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## Serious social media: On the use of social media for improving students' adjustment to college

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### ABSTRACT

A considerable body of research indicates that social support plays an integral role in determining students' successful adjustment to college. Unlike previous research that has evaluated face-to-face support interventions that occur during students' first semester at college, the current study reports on a student-centered social media site designed to enhance students' perceptions of social support prior to their arrival on campus. Results indicated that site usage increased students' perceptions that they would have a diverse social support network during their first semester at college, even when controlling for other potent predictors. The importance of social support perceptions for college adjustment is detailed and the ramifications of the social media intervention are discussed.

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Newer forms of social media differ from older, traditional broadcast media in that they enable peer-to-peer messages, as opposed to unidirectional transmission of one-to-many media content. In doing so, these tools may have the potential to reshape communication patterns among their users by enabling online communication and lowering the barriers to face-to-face interaction. This paper reports on a social media intervention intended to increase connections among incoming college students with the goal of augmenting their feelings of connectedness to the university, increasing perceptions of preparedness and efficacy regarding their future success at college, and providing a peer-driven forum for students to ask and answer questions. A social capital framework was employed to explain the ways in which this technological intervention might affect user perceptions and, potentially, their adjustment to college.

One strand of research investigating the social capital implications of new media has focused on social network site use among college students, investigating sites such as Facebook which are open to the general Internet community (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). Social media are being adopted in other contexts as well, such as internal corporate social network sites (DiMicco, Geyer, Dugan, Brownholtz, & Millen, 2009; DiMicco et al., 2008). These closed sites enable individuals to cultivate self-presentational messages geared towards a particular context or audience and thus avoid the "multiple audience problem" that occurs when multiple aspects of one's social circle are present with little ability to segment messages (Leary, 1995; Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Examples include well known "professional" social media such as LinkedIn and nascent efforts to harness social media for health communication (Elliot,

2010). This study examines whether a targeted social media site can affect the intellectual and social lives of students transitioning from high school to college.

The features of social media that facilitate rewarding and efficacious communication have been discussed and documented across a variety of research contexts. One such context examines how communication technology can be used to improve education and the adjustment to college. A considerable amount of research emphasizes the importance of self-perceptions for students' adjustment to college (e.g., Chermers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001). In particular, students who believe that they have social resources available on campus more successfully handle the transition to college (Brisette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002). Accordingly, the website that was created for the present research was designed to facilitate the development of a support network during students' first year of college, prior to their arrival on campus. Site sponsors hoped to create a closed online community that would provide students with access to other students, staff, faculty, and informational resources.

In the following sections, we first provide a review of the social media research that guided the development of the online community site. This review discusses research that highlights the importance of influencing students' self-beliefs prior to arrival on campus. The manuscript then describes the site's features, the context of its deployment, and the methods used in the study. Results and a discussion of the implications of the study conclude the paper.

### 1. Literature review

#### 1.1. Social media and college adjustment

Over the years, many university programs have been conducted to help establish social support networks once students arrive on

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campus. Several of these programs have focused on developing peer-led support groups (for a review see [Mattanah et al., 2010](#)). The emergence of social media has created opportunities to establish peer-support networks prior to students arriving on campus in ways that may not have been previously possible without the affordances of new media. Indeed, social media websites are being developed by universities to increase connections among graduate students, faculty, and staff across distributed campuses ([Kaya, 2010](#)). Social network sites are perhaps the most prominent example of such media.

Social network sites have received considerable attention from researchers and the general public alike due to the increasingly large userbase for sites like Facebook. Research on Facebook, in particular, has shown that students may reap social benefits from using the site. [Ellison et al. \(2007\)](#) found associations between Facebook usage and various forms of social capital. Social capital broadly refers to social resources that people accrue through their relationships with others. In particular, [Ellison et al. \(2007\)](#) found a strong association between Facebook usage and bridging social capital, which is typically associated with an expansive network of weak ties. Social network sites are thought to facilitate more extensive social networks due to the reduction of costs (e.g., time, effort) for developing and maintaining relationships (see [Donath & Boyd, 2004](#)). As such, having students connect with one another on a social media site prior to their arrival on campus may help students enter college with a more expansive social network than they otherwise might have had, contributing to bridging social capital.

