

Nicole Callahan:

So today we're going to kind of jump a little bit all around, and talk about a lot of different things related to social media. The last time I was at a FSA fall conference was back in 2010, and at that point, we hadn't really launched any social media of our own, so we were really spending a lot of time focusing on online customer listening. So that's what I'm going to start with today. I'm going to go through how you can listen online, using social media.

From there, we're going to go in and talk about some of our new and exciting social media products that Federal student aid has launched this year. We're going to talk a little bit about how you all can use them on your own campuses.

Then we're going to go into how you can really increase engagement with your students using social media, because as we know, social media is all about a two-way conversation. So we want to make sure and try and do that, and lastly, we're just going to briefly touch on measuring your effectiveness using social media. I'm going to touch on it on a high level, but in the resources section of my Powerpoint, you can find all the links that I'm going to mention during the presentation, as well as some formulas and things that I'm not going to cover in detail. So, definitely download that if you want to find some of the links in the presentation.

All right, so, I asked a question back in 2010, and I want to ask similar question today to see how it's changed. So, you can just do this by raising your hands. How many of you in the room have your own personal Facebook account? Whoa. Take a look around the room. That's a lot of people.

How about Twitter account? Does anyone have their own personal Twitter account? Okay, shameless plug, the hashtag is fsaconf12, so if you want to Tweet during the session, or throughout the conference, make sure to use that hashtag.

So, how many of you use social media for work? All right. I remember back two years ago, it was a lot fewer, so it's good to see that it's growing.

How many of you manage a Facebook page for your financial aid office or organization? Cool. What about a Twitter account? YouTube? And I'm sure there are other social networks as well. All right. So, good. I just wanted to get an idea, and it definitely has grown a lot, even in these last two years, so that's good to see.

All right, so let's get started. So, how can you use online listening to create better content? Like I said, for a long time, Federal Student Aid didn't have a presence of their own on social media. So a lot of what my team did was we went out in the social web and tried to find out what students were saying about our business, whether it be about financial aid in general, student loans, just the whole process. We wanted to get an idea of what student's perceptions were, what kinds of questions they were asking, what their big pain points were. So to do that, we used social media.

So what is online customer listening? So just as if you were to Google something. Enter in a search term into Google and it would populate websites based on those keywords, or that search term. Social media listening, you do the same thing, except you only search the social web. So, the results that you'll get back will be Tweets, Facebook posts that are public, and things like that. So if you wanted to do a search for a FAFSA, for example, you could search FAFSA, and anyone who had mentioned the word FAFSA in their Tweet or in their Facebook post could populate, and I'm going to show you a couple examples of that.

One of the things we did also want to do is we wanted to give you some things that you can take back into your campus tomorrow and start implementing. So this first section we're going to talk about is good for those of you who may not have a presence of your own, and you are just kind of getting started with social media, or want to learn more about it. This is a good place to get started. So we're going to go over how you can create a process to do some online customer listening based on keywords that might be helpful to you.

All right, and just to note, there are a number of – I'm going to go through a number of tools that you can use to do this. There are tons out there. Some are free, some are paid. The ones I'm highlighting today are all free, so you can go home and use them right away.

So the first step is you want to identify your keywords. Second, you're going to set up your search, and last, and probably most importantly, you're going to want to be prepared. Social media is – people say whatever they want, and it's usually a conversation they may be having with their friend, so you're going to see the good, the bad, and the ugly.

All right, so the first step: Identifying keywords, and you wouldn't think this would be a big deal. You're like, "Yeah, I'm just gonna

do a quick search, find what I need to find, “ but when it comes to doing this on social media, it’s really important that you try and think, especially in this business, that you try and think like your customer.

So, there’s probably a chance that students aren’t going to be writing in their Facebook statuses, “I just completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.” That’s a long and hefty thing to probably write out, but one thing they may say is, “I just completed my FAFSA.” So try and find those words that you think are going to get you the results that you want.

Another example, from Federal Student Aid, we have the national student loan data system. Chances are, a lot of students have probably never heard of that. So when people come to me and say, “Nicole, can you find out what people are saying about NSLDS,” I try and work with them and say, “Let’s try and think of some other words students might use to talk about the same thing.” So, as much as I want to search Federal Stafford loans, or Federal direct unsubsidized loans, you’re probably not going to get many results. So we kind of try and keep it broad, and use some broad search terms.

So just make sure, as you’re trying to figure out what key words you want to search for, you try and keep it simple, and try and think like your customer.

The second thing is you want to consider misspellings. We learned really early that this is a really important one, especially for us. We were doing – we’ve always done a search for FAFSA, with our social media listening, just to get an idea of what students were saying about it, if they were having problems, but we found that more – almost just as many people who were writing in their Tweets and Facebook posts about FAFSA were writing about FASFA. So I’m sure you guys see that a lot, that people don’t know the acronym. It’s a little bit complicated. So make sure you consider things like that.

