal profiles are set up by individuals, whereas public profiles can be established on behalf of educational institutions. All profiles can be classified under a category. Within the “Student Groups” category there are 21 subgroups for members to join and create their own online groups. In 2005 Techcrunch.com reported that 85% of students in supported colleges have a profile on Facebook (Arrington, 2005). The 2007 Educause Center for Applied Research (ECAR) Study of Undergraduate Students and Informational Technology reported that 81.6% of students surveyed used an online social networking site (such as Facebook) on a daily basis (p. 44). From the 2008 Harvard University Institute of Politics, the 15th Biannual Youth Survey on Politics and Public Service revealed that of the 18-24 year olds surveyed, 86% of students attending a 4-year college or university had a Facebook account (p. 26).

According to Aleman and Wartman (2009):

Facebook is now the primary vehicle for student-to-student communication as well the first place that students turn for campus directory information… Students who are involved in campus organizations tell us that Facebook is now the primary method they use to inform other students of campus activities. (p.100) Their study evaluated social networking sites and the specific components of Facebook. The authors also recommend that “since Facebook intersects with college student identity development, there are implications and topics to consider for administrators on campus who support certain student populations” (Aleman & Wartman, 2009, p. 103). Their data showed that in 2005 more than 2,000 colleges and
universities were set up on Facebook as ‘groups.’ However, during the scope of the study the researchers did not isolate student use on the Facebook site; they merely included it as one of the online social networking sites being evaluated. Aleman and Wartman provide foundational support to expand research to student affairs. In 2009, Noel-Levitz released the *E-Expectations Report: Scrolling Toward Enrollment*. Of the 1,005 college-bound high school seniors surveyed, 70% responded that colleges and universities should have a presence within a social network.

Most students entering a college or university in the fall of 2010 will have had access to institutional websites, print catalogs and newspapers, text messages via cell phones, physical campus postings (both paper and digital), email, web portals, the Facebook platform, and more. Because of this, “there is a need for institutions to monitor student access to the technologies and consider what to provide for students and what to leave to social trends to determine” (Mason & Rennie, 2008, pp. 15-16).

To further isolate student use of Facebook from the other online social networks, an article by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) confirmed that “participants overwhelmingly used Facebook to keep in touch with old friends and to maintain or intensify relationships characterized by some form of offline connection such as dormitory proximity or a shared class” (p. 1162) and that “colleges may want to explore ways to encourage this sort of usage [Facebook connections]” (p. 1164). Golder, Wilkinson, and Huberman, using data collected directly from Facebook servers between February 2004 and March 2006, concluded that Facebook was becoming an increasingly prevalent means by which college-age members communicate. By analyzing usage time it was discovered that online social interaction was incorporated
during school hours. Specifically, “Facebook use is at its lowest during the college student weekend, presumably when students are away from their computers, especially Friday and Saturday nights” (Golder et al., 2006, p. 9). They concluded that student use of Facebook “does not represent leisure time, but rather social interaction engaged in as an activity paralleling the schoolwork and other computer-related activities during the week” (Golder et al., 2006, p. 9).

The study conducted by Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfeld (2008) addressed changes in use and perception of Facebook among undergraduate students at a large public university. Two survey results support the need for further research in student use of Facebook as it pertains to student affairs: student use time on Facebook was shown to have increased from 28 minutes per day in 2006 to 82 minutes per day in 2008 (p. 724) and the statistically significant increase in response to the statement “I use Facebook to find out about things going on at MSU” (p. 728). No anecdotal evidence was provided from the interviews with the students to define “things.”

Studies by Scott Silverman and Neil Selwyn lay the foundation to further explore the Facebook site and student use for student affairs practitioners. Much of the earlier research on social networking revealed usage of Facebook by students (Selwyn, 2009; Silverman, 2007), identity development (Woolley, Limperos, & Tamul, 2008), time spent online (Salaway et al., 2007), and general features of the Facebook platform such as staying in contact with friends, uploading photos, etc (Golder et al., 2006; Ellison et al., 2007; Rosenbloom, 2007) but did not give total focus to the impact for student affairs.
Problem

Given that 81.6% of college students engage in online social networking daily (Salaway et al., 2007) for an average of 82 minutes (Lampe et al., 2008) and that Facebook is the number one social networking site in the United States (Alexa, n.d.-b), student affairs professionals in higher education need data to begin to assess the value of use of Facebook as a tool to communicate and interact with their students. Specifically, do 18-24 year old students use the social networking site Facebook for information about student affairs programs, and if so, how do they use it? If this student group does not use the social networking site Facebook which service(s) do they use?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore Facebook as a communication tool for student affairs and compare it as a source with other communication modalities to describe the 18-24 year old student demographic preference on receiving information about student affairs activities and departments.

Research Questions

1. For what purpose[s] are students currently using Facebook related to student affairs in higher education?

2. If students are currently using Facebook to receive information about specific student affairs divisions, which other student affairs services would students consider using Facebook to receive information?

3. Is there a difference in student use of Facebook among institutional types?
4. Is there a difference in use of Facebook for student affairs services between students new to Facebook in college compared to those who were established Facebook users prior to entering?

5. If not Facebook, how do students prefer to receive communication on student affairs events and programs?

Definitions of Research Terms

Factors included in this study are operationally defined below.

- Communication modalities/mediums: A term used to categorize multiple ways in which to communicate. Specific communication modalities referenced in this study include: Facebook, college email, college websites, text messaging, college newspaper, physical campus postings (banners, kiosk, TV ads), and personal email.

- Established student: A student who has had an active Facebook account for 2 or more years.

- Facebook: “1. (noun): The online social networking site. 2. (verb): To engage and participate in the online social networking site” (Aleman & Wartman, 2009, p. 135). The mission of Facebook is “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected” (Facebook, n.d.-b).

- Institutional types: Categorical classifications of institutions of higher education limited to: four-year public, four-year private, public two-year, or technical school for the purposes of this study.

- New student: A student who has had an active Facebook account for less than 2 years.
• Student affairs activities and departments: The most commonly identified services and departments within student affairs found in literature and used for this study are admissions/recruitment, orientation, academic advising, awards and banquets, student life/organizations, Greek life, residence hall, athletics, fine arts (i.e. performances and guest lecturers), financial aid, course registration, tutoring, career services, volunteer or service learning, and multicultural services (Komives & Woodard, 2003).

Significance of the Study

Facebook originated with four-year residential campuses where users were required to sign in with their .edu email addresses. The platform was eventually opened to all institutions of higher education. Given that students at four-year institutions were the first to engage in Facebook, will they have higher percentage participation over their two-year constituents? As revealed in Golder et al. (2006), “Facebook users appear to be clustered by school” (p. 1) and that Facebook is “a useful place to communicate with others” (p. 2). Silverman’s and Selwyn’s Facebook research was limited to one institution. Both recommend expanding the research to other institutions and institutional types.

Data presented in the 2007 ECAR study explored the idea that students were moving away from email to more real-time data communication modes (like texting and instant messaging). Their results disputed that and found that 85.1% preferred email for official college and university communications. A poll conducted by Intelliworks in January 2010 corroborates this with results that 78% of student responses stated they
would prefer an email for admissions notification (compared to other communication modalities).

The 2009 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) revealed that from the more than 400,000 students surveyed, 64% of the traditional aged students accessed social networking tools multiple times a day. When the students were surveyed about the frequency of using a social network to communicate about coursework, 63% responded they communicate with other students, instructors, or college staff about coursework on a minimum monthly basis. When the question was reversed and the students were asked how often their college communicated with them regarding student services using online social networking, the result was 38% on a monthly or more frequent interaction.

Facebook opened up to the general population in the fall of 2006, providing the opportunity for the college senior class of 2010 to have had a Facebook account during the four years of their undergraduate career. Ellison et al. (2007) found that “there was a slight tendency for newer students to use Facebook to meet new people more than for juniors and seniors to do so” (p. 1155).

Institutions of higher education are in a reactionary mode to the development of Facebook. There are several other online social networking sites, but due to the overwhelming popularity of Facebook, it will be the only site targeted for this study. The research has shown that students and colleges are using Facebook (Anderson, 2001; boyd, 2007; Hargittai, 2007; Li, 2007; Pempek et al., 2008; Rosenbloom, 2007; Salaway et al., 2007; Selwyn, 2009; Silverman, 2007; and Stutzman, 2006). This study provides
descriptive data for student affairs professionals to understand the reported use of Facebook and other communication modalities.

Limitations

Facebook is a nebulous online environment with applications and features that are constantly changing. In 2006 any online member who was in the same network (i.e., from the same educational institution) could view any personal profile within that same network. That has since changed and only those who mutually agree to be “friends” will be able to see the content of each other’s Facebook page. There is limited, published research available and of that, little is dedicated to Facebook usage pertaining to student affairs. The student responses may or may not be accurate as the information is self-reported.

Delimitations

Only current college students in the United States within the 18 to 24 year-old demographic with active Facebook accounts (and not any other type of online social networking account) were surveyed. The focus groups consisted of the same student demographic as that of the online survey group who also served as student ambassadors at select institutions.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Much research has been conducted on the students using Facebook (Anderson, 2001; boyd, 2007; Hargittai, 2007; Li, 2007; Pempek et al., 2008; Rosenbloom, 2007; Salaway et al., 2007; Selwyn, 2009; Silverman, 2007; Stutzman, 2006); but of this, limited feedback is available for student affairs professionals as to the most effective use of the Facebook platform for their specific department. A January 2010 poll by Intelliworks questioned 18-24 year olds on their preferred communications channel from colleges and universities on receiving admissions information: email and Facebook were the top two responses (Intelliworks, 2010). The poll which was conducted on LinkedIn (a predominantly social networking site for business contacts) resulted in 100 responses and only focused on information pertaining to admissions.

