

## Social Media Ethos: Raising Awareness about Communication Center Programs and Outreach through the Use of Twitter

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Communication centers often develop a social media presence to engage with audiences about services, programs, and strategies. Twitter, as a popular social media platform, has been adopted by many communication centers. In this article, researchers from the Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) Noel Studio for Academic Creativity share strategies, best practices, and analysis for using Twitter tags, hashtags, and geotags to engage with different publics.

*Keywords: Twitter, Noel Studio, tagging, hashtagging, geotagging*

*Follow the Eastern Kentucky University Noel Studio for Academic Creativity on Twitter and Instagram at @noelstudio and on Facebook at Studio for Academic Creativity.*

### Introduction

While many communication centers have a plan for social media design and presence, others are just beginning this move or are considering ways to reinvent their presence and content. Thus, more systematic and evidence-informed approaches for communication centers' use of social media is timely and necessary.

In this article, the authors--all familiar practitioners of social media platforms and informed in the design, implementation, management, and goals of their program's social media presence--examine the Twitter profile of the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), a regional comprehensive university located in Richmond, KY, of about 16,000 students. Specifically, the authors explore the ways the program uses tagging (individuals or entities), hashtagging (to create indices), and

geotagging (identifying or publishing a location) to design engaging, site-specific content for followers and audiences. These techniques allow the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity to engage with publics while sharing valuable information about the program. The @noelstudio's audience consists of multiple readers or stakeholders:

- Internal stakeholders: EKU students, EKU alumni, Noel Studio consultants, Noel Studio alumni, EKU administrators, including department chairs, deans, provost(s), and president;
- External stakeholders: students at other higher education institutions, Noel Studio consultants' parents, EKU students' parents; and
- External organizations: state, local, regional, national, and international organizations ranging from those in the Richmond, KY (local area such as Chamber of Commerce) and companies, to other higher education institutions,

and higher education institutions' communication centers (such as Nova Southeastern University's Writing and Communication Center, the University of North Carolina Greensboro's Communication Center, and Georgia Tech's CommLab).

Much like the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity, a large number of communication centers have taken to social media. Their uses of Twitter, however, vary widely.

Ridley (n.d.) explored the ways in which colleges and universities are using social media to communicate to (and attract) students. Importantly, as Ridley explained, "schools have taken notice of what students are looking for, and are using social media to share their campus culture with prospective students and their parents." As a central presence and advocate for communication processes and practices on many campuses, communication centers have also followed suit by designing their own presence in the social media landscape. Similar to Ridley's description, communication centers have designed social media profiles to share their program's culture with students and other members of their academic community(ies) and the world, with a potential reach far beyond the walls of their space or campus. While every communication center would have a different reason for establishing a Twitter profile, four broad-based goals might include:

- Increased potential communication with current students at the college or university;
- Potential for communication with current clientele of the communication center;
- Potential for communication with prospective clientele of the communication center; and

- Platform for showcasing events, programs, or available resources.

Communication centers, however, would have many reasons for enhancing their digital presence through the use of Twitter, and each center brings with it a unique approach. As even more communication centers join this social media platform, additional research and analysis is needed to understand strategies and practices, especially within the context of communication center usage.

When designed and used intentionally, Twitter can be a meaningful and powerful platform for communication centers to establish a relationship with current and potential clientele--a relationship harder to foster through traditional media, such as websites, posters, or handouts. Twitter is a social media outlet that almost all current and incoming college students are not only familiar with but enjoy and use casually. As a strategy for maximizing audience reach and promoting interactivity, tagging, hashtagging, and geotagging can help increase a communication center's presence and reach and situate messaging within the larger structure of the institution, including spaces or places where activities take place.