Also, if you’re searching for your financial aid office, you might not want to search for the exact name. Maybe students on your campus have a nickname for your office. I don’t know, it might be good, it might be bad, I’m not going to get into that, but just keep those kinds of things in mind.

The second thing you’re gonna want to do is set up your search. So, kind of what I used to do is I’d write down five or six

keywords, put a Post-it up on my computer, and every day I'd come in the office, check my email, and then go out and just search for those couple keywords I had.

So the site I'm showing up here is a site called Social Mention, and you can go there from – by going to socialmention.com, and it's kind of like a Google of the social web. So you can enter in any search term you want. So up at the top, you can see I entered FASFA, and out will pop examples of posts that include the keyword that you entered.

So, you can see some people are gonna just say, "I just completed my FASFA." Some people are gonna say, "I hate FASFA." Some people are going to say, give you – you'll get constructive things out of this, but a lot of this is going to be kind of weeding through the noise, but a lot of the time, you will, as you go through, you'll find some really nuggets of information that can help you learn a little bit more about your business and what people think about it.

Also, Social Mention gives you suggested keywords, based on the one you're searching, so that's another way, if you can't think of how students might talk about this. It gives you suggested keywords, and it also gives you some stats you can use as well.

The second, and probably more important for our business, I've come to find, is a site called Board Reader. So, I'm a huge social media fanatic. I love all the traditional social networks, but what I come to find is that in the financial aid community, not as many people, not as many students, will talk about this kind of stuff on their Facebook pages or their Twitter accounts, but they will go to forums. They will go to forums, like everything from College Confidential to Ask.com to Yahoo! Answers, to try and post their question out to the public and get an answer.

So what Board Reader does is it searches all the forums out there. So if you're trying to get a good idea of what the questions are at the time, the common questions around financial aid, do a search for financial aid and Board Reader, and see the kinds of questions people are asking. You're not alone. I know in all my sessions, I've gotten – we get the same questions every day. "How do we help that process?" And this, well, at least, if nothing else, help you find that you're not alone, so...

The next is Google Alerts, and what Google Alerts focuses on is kind of the mainstream media, and blogs. So, this will pull everything, from your *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journals*, to

your *Inside Higher Eds*, and things like that. So the good thing about Google Alerts is you can enter in your search term and tell Google Alerts, “I don’t want to have to go to this site every day. I want it to come to me in my email.” So you can set it up to get email alerts. So I get one for our keywords, the top ten posts each day related to the five keywords I care about, and Google Alerts sends me an email digest every day, and I just scan through that. So, at the very least, this is something you can do.

So, customer listening can be something that’s very time consuming. You can literally go through these Facebook posts, and Twitter posts, and blogs, for days and days, but I always say, “Just dedicate 15 minutes to it a day.” After you check your email, just log on, do a couple quick searches, see what’s going on, and you can – we found out a lot about our business, and I think you will too.

So, last, and more importantly, it’s very important when you do this that you are prepared. You kind of have to have a thick skin to do this kind of thing, because like I said, people say whatever it is they want. As my boss always says, “You’ll never imagine – you could never imagine the number of Fs that become – that come before and after the word “FAFSA” in people’s Tweets and Facebook posts. So, people are brutally honest, but a lot of times, we do end up getting some really constructive information from doing this. So, you’re going to get bad grammar. You’re gonna get curse words, but it’s useful in the end.

So my next point is that you can do this customer listening, the 15 minutes a day, until you’re blue in the face, but what are going to do with it is really kind of what matters. So, at Federal Student Aid, we do customer listening for two main reasons, and we get a lot – also a lot of other things out of it as well, but the first is we use it to create relevant content, and the second is we use it to identify any issues that come up, ‘cause a lot of times you can find out things on social media faster than you can find it out any other way, so...

All right, so, Creating Relevant Content. One of the things we use social media for is to find out what the frequently asked questions are. We monitor Twitter every day, and just kind of scan through. Sometimes people direct questions at us, and we’ve come to find out that we tend to get the same 20 or so questions from almost every person. There are these key issues that are really confusing to people. So we try and identify what those frequently asked questions are, and then go back to our content on our websites, on

our social media, and see what could we do to improve the content in these areas so that people don't have these questions anymore. So we've been doing a lot of this lately at Federal Student Aid, and we're going to continue to do more, so...