It is no secret that institutions of higher education are utilizing the Facebook site. The first longitudinal study of social media and college admissions conducted by Nora Barnes and Eric Mattson (2009) discovered that “85% of college admissions offices are using at least one form of social media” (p. 3). This study included all four-year accredited institutions in the United States. So powerful is the influence of social networking among students that Barnes and Mattson (2009) predict that “as more and more young people spend increased amounts of time on these online networks, an institutional presence will be mandatory” (p. 5). Facebook has become so prevalent in admissions that companies like Inigral, Intelliworks, and Bluefuego were founded to help institutions develop applications that help colleges to create central Facebook sites where students can post pictures, track on-campus activities, and ask questions.
In August 2010 Facebook had 500 million active users—defined on the Facebook homepage as those who have returned to the site in the last 30 days (Facebook, n.d.-a). This website is one of the most-trafficked personal home page sites in the world (Facebook, n.d.-c). According to Alexa, a web information company, Facebook is the number two top site overall on the web and the number one social networking site both in the United States and globally (Alexa, n.d.-a). The other social networking sites like MySpace and LinkedIn do not have an origin with educational institutions and other computer mediated communication modalities such as blogging and instant messaging are features that are incorporated into Facebook. In 2009 Twitter and YouTube had limited applications for institutions of higher education (Reuben, 2008).

Of the research that has previously been conducted, some common themes of student use emerged. As a relatively new feature of the Internet, most research through 2009 explored student use of Facebook, why, and when students are utilizing this online platform. From the results we know how much time students spent on Facebook (CCSSE, 2009; Ellison et al., 2007; Matney, Borland, & Cope, 2008; and Salaway et al., 2007) the primary purpose for their use (CCSSE, 2009; Ellison et al., 2007; Golder et al., 2006; Matney et al., 2008; Pew, 2005; and Selwyn, 2009), and some general recommendations or benefits of embracing the use of Facebook (Aleman & Wartman, 2009; Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2002; “How to Make Facebook,” 2006; Mason et al., 2008; Selwyn, 2009; and Silverman, 2007). Of these, few studies addressed departments within student affairs and the use of Facebook (CCSSE, 2009; Ellison et al., 2007; Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Matney et al., 2008; and Silverman,
It is from these and other sources that we can generate a profile of average usage for a student on Facebook which can then be used to further explore how student affairs in higher education can capitalize on the use of Facebook.

Not only does a national average of 86% of college students use Facebook (Harvard University Institute of Politics, 2008, p. 26), but 64% of users are on multiple times a day (CCSSE, 2009, p. 8) for an average of 10-30 minutes a day (Ellison et al., 2007, p. 1153). The main reason cited for Facebook use was to stay connected with friends (boyd, 2007; CCSSE, 2009; EDUCAUSE, 2007; Ellison et al., 2007; Golder et al., 2006; Matney et al., 2008; Pew, 2005; Rosenbloom, 2007; Selwyn, 2009). This usage can translate to higher education by helping students feel more connected (CCSSE, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Silverman, 2007; and Stutzman, 2006) in an online environment that they have integrated into their daily lives.

Institutions of higher education have responded to the consumer driven demand of physical structures (building state of the art recreational facilities and high end, luxury residential living); and at the same time, institutions should also give consideration to communication modalities for recruiting and retaining students. After reviewing Facebook usage of 92 undergraduate students at Georgetown University, the 2008 study by Pempek et al. recommended that colleges and universities take advantage of the new way in which students are communicating with each other en masse using the Facebook platform.

Research on Student Usage

Scott Silverman’s 2007 dissertation, titled Creating Community Online: The Effects of Online Social Networking Communities on College Students’ Experiences;
How can Student Affairs Professionals Best Respond to this Emergent Phenomenon, explores the activities college students were engaging in online and provides insight for student affairs practitioners to determine their level of involvement with developing programs utilizing online social networks (OSNs). “By examining the impact of OSNs on student experiences, student affairs professionals can reach out to and program for online communities in similar style as they would for…other constituent groups” (Silverman, 2007, p. 208). The phenomenological study explored students’ perceptions about OSNs and the role that colleges and universities should play, especially in terms of how to work with students in this online community. Silverman’s research supports the idea that involvement can lead to integration. “Some identified that Facebook and other OSNs help them connect to classmates that they may not otherwise have had contact with, and that has helped their academic performance,” (Silverman, 2007, p. 109) but Silverman does not expand on academic performance but rather on connections with classmates.

Silverman (2007) encourages further research, especially among different institutional types, so that student affairs practitioners will be able to gain knowledge to “provide programming for a campus community that has not previously received attention” (p. 208).

One of the first comprehensive studies on student use of Facebook was conducted by Neil Selwyn at the School of Social Sciences at Coalsville University in the United Kingdom. A study of 909 undergraduate students included the research question “what aspects of students’ interactions via Facebook can be considered to be related to their university education?” (Selwyn, 2009, p. 159). The content of the
Facebook pages of the undergraduate students in the School of Social Science was monitored for 5 months (November 6, 2006 – March 12, 2007) through a systematic evaluation. It was determined that 4 percent of the interactions were related to studies and/or academic aspects of the university experience (Selwyn, 2009). Through the student exchanges, Selwyn was able to capture anecdotal evidence that while the university had attempted to communicate information to the students regarding various aspects of course requirements, the method was not always in alignment with the students' preferred means of communication. One specific example showed where a university official sent an email out to the students at 8:00 a.m. stating the venue for the session that day had changed. The student had posted on Facebook that she rarely checks email before leaving the house (Selwyn, 2009, p. 164). It should be noted that since the time of Selwyn’s study, the security features on Facebook have changed and the only way to access a student’s content is by the student accepting you as a “friend.”

Another study evaluating student content on Facebook provides a starting point for institutions of higher education. The 2008 study by Pempek et al. recommended that colleges and universities model the communication method used by students on Facebook. Following the “one-to-many” concept, they encouraged building academically-focused websites where students and professors engage in dialog by posting comments.

The concept of faculty and administrators engaging students in their online environment should be approached with thoughtful consideration. “There were mixed feelings about the role of administrators on Facebook” (Aleman & Wartman, 2009, p. 91). Silverman (2007) acknowledges that “administrators have the unique opportunity
to support students in their online social networking” (p. 200). It is perhaps more of a facilitation of information on behalf of the institution that students would be supportive of an administrative presence on Facebook opposed to a person-to-person “friend” type of connection. Aleman and Wartman (2009) recommend that “the best way for student affairs administrators to connect with students and dialog about their Facebook use is through student leaders” (p. 94). The feedback from Aleman and Wartman’s research emphasizes the development of student identity and how the student’s Facebook persona is a direct extension of reality rather than how student affairs administrators can capitalize on this communication modality.

Some of the initial research of Facebook conducted by institutions of higher education provided indirect feedback for student affairs personnel. In a 2007 New York Times article, Stephanie Rosenbloom reveals that “scholars at Carnegie Mellon used the site [Facebook] to look at privacy issues. Researchers at the University of Colorado analyzed how Facebook instantly disseminated details about the Virginia Tech shootings in April” (Rosenbloom, 2007). Rosenbloom further explores the appeal of the data provided by Facebook for the social sciences — sociology, psychology and political science. “The site lets them examine how people, especially young people, are connected to one another, something few data sets offer, the scholars say” (Rosenbloom, 2007). At the time of these studies, students were required to use their college-issued email address in order to open a Facebook account. Once established, it could be viewed by those in the same network (all those at the college or university). Since that time, the privacy settings for Facebook have changed and students have individual control over who can publicly access their information. During the inaugural
years, Facebook provided a cornucopia of self reported information by the students. Other institutions that participated in the data mining included Indiana, Northwestern, Pennsylvania State, Tufts, and the University of Texas. Rosenbloom specified “these institutions are testing theories about relationships, identity, self-esteem, popularity, collective action, race and political engagement” (Rosenbloom, 2007).

While these institutions were providing feedback on student use, the results did not provide direct implications for student affairs. In 2009, Noel-Levitz released *E-Expectations Report: Scrolling Toward Enrollment*. Of the 1,005 college-bound high school seniors surveyed, 70% responded that colleges and universities should have a presence within a social network with no further details provided as to what type of presence (Noel-Levitz, 2009). From the Lampe et al. (2008) study, there was a statistically significant increase in response to the statement “I use Facebook to find out about things going on at MSU” (p. 728) with no clarification to the term “things.” Further hints as to which services students would access using Facebook were alluded to in the study as well. When the Ellison et al. (2007) survey was evaluated using a regression analyses, the perceived audience for the respondents’ Facebook profiles resulted in slightly less than 10% for administration and, ironically, 80% for a stranger at the university—the term stranger, as reported by Ellison et al., excludes classmates, professors, administrators, and resident advisors (p. 1156). The 2009 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) found that a combined 42% of traditional aged students use a social networking tool multiple times per day/week to communicate about coursework. Inversely, 16% said that their college used a social networking tool to communicate about services.
In the 2009 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the most frequently selected method of communication between students and faculty was e-mail, with 85% of students identifying it; 6% identified social networking sites as a method of communication (p. 20). The NSSE study primarily focused on communication between faculty and students but lends support to Tinto's involvement theory. “Students who use interactive technologies are also more likely to say their campus environment is supportive and contributes to their knowledge, skills, and personal development” (NSSE, 2009, p. 20). The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) releases an annual *Profile of the American College Student*. In the 2008 report, students responded to the question “What is the most common way you learn about campus events?” (NASPA, 2008a, p. 1). The highest response was 28.55% for flyers/posters/banners/chalking on campus. The second highest response was 21.70% for campus e-mail and online communities, including Facebook, generated a 6.48% response thus mirroring the results of the NSSE study.