### **The Importance of Situating Space through Twitter**

The Noel Studio is a 10,000 square foot space located in the heart of the historic Crabbe Library on the ECU campus. The space is bright, with ample natural light shining into the Greenhouse, a flexible space at the center of the Noel Studio, where one-on-one and small-group consultations take place. Furniture is brightly colored, with most situated on wheels to facilitate easy movement and reorganization as needed, which is key in creating a space that promotes collaboration and interaction

among students as they design and hone communication projects.

Impressions  
times people saw this Tweet on Twitter

Total engagements  
times people interacted with this Tweet

Figure 1. *Example Twitter analytics.*

Figure 1 shows a photo posted to Twitter in advance of a Noel Studio consultant educational development session. This photo offers a unique angle of a popular and prominent space in the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity, often referred to as the Greenhouse. The physical structure of the space--the building itself and the way it is designed--communicates an ethos to students and all members of the university community. That is, the space showcases the importance--and centrality--not only of communication but also of academic success. Space is critical to the mission of the Noel Studio and the ways that services are delivered. The space, that is, projects an ethos of creativity, innovation, and communication where students are encouraged to create environments to fit their communication activity for that visit (Bunnell et al., 2016; Carpenter, 2016; Carpenter & Apostel, 2017).

As a strategy for engaging audiences through Twitter, tagging, hashtagging, and geotagging allows communication centers to cultivate an ethos for their program, showing characteristics of the space, events, people, and other features that audience members can follow or track for information about events or other updates. Regardless of the footprint a communication center occupies, the physical space--or features, tools, or resources included in it--can allow audiences to develop a relationship with the program. Tagging, hashtagging, and geotagging can offer valuable opportunities to increase interaction among interested

populations. Effective strategies employed by the Noel Studio include:

- Highlighting a new resource located in the communication center

210

21

Use a hashtag to describe, provide context for, or align with a trending hashtag (made popular by frequent Twitter use) to display a new resource within the communication center. In addition, a geotag can be used to show followers the communication center's location or to ensure that if the location is searched by users, the photo is archived, searchable, or available.

- Showcasing a staff member working with students in the space

Hashtags or geotags can align the staff member profile or photo with the communication center or larger institutional social media efforts. Both strategies can increase engagement in the form of impressions (Twitter users who see the post) or engagements (when followers interact with the tweet, usually by clicking on the photo or link).

- Situating the communication center within the geography of the larger campus

Tags or geotags can serve as a way to situate the communication center--or its programming--within the geographic context of the campus. Alternate locations, satellite centers, and promotion initiatives can help alert students and members of the campus community of this communication center activity.

- Featuring technology or recording equipment available within the communication center

Tags can describe the technology for readers or add context for use or connections to potential student visitors.

- Showing students recommendations for navigating communication center spaces.

Tagging, hashtagging, and geotagging can help situate allied programs within the context of communication center activity. Communication centers can use these tagging features to connect with academic departments or locations, for example, to show programmatic alignment.

The @noelstudio feed, designed and managed by the Noel Studio's Social Media Committee, employs many of these approaches by displaying photos of new or recently updated spaces, technologies, or tools using related tagging strategies. Staffing profiles or updates can follow similar approaches, which allow for an archival connection to the communication center. The use of the Noel Studio Twitter handle and content related to it is often pushed by the student staff who are employed there. Undergraduate students who work for the Noel Studio often retweet and react to posts, allowing them to promote their workplace and reach a broader audience than the feed alone may be able to reach. The staff of the Noel Studio is able to gain experience with social media through these activities, setting them up for more efficient technological and communication skills in the future.

### **Twitter Applications for Communication Centers**

While the tone used by most colleges and universities on social media, and on Twitter specifically, may be viewed as formal compared to that of other industries (e.g., Wendy's sassy signature tone), the goal of many Twitter feeds is to engage audiences, in many cases with a focus on students. Some posts might boast academic accomplishments or credentials, while others might focus on social aspects of life at the school or as a student. Depending on the goal(s) of the Twitter feed, posts might take an academic or humorous tone (or offer a mix, depending on the content). Some

Twitter feeds have become remarkably popular, such as popular fast food chains, among a variety of audiences with varying levels of interest in the content. However, other feeds offer only light content, posting simply a link to a website or a photo with little opportunity for interaction, often resulting in little impact or engagement as determined by analytics via Twitter. Figure 2, for example, offers an example of a recent post via Twitter. This post reached 210 followers, with 21 engagements (or interactions with the content posted, often in the form of a link click).

