



April 12, 2013; Circulation: 153,847

NJ colleges, students respond to social media

After working for 20 years in public relations, Randi London could see the world had changed around her. Say goodbye to the days when a simple press release and follow-up phone call was the standard, one-two punch of marketing communications. Say hello to Twitter and tweets, Facebook and friends, and the brave new world of social media.

Like so many other middle-age professionals, London was looking to update her skills and get on board with change. So she enrolled in a graduate integrated communications course at William Paterson University in which she's learning the new language of marketing — much of it driven by the social media's pinpoint advertising targeted to Facebook pages and smart-phone applications.

"I came back to kind of shift my career," said London, who lives in Wayne with her family. "It's definitely challenging to come back to school when you are in your 40s. Doing online advertising is all new to me. But I'm a better student now after spending 20 years in P.R."

As the digital revolution presses on, colleges have responded to the growing need for workers to keep up with the changes. Besides updating the traditional menu of computer science courses for undergraduates, many New Jersey institutions are expanding quick-hit certificate programs geared toward older professionals eager to make money using the social media for e-commerce.

William Paterson plans to offer a social media marketing communication certificate program beginning this summer.

The program will be divided into five abbreviated courses and include writing for the digital media, website design and development and strategic problem solving using the Internet.

For working professionals, the certificate program is shorter route to learning how to use social media tools than pursuing a degree.

"You can be brought up to date and learn these skills. You don't have to go back to school for a degree," said Bernadette Tiernan, who heads the Center for Continuing and Professional Education at WPU. "This is something that you can do immediately to update your skills, especially if you're in marketing, sales or customer service."

Most colleges in North Jersey have taken the plunge into social media. Among the offerings:

Seton Hall University in South Orange offers a five-session course on social media beginning in September. The class meets on Saturday mornings and costs \$150 per session or \$500 for the

entire course. The course is run by the College of Continuing Education and Professional Studies. Check out ceps.shu.edu or call 973-761-9087.

Bergen Community College in Paramus has extensive courses in e-business and website development. BCCC offers a two-year associate's degree in e-business management, as well as Web development and video-game development. Check out bergen.edu for details.

The County College of Morris in Randolph has a two-year degree program in video-game development. The course, game design concepts, begins in the fall and teaches character development, story writing, computer programming, color use, logic and 3D animation. For details, call the Department of Information Technologies at 973-328-5780.

Montclair State University offers an array of undergraduate and graduate courses in multimedia computing, advanced Web development and game development within the College of Science and Math. Get details at montclair.edu.

The Adult School of Montclair, located at Montclair High School, has a two-session class in search engine optimization on April 22 and 29. The cost is \$49. Call 973-746-6636.

For young people who were brought up on computers, working a social media site might be as challenging as tying one's shoes. But colleges are raising the bar by offering courses in which students create the software and the mobile applications that are useful to them.

At Montclair State, Petrali Chatterjee's class is developing its own mobile phone application to help students with an age-old problem: how to buy and sell used textbooks. "It's one of those ideas that has a lot of promise because it relates to their life," Chatterjee said.

At Seton Hall, Associate Professor Joseph Martinelli says he's "all in" when it comes to social media. But the former print journalist tries to impress on students that technology is only effective if people use it correctly.

"In teaching social media, I still use the Five W's of journalism," he said. "Who do you want to contact? Why do you want to contact them? What are you going to contact them about? Where do you want your social media site to be established? And how are you going to keep it relevant?"

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