Institutional Challenges

While the traditional aged college student has grown accustomed to and expects rapid upgrades in terms of their technological resources (Hargittai, 2007; Heiberger & Harper, 2008), student affairs professionals must be mindful that, even with this greater access to information, students do not possess any greater knowledge than their predecessors (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006). Students entering a college or university in the fall of 2010 will have had access to institutional websites, print catalogs and newspapers, text messages via cell phones, physical campus postings (both paper and digital), email, web portals, the Facebook platform, and more. “There is a need for
institutions to monitor student access to the technologies and consider what to provide for students and what to leave to social trends to determine” (Mason & Rennie, 2008, pp. 15-16). With so many communication modalities, institutions may find themselves being more strategic when it comes to choosing the most effective means given current resources and attempting to streamline the process.

The advent of social media has created so many forms of media, that those who follow blogs, Twitter friends, Facebook friends, MySpace friends, etc., can easily find themselves overloaded now when trying to keep up with “traditional media,” such as e-mail, print publications, and instant messaging. (Reuben, 2008, p. 8)

The 2008 NASPA survey provided students with 11 categories of communication in order to select how they most commonly hear about campus events. With so many options addressing such a wide range of topics, we need to drill down to the specifics of the service or event that needs to be communicated. One of the challenges is resolving conflicting feedback, specifically when addressing which communication modality is best to send a message to a student. With high Facebook usage one would presume that “students check Facebook and MySpace before Groupwise [campus e-mail system]” (Connell, 2009, p. 33) and are therefore missing important email messages from colleges and universities. Further, Carnevale (2006) found that students no longer prefer email and Selwyn (2009) provides evidence where a student had posted on Facebook that she rarely checks email before leaving the house (Selwyn, 2009). Yet a surprising 85.1% of respondents to the ECAR study stated that email is the first choice for institutional communication. Perhaps it is the two parties who are involved in the communication that best determines which format to use. While the 2005 report from the Pew Internet and American Life Project titled Teens and Technology found that while teenagers preferred new technology like instant or text messaging for talking to
friends, they resorted to e-mail to communicate with "old people" (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Smith, 2005, p. ii).

Without asking the specific questions pertaining to isolated services, student affairs personnel will be unable to effectively and efficiently communicate with students if they continue to use generalized results. The need to communicate such a wide range of information requires the direct response from the intended audience as to their preferred method of communication.

We in higher education should come to recognize that this universal commercial site [Facebook] is here to stay. We should use it for advertising and for communications—and certainly for emergency messaging. (Mitrano, 2008, p. 73)

While the previous research cited does not show a high volume of communication between institution and student occurring using Facebook, one attributing factor is the response rate of institutions choosing to utilize this medium. In order to effectively use an online social network, institutions must be willing to support the resources needed in terms of both time and personnel (Reuben, 2008; Violino, 2009). It is estimated that institutions wanting to keep their online presence current especially within the realm of Facebook should allocate 1 to 4 hours a week for updates and postings (Reuben, 2008). This does not take into account the amount of time and personnel who are involved in maintaining and sending updates through the more established channels of communication.

Students use Facebook as their primary method of communication (Aleman & Wartman, 2009) and this activity needs to be explored in order to understand detailed use as it pertains to student affairs. This feedback will enhance the online interaction
that is currently haphazardly taking place between institutions of higher education and their students.

Theoretical Framework

In 2010, Facebook was still a relatively new phenomenon and a tool which provided a forum for much student interaction. If some of this interaction can be directed by student affairs personnel this may result in greater integration of the students at the institution. The following student affairs theoretical concepts are referenced as a foundation to support the need to interact and the potential value to student affairs by doing so.

*Alexander Astin, Involvement Theory*

According to Astin (1991), students are able to create self-produced environmental experiences and “the richest source of data on students’ environmental experiences is the students themselves…student as an observer” (p. 85). Facebook is an example of this environmental experience in which students are participating. Facebook is an external website, separate from any college or university controlled Internet resource. As such, the focus of control is the user (EDUCAUSE, 2007; Mitrano, 2008) mostly the individual level. In order to maximize Facebook usage for student affairs we need to acknowledge from Astin's involvement theory that in order “to achieve the effects intended, [we] must elicit sufficient student effort and investment of energy to bring about the desired learning and development” (Astin, 1984, p. 301). By posting information haphazardly on Facebook, the profession of student affairs is not properly evaluating student time and effort to ensure this is the most accessed and efficient medium. Student affairs professionals should be deliberate in their use of the Facebook
platform and acknowledge limitations imposed by the platform as well as arbitrary boundaries placed by the students. Even with the enormous popularity of the online platform and creation of security and privacy authentication software for Facebook applications, some reservations must be made regarding the services placed outside the institution’s full control.

In order to create a holistic view of student use of Facebook, previous research (CCSSE, 2009; Ellison et al., 2007; Lampe et al., 2008; Matney et al., 2008; and Salaway et al., 2007) is cited to reveal their quantitative usage even though this study focused on qualitative responses. Astin (1984) emphasized that involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features.

In *What Matters in College, Four Critical Years Revisited* (1993) Astin pointed out there was a “pervasive pattern of positive benefits associated with frequent student-student interaction” (p. 385) and that “these findings support the continuing efforts of student affairs professionals to find ways to engage students in …programs that encourage student-student interaction” (p. 386).

*Arthur Chickering and Linda Reisser, Education and Identity*

The primary purpose of an online social network is to connect with people. One must be aware that “student culture can affect the development of identity and purpose by encouraging wide-ranging exploration or curtailing it” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 395). Facebook and other online social networks are now integrated to the daily lives of students (Golder et al., 2006). It is the responsibility of student affairs professionals “to create and maintain educationally powerful environments” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 454), which may mean tapping in to the features of Facebook to enhance the student
experience. “On Facebook…students shift between multiple selves and experiment with different identities” (Aleman & Wartman, 2009, p. 89). Some of this identity development is being expressed through the applications on Facebook (Woolley et al., 2008).

Vincent Tinto, Involvement

Tinto’s model of institutional departure offers guidance to “administrators who seek to design academic and social programs and experiences intended to promote students’ educational growth” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 56). “The level of student involvement and integration in any of the components of an institution’s academic and social systems can be a critical factor is students’ persistence decisions” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 426). By further evaluating how we can reach students online through Facebook, services can be enhanced to aid student retention. Silverman (2007) makes the recommendation that “promoting the campus events through OSNs is generally both anticipated and appreciated by the students” (p. 210). Matney et al. (2008) found that 37.5% of survey respondents said that they use Facebook for student organization information.

Facebook serves to lower the barriers to participation so that students who might otherwise shy away from initiating communication with or responding to others are encouraged to do so through Facebook. (Lampe et al., 2008, p. 1162)

Facebook has changed the way in which students can interact with each other as well as the college or university. Heiberger and Harper (2008) encourage student affairs practitioners to commit further resources to programs within social networking sites, specifically Facebook. By expanding a presence on Facebook, institutions are providing one more avenue for students to become integrated in the campus community.
The results of the 2009 Community College Survey of Student Engagement confirmed speculation from Laird and Kuh (2005) that “the more students use social networking tools for academically purposeful activities, the higher their levels of engagement” (CCSSE, 2009, p. 9).

Astin, Tinto, Pascarella and Terenzini establish the general framework of the need for institutions of higher education to interact and engage their student population. From this, the extraction is made that this interaction (via Facebook or other communication modalities) will lead to engagement (CCSSE, 2009). Institutions will face challenges on how to provide purposeful online activities and effective communication. The Facebook platform permits the creation of multiple features including personal profiles, applications, groups, and public profiles. All profiles can be classified under a category and there are 21 subgroups within the “Student Groups” category. It is within these subgroups that institutions of higher education are using Facebook; however, it is not known how colleges and universities are using the categories. The programmed categories of student groups on Facebook closely mirror some of Komives and Woodard (2003) divisions within student affairs including Academic Advising, Greek Life, Residence Life and Housing, and Enrollment Management (Admissions/Recruitment). It is within the general context of the theoretical framework and the categorical classification that this qualitative study explored student use of Facebook and other communication modalities. Since there is limited research on Facebook usages and its impact on academic and social integration, the first task for this research is to understand current use. Once the current use is understood, the potential can be explored.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative approach was used to explore student use of Facebook and other communication modalities for the purpose of obtaining information about student affairs activities and departments.

Commercially developed instruments for assessing educational environments are of limited use because they are designed primarily to assess the environment of the total institution rather than the environmental experiences of individual students within that institution. (Astin, 1991, p. 235)

By designing the online survey, data were drawn at the individual student level. Given that limited research has been conducted for this specific area, qualitative research techniques are best used to discover themes and patterns of use (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

Social Networking Site for Data Collection

The reason for selecting Facebook over other social networking sites for this study was based upon the platform’s origin. Facebook was launched at Harvard and then within two months of its debut expanded membership to include other Boston area colleges. Participation was extended to most universities in the United States by 2004 before the platform opened up to the general public.

The data were collected from a combination of surveys and focus groups. The online student survey was administered to college students attending at least part time in spring 2010 in the United States who had active profiles on Facebook that fall within the 18 to 24 year old demographic. The online survey was housed on a Facebook fan
Silverman’s research solicited participation through Facebook flyers and by him joining membership to the largest groups on Facebook. In 2007 he was able to attract 367 online survey participants. The goal for this study was to target 500 responses.

Instrument Development

The qualitative survey instrument was created and distributed using Zoomerang, an online survey tool. A group page that contained a description of the study as well as a link to the Zoomerang survey was designed within the Facebook platform. The Facebook group initially limited membership to those who were 18-24 years old. This limitation was later removed to give individual access to the survey even if one did not meet the demographic target. Limiting the group by age may have also restricted some eligible participants if they falsified their biographical information in Facebook.