The second is to determine seasonal and timely content. So, as a lot of you know, we are in a very seasonal business, so although not everyone follows the traditional path, a lot of times January through March, April is peak FAFSA season. A lot of people are focused on filling out the forms. Around graduation time, we want to remind those students who are graduating that you have student loans, so start to make that relationship with your loan servicer and get to know what you have to prepare for in the coming months to start repayment, and then of course, six months later, or nine months later, remind them grace periods are ending. Time to really get your ducks in a row.

So, we kind of monitor how the questions change over the year, so that when we're writing our Tweets, and we're our Facebook posts, we can kind of cater those. So hopefully, we can try and answer people's questions before they even have to ask.

And the last is we use it to get feedback on our products and services. So, as some of you may know, we just launched a new website recently, studentaid.gov. If you haven't seen it, I highly encourage you to take a look.

So when we launched that, of course we have a site survey, and we did focus groups, and all the general things, but we also went out on social media and said, "What do you all think about this?" And we're gonna – over the next couple of months, we're doing a number of different pushes on social media, to try and find out what students think about process, and our products, and our services, and how we can improve them, just using social media. So, if you ask people, they'll tell you. So, it's been pretty helpful for us.

The second is to identify key customer issues, and up on the screen, you're gonna see I put an example of one instance where we were able to use social media to figure out a problem that we had, and then were able to take steps to try and fix it. So, essentially, as some of you may know, on the FAFSA website, sometimes if you're using certain browsers, you're not able – you'll get a message on the FAFSA saying, "This is an incompatible browser to download it. Updated browsers go here,"

but all that really means, “incompatible browser,” is that we haven’t tested it yet.

So that was one of the number one questions we were getting every day on social media, people who were confused about that incompatible browser question. So we were used to answering those, but there was one day that Tweeted at us and said, “I’m having an issue,” and so I responded back with our general message, “Even if it says ‘incompatible browser,’ chances are you can still fill out the form. So go ahead and give it a try,” and she Tweeted back at me and said, “No, that’s not the problem. There’s something else going on. I can’t get in. Something’s wrong,” and then someone saw that she had Tweeted it and Tweeted at me as well, and said, “I’m having the same problem.” So I was like, “Hmm. I don’t know if there’s something going on or not.”

So I then forwarded it to the FAFSA team, who did some research and found out that people were also calling our call center about this. So there was something going on, and they were able to identify that we were having a minor issue with an operating system on the Mac. So we were able to identify that issue first on social media, and then we were able to really, as soon as we could, take action, and try and get that fixed as soon as possible. So, a lot of times, social media has alerted us of things that have – are going on, or that are happening, before we hear it from our traditional channel. So, it’s proved to be pretty helpful for us.

All right, now to the fun stuff. So like I said, the last time I was here was back in 2010, and we didn’t have a presence of our own. Back then, social media wasn’t really new anymore, but it, especially in the financial aid community, a lot of people hadn’t really adopted it yet. People didn’t have their own Facebook pages and Twitter accounts, and now we’re obviously seeing a huge amount of growth, but at this point, social media kind of isn’t new anymore. It’s really – everyone raised their hand, saying that they had a Facebook page. People are all about it. It’s really ingrained in every part of our lives. So, it’s not new, but it is definitely evolving.

So one of the things our team does is just constantly trying to keep up with what’s new and what’s changing. Facebook likes to make changes every other day, that cause us to have to make changes to the things we do, and also trying to keep up with “What is that new – what are the new social networks? What are the kids using these days?” So, we spend a lot of time trying to figure out and keep on top of that stuff.

But secondly, and you probably heard this in a number of other sessions, Federal Student Aid has really tried to take a customer-centric approach. A little over a year ago, we created the customer experience group at Federal Student Aid, and I'm actually a part of that group, and it's – Brenda Winchell, the Chief Customer Experience Officer, has really charged us to really try and understand who our customers are and what they need from us; what we're not doing as well as we could be doing; and how we can make those improvements. So we spent a lot of time figuring out what students' pain points were.

One of the main things, they just don't understand the process as a whole. They also told us, "We're not gonna come to you, so if you want to get your messages out to us, you have to come to us." So one of the big things that came out of that was, of course, studentaid.gov.

As you probably saw during the general session, Federal Student Aid had 14 different student facing websites. Students had no idea where they were supposed to go to get certain information, and they were just honestly confused.

So studentaid.gov is the first phase in a multiphase project, where FSA is trying to consolidate our web presence, and kind of create an one-stop shop for students. So what studentaid.gov did was it consolidated five of those 14 websites. One of my favorite parts of the studentaid.gov process in the new site is the content. We went out to every publication, everywhere website Federal Student Aid owns, took all the content, dumped it into different buckets, consolidated it, and most importantly, wrote it in plain language, so that students can understand this pretty complicated topic.

