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this study may provide impetus to rethink the mechanisms for information dissemination to target audiences.

Literature Review

The overall purpose of attracting and engaging college students in co-curricular activities is to provide them with additional opportunities to learn and grow. To this end, the ability to understand how the behavior, needs, and preferences of younger demographics are evolving has important implications. How to capture the attention, effectively serve and activate th

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student involvement theory, which asserted that increased student participation is directly tied to greater personal development, growth, and achievement. Involvement, now referred to as engagement, includes investment both in and outside the classroom (i.e. time and effort spent interacting with peers, faculty, and staff, as well as participating in co-curricular activities). This landmark study made several important contributions, including: focusing on student motivation acknowledging that resources are finite, and assessing successful practice by the degree of involvement fostered. Research has since expanded upon this notion and affirmed the importance involvement holds in successful educational outcomes (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kuh, 2009).

start viewing engagement as a two-way exchange and no longer maintain a mindset that places reexamine program and service design to better meet the needs and preferences of students is echoed across student affairs literature (Jones & Hill, 2003; Lowery, 2004; Winniford, Carpenter, & Grider, 1995). The first step toward improving service is to better understand student motivations and preferences.

The motivation to participate in activities varies from student-to-student and across differing circumstances, with many subtle differences between forms of volunteer service (Winniford et al., 1995). The literature consistently points toward the important role of peers and the need for affiliation in motivating students to engage. Recent findings from the National Survey of Student Engagement (2010) affirmed that shared learning activities among students were positively related to heightened involvement.

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In addition to general apathy, demands participation in service and engagement activities (Raill & Hollander, 2006; Zimmerman & Halfacre-Hitchcock, 2006). According to a 2008 NSSE survey, employment responsibilities were maintained in addition to academic requirements for -time first-year students and three-quarters of seniors at four- (as quoted in Kuh, 2009, p.

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of the virtual presence of the CCE, for its inaugural S.O.S. activity, the only means utilized for recruitment were online and mobile forms of social media. Other tools were used to drive students to the details needed to engage. This was to ensure that those students who came seeking involvement only received the notification and information through these new strategies. The results of this test provided valuable insight into the reach of the marketing instruments and their effectiveness in moving students to action.

Results

The initial study conducted in April 2010 yielded very useful data, which helped direct 12 participants indicated dissatisfaction with the current online information and resources regarding service and engagement opportunities. While attempting to obtain the information necessary to participate in the six scenarios, only those who had previous service experiences and relationships with university faculty and staff or community organizations knew how to access it. They indicated, however, that they only found details on two to three of the six possible activities with which they were presented. The students with little or no previous involvement grew very frustrated with their inability to locate the needed information. They reported that they looked for 6-10 minutes per activity before giving up, which they indicated was longer than the 3-5 minutes they would have explored on their own under normal circumstances. Consistent with the literature, students indicated a strong preference for online interaction (e.g., Twitter; Facebook; websites; and short, informative emails) over more traditional means. When asked to prioritize the list of possible methods for information dissemination, however, there was no consensus, as each student had his/her own preference. In fact, several made the point that the CCE should continue

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easy to navigate with updated and current information. A common obstacle described was not being able to find desired information and/or having to click through multiple pages to locate it.

Across multiple sessions, preferences were voiced for personalized and customizable content, including the ability to view a website in different languages, as well as the ability to perform refined searches for information. It was also deemed important to provide information across multiple mediums, including social networking sites, as well as to utilize tools that provide event reminders, such as Facebook events and Google Calendar. Participants in all four focus group sessions expressed frustration with not being able to find and receive information when they need it. There were multiple mentions alluding to an existing disconnect between the busy schedules and lifestyle of students and the traditional hours maintained and supports available via campus offices. Participants in each session also indicated a strong interest in

answers at night or somehow over the wee

The response to the e-
tools, was largely positive, but revealed a preference for a more convenient-to-read format. As

have the t

ll as the three-
column format, were all considered strong points. Its utility was often compared to *B-Line*, the

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university-wide e-mail of daily announcements. While there was dissenting opinion on *B-Line* effectiveness, its ability to be quickly scanned was deemed very important. In the final focus group session, participants were provided with an updated edition of the e-newsletter intentionally formatted with more concise descriptions. This was the only session where feedback related to having too much written copy was not offered.