In addition to helping establish and maintain interpersonal connections, researchers have argued that social media sites like Facebook have the ability to guide students entering an unfamiliar social environment. [Selwyn \(2007\)](#) argues that Facebook has “become an important site for the informal, cultural learning of ‘being’ a student, with online interactions and experiences allowing roles to be learned, values understood and identities shaped” (p. 18). Likewise, [Yu, Tian, Vogel, and Kwok \(2010\)](#) suggest that social network sites offer a unique opportunity to promote socialization to the college environment. They argue that social network sites can help students learn about their peers and college which, in turn, can create satisfaction and affiliation with the University. Students’ sense of belonging – whether they feel included in their college community – has a documented relationship with college adjustment. For instance, student perceptions of belonging have been positively associated with feelings of social acceptance and academic competence (e.g., [Pittman & Richmond, 2008](#)). Consequently, social network sites may function to improve the transition to college by helping students socialize to their new environment and establish a sense of connection with their institution. Research by [Haythornthwaite and Kazmer \(2002\)](#) supports the notion that social media can be utilized to develop student-to-student and student-to-instructor connections.

Given the potential for social network sites to socialize students on campus, whether the normative behavior being expressed on such sites promotes positive student expectations is expected to play a role in how this socialization unfolds. Research on social network sites does not unequivocally conclude that increased usage of social media will result in positive outcomes (e.g., [LaRose, Kim, & Peng, 2010](#)). For instance, college and high school students often use Facebook to post pictures of excessive drinking behavior ([Kolek & Saunders, 2008](#)). Establishing a counter-narrative that highlights healthier and more constructive examples of student behavior may assist student adjustment.

In addition to the benefits that may be obtained through social network sites, other forms of communication technology have been shown to help students in educational settings. In particular, web logs (blogs) have been utilized for a variety of educational purposes. Blogs – defined here as online personal journals – are used to fulfill many interpersonal goals such as maintaining ties with family and friends ([Stefanone & Jang, 2008](#)). Blogs in education typically differ from mainstream blogs in that they are less visible to the masses and are written for a specific

community ([Blau, Mor, & Neuthal, 2009](#)). Researchers have argued that, although they are potentially confined in their scope, blogs can be used in academia to connect students, foster social support, and promote self-expression ([Deng & Yuen, in press](#)). It is possible that a limited community of bloggers who share some common bond (e.g., first-year students) could enhance the benefits attributed to blogging in general. For instance, [Baker and Moore \(2008\)](#) contend: “Blogging may function as a safe space where people seek out others for mutual feedback and support, fostering a sense of security and help” (p. 748).

Having the ability to seek out help and express feelings and concerns has been shown to play a role in students’ adjustment to college. Research by [Srivastava, Tamir, McGonigal, John, and Gross \(2009\)](#) indicates that among students entering college, emotional suppression was associated with less social support, less felt closeness to others, and less satisfaction with one’s social network. As such, affording students – prior to entering college – the opportunity to express their concerns and seek out feedback in a closed network composed of similar others may enhance perceptions of social support. Likewise, self-disclosing on blogs may help students integrate into the college environment and expand their network of weak ties ([Ko & Kuo, 2009](#)). The ability to engender positive experiences and constructive self-beliefs in students prior to college may significantly influence their adjustment to college life.

### 1.2. Self-beliefs and college adjustment

Theory on self-beliefs can help explain how social media may affect students’ perceptions of college life and, in turn, their adjustment to college. Social cognitive theory ([Bandura, 1989](#)) details how internal cognitions and environmental factors work in conjunction to alter self-beliefs. Self-beliefs are central determinants of human affect and behavior. For instance, greater self-efficacy has been associated with setting higher goals, having greater motivation to achieve goals, and coping better with stress during taxing times (for a review see [Bandura, 1989](#)). Germane to the current study, self-beliefs can be influenced by one’s social environment.