So, the result is here. Studentaid.gov. I highly encourage you to take a look at the site. We have a resource center, the fafsa.gov, studentaid.gov resource center upstairs, in Bay Hill 25, if you want us to go through it with you, and show you some of the cool features, but if you haven't taken a look at it, definitely encourage it.

So like I said, the second thing they told us was that they're not coming to us. So as part of the studentaid.gov process, we decided we want to be able to give students the information that they want, in any format that they want to see it in. So whether it's in text, whether it's in video, whether it's in 140-character updates, we

want them to be able to access our information. So what came of that?

We launched a social media presence on a number of different social networks. So, the first of which I'm going to show you is Twitter, and we actually launched Twitter back in January, before studentaid.gov launched, because we realized around the time that the FAFSA launches, we were seeing so many questions out there on social media, and so many students who were confused. I couldn't tell you the number of people I saw Tweeting saying, "Ugh, I can't believe you have to pay \$80 to complete the FAFSA." So we want to make sure that the people out there know that this application is free. We're here to help you. It's easier to complete. It's faster; and let us know if you have any problems.

So we launched, at FAFSA, on Twitter, back in January. At that time, we didn't really know what we were getting ourselves into, so we didn't really have an engagement strategy, in terms of being able to respond directly to any questions that came to us on Twitter.

So what we decided to do was instead once a month, what we call Ask FAFSA Office Hours. We actually hosted one live from the conference last night, which was really fun, so if any of you got to attend that, and basically all it is we do a call-out. We'll put a blog post up and say, "What questions do you have about financial aid? If you have any questions, Tweet them to us, using a hashtag, which is the pound symbol with words, or a word, or words next to it – pound-ask-FAFSA, and we'll respond to your questions during this timeframe once a month, and each month we'd pick a different topic. We did everything from – we've done everything from financial literacy, we've done one on public service loan forgiveness, and so we say, "What questions do you have about this topic, and we'll have all the experts in the room ready to answer them live on Twitter."

So that's been really successful, and I'm going to go into more detail about that later, and I'll actually show you a video, so you can get a better understanding of how it works, but on Twitter, we post about three times a day. We encourage you to re-Tweet our posts. We encourage you to – if you want, you can copy and paste them, and make them your own Tweets. It's not plagiarism. I'm giving you permission. You can take anything that we've done and use it for your own Twitter account. Also, if you – for those of you who aren't really there yet, and you're not ready to get out there on Twitter, and you don't think you have the resources,

another thing I've been suggesting to the financial aid administrators who've been coming and seeing me in the resource center is if your school has a twitter account for the entire university one, send – whoever manages that, send them some Tweets and say, "Hey, I have a couple financial aid – a little bit of financial aid information. Could you get it out there on twitter to the students?" So even if you can't manage your own financial aid office twitter account, definitely send it to your schools if they have one.

The second network is Facebook. Kind of everyone has Facebook these days. So one Facebook, we have – we post all of the events that we're going to be going to with – that our outreach team is going to go into. We post photos. We post – about one – about an update or so a day, and I'll show you an example of kind of what one looks like, so you get an idea.

So, one thing that we really found to be successful is that visuals have really gotten us a lot more engagement than just general text posts. We see ten times the level of engagement on our posts when we include a picture. So, we have photos up on our Facebook page. You can feel free to use those on your own websites, on your own Facebook accounts. You're more than welcome to take those.

So we'll just post an update. "Did you know that you must complete a FAFSA each school year? The good news, if you've completed it in the past, a lot of your info will roll over automatically," and then we always try and direct them back to one of our websites where they can get more information.

So as you can see, we got some pretty good feedback. A number of likes, a number of people sharing this post, so – and we highly encourage you to do the same.

The next is YouTube. So, as I've been telling a lot of people, let's be honest. Students don't really like to read. I'm sure you guys encounter that a lot, especially with the kind of information we have. It's not the most exciting, even for me. My head was spinning during that general spinning, but – so we've decided to give students this information in whatever format they're comfortable with. So, like I said, whether they want a video or text. We've developed a number of new videos and it's very exciting, and we house them all on our YouTube channel. They're also embedded in studentaid.gov, in the appropriate areas, that kind of take the process and bring it down a level, to some – to a level

where students can really understand it. We have a bunch of videos already ready. One about FAFSA overview, we have financial aid process. We just actually launched two new ones this week, so I encourage you to take a look at our YouTube channel at youtube.com/federalstudentaid, and we're going to continue more of these videos rolling out over the next couple of months. We have a bunch of them that we're working on right now, so keep checking back, but rather than keep on blabbing about it, I might as well show you. Okay. *[Video plays 00:25:00 to 00:26:55]*

All right, so what did people think? Good? *[Applause]* Good, and like I said, we're going to have a number of these videos rolling out, and we're still preparing for some of them. So if you have suggestions for video topics, or any kind of thing that you want to see from us, please come visit me in the resource center. I'm happy to – I actually love to hear what you think. You all are the ones who see these students every day and know what they need. So, come up and see me, and let me know, and we'll see what we can do.