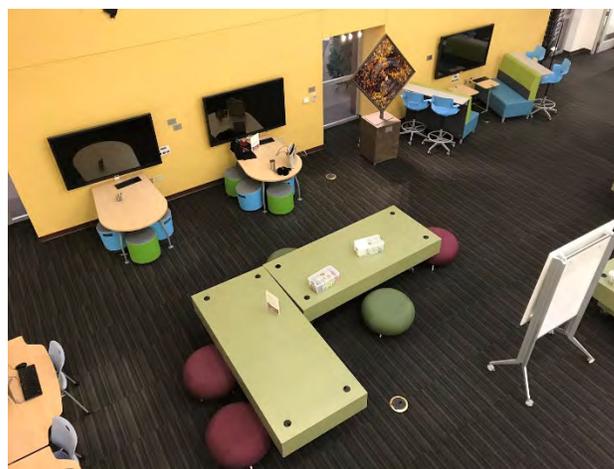


Figure 2. *Noel Studio for Academic Creativity Greenhouse, posted on Twitter (Photo by Russell Carpenter, @rustycarpenter)*

Marciniak (2012) noted that student perspectives on Twitter are often some of the most heard. In this article, Marciniak addresses how students often tag and talk about their experiences at the center, some saying that the center was their “bff” for the day, while others remark that they don’t understand why they need to use the center in the first place. The concept of online student communication ties into Keogh’s findings, as Keogh also weighs in on how students, new and old, use online conversation to learn about whether or not certain institutions offer the services they need. Students’ use of tagging or geotagging

within the communication center while remarking and conversing about the center online can be an effective means of getting a center's name and reputation into the student sphere while also giving the center an opportunity to directly address student ideas and questions.

Twitter should make possible new kinds of engagement for communication center populations. Keogh (2018) explained that "young people view social media as more credible compared with traditional media and information provided by companies" (n.p.). In addition, Keogh added that 83% of students now use social media to aid in choosing their prospective college. Twitter then allows for a conversation to emerge between the institution (or communication center) and the student. Best practices for use of social media in an academic setting, according to Jones (2010), include being transparent in the intent and purpose of social media usage, as well as being "nimble" in reacting to how users are engaging with the shared content. When handled correctly, Twitter shows potential for deep, substantive, and sustainable relationships between institutions and related populations.

A study by Kimmons, Veletsianos, and Woodward (2017), however, found that colleges largely use Twitter as a news platform, recruitment tool, and public relations device; in essence, as a monologic device to disseminate information rather than as a platform to invite interaction and discussion with students, faculty, or the public. Shapiro (2013) of UW-Madison lambasts using Twitter to convey only neutral information--availability, workshops, and programs for example--calling it "the party-going equivalent of standing alone in the corner spouting out your observations to no one in particular" (n.p.). While communication centers should use Twitter to amplify its spaces and services, its

marketing should have an undercurrent of sociality that gives it an approachable, warm aura that would--to extend the party-going analogy--kickstart a genuine conversation with a stranger.

Several approaches that complement the use of tags, hashtags, and geotags can be taken to invite effective social media engagement, beyond solely posting links or institutional information. Fandel (2018), for example, emphasized the power of images in the social media landscape. One of the most important parts of publishing a book, Fandel claims, is deciding what the cover of the book will be, as the book's cover has the potential to attract the attention of a wandering shopper as they move through a store. Likewise, the use of images in social media posts have tremendous power to convince a user to pause their rapid scrolling. Once a user stops, the image--which can be a poster for an upcoming workshop, an infographic on the writing process, a candid shot of students having fun in the communication center, among other possibilities--can then convey important information (as well as an important "vibe" for the center) that persuade a student to participate in the center's services. If a communication center's social media strategy boils down to interactive marketing, or, at least, interactive marketing can be one of the center's primary tenets--images are a highly reliable tool to engage with an audience.