Through social observation and interaction, people are able to acquire a variety of important information from others that can be used to direct their own behavior and beliefs. Before the advancement of communication technology, such observation was more likely to be restricted to one’s immediate social environment. However, new media currently enable the mass dissemination of messages, reduce the constraints of geographical dispersion, and facilitate the recordability of communication ([Bargh & McKenna, 2004](#)). Social network sites exemplify such media. [Bandura \(2001\)](#) specifically emphasizes the importance of electronic media in the process of socialization:

Because the symbolic environment occupies a major part of people’s everyday lives, much of the social construction of reality and shaping of public consciousness occurs through electronic acculturation. At the societal level, the electronic modes of influence are transforming how social systems operate and serving as a major vehicle for sociopolitical change. The study of acculturation in the present electronic age must be broadened to include electronic acculturation (p. 271).

Reducing uncertainty about college and shaping positive expectancies through social media can go a long way in facilitating a healthy transition to college.

Indeed, a considerable amount of research has been dedicated to examining how the psychological disposition of students affects their adjustment to college. One line of research, in particular, examines the association between optimistic beliefs and student success. In general, positive expectancies for the future can have beneficial effects for social adjustment during stressful life events ([Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 2001](#)). Meta-analytic findings support this assertion and offer insight into why such associations exist. Across 50 studies, optimistic

beliefs have been found to be positively associated with coping strategies that attempt to reduce stressors and are negatively associated with coping strategies that attempt to avoid stressors (Nes & Segerstrom, 2006). As such, students who enter college with an optimistic outlook benefit from being more adept at coping with the difficulties of adjusting to a new environment.

A reason optimistic students may cope better with the stressors of college life is that they are able to foster more supportive social relationships (Brissette et al., 2002). Past research suggests that relative to pessimists, optimists experience fewer negative social encounters (Lepore & Ituarte, 1999) and are found to be more socially attractive (Carver, Kus, & Scheier, 1994). Brissette et al. (2002) tested the hypothesis that optimistic beliefs foster social support by tracking students across their first semester at college. Reports of optimism obtained at the beginning of the semester predicted perceived social support at the end of the semester. Overall, the findings were consistent with the interpretation that increases in optimism led to greater perceived social support, which in turn, improved the psychological adjustment of students (less stress and depression). Most notably, the actual self-reported sizes of students' social networks did not predict their psychological adjustment to college. Rather, it was their *perceived* social support that impacted reports of stress and depression. Similarly, academically oriented self-beliefs have been found to directly affect academic expectations and performance across the first year of college, even when controlling for objective measures of academic ability such as high school grade point average (Chemers et al., 2001). That self-perceptions have the potential to impact academic adjustment beyond what can be explained by more objective predictors of college success signifies the importance of enhancing student self-beliefs.

There are two critical takeaways from the literature that has been reviewed to this point. First, media can play an important role in shaping self-beliefs and perceived social norms. Second, self-beliefs and perceived social norms can affect students' adjustment to college. This paper is concerned with a social media site developed by the university's residential housing department to cultivate healthy beliefs about college among incoming students and to model positive social norms. A particular focus of the research is students' beliefs about the social support they would have on campus given the considerable importance of such perceptions.

### 1.3. SpartanConnect

SpartanConnect is a social media site that was created to enhance feelings of connection between students and their on-campus residential "neighborhoods" at Michigan State University. A neighborhood is a geographically defined cluster of residence halls. Students in one such cluster, which houses over 3000 students in three different residence halls, were given access to SpartanConnect the summer before they started at the University. The site allows students to log in with their university system ID and password, which they also use for email, registration, and other tasks. No content was visible to those who were not logged into the site, and messages to students highlighted the private, focused nature of the user base. The site enabled users to create simple personal profiles that include a photograph and information regarding their residence hall, hometown, year in school, and academic major. The service itself is branded as a university site and has an official university domain name reinforcing its status as an officially sanctioned system.

The site includes a number of features to facilitate communication and content sharing with other students (see Appendix A for website screenshots). At the time of data collection, users of SpartanConnect could join groups, organized around both interests and residence-hall geography, each with its own forum, event calendar, and member directory. Groups were created by administrators before the site launched for each residence hall "precinct," or group of nearby rooms, so that students could meet their neighbors before they arrived on

campus, plan group events, and share information and resources helpful in making the transition to college life.