All right, the next social network we manage is probably one that is less popular. Probably less people have heard of it. How many people have heard of Storify before? A couple. All right. Well, it's pretty new and up and coming, and if you haven't seen it, I highly encourage you to go and take a look. It's a pretty cool concept. A little difficult to explain, but I'm going to show you an example in a second, but what it is is kind of a social media aggregator, so it allows you take different pieces of the internet, so whether that be a Tweet or a YouTube video, or a Flickr image, and really easily pull them into kind of a story, and you can insert text. So it's been a really cool way and we're still experimenting with it at FSA, to kind of, again, display our information in a little bit more of a visually pleasing way, but another main way we use Storify is for our Ask FAFSA Office Hours.

Like I said, each month we take questions from students all across the country, and we have an hour each month where we bring in the experts and answer them live. So, the problem is is you're not available during that hour, we don't want you to lose out on that information, because a lot of the questions that these students ask are very common questions that multiple people might find useful. So, what we do is after each Office Hours, we go and pull every Tweet that was asked, along with our answer to each one of those Tweets, and put it together in a story, and so we then shoot it out on our Facebook account and our Twitter account, and say, "If you missed Office Hours last night, come and check out our Storify and

you can see the full list of the Q&A. So, that's been pretty cool, and if you haven't seen Storify, again, highly encourage you to take a look at it. We just actually posted our summary from last night, so if you weren't able to attend last night's Office Hours, go and take a look at it.

The next social network that we manage is called Visually, and just like YouTube is a place where you can store videos, Visually is a place where you can store what's called infographics. So, infographics are kind of a way to take data and information and put it in a visual format. So, how many of you have students who don't like to read? A lot, right? Okay, so, infographics are a way to trick them into thinking they're not reading. They think they're looking at a picture, so just let them think that.

Here's an example of what – two examples on what an infographic looks like. So you can see on your left, the financial aid process infographic. So we basically took the financial aid process, wrote out some text, and snuck in a picture, so people can see a visual of the roadmap, and then they can read the information along the way.

On the right-hand side, you'll see kind of more of a traditional infographic, in that it uses data. So this one takes income level and compares it to level of education, to show students what the value of an education is, and these are two infographics that we have available on our site. We have them available on Visually, and we also have them available on studentaid.gov.

This has been a huge hit in the resource center. I highly encourage you, go and download these, and print them out, and hang it up in your office, or embed them in your website. We want you to use these. We think they're really good, and students seem to really, really like them, so feel free to take these and use them however you want, which brings me into exactly that. How can you leverage our content, and what we've already done for your own social media presence, or for your own websites on your campus.

So the first and most basic is Sharing is Caring. So, we spend a lot of time writing content. You wouldn't believe – people think, "Oh, Nicole. You just play on Facebook all day." I get that all the time, but no, it actually takes a lot of effort to try and get our content down to short enough of characters to fit into the specifications that these social networks have, and also to make it engaging. We don't just want to be blasting information out there.

We want to make it something that encourages students to talk to us. We don't to just talk at them.

So you can, please, share our Facebook posts, re-Tweet our Tweets, take our YouTube videos and embed them in your own site, link to them from your site. We encourage you to use them in any way you can.

And this is – so this next is Beg, Borrow, and Steal. So, like I said, you have permission to take any content that we have, and use it for – to help your students. For your own site, or for your own social media. I am giving you permission, so please take it.

Another thing to note is that Financial Student Aid, we're going to begin working on something we're calling a professional's tool kit, and this is for school counselors, access organizations, and also financial aid administrators. So we want some feedback before we get started on what would be helpful to you. We already written a bunch of tweet – tweet. I sound like Jeff Baker. We've already written a bunch of Tweets and written a bunch of Facebook posts, and we have them, so we want to know would it be helpful for you all to have – if you give you everything and say, "Here are some Tweets you can use. Here are some Facebook posts you can use," and if so, kind of what format you want these things in. So if you have any feedback for me there – we want to make sure it's useful to you, otherwise it doesn't really serve a purpose, so please come talk to me after, or in the resource center, and let me know if you have any suggestions, but look out for that. So hopefully that's something we'll get done for you all.