Zoomerang has built-in features to ensure complete responses are provided for the questions. In order to ensure all research questions would be addressed in the survey, all multiple choice questions required a response. There are 21 subtypes for members to join within the “Student Groups” category on Facebook: abroad/overseas, academic, advising, alumni, classes and departments, clubs and societies, community, creative arts, dorms and residences, ethnic/cultural, fraternities and sororities, general, media/publication, musical, political, pre-professional, religious, service, social, student government, and study. These categories are wide-reaching and mirror some of the core services found in student development theory (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Komives & Woodard, 2003). By cross referencing the student affairs services identified in Komives and Woodard (2003) with these student group categories, a list of
services being assessed was generated for the student survey. The survey categories included Admissions/Recruitment, Orientation, Academic Advising, Awards and Banquets, Student Life/Organizations, Greek Life, Residence Hall/Housing, Athletics, Fine Arts (i.e. Performances and Guest Lecturers), Financial Aid, Course Registration, Tutoring, Career Services, Volunteer or Service Learning, and Multicultural Services. If an institution was not providing these services or students were not using Facebook for this purpose, that information was captured as well.

The items in the survey corresponded to the research questions and provided a basic demographic profile of the participants. The first survey question provided consent for the study. The second survey question asked for the student’s status: full-time, part-time or not attending. If the student selected the not attending option, a skip feature was inserted so that the student was taken to the end of the survey.

Research Question 1, “For what purpose[s] are students currently using Facebook related to student affairs in higher education?” was addressed in Survey Question 11 “Which of the following Student Affairs programs have you accessed online through Facebook (please mark all that apply).”

Research Question 2, “If students are currently using Facebook to receive information about specific student affairs divisions, which other student affairs services would students consider using Facebook to receive information?” was answered with the responses from Survey Question 12 “Which of the following services does your school currently not have on Facebook, but you would use? (please mark all that apply).”
The results from Golder et al. (2006) showed student participation to be clustered by school, which is logical given that students were required to use their college-issued email addresses when the platform was first opened. Given the changes in recent years where anyone with a valid (non-educationally affiliated) email can set up an account, would those results remain constant? Research Question 3, “Is there a difference in student use of Facebook among institutional types?” To provide a response to this, Survey Question 6 asked “Which type of educational institution do you attend?” The responses from Survey Questions 11 and 12 were compared to the institutional types listed in Survey Question 6.

Lampe et al. administered surveys on student use of Facebook in April of 2006, 2007, and 2008. From their results published in 2008, they determined that students who were considered “late adopters” of the site (defined as students who joined the site in 2007) were more likely to use it to meet new people compared to those who had more established profiles (Lampe et al., 2008, p. 725). Would those students who were new to Facebook be more inclined to use it for student services compared to those students who had existing accounts? This was the premise for Research Question 4, “Is there a difference in use of Facebook for student affairs services between students new to Facebook in college compared to those who were established Facebook users prior to entering college?” In order to address this, responses from Survey Question 11 were compared to responses to Survey Questions 8 and 9 “How long have you had your Facebook account? and Did you participate in Facebook groups prior to entering college?”
There is a discrepancy in results of previous research regarding communication (Facebook versus email). With so many communication modalities available, students may prefer one type of communication over another depending on the event or type of information that needs to be communicated. Research Question 5, “If not Facebook, where do students receive their primary source of student affairs information?” This was answered through Survey Questions 13 and 14 “For each of the events and activities, please select from the following options of how you would first likely hear about the event.” The events and activities were divided between the two questions to prevent a long list and an attempt to retain student interest to complete the survey. The responses were also divided to represent two types of activities: Survey Question 13 targeted more institutionally initiated events while Survey Question 14 had greater student involvement in the event. The survey participants were not made aware of the difference and it was anticipated that there would have been greater variation in the responses of the Survey Question 14. Survey Question 15 was an optional, fill in the blank statement with the same modality preferences as the previous two questions to provide students with an opportunity to report any other events or activities that may have been omitted.

To establish credibility of the qualitative survey, a draft pilot of the survey questions were presented to a group of student affairs professionals and current college students for their assessment of the content. Those participating in the review represented various institutional types so that the questions would elicit descriptive information addressing student preference and use of Facebook or other communication modalities for student affairs information. There were six professionals
working at public four-year universities, three professionals from private four-year universities, and three professionals from a public two-year institution who provided feedback on the survey. Of the student group, four attended a public two-year institution, one attended a technical college, and one attended a public four-year institution. The survey questions represented the departments and activities recommended by these two groups and the research literature.

Two optional open-ended questions were placed at the end of the survey to capture anecdotal commentary should an activity or program not have been listed in the multiple-choice questions. Survey Question 16 read “Do you have any comments on college or university use of Facebook as a way to communicate with students?” and 17 “Do you have any comments on how colleges or universities can more effectively communicate with students?”

**Student Participation and Focus Groups**

Student participation was solicited through networks where the I had established relationships as well as through professional affiliations. The goal was to have 500 responses from students attending diverse institutions in the United States in order to provide feedback for as many institutions as possible. The survey was administered for three months during the months of July – October 2010. The survey was designed so that the students participating spent no more than 10 minutes answering the questions.

In order to ensure the quality of the data gathered from the online surveys, the information was compared and contrasted with results from three focus groups to triangulate the findings. “Triangulation helps to eliminate biases that might result from relying exclusively on any one data-collection method” (Gall et al., 2003, p. 464). The
focus groups consisted of the student ambassadors at Collin County Community College District (Collin College), a two-year public community college; the University of North Texas (UNT), a public four-year university; and Texas Christian University (TCU), a private four-year institution. The student ambassadors at each institution were able to expound upon the research questions. The ambassadors were asked to fill out a demographic data sheet that contained the same questions as the second page of the online survey. During the focus groups, the session began with a brief introduction and then an explanation the purpose of the study to the students. A protocol was followed to ensure that the same topics were addressed in each focus group but also probed further discussion on any topics students mentioned without prompting. The questions that were presented in the Facebook usage section of the online survey (Questions 8-15) were asked using an open-ended format in order to better capture a more comprehensive understanding of student use of Facebook as it pertains to student affairs. Examples included “How do you currently use Facebook in order to stay connected with your college?” “What services on Facebook does your school not provide that you would like to see,” “If not Facebook, where do you receive information on the following student services (list from Survey Question 10: Admissions/Recruitment, Orientation, Academic Advising, Awards and Banquets, Student Life/Organizations, Greek Life, Residence Hall/Housing, Athletics, Fine Arts (i.e. Performances and Guest Lecturers), Financial Aid, Course registration, Tutoring, Career Services, Volunteer or Service Learning, and Multicultural Services).”
Data Analysis

Features of the Zoomerang survey tool

The Zoomerang tool has built-in statistical analysis features including mean, median, mode, range, standard deviation, standard error, and confidence intervals. The comparison reporting feature of the tool permitted the grouping of subsets of data using survey filters. A filter was created to provide the data for Research Question 4 “Is there a difference in use of Facebook for student affairs services between students new to Facebook in college compared to those who were established Facebook users prior to entering?” by taking the responses from Survey Questions 8 and 9 and comparing them to responses to Questions 11-15.

Some of the reporting features supported by Zoomerang proved to be too cumbersome to generate a readable chart, so the raw data was exported to an Excel chart. This data was then further analyzed as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Procedures for Analyzing Data

The data from the online survey were presented in table format. The online survey questions that generated a single response were listed in a table format in descending order. This descending frequency table was used to answer Research Questions 1 and 2. To address Research Questions 3, 4, and 5 the activities listed in the table were listed in the same order as the online survey responses. A similar approach was taken with the responses from the focus groups. The answers were reviewed for frequency of response from high to low and compared to the list of the online results to see if the online responses could be corroborated by the focus group.
When a comment was made by a focus group member that supported both the online results and the focus group consensus, that comment was reported.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Online Survey

The online survey developed using Zoomerang software was launched July 8, 2010. The URL to the survey was distributed through numerous email listservs and posted to several Facebook walls. The link to the survey was housed on the Facebook community page *College and Student Use of Facebook Survey*. Through the snowball sampling technique, a group of students who had active Facebook accounts were contacted and then asked to forward the online survey to other students. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the purpose of the snowball technique to identify “cases of interest from people who know people” (p. 28).

Within the first 48 hours of launching the survey, 76 responses had been received. After the first week, the data collection peaked and the responses slowed to a couple a day. Given the survey was launched toward the end of the second summer session, a relaunch was completed at the beginning of the fall semester to generate more responses. On September 15, 2010 the number of usable surveys was 177. In reviewing Facebook’s ad policy it was realized that an ad could not be taken out to target eligible students to direct them to the survey’s landing page. Per the policy, “ads cannot mention or refer to Facebook, its site or its brand in any manner” (Facebook, n.d.-e). The title for the survey is “Facebook Dissertation Survey” and clearly refers to Facebook numerous times. Written in the research proposal for institutional approval at Collin College was the distribution of the survey through email listservs (Appendix D) as an added provision should the snowball technique not yield the desired responses. This
strategy did not capture students with active Facebook profiles but rather all students enrolled at Collin College. The survey link was sent to the entire Collin College student population including those students who had attended the institution within the past 18 months \( n = 73,550 \) from a generic news account. As with the initial launch, the first 48 hours yielded a high response of 127 additional usable surveys. The trend of response rates dropping after this point in time mirrored that of the initial launch. The survey responses had reached a point of diminishing returns and it was decided to close the survey and run with 395 responses after being open for 3 months. As of October 10, 2010 the Zoomerang survey site experienced 1,220 hits with 515 submitted surveys. Once the surveys were reviewed for consent approval and student enrollment, the final eligible completed surveys totaled 395. The results of the student demographic section (Survey Questions 2 through 7) are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

*Student Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>73% (287)</td>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>79% (308)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27% (108)</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>22% (87)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Institutional Type</th>
<th>Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>FR</td>
<td>Public 4 year</td>
<td>On Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>SO</td>
<td>Private 4 year</td>
<td>Off Campus (college)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>JR</td>
<td>Public 2 year</td>
<td>Off Campus (non-college)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>SR</td>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>Commute from home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of the respondents were female (73%) attending college full-time (79%) at a public 4-year institution. The average age was 21 years old. Under institutional type there were four categories: public 4 year, private 4 year, public 2 year and technical. The survey permitted students to write in the name of the institution should they not know the classification. Those students were distributed to the appropriate category with the exception of one. For reporting purposes an “other” category was created to capture an outlier of an individual attending the United States Naval Academy.