Furthermore, site-wide forums provide discussion spaces for more general topics, and media collections allow for the sharing of photos and videos. Finally, each user has a blog in which to post his or her text entries. Blogs, forum posts, and media can be tagged to facilitate topical grouping, and a tag cloud with the most popular tags appears in the sidebar of all site pages.

Site-wide full-text search provides a mechanism for finding content on SpartanConnect. Users can search for and add other users as contacts (analogous to "friending" on Facebook) and send private messages to individuals or groups to which they belong. The site was promoted to students via an email sent to their university and secondary email address over the summer, with subsequent emails promoting specific contests intended to increase visibility and use of the site. Additionally, resident advisors were contacted and informed about the site and the ways it could be used to share information. Combined, these features were designed to facilitate interaction and the dissemination of useful information among students prior to their arrival on campus.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

A sample of first-year students at a large Midwestern University was invited to participate in the study. A total of 265 incoming students completed both a pre-test survey prior to their arrival on campus and a follow-up survey during their first two weeks at college. The participants, of whom 70% were female, self-identified with the following ethnicities: Caucasian (80%), African-American (7%), Asian American (6%), Hispanic (3%), Bi or Multi-racial (3%), and (1%) other.

### 2.2. Procedure

First-year students assigned to live in three geographically proximate residence halls on the campus of a major Midwestern university were invited to use the website prior to their arrival on campus. Before receiving access to the website, students were invited to complete a pretest survey. They were first solicited through email with the inducement of a raffle for a \$100 gift card. Students who did not respond to email invitations within 6 days were sent an invitation to their home through the U.S. Postal Service. The invitation included a \$1 cash incentive and the location of the online survey. The pre-test survey was closed before students were given access to the website. Overall, there was a 49% response rate, and a total of 1639 first-year students completed the entire pre-test instrument.

Students were first informed of the website and provided with its URL in an email from the University Housing Assignments Office that notified students what hall they would be living in during their first year. Two additional email messages were subsequently sent to students who did not initially log into the website. Prior to the first day of classes, 1576 students had created profiles on the website. During the first two weeks of classes, all first-year students were emailed a request to complete an annual survey conducted by the University's Department of Residence Life. This annual survey measures students' expectations about a range of issues (e.g., academic, social, health) related to the first year of college and is used to benchmark progress on a number of different issues for multiple University offices. Items specific to the website were included in this year's survey, which functioned as the post-test instrument for our study. A total of 1616 first-year students completed the post-test survey, of which 265 had completed the pre-test survey, serving as the final sample for the present study. Care was taken to treat participants appropriately throughout the entire research process. The Institutional Review Board at the researchers' University approved all components of the study, all data were stored confidentially, and participation was completely voluntary.

### 2.3. Measures

The bridging social capital scale reported in Ellison et al. (2007) was adapted and employed in the pre-test survey to assess students' perceptions that useful weak ties would be formed at college in the Fall. Nine items ( $M=4.01$ ,  $SD=.48$ ) were measured on 5-point Likert-style scales with endpoints ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The scores were averaged across the 9 items. Scale reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha=.87$ ).

An academic expectations scale developed by Chemers et al. (2001) was also included in the pretest survey ( $\alpha=.94$ ). Four items ( $M=4.38$ ,  $SD=.51$ ) measured on 5-point Likert-style scales were included, with scale endpoints ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Items included "I expect to do well in my courses at [University name]" and "I anticipate getting good grades at [University name]."

Several items were included in the follow-up survey to assess the extent to which participants were familiar with the website and used it over the summer. Participants were first asked if they had ever heard of the website. Students who reported being aware of the website were then asked whether they had created a profile on it. Participants who confirmed that they had created a profile were asked how many "contacts" they had established on the website. Being a contact on the website was similar to being a "friend" with someone on Facebook, although unlike on Facebook such ties were not prominently displayed to others on the website. As on Facebook, privacy settings could be set on the website so that only contacts could see certain information.

