

The Use of Social Media in a UK School of Pharmacy to Increase Student Engagement and Sense of Belonging

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Abstract : Medway School of Pharmacy – a joint collaboration between the University of Kent and the University of Greenwich – is a large school of pharmacy in the United Kingdom. The school primarily delivers the accredited Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) degree programme. Reportedly, some students may feel isolated from the larger student body that extends across four separate campuses, where a diverse range of academic subjects is delivered. In addition, student engagement has been noted as being limited in some areas, as evidenced in some cases by poor attendance at some lectures. In January 2015, the University of Kent launched a new initiative dedicated to Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI). As part of this project, Medway School of Pharmacy employed 'Student Success Project Officers' in order to analyse past and present school data. As a result, initiatives have been implemented to i) negate disparities in attainment and ii) increase engagement, particularly for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students which make up for more than 80% of the pharmacy student cohort. Social media platforms are prevalent, with global statistics suggesting that they are most commonly used by females between the ages of 16-34. Student focus groups held throughout the academic year brought to light the school's need to use social media much more actively. Prior to the EDI initiative, social media usage for Medway School of Pharmacy was scarce. Platforms including: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, The Student Room and University Blogs were either introduced or rejuvenated. This action was taken with the primary aim of increasing student engagement. By using a number of varied social media platforms, the university is able to capture a large range of students by appealing to different interests. Social media is being used to disseminate important information, promote equality and diversity, recognise and celebrate student success and also to allow students to explore the student life outside of Medway School of Pharmacy. Early data suggests an increase in lecture attendance, as well as greater evidence of student engagement highlighted by recent focus group discussions. In addition, students have communicated that active social media accounts were imperative when choosing universities for 2015/16. It allows students to understand more about the University and community prior to beginning their studies. By having a lively presence on social media, the university can use a multi-faceted approach to succeed in early engagement, as well as fostering the long term engagement of continuing students.

Keywords : engagement, social media, pharmacy, community

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