University of Illinois Social Media Conference 2014
Being Ambassadors for Illinois, by Holly Rushakoff

[slide: title]

Hello everyone! Thank you for coming to the *first* University of Illinois Social Media Conference! Hashtag #ILLINOISsmc! It's cool to see all the social media enthusiasts physically gathered in one place. You can probably tell by the size of this audience, but did you know that more than 150 units on campus are on social media? And in the U of I directory, there are more than 450 separate social media accounts listed. That's a lot of work, and a lot of *net*works for the University of Illinois, so it's about time we plugged into each other. We have a great agenda today and tomorrow with the spirit of getting more of us on the same page and helping each other out. So thank you for being here, in our beautifully renovated Lincoln Hall Theater. This is a real Instagram moment.

[slide: LAS]

My name is Holly Rushakoff. I'm the associate director of communications and marketing for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. One of my responsibilities is managing the Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest accounts for the College of LAS. I'm also a member of the volunteer team that handles the University of Illinois social media. I've given presentations and organized panel discussions on social media over the past couple years here. So I'm really happy this conference is finally happening. It won't bother me if you have your laptops or smartphones out. I'll assume you're commenting on how awesome this conference is. If you are sharing thoughts or questions on Twitter, make sure you add #ILLINOISsmc to your posts, which will help demonstrate how hashtags work to those just learning.

[slide: hashtag]

The "smc" in our hashtag stands for social media conference. And, to explain a hashtag, it is a unifying keyword that people use to contribute to an ongoing conversation. Anyone can search the hashtag to catch up on the topic or to discover someone they might want to follow. An easy example to demonstrate hashtags is #Illini, which will show a lot of comments about sports, but also sometimes campus-related stories or events for Illini. It's mostly used on Twitter and Instagram, and more recently, Facebook, as well as other platforms.

[slide: Montel]

In March, I attended the CASE Social Media and Community conference, which used the hashtag #CASEsmc. The CASE conference was an excellent experience, and not

just because it was in sunny LA, or because the famous talk show host Montel Williams stayed at our hotel—who, as you can see, we turned into a meme.

[slide: CASE]

About 150 universities were represented, from UCLA to Cornell, Penn State, U of Chicago, Dartmouth, to MIT. We spent two and a half days absorbing current topics on social media in higher education. I was so excited to be there that I noticed my palms actually got sweaty during the first person's presentation. Here I was, a representative for the University of Illinois, getting to hear firsthand-experiences from leaders in higher ed social media, with a crowd that was also hungry to learn their insights.

[slide: Andrew Gossen]

Right off the bat, Andrew Gossen laid the groundwork with his presentation on "Coping with Digital Disruption in Educational Advancement." Andrew Gossen is the senior director of social media strategy at Cornell University, and a consulting vice president at Grenzebach Glier and Associates, or GG+A, who are consultants in philanthropic management that U of I has been working with this spring.

Andrew Gossen spelled out how social media has been such a game changer over the past decade, that it's no longer business as usual for any of us in communications and marketing, alumni relations, or development.

[slide: Higher Ed Live]

He continued the conversation a month ago on a Google Hangout for HigherEdLive, with the compelling title: "If You Don't Like Change, You'll Like Irrelevance Even Less: Disintermediation & Higher Ed." "Disintermediation" means fewer intermediaries or fewer go-betweens, exemplified by Netflix displacing Blockbuster, or Amazon displacing Borders. Obviously, I had to ask Andrew Gossen if he could be our keynote, but since he is in such high demand, he was already booked, so I will paraphrase a few points from his CASE presentation.

Here are his suggestions for dealing with our changed landscape:

[slide: pt 1--accept the lost control]

First, we have to accept the lost control we used to have. Marketers, for example, are not in sole control of their message anymore; anyone can broadcast their opinions about our brand, good or bad, which can gain publicity through social media, as we well know. As for alumni relations, they were affected when alumni were suddenly able to find each other using LinkedIn and Facebook, rather than having to consult the university for the alumni directory. And development is

starting to see changes in giving preferences with the rise of crowdfunding, where platforms like Kickstarter are becoming a popular way to donate to causes, because people can *see* the impact their money will have, as opposed to simply making a transaction through a static web form.