Lastly is that these – people who came to my session yesterday, and I talked about this, and then came to the resource center to get a better understanding about what I'm going to tell you, were amazed at how easy this is. So, if you maybe don't have the resources to create your own Twitter account, but you still want – you still think our information might be helpful to students, you can actually embed our Twitter stream in your website, so that students who come to your website get the most recent updates from Federal Student Aid, and it is extremely easy to do. We actually – I actually provided you with the code at the bottom, that you can literally just copy and paste that, and put it wherever in your html area of your website. If you have a webmaster, they'll absolutely know how to do this. Or if you do it on your own, you might know how to do this. You can just put it directly in the space where you want it to go.

Also exciting, we just recently uploaded three how-to videos to YouTube. So if you go to our YouTube channel and go to the professional resources section, up in top right-hand corner, there are three videos that walk you through step by step how to do this.

This is the first. How to Add the FAFSA Twitter Stream. The second is How to Embed our YouTube Videos in Your Site, and this is the one that people really love. We've already created the videos. You might as well use them, if – you don't have to create them yourselves. We've already done it, so please – use these in your website. We highly encourage it, and it's literally two clicks, and then copy and paste. So, check out the YouTube channel to find the videos that will take you step by step through it.

Like I said, you can also embed our infographics in your website. So, again, two clicks, and you can embed them in your site. Again, also print these out. Someone upstairs was also just telling me, "We have monitors up in our financial aid office, so that when students are in the waiting area, we post some announcements up on that monitor." Put an infographic on there. That's what they're there for. So use them however you think may work for your financial aid office.

Lastly, I'm going to give you this website. If there's one website you want to know, it's studentaid.gov/resources. So, this houses all of our publications, in PDF; all of our fact sheets. You can download our videos here, and you can download our infographics here, and as we create more over the coming months, we're going to dump them all in here. So keep checking back and see – seeing what's new. They're all accessible, so ready to use and download.

All right, then for those of you who have your social media profiles, and you're just trying to figure out "How can I get my students to talk to me?" and "How can I get – make it a little bit more of an engaging experience?" We have a couple tips.

The first, I kind of mentioned this before, but visuals, visuals, visuals. Students don't like to read, but if you trick them and think they're looking at a picture, they will usually digest the information a little bit better. We find that we get insane engagement levels on anything that includes a picture on social media.

So one way we implemented this – like I said, we have these Ask FAFSA Office Hours, and we were posting up blog posts to announce it, and that's great, but we decided, "Why don't we make

flyers, kind of like visually exciting flyers, and Tweet them out, or post them on our Facebook page,” so that students don’t feel like they’re reading text, but they think, “I’m looking at this cool poster,” and those have been really successful. So, any kind of visual engagement you can do, we highly encourage it. You can take the photos off our Facebook page. You can take screenshots of our videos and use them as photos. I do that all the time, so definitely try that out.

The next is mobile. So how many of you have a Smart phone? How many of you have ignored part of my presentation to check your Smart phone? A lot, right? No, I’m just trying to prove that people are constantly on their mobile device, so it’s important that you check your website. Make sure it looks okay on a mobile device, because more and more, that’s how students are accessing this information. Some students are skipping laptops altogether and just getting iPads, or just having an iPhone, or an Android. So make sure that your stuff looks okay on mobile.

The next way to increase engagement is host an Office Hours of your own. For those of you who were at the Office Hours yesterday, it’s a little – it can be a little bit of a complicated process with – on the FSA side, because we’re dealing with a whole country, but there are lots of ways that you can kind of make it work for your school. So, like I said, this is a time where we do a call-out and invite students to send us any questions, and then we provide answers.

Here’s a sample of one we did last month with Arne Duncan. So, he actually was great. He will take the toughest question you give him, and he has an answer for it. So you can see, students was Tweeting him in questions, and he was responding right back. So it’s pretty cool. I think people are really excited that they actually get a response from the government. It’s really been successful for us, but just to give you a better idea about how it all works, I’m going to show you a quick video. *[Brief pause]* Or maybe I’m not. *[Video plays 00:39:53 to 00:40:10]*

All right, so that’s just like a quick overview of kind of how our Office Hours works, but we realize that this might not be – this might be a little bit complicated to do on a small campus, so we have another suggestion, and that is to do an impromptu Office Hours.

Arne Duncan does this really well, and he’ll say on Twitter, I have 20 minutes between now and my next meeting. If you have

questions for me, Tweet them to me now,” and he actually will sit there and respond to questions himself, and students love – well, people love this. Social media is very instant, so we do Ask FAFA Office Hours, where we announce it in advance, and people send us in questions, and then they wait until the Office Hours, but this is really great, because they get instance responses. So, maybe you tell your students, “Instead of giving us a call, or instead of coming in and waiting in line at the financial aid office, every Tuesday from 3 to 4, we’re going to have someone on Twitter ready to answer your questions,” and then you can just go out and invite students to Tweet at you, instead of calling or coming and waiting in line.