These strategies can be paired with the use of tags, hashtags, or geotags as well. Using these features in Twitter aligns communication centers' messages either through the thoughtful use of hashtags or geographic space, the communication center itself, or the larger building in which it is situated. Communication centers often include images of their location or their building as a whole when geotagging. If a student is trying to find the communication

center, the image can serve as a means to direct the student, whether they are across campus or standing right in front of the building. Providing images also serves the same service as a face with a name--the location and appearance of the communication center and building will become synonymous with those who see the tweets.

Without a doubt, the decision to launch--and maintain--a communication center presence via Twitter is an important one. Tagging and geotagging serve as tools for aligning Twitter messaging with communication center spaces and geographies. In the following paragraphs, the authors explore the complex decisions that go into a communication center's Twitter feed with a focus on applications of tagging and geotagging.

### **Noel Studio Use of Twitter**

The Noel Studio has designed and developed strategies to ensure success using Twitter tags, hashtags, and geotags. These strategies allow @noelstudio to provide program-related updates, circulate announcements or information about the program, and reach wide audiences with valuable information. Three strategies have enabled the success of the @noelstudio feed, while also showing unity with the larger university.

Tagging is the use of another handle in a posting (the use of @ and the user's handle, such as "noelstudio"). In addition, hashtags, such as #EKUSummer, can be used to tag posts related to various topics. Tagging other--or related--handles (such as @EKUEnglish) can also result in "retweets" that allow the original post or content to reach the followers of that account as well. If the @noelstudio account has over 1,300 followers and a post is retweeted by @EKUEnglish, which has 800 followers, it

is possible for the post to be seen by 2,100 followers, for example. Tagging, in its various forms, is often a viable strategy for reaching the largest audience possible with your communication center's tweet. In the section that follows, however, we offer best practices and recommendations for maximizing some of Twitter's most powerful features for use in sharing communication center content.

Best practices and recommendations have been widely shared, and many offer sound advice for Twitter users that can be applied--in many ways--to communication centers as they design and implement tactics that will work for their programs. With millions of tweets per day, Twitter is a highly active social media platform.

Most importantly, Twitter feeds should be intentionally designed to maximize readership and engagement. Communication centers should have a clear and well-designed plan for their feeds. Tagging and geotags help communication centers engage with followers, promote their services through giveaways that showcase services and programs, use analytics to reach audiences and increase the reach of posts, and tailor content to audiences. Twitter tagging as a strategy gives the public a key word or phrase to focus on, allowing them to track the tag if they want to keep up with events and services connected to it, and they can share their own connections to the concept by using the tag themselves in their own tweets. Students can also geotag themselves at the communication center. In this way, they can let their friends and family know where they are and what they're doing and possibly entice others to join them. Images used in posts are also effective in drawing attention, as it only takes a moment to look at a photo, and Twitter already includes only a small window of text for each post. By engaging with tags, hashtags, and geotags, the Noel

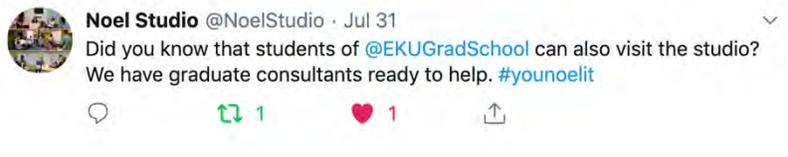
Studio is able to connect with the public on multiple levels.

Table 1 provides samples of Twitter tags used on the @noelstudio feed. Tags were designed by the Noel Studio's Social

Media Committee or adapted from the university's presence. Consistency among tags allows Twitter users to search for and access posts while also using the same tags to participate in conversations.