Focus Groups

In this research project, focus groups were conducted on three separate college campuses; therefore, it was necessary to receive approval at each institution. The consent form signed by each student participating in the focus group was approved by the University of North Texas Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). The focus groups met in late summer and early fall 2010. The student ambassadors at each institution were given the date of the session and attended on a voluntary basis. During each session, the same protocol was followed starting with a personal introduction, distributing and reviewing the consent form, distributing the biographical data forms, and providing a definition of the term “communication modalities” as used for the purpose of the study. After all forms were signed and basic questions addressed, the survey questions were presented to the groups. As previously stated in the methodology section, the questions mirrored those of the online survey but offered an open-ended response. A comparison of focus group demographics can be found in Table 2.
Table 2

Focus Group Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Collin College</th>
<th>Texas Christian University</th>
<th>University of North Texas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflecting the population of students taking the online surveys, the majority of the ambassadors (73%) were female. All ambassadors were full time students at their institutions. The average age was 21 years old.

Research Question Results

Research Question 1: For what purpose[s] are students currently using Facebook related to student affairs in higher education?

The online Survey Question 11 presented a list of 17 student affairs programs for students to select based upon which they have accessed through Facebook in the last year. Two categories received the majority (83%) of the responses from the online survey. The category with the highest response was the statement “I do not use Facebook for these” with 51% selecting this option. Of the services listed, 32% reported
using Facebook to access Student Life/Organizations within the last year. The 
remaining responses dropped almost in half after that selection. The responses are 
listed based upon frequency of selection in Table 3. The total number of responses will 
 exceed the 395 participants as multiple activities could be selected.

Table 3

*Student Activities Accessed in the Last Year on Facebook*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not use Facebook for these</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Life/Organization</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Life</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence Hall/Housing</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My institution does not offer these</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions/Recruitment</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer or Service Learning</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awards &amp; Banquets</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Services</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Registration</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students participating in the focus groups were asked, “How do you currently use 
Facebook in order to stay connected with your college?” They were not given a list to 
select from and their responses corroborate the online responses. All three groups had
individuals who acknowledged using Facebook for student organization events and activities. Both 4-year institutions included the accessing of athletics during the past year, indicated in Table 3 as the third highest activity selected. The Ambassadors at Collin College had three students (60%) who were not using Facebook to stay connected with their college. One made the comment that “Facebook has no direct connection” for them to the college activities. The TCU Ambassadors provided the specific detail that on Facebook their organizations are using the invite feature of the website to notify students of upcoming events. This feature will then list the activities the students have indicated they are attending under an “events” tab on their Facebook homepage.

Research Question 2: If students are currently using Facebook to receive information about specific student affairs divisions, which other student affairs services would students consider using Facebook to receive information?

The online survey presented students with a list of services asking that if their institution currently did not have them on Facebook to select those that they would use. The items listed in Survey Question 12 were duplicated from Survey Question 11. Since students were able to select multiple responses, there was some clustering of the responses. The option that received the highest percentage of selection was the statement, “I would not use Facebook for any of these” with 39% of respondents selecting it. Table 4 provides the results of Survey Question 12, exhibiting a tight clustering of the next five responses: financial Aid, tutoring, course registration, academic advising, and career services.

The lack of responses from the focus groups also reflects the majority selection from the online surveys of not using Facebook for the student services. The
ambassadors were asked “What services on Facebook does your school not provide that you would like to see?” One response that had not been an online option came from the Collin College Ambassadors to provide emergency notifications through Facebook. The TCU Ambassadors suggested posting student satisfaction surveys. A member of the UNT Ambassadors stated “sometimes I think there is too much on Facebook.”

Table 4

**Student Services not on Facebook that Would be Used**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would not use Facebook for these</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Registration</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Services</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer or Service Learning</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Life/Orgs</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions/Recruitment</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Services</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awards &amp; Banquets</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence Hall/Housing</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Life</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 3: Is there a difference in student use of Facebook among institutional types?

To identify user preference by institutional type, a filter was placed on Survey Question 6 to isolate each student’s responses to Questions 11 and 12 within the Zoomerang survey tool. Those students who did not know their institutional classification and listed the name of their school were manually calculated in to the results as listed in Table 5. Data from four observations were removed; only three were from a technical school and one from the United States Naval Academy. Since there were limited responses, these institutional types were not included.

Table 5

Comparison of Services by Institutional Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Public 4 year (n = 205)</th>
<th>Private 4 year (n = 15)</th>
<th>Public 2 year (n = 171)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current Use</td>
<td>Future Use</td>
<td>Current Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admissions/Recruit</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Advising</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awards/Banquets</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Life/Orgs</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Life</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence Hall</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course registration</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Services</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer or</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Svcs</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not use Facebook</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Current Use percentages are from responses indicated in Survey Question 11 and Future Use are the responses from Survey Question 12.
All three institutional types indicate a 20% increase or higher in the following service areas: academic advising, course registration, tutoring, and career services. In Table 3 student life/organizations was the second highest overall activity selected for current student use and the information presented in Table 5 indicated that those students attending a public 2-year institution would see a gain in future use. The drop in selection by the 4-year institutions indicates they are currently engaged in that activity through Facebook. In reviewing the activities, there was an increase in future use in every student affairs area from those attending a public 2-year institution.

Research Question 4: Is there a difference in use of Facebook for student affairs services between students new to Facebook in college compared to those who were established Facebook users prior to entering college?

To provide a response to this question a comparison report was run by taking the responses from Survey Questions 8 and 9 and comparing them with the responses from Survey Question 11. Two separate queries were run to show the results from the students who were considered new to Facebook (those who responded less than 1 year and 1-2 years) and separately for those students who were considered established users (responses indicating 2-3 years and 3+ years). Table 6 shows the results of the programs that were accessed online during 2010. Of the new students ($n = 133$), 58.6% did not participate in Facebook prior to entering college compared to 26.7% of existing users ($n = 262$).
For actual use, the three areas that have the highest percentage difference are student life/organizations, Greek life, and athletics. Of those students who had established Facebook accounts, 39% of the cohort used Facebook for student life/organization information compared to only 20% of those who were new to Facebook. Athletics was used by 8% of the students new to Facebook, while 22% of established users accessed this activity. Greek life was used by 19% of established users compared to only 5% of those with a new account. By contrast, 66% of new users would not use Facebook for any of the services while only 43% of established Facebook users would not use it.
Research Question 5: If not Facebook, where do students receive their primary source of student affairs information?

The students were given two survey questions that divided student services between institutionally initiated activities and those that had greater student leadership. Those taking the survey were not notified of the distinction in types of service. The students were only able to select one type of communication modality. Table 7 shows the variation in preference of communication modality based upon the activity.
Table 7

Communication Modality Preference Based on Student Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutionally driven activities</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>College email</th>
<th>College website</th>
<th>Text Message</th>
<th>Face to Face meeting</th>
<th>College Newspaper</th>
<th>Physical campus posting</th>
<th>Personal email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awards/ Banquet</td>
<td>13% (51)</td>
<td>51% (200)</td>
<td>12% (48)</td>
<td>2% (6)</td>
<td>3% (12)</td>
<td>3% (11)</td>
<td>7% (27)</td>
<td>10% (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/University Athletics</td>
<td>28% (109)</td>
<td>29% (113)</td>
<td>20% (79)</td>
<td>2% (6)</td>
<td>1% (5)</td>
<td>6% (22)</td>
<td>10% (38)</td>
<td>6% (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus/closure emergency</td>
<td>13% (51)</td>
<td>19% (75)</td>
<td>4% (16)</td>
<td>53% (211)</td>
<td>1% (3)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2% (6)</td>
<td>8% (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class registration</td>
<td>10% (39)</td>
<td>43% (170)</td>
<td>25% (97)</td>
<td>4% (16)</td>
<td>3% (12)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2% (7)</td>
<td>14% (54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship Opportunity</td>
<td>14% (57)</td>
<td>50% (199)</td>
<td>11% (42)</td>
<td>3% (11)</td>
<td>2% (9)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2% (9)</td>
<td>17% (68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid information</td>
<td>8% (31)</td>
<td>49% (195)</td>
<td>15% (61)</td>
<td>2% (9)</td>
<td>4% (16)</td>
<td>1% (3)</td>
<td>3% (11)</td>
<td>17% (69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important dates/deadline reminders</td>
<td>19% (74)</td>
<td>40% (157)</td>
<td>11% (43)</td>
<td>13% (53)</td>
<td>1% (3)</td>
<td>0% (1)</td>
<td>2% (7)</td>
<td>14% (57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-campus housing registration</td>
<td>10% (40)</td>
<td>44% (173)</td>
<td>23% (90)</td>
<td>3% (10)</td>
<td>3% (10)</td>
<td>1% (4)</td>
<td>5% (19)</td>
<td>12% (49)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 7 (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Student driven activities</strong></th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>College email</th>
<th>College website</th>
<th>Text Message</th>
<th>Face to Face meeting</th>
<th>College Newspaper</th>
<th>Physical campus posting</th>
<th>Personal email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social event</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(185)</td>
<td>(91)</td>
<td>(43)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Gov't Association</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(112)</td>
<td>(133)</td>
<td>(70)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>(40)</td>
<td>(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community outreach/service learning</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(116)</td>
<td>(131)</td>
<td>(70)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>(29)</td>
<td>(24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Union Event</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(147)</td>
<td>(117)</td>
<td>(45)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(38)</td>
<td>(17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intramurals/Rec sports</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(135)</td>
<td>(103)</td>
<td>(71)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(39)</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student leadership</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td>(139)</td>
<td>(77)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td>(21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General campus news</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(107)</td>
<td>(161)</td>
<td>(66)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>(25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Institutionally driven activities are from Survey Question 13 student driven activities are from Survey Question 14. The total number of responses is listed in parentheses below the percentage.
The focus group responses were varied in communication modalities across the activities. The one activity that had a unanimous response across all three groups was campus closure/emergency. Everyone wanted to receive a text message. This was also the highest rated activity and communication modality from the online surveys receiving 53% of the responses. A comment made from one of the focus groups on this event was that “this is important.” College email was highly represented in the comments made by the ambassadors for numerous activities as well as being either the first or second communication modality for the online surveys. Without the limitations of the pre-set communication modalities in the online surveys, the ambassadors shared some innovative ideas. The UNT ambassadors stated “streaming video could be used during student government debates.” The TCU ambassadors thought of a “pop up feature for our email to remind us of an important date or deadline.”

