

CAMPUS LIFE

# Voices: Can social media help combat social anxiety?

By *Agatha Kereere* December 19, 2014 4:00 pm

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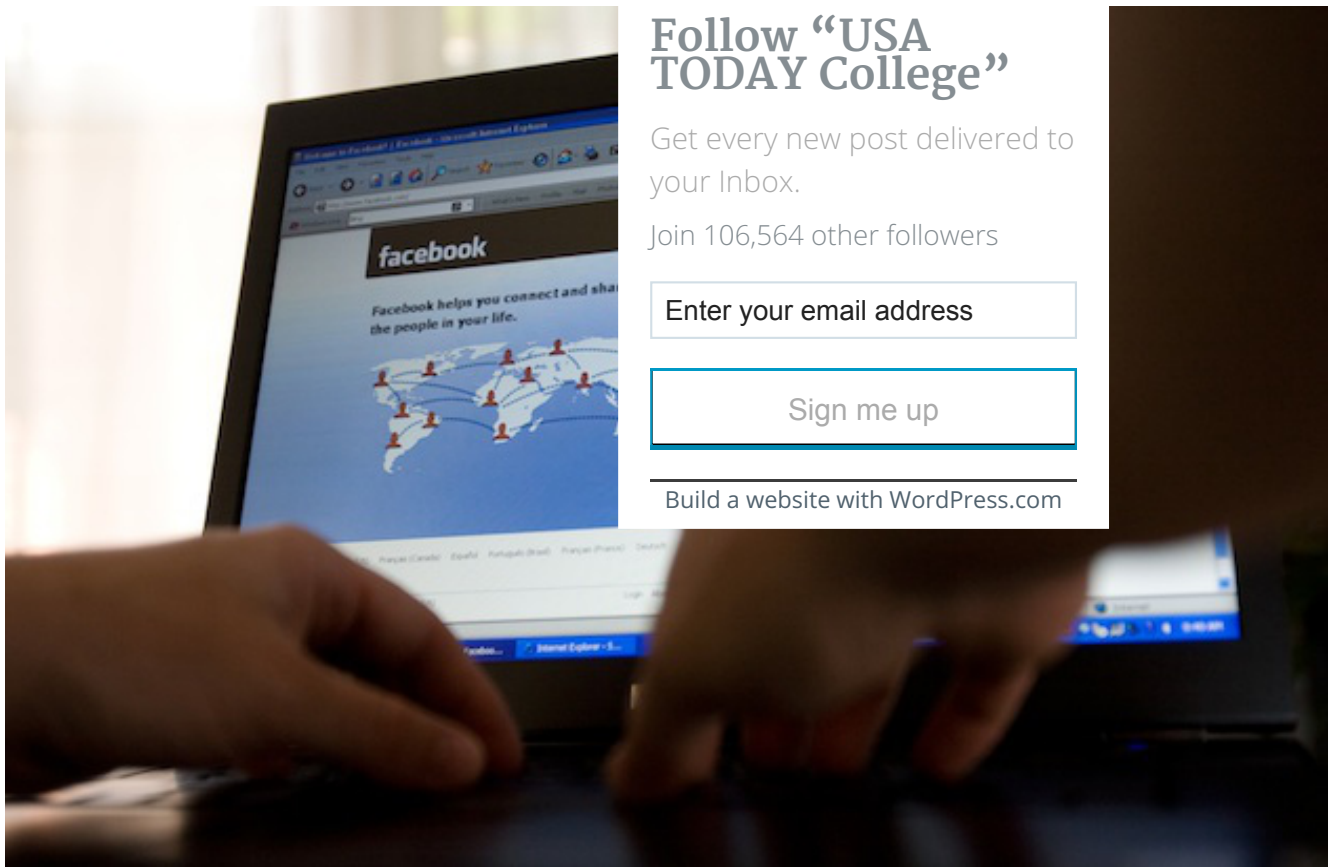
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Michael Nichols was in the middle of giving a presentation at a local high school. His descent into anxiety spiraled from there.

"I kept thinking it was going to be a disaster," said the music teacher. The anxiety forced him to cancel his students' music lessons constantly until he had to stop work and sell his studio.

Nichols suffered from social anxiety, a disorder that had him fearing potential in-person social interactions for fear of being scrutinized. He had been feeling uneasy for a while but hadn't experienced the full force of his disorder until that evening.

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"I began losing students because I was canceling too much, I just couldn't continue," Nichols said, "I was in my studio and I still had about 60 music students but I just couldn't get through all of them."

According to *Web MD*, social anxiety is a disorder that leaves the person suffering from an intense fear of social situations. The *Library of the U.S. Courts of the Seventh Circuit* reports 6.8% of Americans 18 and older are reported to have suffered from the disorder.

Social networking was used to inform, entertain, and interact with others since it took off in 2002 with [Friendster](#), according to *The History of Social Networking*. Among other breakthroughs, it made the world seem accessible to persons who were too gripped by fear to interact in person.

Chelsey Falco, 23, a freelancer and blogger, was diagnosed with social anxiety when she was 14.

"My social anxiety dated back to the early years," Falco said, "Coming from a family with outgoing and social parents and siblings, I — being the opposite — always felt like the odd one out."

She, too, turned to the solace of virtual relationships.

"Social media is easier than face-to-face interaction. I find strangers are easier, I'm bound to know less people, and I can press 'submit' without seeing a person's reaction.