The desire to receive answers quickly was deemed a priority in all sessions, however, it was acknowledged that receiving a timetable on when an answer could be expected was valued and would likely suffice on most occasions. As
get a response even if you do not get the answers you are looking for right away. Even if it is an automated response that tells me I will hear something within 24 or 48 hours. It helps you feel like you mat
or having the option to connect with a staff member via instant message chat.

Finding 3: Peer Interaction Preferred

The opportunity for shared experiences and to learn about opportunities from peers is important to students. Focus group participants collectively agreed they would be more inclined to participate in an activity when they had friends or knew others who would be participating as well. As one student

mentioned they would not necessarily reject an activity attending, but also d

The idea of the CCE utilizing students as ambassadors was discussed in the final two focus group sessions. Participants within both sessions indicated they would be more likely to

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get involved if they heard about opportunities from a fellow student. Upon hearing this idea, at least three participants offered to act as the conduits through which the CCE can reach more students with one individual saying that ambassadors for on-

Finding 4: Students Prefer Social Media and Mobile Devices

An active presence on social networking sites and making information available via mobile devices can be useful tools for reaching and mobilizing students. Both social networking sites and mobile devices were designated as significant resources for information and integral parts of everyday life. Approximately 90% of the participants indicated that they were active Facebook users. One participant identified himself as an active user of eight different social

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Figure 1.

ications.

In each focus group session, social networking sites were identified as an essential

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, who identified herself as not being active on any social networking sites, still

Students said that they held different expectations for the information made available through social networking sites compared to that found on a university website. Social networking sites were expected to have content that is

was currently little interaction on the

the office itself. Ideas were offered to spur more interaction including: having contests, seeking feedback on new ideas, as well as having students involved with the CCE to help manage and monitor it.

Upon describing the Service on the Spot program (the spontaneous service activity promoted through social media) in three focus group sessions, participants responded favorably, communicating interest in participating. As one student who identified herself as not being very involved said

ested in participating in that type of

The ability to receive information via mobile phones was also very well-received. As one

-the-

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at your computer all the

identified as a useful tool to reach students as a reminder for upcoming events or programs. This was particularly relevant for participants who might want to be involved, but do not have Internet

it is not being utilized on campus very much

presents an opportunity for the CCE, however, the way in which it is used is vital to its success.

The frequency of text message reminders, their content, the ability to easily opt-in and opt-out, and the timing with which they are delivered were all mentioned as important items to consider.

Finding 5: Limited Contact Preferred

Finding 6: Establishing Campus Presence

It is important for the CCE to distinguish itself and maintain a consistent and visible presence across campus. While the CCE has made progress during its first year, the challenge lies in distinguishing the role and services it provides for students and communicating it to a larger audience. Across each focus group, participants indicated that having a presence at major campus events and collaborating with already-established offices, student groups, and community organizations is important to reach and identify with a larger audience of students. While the CCE has engaged in these activities throughout the year, the feedback received might indicate that a more consistent presence is warranted.

Different outlets for increasing the

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Bridging the Digital Divide Project. This project increases computer access to marginalized populations by refurbishing used computers that are then loaned to them through five local collaborating nonprofits. For this particular S.O.S. activity, students unloaded, sorted, tested and then delivered equipment prior to the start of the refurbishing phase.

The only means utilized for recruiting students for the activities and providing details required to participate were online and mobile social media. This meant that those students who attended only received the notification and information through the new strategies or by word-of-

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methods they have indicated they prefer, to promote interaction, and expand the online visibility across various platforms. These new initiatives:

Address evolving student preferences for information across various online and mobile platforms.

Increase interest and make it easier for students to participate in meaningful service activities.