**Table 1: Sample tagging with and among allied campus areas.**

Twitter Handle	Best Practice
<p><i>@EKUSummer</i></p> <p>The @EKUSummer feed is often tagged to promote summer courses at ECU, many of which require consultations or workshops in the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity.</p>	<p>Noel Studio 1,337 followers + ECU Summer 280 followers + Rusty Carpenter 843 followers = potential to reach 2,460 accounts</p> 
<p><i>@eku_english</i></p> <p>The @eku_english feed is operated by ECU's Department of English. This handle is often tagged in posts of potential interest for ECU English students and followers.</p>	

<p><b>@EKUScholarsWeek</b></p> <p>The @EKUScholarsWeek handle includes content and information related to Scholars Week, a university-wide program coordinated through the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity focused on showcasing the scholarly and creative endeavors of the ECU community. Posts often include tagging the @NoelStudio feed and include relevant content.</p>	 <p>Noel Studio Retweeted</p> <p><b>EKU Scholars Week</b> @EKUScholarsWeek · Apr 8</p> <p>Scholars Week begins today with several events for the @eku community! The full calendar is available at <a href="http://bit.ly/2G1LXoL">bit.ly/2G1LXoL</a>. #EKUSW19</p> <p><b>Monday</b> How to Obtain University-Funded Scholarship through the University Research Committee 12:15pm   Noel Studio Discovery Classroom (3300)</p> <p><b>Art Student Association Annual Juried Exhibition</b> 2-4pm   Fred Parker Giles Gallery, Campbell Building.</p> <p><b>Faculty Awards and Honors</b> 4:30-6pm   Faculty Center for Teaching &amp; Learning (318)</p> <p><b>Tuesday</b> Human Needs Presentation 10am-12pm   3040 &amp; 3042</p> <p><b>Wednesday</b> Human Needs Presentation 10am-12pm   3040 &amp; 3042</p> <p><b>Thursday</b> Human Needs Presentation 10am-12pm   3040 &amp; 3042</p> <p><b>Friday</b> Human Needs Presentation 10am-12pm   3040 &amp; 3042</p>
<p><b>@eku_CLASS</b></p> <p>The @eku_CLASS feed is maintained by ECU's College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences (CLASS). The Noel Studio often tags college handles to share content relevant to their students and faculty.</p>	 <p>Noel Studio Retweeted</p> <p><b>Rusty Carpenter</b> @rustycarpenter · Feb 19</p> <p>Day 2 of the @eku Faculty Leadership Institute takes place on Fri, March 1, and will feature several great sessions, including this student panel. Sign up is still available at <a href="http://studio.eku.edu/faculty-leader...">studio.eku.edu/faculty-leader...</a> @NoelStudio @ekulibraries @eku_CLASS @EKUOnline @EkuDiversity</p> <p><b>2019 Faculty Leadership Institute STUDENT PANEL</b></p> <p>In this session, ECU students will share what they appreciate most about faculty, experiences they've had with transformative faculty leadership, and success stories that have motivated them in their academic careers at the University and beyond.</p> <p><b>Friday, March 1   12:15-1:15pm</b> Faculty Center for Teaching &amp; Learning, Main Library 318</p> <p>Moderated by <b>Dr. Abbey Poffenberger</b> Associate Professor of Spanish   Chair, Dept. of Languages, Cultures, and Humanities</p> <p>Julia Bellendir</p>
<p><b>@ekugradschool</b></p> <p>The Noel Studio often tags ECU's Graduate School in posts of relevance and importance to graduate students and related populations.</p>	 <p>Noel Studio @NoelStudio · Jul 31</p> <p>Did you know that students of @EKUGradSchool can also visit the studio? We have graduate consultants ready to help. #younoelit</p>

As Table 2 shows, hashtags are used to organize content on social media and can be

helpful for users when they are searching for a specific type of media to view. By

participating in hashtags, you can have your communication center associated with a short saying or catchphrase that will help

users remember you and make it easier to find posts about your center.