A website exposure variable was constructed from these questions in order to examine how website usage influenced the dependent measures. The ordinal website exposure variable had four levels: students who never heard of the website (coded 1), students who heard of the website but did not establish a profile (coded 2), students who heard of the website and established a profile (3), and students who heard of the website, established a profile, and had above the median number of contacts (4). The median number of contacts was 2. The mean score for the exposure measure was 2.10 ( $SD=1.07$ ).

In order to control for use of other popular social network sites that have already been linked to the formation and maintenance of social capital (Ellison et al., 2007; Steinfield et al., 2008), and to assess whether there were any added benefits to creating a closed, student-focused community, participants were also asked two questions regarding their usage of Facebook. Students indicated whether or not they had a Facebook profile; 97% reported that they did. The students with a Facebook profile were then asked to indicate how many Facebook friends they had in their residence hall ( $M=9.13$ ,  $SD=12.38$ ).

Two dependent measures were created from the post-test survey to assess potential outcomes from the use of SpartanConnect in the summer before arriving on campus. First, we created a bridging self-efficacy measure, focusing on students' perceived ability to form helpful social ties on campus. Because the post-test was completed in the first week that students were on campus, we believed it was too early to attempt to measure campus-specific social capital outcomes. However, as noted above, perceptions of social support have been linked to academic performance, and self-beliefs have been demonstrated to be a powerful predictor of a wide variety of performance outcomes. Hence, this measure investigates the extent to which students believe they will form connections with a heterogeneous set of people who may prove to be useful sources of academic support. The scale was constructed from 5 items appearing in the annual first-year student assessment survey. Items reflecting the conceptualization of general bridging social capital in previous research (e.g., Ellison et al., 2007) were chosen (see Appendix B). Participants were asked the likelihood that they would do or experience different scenarios during the upcoming semester, such as "Have significant out of class conversations with faculty" and "Learn something from someone who has very different beliefs." The response values ranged from 1 to 7 on a

Likert-style scale, with endpoints from "No/Not a Chance" to "Yes/A Sure Thing" ( $\alpha=.76$ ,  $M=4.84$ ,  $SD=.88$ ).

Our second outcome measure was an academic self-efficacy scale created using 3 items from the first-year student assessment survey. Participants were asked to indicate the likelihood that they would "Get at least a 3.0 for your first semester," "Keep up to date with classes and assignments," and "Manage your time effectively." The seven-point Likert-style scale also had endpoints ranging from "No/Not a Chance" to "Yes/A Sure Thing" ( $\alpha=.79$ ,  $M=5.64$ ,  $SD=.78$ ). Items from both outcome scales were first examined using an exploratory factor analysis (principal components with varimax rotation), confirming the presence of two discrete dimensions.

### 3. Results

To examine the effect website activity had on perceptions of bridging self-efficacy for the Fall semester, a stepwise multiple regression was conducted (see Table 1 for correlation matrix, Table 2 for regression results). To better examine the unique influence of website activity, we first controlled for participants' number of Facebook friends in hall and pre-test bridging social capital by entering them into the first block of the equation. The website activity variable was then entered into the second block of the regression equation.

The model regressing bridging self-efficacy on the number of Facebook friends in hall and pre-test bridging social capital was significant,  $F(2, 245) = 13.15$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .09$ . When website activity was included, the overall model accounted for additional variance,  $F(3, 244) = 12.71$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\Delta\text{Adj. } R^2 = .04$ . Results indicate that website activity significantly predicted bridging self-efficacy,  $b = .20$ ,  $t(244) = 3.28$ ,  $p < .01$ , even when controlling for the other factors. Additionally the number of Facebook friends in hall,  $b = .12$ ,  $t(244) = 1.97$ ,  $p = .05$ , and pre-test bridging social capital,  $b = .24$ ,  $t(244) = 3.77$ ,  $p < .01$  were significant, independent predictors in the full model.

In order to investigate the ramifications that increases in bridging self-efficacy may have for perceptions of academic outcomes, additional analyses were conducted. A bivariate correlation indicated that there was a significant association between bridging self-efficacy and academic self-efficacy,  $r(336) = .42$ ,  $p < .01$ . To probe this association further, academic self-efficacy was regressed on bridging self-efficacy, controlling for pre-test assessments of bridging social capital and academic expectations.