Foster a spirit of service and community among students through online networks and collaborative events on and off campus.

Present new and unique opportunities for students to interact with the .

Raise awareness of the newly-formed CCE office and expand its reach among students.

Design of Information Management Program

Based on the findings reported above and specific recommendations provided through ongoing interactions with students, a number of new methods utilizing social media to connect with students were initiated. The CCE utilizes a multi-faceted marketing approach to disseminate information about its offerings and promote events and opportunities to students. It has established and is maintaining a presence across a number of social network sites, including Facebook, Twitter, FourSquare, Flickr, Pinterest, and LinkedIn, to ensure that students can receive information and engage with the office through their preferred medium.

Facebook serves as the social media hub and through the use of a social plug-in, displays the content of the CCE Facebook page on its official university website (allowing the CCE site visitors to access its Facebook offerings without having to be a member of the site). This is an important vehicle not only to drive traffic to the CCE website, but to feature additional content, as well as to communicate and interact directly with students. Additionally, the CCE

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Facebook page has been customized to display updates from the CCE Twitter feed, as well as to view Foursquare updates once again syncing content to help ease consumption. The content promoted via the Twitter account is used in a similar vein to Facebook, but is also used as a publ

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Mobile tagging is a technique being utilized to engage an increasingly tech-savvy generation of students. This is used to engage students in the

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Before implementing a student-recommended method, conduct a brief feasibility assessment to determine if there are adequate resources and knowledgeable people to develop and oversee the process. Consider how well the new approach can be supported both in the immediate and long-term. It is imperative that it can be sustained with minimal staff time, or it may not be worth the considerable investment of time it takes to launch. While it is advisable and possibly more efficient to use student support, careful oversight is important because students may not have a clear sense of the differences between personal and professional uses of social media. While remaining open-minded to new means of communicating, attend to the need to remain efficient and professional.

Utilizing the most popular means for communicating with students is by its nature an ever-evolving endeavor. This requires constant vigilance and ongoing assessments to determine impact and may involve risk. Pioneering new tactics may mean that on occasion one does not prove to be as effective as hoped. For example, the CCE has recently included Pinterest in its cadre of communication strategies, though predictions regarding its long-term ability to attract followers are mixed.

The available forms of social media are constantly growing and may quickly overwhelm novices. As an office decides to adopt new methods of communication, it is important to start with one or two innovations and master those before expanding. Also, there is a limit to how many communication platforms can effectively be managed by one office, so it is important to

Most important in the implementation of new information dissemination strategies is the development of a comprehensive plan. It is recommended that experienced professional staff and other reliable sources be consulted to take advantage of knowledge that is as current as

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possible. After careful investigation, planning, and preparation, the most appropriate and effective digital communication tools will be identified and, if closely monitored and modified as needed, will result in successfully informing and engaging students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Investigating the use of social media and other digital means of communication to inform and mobilize college students is a relatively new area of research. As such, there are many unexplored aspects which, if studied, could provide direct benefit to college/university staff and faculty, as well as the students they serve.

As discussed in detail above, available digital means for communication are constantly changing. The degree to which these new tools can be employed on college campuses and strategies for their effective utilization would be of keen interest to those charged with communicating with students. In addition, as new forms and tools are developed, ongoing study is needed to ascertain current student preferences, which are essentially moving targets. These may also differ some from campus-to-campus, so it would be useful to compare student preferences across multiple campuses to determine if there are discernible patterns.

Efficiency of effort is of great concern on resource-strapped campuses today. Managing a variety of forms of outreach through a single management program would be highly desirable. As new online tools are developed to manage multiple methods of digital communications, it is important to identify, test, and report on those of greatest utility and benefit.

Lastly, more research is needed to determine to what degree each form of communication is successful, either solely or in combination with others, in actually mobilizing students to become engaged -based information, it is more difficult to ascertain the impact these have had on student behavior. Ultimately, mobilizing informed students is the goal of college engagement initiatives.

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