**Table 2: Hashtags Commonly Used for the @noelstudio Twitter account.**

Hashtags	Best Practice
<p><i>#younoelit</i> and <i>#EKULNAP</i></p> <p>Creating a hashtag that is unique to your communication center can help the program promote its brand. For example, this tweet promotes the Noel Studio's Long Night Against Procrastination (LNAP) a 24-hour event focused on supporting student writing, research, and communication while also building community as students compose and revise among consultants and peers in the space.</p>	
<p><i>Retweeting #EKUSummer</i></p> <p>By retweeting other accounts that use a hashtag, the communication center account can be more easily found by those who are searching for that specific tag. For example, when someone searches for #EKUSummer, they can find the Noel Studio's account listed in the retweets for the original post that was shared.</p>	
<p><i>#EKUSW19</i></p> <p>This hashtag is recurring annually among Noel Studio programs and is used to</p>	

promote the university's annual Scholars Week. The last two numbers (in this case, "19") always change to reflect the year that the hashtag is being used, which can also make it an effective tool for archiving. To see posts from any given Scholars Week, simply search for the hashtag with that year.



EKU @eku · Apr 16

We love celebrating faculty and student success on the #CampusBeautiful during #EKU Scholars Week. This annual celebration commends the hard work, dedication, and success of students and faculty at EKU. #EKUSW19 #EKUScholars eku.edu/photo/scholars...



You and 4 others



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21



### #EKUDeep

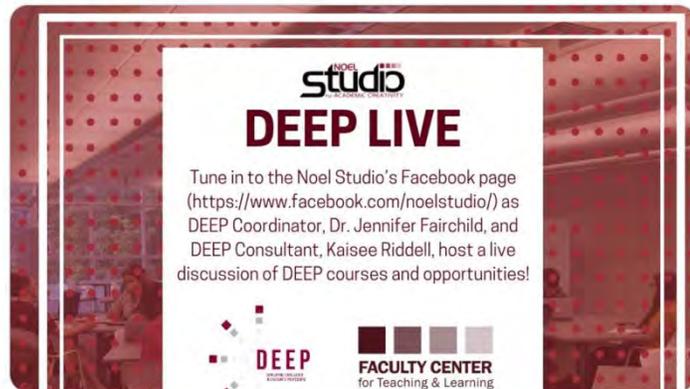
Communication centers can also create hashtags for specific events, such as this one for the Noel Studio's annual DEEP (Developing Excellence in Eastern's Professor) Week. These hashtags help organize all content surrounding the program's event and make it easy to find content for anyone else who is interested in seeing posts about the event.

Noel Studio Retweeted



EKU @eku · Jan 29

Learn about #EKUDeep wherever you are! Tune in to the @NoelStudio FB page tomorrow for a live discussion of DEEP courses and opportunities.



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<p><b>#BGWS</b></p> <p>Communication centers can tag other, related handles (such as @EKUSummer and @EKU_CLASS) to increase access to content and use hashtags to create text that is archivable and searchable via Twitter.</p>	
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Twitter geotags allow communication centers to share geographic information. Geotags can be used to situate the

communication center (or its services and programs) on campus. Table 3 offers an example of geotagging.

**Table 3: Geotagging.**

Geotag	Best Practice
Tagging the Noel Studio as a location	Need help finding us? The Noel Studio is located with the main @ekulibraries complex. Check our location and come for a visit!

**Conclusions**

The authors offer several recommendations for designing, implementing, and managing Twitter tags, hashtags, and geotags. Recommendations are situated into three categories including leadership and professional development, technology and tool usage, and design.

**Leadership and Professional Development**

- Provide professional development for student staff members to design and manage Twitter content emphasizing the potential for tags, hashtags, and geotags;

- Assign students to lead the communication center’s Twitter feed and envision new possibilities for tagging, hashtagging, and geotagging; and
- Encourage leadership development and collaborative opportunities through the use of a student-led and managed Twitter presence for the communication center that allows students to explore using these strategies.