[slide: pt 2a--add value]

Second, Andrew Gossen said, we have to focus intently on *adding value* for the end user. This is a key point—let me expand on it. Adding value for our audience in the digital era requires some thought and creativity.

[slide: pt 2a--add value--C+M]

In communications and marketing, the focus remains on telling good stories that are useful, educational, or entertaining, that continue to build our relationship with our audience. We share those stories on social media, but also produce material strictly *for* social media—something that we think our community would like or share with their networks. For example, on a slow day, you could take a photo of the decorative panels at the end of the theater aisles in here and add value by doing a little research on the Lincoln Hall website to come up with the post: "The #ILLINOIS campus has appreciated beauty for generations. Lincoln Hall is full of historic ornamentation such as these refurbished 1930 cast iron seat panels. Like if you've had a class there before." The pride in how beautiful and historic our campus is, and the fact that nearly all alumni have taken a class in Lincoln Hall, makes it a relevant post that could connect with Illini. Adding a call to action increases your chance of engagement.

[slide: pt 2b--add value--alum rel]

As for alumni relations, social media allows more constant interaction between the University and our alumni than ever before. Think of how to capitalize on that and how to add value for them. For instance, to foster positive experiences with our *younger* constituency who can't give monetarily yet, one idea is to tap into their resource of *time.* It's called "micro-volunteering," where it's easy and requires only a little bit of time, and digital media enables this kind of engagement. In LAS, we want to create an online career-mentoring program to connect our young alumni and our students via LinkedIn, which adds value for both audiences, continues our relationship with the younger alumni, and serves our future alumni. It could potentially expand into Google Hangouts, which are free video conferences, where a few people are interviewed and have a discussion, and it can be watched live or played later from the video archives. Another idea is to create a "second screen" experience, which is when people are watching 2 screens--the TV and also their tablet or smartphone or laptop, to interact with or consume more about that program. During a popular event on TV, whether it's the Oscars, a presidential debate, or the World Cup, if you can cleverly contribute an Illinois

spin to the real-time conversation on social media, and promote it in advance, you can offer a second screen experience. A low-tech suggestion is to have an Illinois professor who's an expert on the topic comment on Twitter throughout the event.

[slide: pt 2c--add value--fundraising]

In development, although this isn't the only answer, the main conversation at the CASE conference was about how other institutions are beginning to embrace crowdfunding and use social media to promote their campaigns. The added value is letting donors choose specific projects that align with their passions. Crowdfunding is also a way to leverage social networks and grab the attention of millennials.

[slide: pt 2d--add value--social media]

With social media content, we also have to make sure we are adding value for our audiences. To make sure you are doing this, ask yourself: First, are you familiar with the basic best practices of that platform? Are you spending time composing the best concise message you can, researching when necessary to add useful information, finding an attractive photo to go with it, if possible (which is worth the effort since statistically photos receive the most engagement), tagging appropriate groups, proofing it? Are you evaluating your work by seeing what your audience responds to the most, and experimenting with posting different times of the day? Do you know how your content compares to your peers' and is there anything you can learn from them? Have you taken advantage of being social with others, so you're not only using the platform to broadcast news, but you're also reaching out to individuals or units that you're talking about? Although some of us were thrown in the trenches when starting social media, do you have clear goals *now* for it? Does your social media complement part of a larger communications plan?

It is a complex task to use social media effectively.

Clearly, social media requires strategy behind it. It is another means for promoting your unit *and* the University of Illinois. It is a place for breaking news, if you have it and want to be the originating source of it, which you should in many cases. It is furthermore an opportunity to interact with your audience—that's one of the reasons it's so special.

[slide: superfans]

What we have on social media are our self-identified, opted-in University of Illinois *Superfans*. And we ought to treat them specially. And that takes careful planning and research to add value for them. To make a quick analogy, I think of getting a Like on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram as receiving a high-five. So when

I write a post for social media, I think, "What can I say or share—how can I word it—that will entice people to respond somehow (and not leave me hanging)."

