Facebook Pilot Program:Does Social Media Enhance LearningOutcomes & Communities?

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Does Social Media Enhance Learning Outcomes & Communities?

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Introduction

In the process of onboarding new adjuncts, the researchers wanted a way to create more integrated, social interactions between students and instructors. We initially decided to use a secret Facebook group for a single class, but as we read the research available and discussed our project, we decided to create a closed, Facebook group for the entire Criminal Justice Administration program – including students, alumni, faculty, advisory board members, and industry experts.

Non-class materials will be posted on this site, questions will be posed, current events and videos will be posted, and criminal justice alumni, advisory board members, and adjunct faculty will be available to answer questions and provide expertise and advice. Additional experts in the field will provide career advice and answer questions, as well. This will all be done in a safe and nonjudgmental environment that will allow for free flowing dialogue not otherwise available in our highly structured online courses.
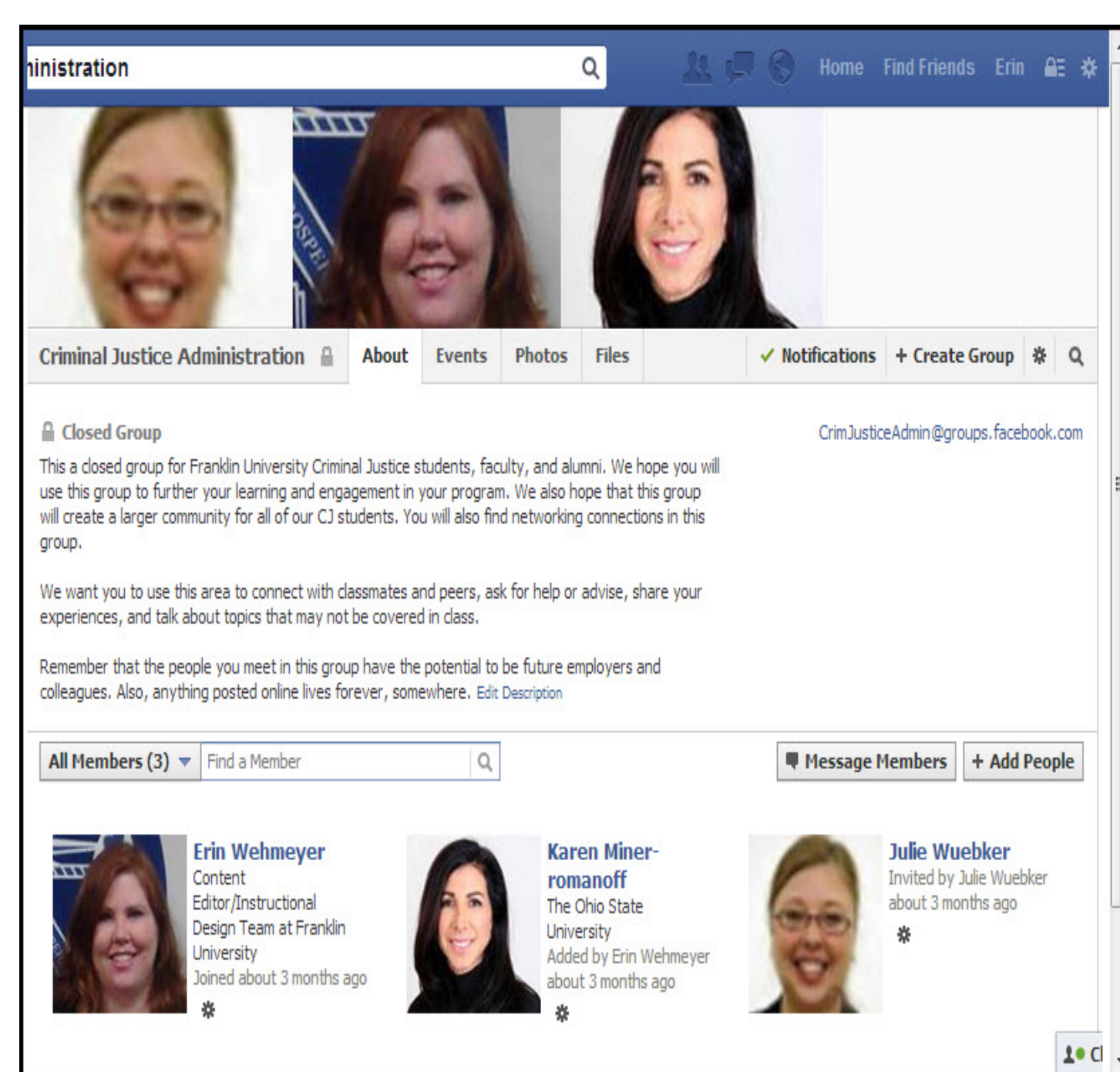
Criminal Justice Administration Facebook group page

Hypothesis: We contend and research thus far supports, that any interactions, formal or informal, will increase emotional and social engagement with coursework, the CJAD program, and the University. We believe that this will prove true for students, alumni, advisory board members, and industry experts.