**Technology and Tool Usage**

- Encourage students to learn about Twitter tags, hashtags, and geotags as a powerful social media strategy;
- Provide research and innovation opportunities using the communication

center's Twitter presence that allows for new possibilities to emerge through the use of tags, hashtags, and geotags; and

- Explore how the tags, hashtags, and geotags within Twitter function and discuss audience(s) and stakeholders with communication center staff members.

### Design

- Allow students to design Twitter content using Canva and other freely available online platforms, which also gives them experience using digital tools for design work (and multimodal projects) that expand the communication center's reach via tags, hashtags, and geotags; and
- Integrate the communication center's spatial ethos through tagging.

Twitter can be a powerful social media application for communication centers. However, a communication center's Twitter presence should be carefully designed, cultivated, and managed. While using Twitter might seem "easy" enough, planning and sustaining a presence can present challenges and is worthy of in-depth discussion and, if implemented, long-term commitment. It is important to understand--and anticipate--the expectations of Twitter feeds, especially among readers, clientele, or other readers. Planning a communication center's Twitter persona--or an update to a Twitter profile--is a critical step. If students or student teams are managing or implementing a social media presence, consistency and sustainability are also important.

Several considerations emerge for designing a consistent and sustainable Twitter presence. A communication center's Twitter persona, including careful and intentional consideration of tags, hashtags,

and geotags, must be aligned and cultivated often. That is, some content focuses on the broad work of the communication center while other content has a shorter shelf-life (if promoting an event, for example).

Tagging practices and related media shared can and should be assessed often.

Ideally, however, communication centers will continue to design Twitter presences that promote the academic--and social--attributes that make these spaces and programs central to their institutions. Thoughtful and strategic use of tagging can allow for the careful cultivation of a communication center's ethos by aligning the valuable academic and social activities of the program with the institution's mission, vision, and values.

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### Author Biographies

Adrian Bryant is a junior English major at Eastern Kentucky University. He currently works as a Course-Embedded Consultant (CEC) at ECU’s Noel Studio for Academic Creativity, where he has worked for two years. Bryant is planning to pursue an MA in Communication upon graduation.

Darian Bianco is a senior English Literature major of Eastern Kentucky University who will graduate in December of 2019. She has worked as a general, media, and course-embedded consultant for the Noel Studio over her three years of employment there. Bianco is planning to apply to the Bluegrass Writer’s Studio upon graduation.

Kaisee Riddell is a Summer 2019 graduate of Eastern Kentucky University. Her previous roles for the Noel Studio include Consultant for the Developing Excellence in Eastern’s Professors (DEEP) system and managing social media for the ECU Summer initiative. Riddell is now pursuing a Master of Public Affairs degree at Indiana University Bloomington.

Abby Gardner is a 2019 MA graduate of Eastern Kentucky University. Serving both the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity and the Faculty Center for Teaching & Learning as a consultant for two and a half years, she most recently served as Program Coordinator for Pedagogicon 2019.

Jessica Vaught is a 2018 BA graduate of Eastern Kentucky University. In her time at ECU, she served as an academic consultant and peer mentor at the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity where she also streamlined and supervised its PR & Social

Media Committee. Vaught has collaborated on publications with Russell Carpenter including “How Do You Know? A Studio-Based Approach to Metacognitive Practice,” featured in *An Introduction to Tutoring in the Writing Centre*. Vaught is currently an English instructor at Madison Central High School.

Russell Carpenter, Ph.D., is executive director of the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity and associate professor of English at Eastern Kentucky University. Recent books include *Studio-Based Approached for Multimodal Projects*, *Writing Studio Pedagogy*, and *Engaging Millennial Faculty*. Carpenter’s Twitter handle is @rustycarpenter.