Aaron Cobb, 29, from San Francisco said his social anxiety disorder was exacerbated by adjustment disorder.

"I have a difficult time processing major life changes and I spent a few months isolating myself, which manifested itself as panic and anxiety."

Bill Munze, a mental health counselor in Boston, said online interaction work sometimes works and sometimes doesn't work in alleviating some of the disorder's symptoms.

"Using social media *could* be helpful for people who have social anxiety by giving them a non-threatening forum to connect with other people," he says.

Falco said she felt more at ease blogging when it came to connecting with people and was always pleased when she saw comments that read "OMG, I do that too!"

Cobb said that some of his online connections helped with his symptoms.

"I used to be ashamed of it, I didn't know what was going on but I learned to articulate what was going on and what worked for me."

Lauren Conklin, a postdoctoral research fellow at the Center for Anxiety and Related Disorders at Boston University, said about 75% of those in early adolescence — specifically ages eight through 15 — have social anxiety.

"It's much less common to get it in college or adulthood because you usually see it at a much earlier age," she said.

Other aspects may play a part as well, Conklin said.

"Some people may say that embarrassing moments for people, which are often a mix of things, definitely play a role of variability."

"Genetics and a moderate level of inheritance could result in kids developing negative emotions," Conklin continued, before she said that an embarrassing moment could've left an increase in anxiousness and hesitancy as lasting results.

Though online connections were capable of helping a person socially, conversely, the negative aspects were just as visible, as Munze said.

"There is quite a bit of research showing that social media can make us depressed. There could be a number of reasons for this: it may be that people who passively consume content but don't interact feel less connected to others."

But, the biggest cause, Munze speculated, was the “distorted and biased portrayal people give of their lives.”

“People generally post their highlights but they don’t usually publicize all their insecurities and conflicts,” he said. “So an outside observer sees that other people’s lives look so great and then they compare this to their own lives. We compare other people’s highlight reels to our outtakes.”

Falco agrees.

“We have a tendency to abuse social media, say more than people care to hear, and show our lives the way we want others to see them but connecting is great and it helps.”

The final word on whether social media hindered more than assisted a person rested on the individual, Munze said.

“I would caution them not to use it as a substitute for face-to-face socialization and to understand that their perceptions of others based on online activity may not be accurate.”

***Agatha Kereere is both a Journalism major and a Psychology minor at Emerson College. Thus far, she has served as an intern for both Governor Deval Patrick and for ITV Studios – New York. She loves traveling, reading, Michael Jackson and all things 90’s.***

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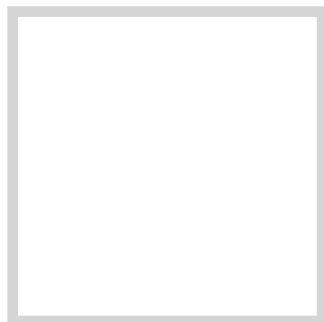
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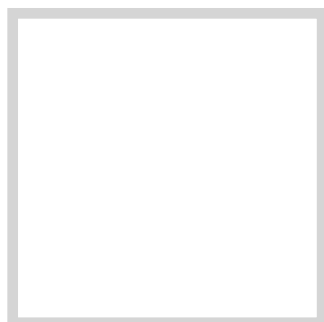
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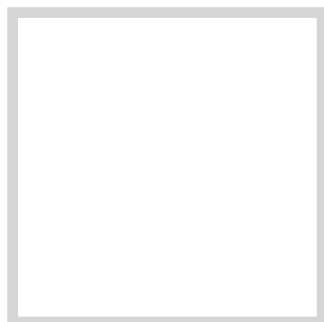
Due to numerous alcohol and risk management violations, the school has suspended 13 fraternities from participating in recruitment.



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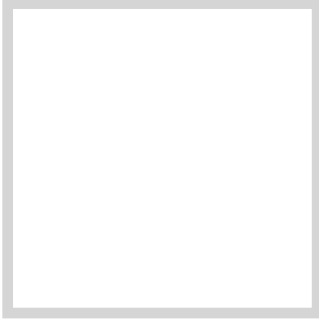


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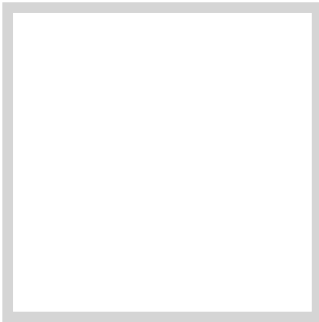
other initiatives.



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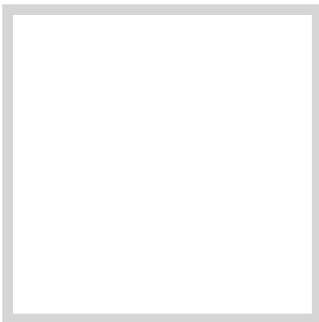
The program focuses solely on first-year students and is part of a comprehensive program to reduce underage drinking.



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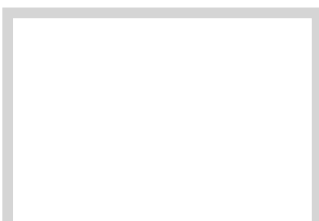
We now have these new power rankings, based on how bad the grammar of each team's respective fan base is.



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