



## Wired Campus

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### Colleges Build Hubs to Track Social-Media Buzz About Their Institutions

By Travis Kaya



Colleges are increasingly sending out announcements on Twitter, Facebook, and other social-media services, hoping to build a positive buzz about the institution and keep people informed. As the list of departments and officials adopting the services grows, some institutions are building Web sites that aggregate college-related social media in one place.

A Twitter aggregator at North Carolina State University, for instance, features an up-to-the-minute feed of tweets coming from 95 different university

Twitter accounts, including from academic departments, alumni associations, and dining halls. "The voice of the university was through all of these separate Twitter accounts," said application developer Jason Austin. "What we did was look at how we could leverage that to promote the university and promote these individual Twitter accounts."

In addition to collecting tweets from across campus, Mr. Austin said the university worked to improve the quality of its official Twitter feeds by training staff members on how to best use microblogging. "I think Twitter was one of those buzzwords that everybody wanted to get on there, but not everybody knew what to do with it," he said. "We had to do a good bit of education to teach people on campus not just how to do it but why we do it that way."

The university is now giving away the aggregator software to anyone who wants to use it, by making it open source and putting it online. Mr. Austin said the software has already been adopted by a handful of colleges.

Bates College has gone beyond Twitter by aggregating all of its social-media platforms on a single Web page. Its Bates Social site features links to athletics blogs and those by professors, as well as Facebook and LinkedIn groups for alumni, and lists of Twitter accounts from students and clubs. It also allows members of the college community to subscribe to an RSS feed of various Bates-related blogs and add their own social-media content into the mix. Designed during a larger restructuring of the college Web site, Bates Social "was developed to provide a tool for both internal use and visitors seeking to connect with Bates people or learn about the college," said Bates spokesman Doug Hubley in an e-mail.

Bryan Alexander, senior fellow at the National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education, said the Bates site is a simple way for colleges and universities to corral information from social media. "So many great technology ideas seem totally obvious when you see them in action," Mr. Alexander said. "It's a very basic, simple idea, but those are often the ones that change the world."

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