In addition to the online survey questions with the populated student activities, the students were also given the opportunity to report an event or activity and the type of communication modality they would prefer to use to hear about the event. There were 29 responses provided with only two categories receiving multiple responses: fine arts/music related activities (with 6 responses) and class cancellations (2 responses). There was not a majority communication modality for the fine arts events but both respondents who reported wanting to know about class cancellations requested that information to be communicated through a text message. Some of the comments did not include a specific event but mentioned other communication modalities such as automated phone messages (no event or activity listed), RSS feeds for general news and important events, and iPhone apps (again, no activity listed).
Other Findings

Two open-ended non-mandatory general response questions were included at the end of the survey. Survey Question 16: “Do you have any comments on college or university use of Facebook as a way to communicate with students,” received 116 student responses. The responses ranged from a short phrase to several sentences. In reviewing the content of the responses, certain themes were identified (Miles and Huberman, 1994 and Gall et al., 2003). Of the 116 responses, 67 supported some type of institutional use of Facebook to communicate with students, 41 opposed using the communication modality, and 8 were indiscernible.

Of those who supported institutional use, a couple of themes emerged from the written responses: the limited use of the site by separating social events from academically related issues and institutions needing to be adept at using the features within the social networking site. The comments about using the site for social events were broad in their request, mostly wanting an increase in usage. However, those comments directed at the features offered on the site were more specific. “Create an app that allows for tutoring or asking reference questions through Facebook.” “Status updates don’t cut it. Use the facebook event setup, invite the students.”

Survey Question 16 asked specifically about Facebook usage by colleges and universities while Survey Question 17 was intended to solicit other responses “Do you have any comments on how colleges or universities can more effectively communicate with students?” Of the 81 responses, 14 students reiterated the use of Facebook for communication. Use of email received an additional 10 responses. One trend in the responses of Survey Questions 17 and 13 was the identification of numerous types of
communication modalities. There were 10 who indicated multiple methods of communication. “Facebook, email, and text are most efficient.” Pairing with the comments of multiple modalities was the concept of having a single source for students to reference. “Just a centralized location for information” and “…it is helpful to have a designated place for information.”

Both open-ended questions presented a couple of responses where students expressed frustration with the relevance of the messages being sent to them. The overwhelming amount of information being sent generated this response:

Stop flooding my student email with tons of information about free hot dogs or 99 cent hamburgers. I don’t care, and when my inbox has 100 new messages in it and only 1 of them is relevant [sic] to me, that 1 message gets over looked.

Students also expressed an interest in personalization. One online response was from a student who made an “A” in an online course and kept getting emails on how to be successful in online courses. The UNT ambassadors reflected this with a response of wanting to “bring personal experience back” when asked how colleges or universities can more effectively communicate with students, that the concept of “being student centered is getting lost.”

Findings Outside of Research

Student email was identified as one of the top communication modalities and yet, when the survey was sent out to the email addresses of 73,550 Collin College students there was less than 200 responses from those attending a two-year institution. Those students who were approached directly on Facebook were the ones who appeared to complete the survey in a higher percentage than those who received a general request. In an October 2010 presentation, Kim Yousey-Elsener, the Associate
Director of Assessment Programs for StudentVoice, mentioned that conducting assessments of college students was becoming increasingly difficult (StudentVoice is a service provider for assessment in higher education). Kim Yousey-Elsener (2010) stated that students are experiencing “survey fatigue” and that is perhaps why percentage of returns is dropping. This combined with the reality that many students do not check their college email regularly are contributing factors to the low rate of return of surveys for this study.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore Facebook as a communication tool for student affairs and to compare it as a source with other communication modalities to describe the 18-24 year old student demographic preference on receiving information about student affairs activities and departments. As revealed in the findings from the online survey and the focus groups, student preference varies depending on the activity. This may explain the conflicting information between Connell (2009), Carneval (2006), Selwyn (2009) and the Educause Center for Applied Research (ECAR) studies (2007) regarding student preference in communication between Facebook and email.

Research Question 1: For what purpose[s] are students currently using Facebook related to student affairs in higher education? Facebook offers an invitation feature for events which makes it a logical option for student organizations to be able to reach out to their membership. This provides quick, instantaneous messaging for students who have Facebook updates sent to either their phone or their email (or both). This same feature can be utilized in Greek life and athletics. Even though these were the activities that received the highest percentage of access, they were not the highest selected response. The majority of students did not use Facebook for activities related to student affairs.

The open-ended responses indicate that students want a separation between their social and academic worlds even though in the minds of student affairs professionals, these can sometimes overlap. Those responses also share the concern that like college email, their Facebook profiles could become overwhelmed with
information that is not a priority to them. Privacy issues and the college or university’s intentions were also mentioned.

Research Question 2: If students are currently using Facebook to receive information about specific student affairs divisions, which other student affairs services would students consider using Facebook to receive information? With less than 10% of responses separating eight activities it would appear that students would be open to several types of activities being posted on Facebook. However, there is also a 10% gap between the top choice of not using Facebook and the first student activity. Some of the anecdotal information gathered from the open response questions expressed concern about personal information getting out on Facebook. Other issues mentioned the lack of maintenance on sites once built and relevance of content being submitted. Reuben (2008) and Violino (2009) encourage institutions to support the resources needed in terms of both time and personnel to maintain an online presence. The students are savvy online consumers and know when content is kept current. Specific examples of which Facebook features could be used to enhance the students’ experience were provided in the general comments of the online survey.

Research Question 3: Is there a difference in student use of Facebook among institutional types? In 2006, Golder et al. showed that student participation in Facebook was clustered by school. This study was unable to isolate individual institutional participation but did reveal that students attending 4 year institutions (both public and private) are using Facebook to access student activity information at an increased level than their peers at public 2-year colleges. The results presented in Table 5 also
indicate that students attending public 2-year institutions would use more services if their institutions offered them.

Research Question 4: Is there a difference in use of Facebook for student affairs services between students new to Facebook in college compared to those who were established Facebook users prior to entering college? The results of Research Question 4 showed that students who are new to Facebook are less likely to use it for student affairs programs than those who have had accounts for two or more years. From the survey results of Lampe et al. (2008), students new to Facebook were more likely to use it to meet new people; it is the contrary for student services. It is perhaps after networking and meeting new people that students become more involved and begin branching out their usage of Facebook.

Research Question 5: If not Facebook, where do students receive their primary source of student affairs information? Not to be stated too simply, but email is still a top preference for students to receive their information on student affairs. The feedback from the focus groups was that the functionality of this modality is what keeps it as a top choice. The students are able to sort through the messages and file them more manageably than anything Facebook offers. The concern of personal information being displayed on a website also makes this more secure option viable.

One student commented “Although Facebook would be a more efficient way of contacting students, the university should be careful to protect itself from individuals whose specialty are hacking Facebook profile pages.” The fact that Facebook was established as a social networking site for individuals seems to be overlooked as many
institutions and organizations are trying to modify its use for their needs. Some students see Facebook as their outlet away from academics.

Staying Relevant

Keeping student services relevant in light of the explosion of technological resources has complicated the daily operations of this profession. There are numerous options to communicate information, that finding the best fit may be more challenging than actually disseminating the information. Gina-Lyn Crance, Vice President for Student Affairs at Albright College, shared that “understanding what students are bringing to college in terms of expectations and experiences…is critical for us to move forward and for us to support their development” (Kattner, 2010, p. 2).

There are several resources for colleges and universities wanting to increase their presence in the social networking community. Companies like BlueFuego assist institutions in using web-based tools compatible with Facebook, while OrgSync will build a web-based portal custom to the school and its campus community. Even with 85% of students having a profile on Facebook (Arrington, 2005) one must be reminded that Facebook is a third party affiliate to colleges and universities. While most of the content being posted to the online account can be controlled by the institution, several things cannot. Case in point, Facebook controls the establishment of institutional sites and sets the web domain for anyone trying to join that specific network. This becomes a challenge if an institution needs to change domains. If Facebook sets the account as one domain and the college or university needs to change theirs, that institution is unable to do so through Facebook. This would prohibit the addition of individuals with
the newly college administered domain to the schools online network until Facebook administrators make the update on their side.