All right, so this is the last piece I’m going to touch on in a high level, and then, like I said, you can find more details in the resources section of my Powerpoint, but we’re also going to lastly touch on how to measure whether or not you’re being effective. Like I said, social media is all about two-way communication. It’s all about engaging with people. It’s great to have social media profiles, where you can get your messages out there, but it’s really important that with these mediums, you’re really talk back to your students. You’re really forming relationships with them using these tools. That’s kind of what social media is all about.

So we have six main measurements that we use, and I’m going to describe these at a high level so you get a good understanding of what they mean. So the first is potential reach, and the way I like to think about potential reach is a billboard. So you have a billboard up on a highway. How many people drove past that billboard and had the opportunity to see it? They may not have looked up. They may have been texting – which you shouldn’t do, but – and looked up to the bill – and not looked up to the billboard, but they had the potential to see it.

Engagement volume is about kind of how many people are finding your posts really engaging. So, how many people are liking your Facebook statuses, or favoriting your Tweets? So, how kind of likeable are they?

Amplification rate are how many people are finding your information so useful that they want to share it with their friends? So whether that be re-Tweeting your Tweets, or sharing your Facebook posts, how many people are taking that and sharing it with their friends and really amplifying your message.

The next is engagement rate. So people are Tweeting questions at you all the time. Are you responding to them? Are you ignoring them? So what's your rate of engagement with that back-and-forth conversation?

Next, we have conversion rate, and this has a lot to do with links. At Federal Student Aid, we try and include links in every Tweet and every Facebook post if we can, just because this is complicated stuff. You can only give them so much information in the text, but we can always drive them back to one of your websites to try and find out more detailed information. So, I highly encourage you to do the same, but conversion rate talks about how many people actually click on those links and go to the website?

One of our parts of our social media strategy is that if people ask us a question on social media, we always try and answer it completely in the Tweet or Facebook post, and assume that they will never click on the link, so that they get the information that they need, but of course we always want them to go further and dig deeper.

And the last, and my – probably my favorite measurement – is impact stories. So all the five above it are things that you can jot down numbers and compare over time, and make pretty pie charts, but impact stories is something that you're not going to have a number, and you're not going to have a pretty pie chart. What it is it just tells you how impactful you're being on social media. Are you making a students' lives easier? Are you answering their questions? Are you doing a horrible job? With impact stories, we include, in our reporting, both positive impacts of our social media, and maybe if there are any negative impacts. We include all over the map. We want to know where those places are that we can improve, but I'm going to show you some examples of impact stories, and explain kind of what they mean.

So the first one – around the time we launched studentaid.gov, we decided that we were going to switch around our engagement strategy. We kind of gotten our feet wet with Twitter, and we were ready to start responding directly to people when they ask us questions. So we do our best to do that. We try and monitor it as much as we can, and as long as it's a question that is general enough that we can answer, we will respond to people via social media now. So, you can feel free to direct your students to us if they need help, but of course, the Federal Student Aid information center is always the go-to place for any official or specific stuff, but if they have just general questions, they can come to us.

Anyway, so someone had Tweeted a question at us around the time we launched studentaid.gov and asked us a question about – they were confused about what the word “Stafford” meant, and so we responded to them with an answer, and said Stafford were student loans under a previous program. Some call these direct student loans Stafford, and we gave them a link to more information. They responded back with like an, “Oh my God, I cannot believe you responded that quickly,” and it’s like, “Thank you for responding.” Who knew? Government agencies. So that was really cool for us to see, and we’re like now all of our hard work has kind of paid off, and then the next day she Tweeted again, just, “I cannot believe that you responded to my question. Like, people were really amazed by this.” So, those kind of things are always good to see.

Also, in the top, again, like I said, we solicit feedback all the time. We ask students, “What do you think about this?” We want to hear your opinions, and we want to hear places where we need improvement, but people will tell us, “You really did a good job with the site,” and we really find that great.

We also take the ones that say, “There is an area where you really need to beef up your content,” or, “We really don’t understand this,” and we always route those. Anything that we get like that, we route those to whoever it is in FSA that works on that, and say, “Just an FYI, this is something that people are saying on social media. You might want to take a look into it and see how you can make improvements based on this feedback.” So we are constantly routing things all across Federal Student Aid, as they come into us via social media.

Another one is you’re going to get a lot of people, who, no matter what answer you give them, it’s the wrong answer. It’s an answer that they don’t want to hear, and that’s something you really can’t prevent, and I know you all are used to it, I’m sure, but we had one girl who would Tweet us a lot and say, “I’m having all these problems with my loans. I’m so confused,” and I felt horrible, and our team did as much as we could to give her any information she needed, and her situation was a little bit more complicated, so of course we directed her to the Federal Student Aid information center, but she was still having problems. So we put her in touch with someone directly at FSA, who then worked with her to try and figure out what she can do with her loans, and she Tweeted back at us and said, “I’m not really happy with all the loans that I have, but I’m just happy that someone took the time to help me try

and sort it all out.” So those are the kinds of things that we want to see, and these are the kinds of stories that we hope you all can see as you start to engage on social media, or as you’re already engaging.