The model regressing academic self-efficacy on the pre-test assessment of bridging social capital and academic expectations was significant,  $F(2, 324) = 27.29$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .14$ . When bridging self-efficacy was included into the second block of the regression equation, the overall model accounted for additional variance,  $F(3, 324) = 34.82$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\Delta\text{Adj. } R^2 = .10$ . Controlling for the pre-test measures, results indicate that bridging self-efficacy predicted academic self-efficacy,  $b = .34$ ,  $t(244) = 6.55$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### 4. Discussion and conclusions

This study examined the potential for a student-only website to shift student expectations about their campus experience and

**Table 1**  
Zero-order correlation matrix.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Website activity	–					
2. Facebook friends in hall	.13*	–				
3. Pretest bridging social capital	.03	.29**	–			
4. Pretest academic expectations	.02	.13*	.31**	–		
5. Bridging self-efficacy	.21**	.21*	.30**	.24**	–	
6. Academic self-efficacy	-.01	.15*	.26**	.34**	.42**	–

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 2**  
Results of stepwise multiple regression analysis.

Independent variables	B	SE B	$\beta$	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta$ Adj. R <sup>2</sup>
<i>(a) Dependent variable: bridging self-efficacy (N = 247)</i>					
Block 1					
Pretest bridging social capital	.43	.12	.23**		
Facebook friends in hall	.01	.01	.15*	.09	.09
Block 2					
Website activity	.16	.05	.20**	.13	.04
<i>(b) Dependent variable: academic self-efficacy (N = 327)</i>					
Block 1					
Pretest bridging social capital	.26	.09	.16**		
Pretest academic expectations	.45	.08	.30**	.14	.14
Block 2					
Bridging self-efficacy	.29	.05	.34**	.24	.10

Note: standardized betas reported in block 1 (a) are prior to the inclusion of website activity, thus varying from the betas reported in the text.

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*  $p < .05$ .

academic success. The summer before arriving on campus is a period of anxiety for many students, who must contend with numerous informational needs but may have few social sources to help address them. This is especially true for first-generation students. We explored whether facilitating connections for incoming students – enabling them to ask questions of one another and their residence hall mentors – would influence their expectations for the coming fall.

In a regression predicting students' first-semester expectations of their ability to engage in activities such as interacting with faculty outside the classroom, getting helpful information from residence-hall staff, and connecting with diverse others (bridging self-efficacy), the number of Facebook friends in hall, pre-test bridging social capital, and self-reported website activity were all significant predictors. Of primary interest for the present study is activity on the website, which predicted critical student expectations regarding the discovery and use of a diverse support network. Moreover, perceptions of bridging self-efficacy, in turn, predicted students' beliefs in their ability to do well academically during the semester. However, there was no direct relationship between use of the website and academic self-efficacy. Nevertheless, previous research indicates that perceptions of social support positively influence many aspects of student adjustment.

Although the site did not include directives regarding studying habits or specific course-related material, it did enable students to connect with others and thus perhaps influenced their perception of the university as a place where they could find the resources they need. Indeed, when we examined content on the site, we saw many instances over the summer of students pointing one another towards helpful information. For instance, students posted information about the on-campus orientation program that occurs throughout the summer. Students attending earlier sessions provided information about what to expect and how to get the most out of the event for students attending later sessions. It is this kind of peer-to-peer support and information exchange that the website was designed to promote.

Future iterations of the site could focus on design modifications that would highlight connections among students and lower the barriers to communication. For instance, asynchronous chat could help students develop relationships with a more diverse network of people on campus and receive support from a variety of resources (e.g., health services, tutoring). Similarly, allowing more advanced students into the site, in addition to the residence hall staff, could facilitate more mentoring relationships among newer and older students. Finally, opening up the service to all students at the university would enable more network effects and potentially make

available to students a larger network of weak ties—important for bridging social capital gains.