Methods

Based on extensive research, this project seeks to evaluate the benefits of informal online social media groups to student learning and engagement (through a dedicated, closed Facebook group). We will also be measuring the sense of community built among the various user groups (i.e., students, alumni, faculty, and program administration).

We will be sending individual email invites to all potential users/members of the group. Because of the nature of the group (closed) – all Facebook users will be able to see the group and see the members but only members will be able to see posts and interactions.

We will be utilizing an anonymous, confidential, and voluntary experience evaluation at the end of a predetermined time period.

Student Questionnaire
- Did you feel comfortable posting to the Facebook page?
- Did the availability of experts enhance your learning experience?
- Did the experience lead you to feel more engaged?
- Did it increase the amount of time you thought about your course(s)?
- Because of this group, do you feel that you belong to a community of criminal justice students and professionals?
- Do you use Facebook on a mobile device?
- Do you use Facebook for other professional or quasi-professional groups?

Faculty Questionnaire
- Did you feel comfortable posting to the Facebook page?
- Did the experience lead you to feel more engaged?
- Did the availability of experts enhance your teaching experience?
- As Franklin University Alumni, did you feel providing advice to current students enhanced your professional self-efficacy?
- Because of this group, do you feel that you belong to a community of criminal justice students and professionals?
- Do you use Facebook on a mobile device?
- Do you use Facebook for other professional or quasi-professional groups?

Advisory Board, Alumni, & Others Questionnaire
- Did you feel comfortable posting to the Facebook page?
- Did the availability of experts enhance your learning and teaching experience?
- Because of this group, do you feel that you belong to a community of criminal justice students and professionals?
- Did you feel that your perspective(s) was relevant and helpful to the other group members?
- Do you use Facebook on a mobile device?
- Do you use Facebook for other professional or quasi-professional groups?

Proposed Outcomes

The researchers expect that the CJAD Facebook group will:
- Improve communication and engagement among all the CJAD stakeholders
- Increase student learning and amalgamation
- Increase student and alumni engagement in the CJAD program and Franklin University
- Increase student retention (through increased engagement and additional support opportunities)
- Create a social learning community that enhances and develops the classroom learning communities
- Remove barriers and provide access to one another in a way that challenges the boundaries imposed by traditional hierarchical relationships and classrooms.

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Literature Review (Sound bytes from the research)

The majority of research on social networks, Facebook in particular, is about their recreational use. The research on their use in higher education as more than simply a marketing tool, suggests that social networks are a significant part of our students' and faculties' lives and that we should embrace their use in education. Here are a few of the highlights from our research:

Leece and Campbell (2011) found that students' use of university sponsored social networks can "expand the peer network and counteract the feeling of isolation often experienced by distributed (distance) learners" (p. 11).

Low stakes discussions build engagement which leads to increased amalgamation, a "combination of your opinion, comment or perspective to the original learning fragment, creating a composite result that is a fuller, more robust form of the original" (Lime Green Labs, p. 15).

Selwyn (2011) found that "social media users go online to share and rate, mash-up and remix, friend and trend" (p. 1) and that young people have a "desire for choice, convenience, customization, and control" (p.2).

Some data (as of August 2012) – 69% of online adults use social networking sites and 92% of 18-to-29-year olds use social networking sites (Brenner, 2012 as cited in Joosten, Pasquini, & Harness, 2012, p. 126).

Joosten, Pasquini, and Harness (2012) also found that university use of "social media technologies assist higher education institutions in encouraging digital literacy among their students" (p. 126). Digital literacy includes "skills related to continuous discovery, digital curation, network development, and the ability to connect to real-world issues and take responsibility for their own learning" (p.126).

Kurkle (2011) found that the use of social media can assist in developing the concept of "Community of Practice – a shared domain of interest and shared goals which form the basis of cooperation" (p. 14).

Greenhow (2011) found that social networking sites "feature prominent personal profiling, highlighting the connections between people and content and allow people to visualize, interact with, and activate existing personal and professional networks, and to create new ones unbounded by geographic distance" (p. 5). She also noted that when the U.S. Department of Education wanted to survey what public educators thought were the pressing classroom problems, they used social media to solicit submissions.

According to Bosch (2009), "Facebook fosters micro-communities of people who share interests or partake in similar activities, and the question is whether this kind of effective social networking might be similarly extended from the personal, into the realm of the academic" (p. 193).

Particularly interesting to the researchers, Blakenship (2010) noted that "this realm (social media) is not just the province of the bushy-tailed adjunct professors who are barely out of college themselves…older faculty (those teaching for 20 or more years) use social media at almost the same levels as their younger peers (p. 11).