Recommendations

With the administrative challenges and lack of student responses encouraging Facebook usage, institutions of higher education are not encouraged to spend enormous resources in this one particular communication modality. Given the high number of responses from the online survey combined with feedback from the focus groups, enhanced email options or web portal content might serve the current needs. Text messaging also received several responses and comments as a viable option. While students appreciate the immediate notifications, there is a concern that colleges and universities would start flooding their text mail boxes as was seen with college issued email. The content of the messages would need to be concise. Details of an event could be sent in an email with the date, time, and location supplied in a supplemental text message. Using multiple methods of communication was mentioned in both focus groups and online through the surveys.

The impact of physical campus postings should not be understated. While not receiving high ratings on the surveys, it was identified as an option for every event and activity (unlike the college newspaper). The focus groups also mentioned how much they noticed the on campus signage. “I read everything I walk past” was the response of one UNT Ambassador. As with Facebook and other online postings the information on display needs to be kept current and balanced to reduce on campus clutter.
Suggestions for Future Research

As this study focused on students considered Facebook natives, many students who did not fall within the age range of the study expressed their interest in providing feedback. I was contacted by several students who exceeded the selected age demographic of the study. While the target population was limited to those who would have the opportunity to have had a Facebook account their entire collegiate career, future studies may wish to expand the age range to compare responses.

At the time of this study, downloadable applications for cell phones and iPads were just being developed by colleges and universities. Their implication for communication with students is another modality that could be researched. Much of the information that is being communicated through multiple communication modalities could be more succinctly provided in an events section of a downloadable application. Current strategies for advertising an event include posting it on the college website calendar, sending an email of the event to all students, and posting it on Facebook. The impact of a sole information source would change the way we are communicating with our students. While software exists to be able to blast to multiple endpoints, reducing the demands on personnel to update numerous sites, the effort is only good if the information is being read by the students.

The other communication modalities that received nominal mention in the general comments section included: RSS feeds, Twitter, and Google reader. With technology changing so rapidly the question of which communication modality students are using to receive information on student events and activities will need to be continually explored. While the answers might not change year-to-year, occasionally a
technological leap forward is made and what is not even invented today could be the most popular tool a few years from now.
APPENDIX A

ZOOMERANG SURVEY QUESTIONS
[Facebook and other communication tools]

Page 1 - Question 1 - Yes or No  [Mandatory]

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Thank you so much for your willingness to take my survey. I am a graduate student in the Education Department at the University of North Texas pursuing a PhD in Higher Education Administration. Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following:
Contact: If you have any questions about this research project, please call Alicia Huppe at 972.377.1749 or Dr. Ron Newsom, UNT Department of Education, at 940.565.2722. This study has been approved by the University of North Texas Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the UNT IRB at 940.565.3940.
Purpose of the Research: You are being asked to participate in a research study which involves exploring the student use of Facebook in order to receive information about student affairs activities and departments. The name of the service/department may differ from campus to campus but answer the questions to the best of your ability.
Benefits: The information you provide will help fill a void in educational research as well as provide data for student affairs personnel.
Study Duration, Procedure, Risks: This online survey that will take about 10 minutes of your time. Please answer each question by clicking on the response that best describes you and your preferences. Be sure to submit the survey at the end. This study does not involve any reasonably foreseeable risks.
Confidentiality: No personally identifiable information will be collected. The survey results are password protected.
By clicking yes, you volunatirly consent to participate in this study, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits or rights, and you may choose to discontinue participation at any time.

☐ Yes
☐ No

Page 2 - Heading
Student Demographic Section

Page 2 - Question 2 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets)  [Mandatory]
I am currently attending a college or university:

☐ Full Time (taking 12 or more hours)
☐ Part Time (taking 1-11 hours)
☐ I am not attending [Skip to End]

Page 2 - Question 3 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets)  [Mandatory]
What is your current age?

☐ 18
☐ 19
☐ 20
☐ 21
☐ 22
☐ 23
☐ 24
Page 2 - Question 4 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets) [Mandatory]

What is your classification (by year, not hours)?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate

Page 2 - Question 5 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets) [Mandatory]

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

Page 2 - Question 6 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets) [Mandatory]

Which type of educational institution do you attend?

- Public 4-year
- Private 4-year
- Public 2-year
- Technical School
- List college or university name if you do not know the institutional type

Page 2 - Question 7 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets) [Mandatory]

Where do you live?

- On campus
- Off campus, college apartments
- Off campus, no college affiliation
- Commute from home

Page 3 - Heading

Facebook Usage

Page 3 - Question 8 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets) [Mandatory]

How long have you had your Facebook account?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
- 3+ years
Question 9 - Yes or No  [Mandatory]
Did you participate in Facebook groups prior to entering college?

- Yes
- No

Question 10 - Yes or No  [Mandatory]
Does your college or university have a presence on Facebook?

- Yes
- No

Question 11 - Choice - Multiple Answers (Bullets)  [Mandatory]
Which of the following Student Affairs programs have you accessed online through Facebook in the last year (please mark all that apply)?

- Admissions/Recruitment
- Orientation
- Academic Advising
- Awards and Banquets
- Student Life/Organizations
- Greek Life
- Residence Hall/Housing
- Athletics
- Fine Arts (i.e. Performances and Guest Lecturers)
- Financial Aid
- Course Registration
- Tutoring
- Career Services
- Volunteer or Service Learning
- Multicultural Services
- I do not use Facebook for these
- My institution does not offer any of these

Question 12 - Choice - Multiple Answers (Bullets)  [Mandatory]
Which of the following services does your school currently not have on Facebook, but you would use? (please mark all that apply)

- Admissions/Recruitment
- Orientation
- Academic Advising
- Awards and Banquets
- Student Life/Organizations
- Greek Life
- Residence Hall/Housing
- Athletics
- Fine Arts (i.e. Performances and Guest Lecturers)
- Financial Aid
☐ Course Registration  
☐ Tutoring  
☐ Volunteer or Service Learning  
☐ Career Services  
☐ Multicultural Services  
☐ I would not use Facebook for any of these

---

**Page 3 - Question 13 - Rating Scale – Matrix [Mandatory]**

For each of the events and activities, please select from the following options your preference to hear about the event.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event/Activity</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>College email</th>
<th>College website</th>
<th>Text message</th>
<th>Face-to-Face meeting</th>
<th>College newspaper</th>
<th>Physical campus posting (banner, kiosk, TV ad)</th>
<th>Personal email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awards/Banquets</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>College/University Athletics</td>
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<td>Campus Closure/Emergency</td>
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<td>Class registration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scholarship Opportunity</td>
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<td>Financial Aid information</td>
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<td>Important dates/deadline reminders</td>
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<tr>
<td>On-campus housing registration</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Page 3 - Question 14 - Rating Scale - Matrix

[Mandatory]

For each of the events and activities, please select from the following options your preference to hear about the event.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>College email</th>
<th>College website</th>
<th>Text message</th>
<th>Face-to-Face meeting</th>
<th>College newspaper</th>
<th>Physical campus posting (banner, kiosk, TV ad)</th>
<th>Personal email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social event (Greek life, Student Organizations, RHA, Etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Government election</td>
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<td>Community Outreach/Service Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Union Event (movie, speaker, play)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intramurals/Rec Sports</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>General campus news/updates</td>
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</table>

Page 3 - Question 15 - Rating Scale - Matrix

Please list any event or activity that has not been previously listed that you would like to include and your preference to hear about it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>College email</th>
<th>College website</th>
<th>Text message</th>
<th>Face-to-Face meeting</th>
<th>College newspaper</th>
<th>Physical campus posting (banner, kiosk, TV ad)</th>
<th>Personal email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other event or activity</td>
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</table>

Page 4 - Heading

General Comments

Page 4 - Question 16 - Open Ended - Comments Box

Do you have any comments on college or university use of Facebook as a way to communicate with students?
Page 4 - Question 17 - Open Ended - Comments Box

Do you have any comments on how colleges or universities can more effectively communicate with students?

Thank You Page

Thank you so much for answering the survey questions. Once the survey is closed, I will post the results on the Facebook page.

Screen Out Page

(Standard - Zoomerang branding)

Over Quota Page

(Standard - Zoomerang branding)

Survey Closed Page

The dissertation survey is closed and I am analyzing the data. Thank you.
APPENDIX B

UNT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH FORM
June 17, 2010

Dr. Ron Newsom  
Department of Counseling and Higher Education  
University of North Texas  

RE: Human Subjects Application No. 10-268

Dear Dr. Newsom:

In accordance with 45 CFR Part 46 Section 46.101, your study titled “An exploratory study of students’ use of Facebook and other communication modalities in order to receive student affairs information” has been determined to qualify for an exemption from further review by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Enclosed is the consent document with stamped IRB approval. Please copy and use this form only for your study subjects.

No changes may be made to your study’s procedures or forms without prior written approval from the UNT IRB. Please contact Jordan Smith, Research Compliance Analyst, ext. 3940, if you wish to make any such changes. Any changes to your procedures or forms after 3 years will require completion of a new IRB application.

We wish you success with your study.

Sincerely,

Patricia L. Kaminski, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Chair, Institutional Review Board  
PK.js
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Thank you so much for your willingness to serve in a focus group for my research. I am a graduate student in the Counseling and Higher Education Department at the University of North Texas pursuing a PhD in Higher Education Administration.