Our findings offer insight into how self-efficacy beliefs – a person's sense that they have the ability to enact a successful behavior and that it will be effective (Bandura, 1994) – might be swayed through access to others, a mechanism often associated with social capital. Simply having access to a student-focused online community may have helped students believe that they would be able to reach other students who could provide help, even though use of the site is not directly related to expectations of academic success. Future work is needed to understand the relationship between these variables and how future interventions might capitalize on the findings we have outlined.

Previous findings suggest that Facebook use is correlated with users' amount of bridging social capital (Ellison et al., 2007; Steinfield et al., 2008). The study reported here extends this extant research by focusing on a non-commercial, campus-focused, private social media site created for the purpose of increasing students' connections to the university and to one another. Building upon this research, future work might examine whether social media interventions are helpful for first-generation or low income students, who are especially at risk, and help these students make valuable social connections that will give them the informational and other resources they need to be successful in their academic careers.

A limitation of the current research is that the study relied on a general site-usage variable to investigate the effects of SpartanConnect. This hampered the study's ability to identify precisely what usage behavior generated perceptions of bridging self-efficacy. Thus, the ability to replicate the successful components of this social media intervention in future endeavors is somewhat diminished. Future research would benefit from measuring specific site activity, such as blog usage or forum discussion activity, to more clearly determine the impact that individual features of social media have on people. Additionally, when considering the generalizability of the current findings, it is important to recall that the study was conducted on a subset of incoming students at one university.

Another limitation of the current study was that some items in the post-test instrument were not created specifically for the current investigation. Because we didn't want to jeopardize the annual campus-wide survey offered to incoming first-year students, we were limited in the kind and number of items we could add to the existing survey. Although many of the items in this previously created instrument did probe activities and perceptions of interest to us, future work should employ validated scales and more refined measures, such as those appearing in our pre-test survey.

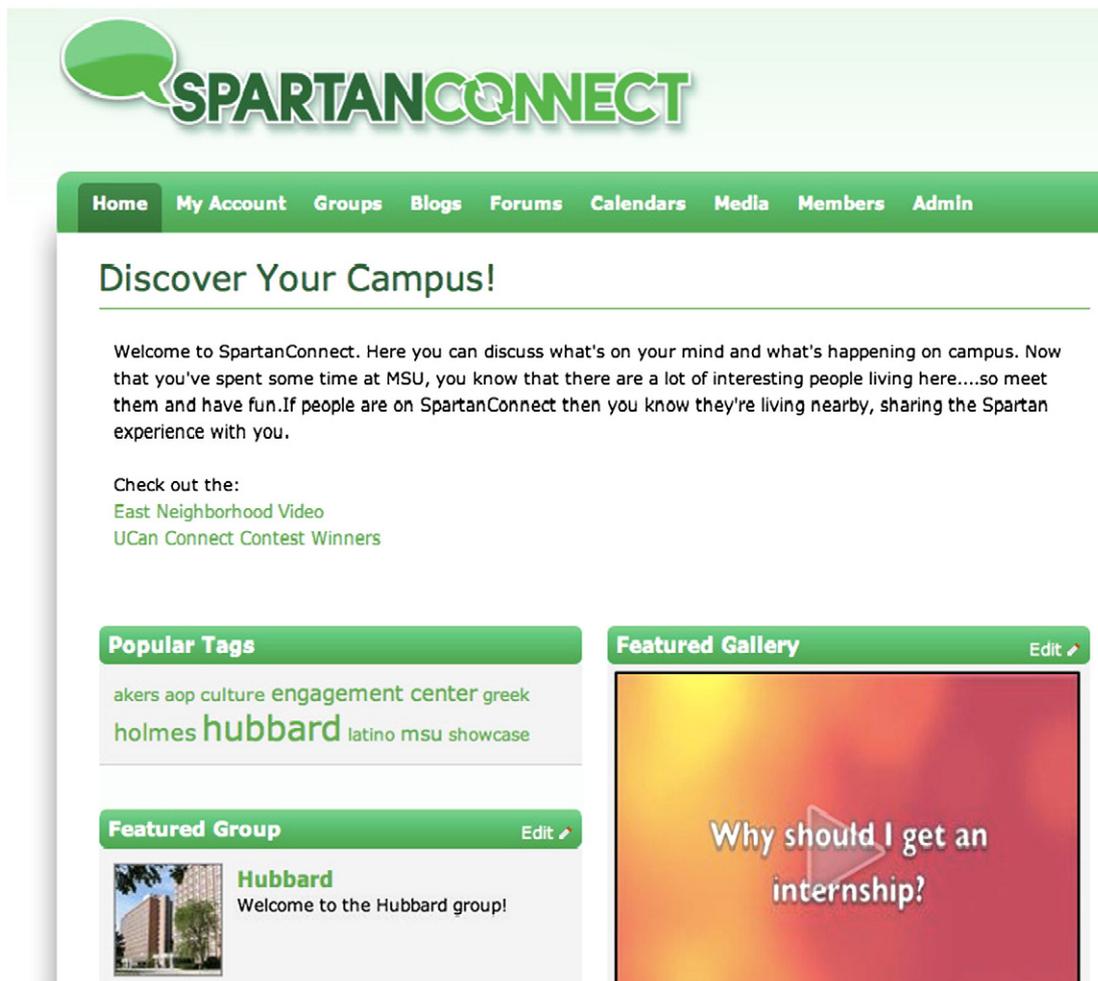
Previous work has explored the role of technologies in transitions. For instance, "friendsickness" refers to the distress caused by moving away to college and the changing nature of friendships it entails (Paul & Brier, 2001). Cummings, Lee, and Kraut (2006) found that services like email and instant messaging help college students remain close to their high school friends after they leave home for college. Although connections to old friends are important, being able to form new friendships is also a critical component of a successful transition to college. Our findings suggest that mediated interactions with others who are also joining the university can be important sources of information that might ease the transition by making users feel like they have access to a more expansive support network on campus.