[slide: pt 3--learn from others + quote]

Going back to Andrew Gossen's points—the third way he suggests we deal with digital disruption is by learning from our constituents and each other. And that's what we're starting to do here today. He said, "We need to come out of our silos. People have strong convictions on what is or isn't our job. But your constituents don't care who it is they are interacting with…."

Whether it's my post or yours, the bottom line to our audience is that they are interacting with the University of Illinois.

The way to come out of our silos is by rallying around our commonality—the University of Illinois itself. We all feel proud when we hear positive news about the University of Illinois, whether at the student, faculty, or institutional level. And we all want the University to be a leader—even in the realm of social media.

(We are doing a pretty good job, by the way. In April, the University's LinkedIn page was cited as one of seven schools "rocking it" by the way we engage our network. In May, our Twitter account was listed as one of the most influential among U.S. universities. And after commencement, *USA Today College* mentioned our #ILLINOIS2014 campaign and the College of LAS got a special shout-out from a graduate for a Throwback Thursday photo that moved her.)

But despite these kudos, for having the world's largest alumni network, we are nowhere close to capturing them yet, as you'll see in the statistics in the next presentation by Matt Dewey.

[slide: key]

If there's one thing I hope you take away from this conference—whether you are a social media manager or not—I hope you will take to heart being an ambassador for Illinois. I hope you will increase your promotion of the main University of Illinois' social media content. And perhaps that will be your gateway to becoming more supportive of other U of I units. Add it to your unit's content mix, or, if you are so moved, like it or share it via your personal account. If you're a social media administrator, it's important to remember that we are still just a part of the whole, and what we do should support the institution and reflect the Illinois brand—through the way we visually appear, the way we refer to ourselves (Illinois vs UIUC), and by sharing the University's content—it should be obvious to our fans, our alumni, faculty, students, and the media, that we are related.

From running the University of Illinois accounts on Facebook and Twitter, and from running the College of LAS's, I am aware that we don't get as many shares from our own internal audience as we could. There are social media posts that could get more circulation by the smaller units liking, sharing, or retweeting it. Especially if the content is something perfectly acceptable for your audience to learn about, that's more views for the Illinois story. And more chances for people to like and share and spread our news. There is no shortage of amazing and interesting news here. Maybe LAS wouldn't share a U of I post about an engineering breakthrough, but we could certainly like the post—it's like giving the U of I a high-five. And isn't it nice to observe collegiality and support among our campus units—not just to us but to our audience as well? I notice when that happens—because it doesn't happen that often. Things like photos of the Alma Mater returning—that's an obvious, excellent item to share and so many units did. But it seems like a general *library* story about them preserving books so rare they exist in only one copy—that could be shared by any unit too, since all of our constituents have probably used the library and would agree that that is a likeable U of I endeavor.

If we can reconsider what is worth sharing to our fans—that it does not have to be limited to your unit's news, but as well as big wins for the University of Illinois itself, student stories, timely "A Minute With" interviews from the News Bureau—then we are together projecting a much louder, cohesive voice on social media for the University of Illinois. We are all helping tell the Illinois story. But I think we need to make sure we are also telling THE Illinois story, which are things you hear from the Chancellor, the News Bureau, Admissions, and U of I's social media. And repetition on social media is not a bad thing—that is, after all, how a story goes viral—and the extra promotion will be hitting a variety of audiences, different times of the day, and is also a means to combat the throttling of organic reach by Facebook. And another reward, as I have experienced in LAS, is that when your unit becomes friendly with another unit's page, it will likely be reciprocated, with them liking or sharing your content as well. (Shout out to the Institute for Genomic Biology—they've become one of LAS's best friends on social media—thank you for that kind of camaraderie, IGB!)

So sharing more of the main campus' stories is easy to get the hang of. But as an ambassador for Illinois, you can do a little more.

[slide: who else can help]

If you can reach out to two or three key people who can also be ambassadors for you—and for us—that is wielding our resources, and their networks, even better. And soon, who we're engaging with exponentially increases. In LAS, we met last month with our LAS Alumni Association Board of Directors to explain how the college uses social media and how they can help broadcast our news and interact

with us online. We are in the beginning stages of working with two members who want to be social media liaisons for us.