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following:

Title of Study: An exploratory study of students' use of Facebook and other communication modalities in order to receive student affairs information

Contact: If you have any questions about this research project, please call Alicia Huppe at 972.377.1749 or the Principal Investigator: Dr. Ron Newsom, UNT Department of Higher Education, at 940.565.2722. This study has been approved by the University of North Texas Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the UNT IRB at 940.565.3940.

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to participate in a research study which involves exploring the student use of Facebook in order to receive information about student affairs activities and departments. The name of the service/department may differ from campus to campus but you will be asked to answer the questions to the best of your ability.

Study Procedure, Duration, and Foreseeable Risks: You will be asked to provide answers to a set of questions through participation in a focus group. This focus group will take about 30 minutes of your time. Your responses will be captured in a set of handwritten notes. This study does not involve any reasonably foreseeable risks.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: While this study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you, the information you provide will help fill a void in educational research as well as provide data for student affairs personnel.

Confidentiality of Research Records: No personally identifiable information will be collected on the student demographic data page. The demographic data sheets will be kept separate from the focus group responses.
Research Participants' Rights:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the above and that you confirm the following:

- Alicia Huppe has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told of the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant, and voluntarily consent to participate in this focus group.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

______________________________  ______________________
Printed name                                  Date

______________________________
Signature of Participant

For the Principal Investigator or Designee:

I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

______________________________  ______________________
Signature of Principal Investigator or Designee  Date

APPROVED BY THE UNT IRB

DATE: [Signature]
APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHIC DATA PAGE AND QUESTIONS
Focus Group Student Demographic Data Page

This information is being collected in addition to the collective responses of the focus group.

1. I am currently attending:
   - [ ] Full Time (taking 12 or more hours)
   - [ ] Part Time (taking 1-11 hours)
   - [ ] I am not attending

2. What is your current age?
   - [ ] 18
   - [ ] 19
   - [ ] 20
   - [ ] 21
   - [ ] 22
   - [ ] 23
   - [ ] 24

3. Which year did you just complete (by classification, not hours)?
   - [ ] Freshman
   - [ ] Sophomore
   - [ ] Junior
   - [ ] Senior
   - [ ] Graduate

4. What is your gender?
   - [ ] Male
   - [ ] Female

5. Where do you live?
   - [ ] On campus
   - [ ] Off campus, college apartments
   - [ ] Off campus, no college affiliation
   - [ ] Commute from home

Facebook Usage
6. How long have you had your Facebook account?
   - [ ] Less than 1 year
   - [ ] 1-2 years
   - [ ] 2-3 years
   - [ ] 3+ years

7. Did you participate in Facebook groups prior to entering college?
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No
Focus Group Questions

Introduction:
The purpose of this study is to explore Facebook as communication tool for student
affairs and compare it as a source with other communication modalities to describe the
18-24 year old student demographic preference on receiving information about student
affairs activities and departments. If you would like to participate in this focus group to
provide feedback on student communication preferences, you will need to sign a
consent form which I have provided for you.

Before we begin the questions I would like you to complete a biographical data page
which will be used to create a profile of this group. I would also like to define the term
“communication modalities” for the purpose of this study. Communication
modalities/mediums: A term used to categorize multiple ways in which to communicate.
Examples for this study include: Facebook, college email, college websites, text
messaging, college newspaper, physical campus postings (banners, kiosk, TV ads),
and personal email.

Questions:
How do you currently use Facebook in order to stay connected with your
college?

What services on Facebook does your school not provide that you would like to see?

If not Facebook, where do you receive information on the following student services:

Admissions/Recruitment
Orientation
Academic Advising
Awards and Banquets
Student Life/Organizations
Greek Life
Residence Hall/Housing
Athletics
Fine Arts (i.e. performances and guest lecturers)
Financial Aid
Course registration
Tutoring
Career Services
Volunteer or Service Learning
Multicultural Services

I will list several events and activities, for each please share with me your preferred way to hear about the event.

Awards/Banquets

College/University Athletics
Campus Closure/Emergency
Class registration
Scholarship Opportunity

Financial Aid information
Important dates/deadline reminders
On-campus housing registration

(Student led)

Social event (Greek life, Student Organizations, RHA, Etc)
Student Government election
Community Outreach/Service Learning
Student Union Event (movie, speaker, play)
Intramurals/Rec Sports
Student Leadership

Do you have any comments on college or university use of Facebook as a way to communicate with students?

Do you have any comments on how colleges or universities can more effectively communicate with students?

Conclusion:

Thank you for your time. The results of the focus group and online survey will be posted on my Facebook dissertation fan page.
APPENDIX D

COLLIN COLLEGE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL AND APPLICATION FORM
Re: Notice of Collin College IRB
Study Title: An exploratory study of student’s use of Facebook and other communication modalities in order to receive students affairs Information
PI: Alicia Huppe
Category: Exempt/Approved
Study #: 2010-07

Dear Alicia,

This letter and attached form is to inform you that the Collin College IRB has reviewed the project “An exploratory study of student’s use of Facebook and other communication modalities in order to receive students affairs Information”. It has been determined that the risk involved in this project is no more than minimal. In accordance with 45 CFR Section 46.101, this study represents a generic minimal risk survey and data cannot be identified to any particular human subject and is therefore exempt from further review. We thank you for complying with the requested documentation and wish you good luck in your project. Keep in mind that it is important to note that subjects should be given a copy of the consent form after they have signed it. Please be advised as well that any changes in protocol need to be communicated with the IRB and that this approval is valid until one year from this date.

Sincerely
Dr. Chris Doumen
Collin College IRB Chair
# Collin Institutional Review Board (for Human Subjects Research) Decision Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Investigator:</th>
<th>Alicia Huppe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact Address:</td>
<td>Recruitment &amp; Programs for New Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone Number:</td>
<td>972-377-1749  <a href="mailto:ahuppe@collin.edu">ahuppe@collin.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Investigators:</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Title:</td>
<td>An exploratory study of student’s use of Facebook and other communication modalities in order to receive students affairs Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sponsor:</td>
<td>None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant Number:</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grant Start Date:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grant End Date:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collin Project Number:</td>
<td>2010-07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is this a “New” or “Continuing” Project</td>
<td>New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Submission:</td>
<td>July, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Resubmission (if applicable):</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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**For Official Use Only**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Number:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IRB process:</td>
<td>X Exempt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Expedited Review</td>
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<td>□ Full Review</td>
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<td>X Approved</td>
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<td></td>
<td>□ Not Approved</td>
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<td></td>
<td>□ Conditionally Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Doumen</td>
<td>July 19, 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* IRB approval is granted only for human subjects research conducted by Collin faculty, staff, or students on or off campus. Significant changes in design or procedures must be discussed with the IRB chair or representative. Periodic reviews of ongoing research are also expected. Any unexpected adverse effects of the research on human subjects should be reported to the IRB chair immediately.
1. State the overall objectives and specific aims of the research.

This study explores Facebook as a communication tool for student affairs and compares it as a source with other communication modalities to describe the 18-24 year old student demographic preference on receiving information about student affairs activities and departments.

Research questions
1. For what purpose[s] are students currently using Facebook related to student affairs in higher education?
2. If students are currently using Facebook to receive information about specific student affairs divisions, which other student affairs services would students consider using Facebook to receive information?
3. Is there a difference in student use of Facebook among institutional types?
4. Is there a difference in use of Facebook for student affairs services between students new to Facebook in college compared to those who were established Facebook users prior to entering?
5. If not Facebook, how do students prefer to receive communication on student affairs events and programs?

2. Who are the subjects and how will they be recruited? Attach letters of approval if access to subjects is sought from clinics or other agencies.
The target for this study will be 500 participants in the online survey and 30 total participants from three focus groups, which will total 530 participants. The population demographic will be 18-24 year old college students. The 500 survey participants will be recruited through a request on a Facebook fan page as well as sending out a survey link via email. For the focus groups, 10 will be student ambassadors at Collin College, 10 student ambassadors at the University of North Texas, and 10 student ambassadors at Texas Christian University. The ambassadors will self select based on availability.

3. **Attach informed consent form.**

   See attached UNT IRB approved consent form

4. **Describe the procedures to be used, especially any experimental and interventional procedures. If deception is used, explain clearly what this entails.**

   Data collection methodology includes both focus groups and an online survey.

5. **What risks are faced by subjects participating in this research, e.g., injury, pain, emotional distress, or invasion of privacy? What measures will be taken to minimize these risks?**

   This study does not involve any reasonably foreseeable risks.

6. **What are the worst-case scenarios, and how do you plan to deal with them? How will any adverse effects on subjects be handled or remedied?**

   As this study involves student volunteers, the worst-case scenario is that the targeted number of students may not be reached. A contingency plan to take out a Facebook ad is in place to recruit students (not necessarily limited to Collin College students). If 10 Ambassadors are not willing to volunteer, the focus group will be conducted with fewer students. Students may withdraw from the study at any time.

7. **Will there be any costs to be borne by subjects by virtue of their participation in this research? Will there be any compensation or reimbursement to subjects in this research (i.e. monetary payments, course credit, services etc.)?**

   No costs will be incurred by the participants. No compensation will be offered.

8. **What are the likely benefits of this research to the subjects as well as to society?**

   The information provided will help fill a void in educational research as well as provide data for student affairs personnel.

9. **Describe any other aspects of the research that may have a bearing on its ethical status.**

   This study is part of dissertation research that has been approved by the University of North Texas IRB, Human Subjects Application No. 10-268.


2. The Academic Dean over the area the proposal falls under must acknowledge that he/she has seen the proposal before it is submitted to the IRB.
REFERENCES


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Yousey-Elsener, K. and Albart, M. (2010, October). *We hear your voice: Sharing your assessment data.* Educational session presented at the TACUSPA Fall Conference, Fort Worth, Texas.