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## Appendix A

## Homepage



**SPARTANCONNECT**

Home My Account Groups Blogs Forums Calendars Media Members Admin

## Discover Your Campus!

Welcome to SpartanConnect. Here you can discuss what's on your mind and what's happening on campus. Now that you've spent some time at MSU, you know that there are a lot of interesting people living here....so meet them and have fun.If people are on SpartanConnect then you know they're living nearby, sharing the Spartan experience with you.

Check out the:  
[East Neighborhood Video](#)  
[UCan Connect Contest Winners](#)

**Popular Tags**

akers aop culture engagement center greek  
 holmes **hubbard** latino msu showcase

**Featured Gallery** Edit

Why should I get an internship?

**Featured Group** Edit

**Hubbard**  
 Welcome to the Hubbard group!

## Calendar of events



Home My Account Groups Blogs Forums **Calendars** Media Members Admin

Calendars ShareThis

## Calendar - Monthly View

[Add New Event](#)

Month View Day View

« October 2010 »

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
26	27	28	29	30	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Next Seven Days**

There are no upcoming Events in the next seven days

### October Events

**National Depression Screening Day**

By: braunlic 10/7/2010

East Neighborhood & all over campus 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM

[Set As Featured](#)

**Fab 50's Dinner**

By: latourli 10/7/2010

Hubbard Hall 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM

[Set As Featured](#)

**Most Peculiar ParTEA**

By: latourli 10/13/2010

Holmes Hall 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

[Set As Featured](#)

**Open House!**

## Forums

**SPARTANCONNECT**

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Forum	Threads	Posts	Last Post
Mentors	2	22	<b>Creating a Group</b> 8/8/2010 10:36 AM By: kellerpe
Akers	7	58	<b>Music Room?!</b> 10/11/2010 10:11 PM By: rosschr2
Hubbard	7	114	<b>CoD</b> 10/26/2010 5:19 PM By: szyman56
Holmes	5	38	<b>Where's everyone living?!</b> 9/4/2010 3:27 PM By: maierduc

## Appendix B

## Bridging Self-Efficacy Scale

- 1) Have significant out-of-class conversations with faculty members about class/subject-related matters.
- 2) Get helpful information about academic success strategies from residence hall staff.
- 3) Learn something from someone who has very different beliefs.
- 4) Have significant out-of-class conversations with faculty about non-class matters.
- 5) Take advantage of opportunities to learn something about different cultures and customs.

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