Another way of recruiting ambassadors is by tapping into student groups—there are a lot of RSOs on campus with academic missions, from the Philosophy Club to the Communication Leaders. If there is a group that relates to your unit, reach out to them to talk about how they can further engage with you and promote you-slash-the University of Illinois by liking or sharing your posts. Once you establish a connection with a natural ally, you can leverage their network to gain more exposure. Which is a good time to reiterate that your content does need to be likeable and shareable. But of course you can always add the U of I campus or other relevant units to your content mix.

[slide: article]

In LAS, we're also trying one more appeal—a direct request to our alumni through our *LAS News* magazine, which recently arrived in about 133,000 homes. I explained how they could help increase our exposure by sharing our University news through social media, and asked our LAS alumni to be ambassadors this way for us. I also invited them to interact with us—or at least tag LAS when they take a selfie with the Lincoln bust. If all they do is begin to follow us, that still is a huge victory because that is the first step to further engagement.

So let's say by fall our campus has a lot more cooperation and support for each other and we're advocating each other. Lots more people hear great stories about University of Illinois faculty research discoveries and transformative student experiences, how we're impacting society, and the multimillion-dollar grants we're receiving—these ideas sound familiar because they are straight from our campus strategic goals, which are perfect indicators of whether you have good content—so then, what's the next step?

[slide: what's next]

Well, once we have more coordinated efforts underway, we are in a better position to make further strides for our institution—for example, making a more resounding impact with a larger audience and increased engagement in our hashtag campaigns. Working together, our efforts will result in stronger brand awareness and affinity for the University of Illinois. Not to mention, we can further collaborate and be creative—once we have a handle on the basics and are mostly all on the same page.

I also hope, as a consequence, that the University of Illinois can be more visible in online conversations specifically about higher education and social media.

[slide: hashtags]

If you check out the hashtags #CASEsmc and #hesm (which stands for higher education social media), those are useful threads to follow on Twitter. Lots of higher ed professionals are sharing articles about social media trends and studies and talking about what their campus is doing. I personally can't wait to brag about what the University of Illinois is doing to strengthen our campus' social media infrastructure. There are many out there, but I have singled out a few more resources that I find useful in case you'd like to check out those too.

[slide: thank you]

We have a lot of talented and knowledgeable people here doing social media, and I know we have more training to do for the campus at-large. And I have good news: The campus social media volunteer team now offers mentoring services that you can sign up for through the conference website at publish.illinois.edu/illinoissmc, under the Resources tab. We will continue to plan workshops throughout the year and this conference will be an annual event. We're painting the bigger picture today, and we will give concrete tips tomorrow to help those who manage social media pages to improve their skills.

The rest of the afternoon you're going to go behind the scenes and learn more about what we are doing at the campus level and you'll hear a panel with avid and skilled users of social media.

Before I conclude, I have a few reminders and thank yous. Again, tweet those nuggets of good information, share your thoughts, or ask questions using the hashtag #ILLINOISsmc. And a housekeeping note: Complimentary iced tea and water will be available during the break at 3:30 in Latte Da on the main floor. But you can't bring food or beverages, besides water, back in the theater, so I hope you can digest everything in 15 minutes.

Now, some thank yous: I want to thank Sue Johnson, the director of communications and marketing in LAS, for supporting my attending the CASE social media conference, which really lit my fire to organize our own conference here, and for all of her help making this event happen. We've been wanting to share social media information with the College of LAS units, but since we are so large, we thought it made more sense to make it a campuswide conference. Thanks also to our LAS graphic designer, Heather Gillett, for making everything look so cool. Thank you to Public Affairs for co-sponsoring with LAS and to Matt Dewey, the leader of our campus social media team and the director of communications in the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement, which is also a co-sponsor. Thank you especially to the campus social media volunteers, past and present, for bringing Illinois to this point.

Finally, thank *you* all for demonstrating your interest in how to propel our campus forward through social media. Go Illini Ambassadors!