So, with that, I’m going to kind of close out, because I do want to leave a little bit more time for questions, and I want to – if you have best practices of your – at your own campus, feel free to also share those, but at this time, I’m going to close it out and start to take questions, and I just ask if you do have questions, please just go to the mike so that everyone can hear what you’re saying, and I don’t know if we have someone that’s bringing the mike around, but if not, you can just go up to the podium.

Audience 1:

Hi, there. One of the things that I’ve – we don’t have a site yet, for social media, because one of the concerns, and I’m sure some of the other schools that do this can share, but is that two-way conversation, because of the bad information. Other students think they’re experts at everything. They’re going to post wrong information and things like that, so that’s been the concern, the posting of bad information, or information that is maybe attacking the financial aid office, because we’re always the bad guy. We’re the _____ office is always the bad guy, no matter – even if you’re doing everything correctly. We’re the enemy to a lot of people, so that’s been the concern. We want to do it. We want to get involved, but the two-way conversation is kind of what’s making us kind of afraid to step into the social media realm, but we think it’s important, because that feedback is important. So, I just wanted – I don’t know if other schools can mention, or if you can mention, some of what you’ve dealt with, but that’s the other concern.

One other thought is the confidentiality aspect, that students are going to be posting too much information about themselves, and obviously they do that anyways, but as far as what our responsibilities would be as an institution to make sure that those students are protected and that they, as far as our conversation back to them, we would be responsible, but that’s the concerns, so...

Nicole Callahan:

Sure. No, great question, and I got a similar one yesterday too, so I know it’s really popular. I will say, one of the reasons it took Federal Student Aid so long to get on social media is because we were worried about the same things, that we deal with sensitive information. We were worried about people posting it. We were worried about what people were going to say, but the fact of the

matter is – number one, I’ll say, I’ll say set expectations. That’s one of the most important things. You want to – if you have a Facebook page, and you’re not going to be responding to people, for example, which I advise against, but you can definitely do that, and make sure they know that this only a page that where – where we’re going to be posting information, and not really responding back to people.

The second thing I would say is create a comment policy. I think that’s the most important part. We have a comment policy available at studentaid.gov/social, where we outline – we try not to limit speech. If people say bad things about Federal Student Aid on our Facebook page, we leave it up, because it’s – if people have that opinion, that’s fine. As long as it doesn’t violate the certain terms of our comment policy, like using hateful speech and certain other things that you can see on our comment policy, but create one of those and put it up on the Facebook page, and let people know what’s acceptable and what’s not.

In terms of the other students posting wrong information, I think that’s a perfect way to have like a learning moment, because people post wrong information, and then you respond back with, “Actually, this is actually how it works.” I’m sure a lot of people probably thought that same wrong thing, and so for you to highlight that that’s in fact not correct, and that this is the correct thing that you do, I think that’s really helpful for people. Did I miss any other part of your question?

Audience 1: No, I think you got it.

Nicole Callahan: Is that – does that kind of answer it? And I would say, it is kind of nerve wracking to get out there, but people at FSA – some of our former biggest critics have become our biggest advocates, after seeing the kind of value you can get from this stuff. So, you don’t always get positive, honky dory things, but a lot of times, some of the negative things can really help you make improvements to your processes, so –

Audience 1: The only other thought I had is the fact that social media is 24/7, and obviously, we don’t have most – don’t have staff to monitor things 24/7, so what are your thoughts on that?

Nicole Callahan: Sure, so we try and respond to things within 24 hours. That’s like our general process, but I’ve seen a lot of people on Twitter write in their bio section, “This account is monitored Monday through

Friday, 9 to 5.” So that’s one way to get around it. It’s all about setting expectations.

Audience 1: Thank you.

Nicole Callahan: Sure.

In the – do you want to go to the one in the back? Sorry.

Audience 2: Yeah, sure. This is kind of based off of what you just said, but you said you post on Twitter about three times a day, and Facebook about one time a day. Do you sit and respond immediately? Or do you wait like an hour for questions to come in? How do you go about responding to questions on a regular basis?

Nicole Callahan: Sure, so we have a team of four now, and we all kind of just take turns monitoring Twitter. So you know, we have other things to do during the day, of course, just like you all do, so I’ll check it. I’ll go through and just scan through it every hour or so and say like, “Oh, has anyone asked a question?” And we just scan through. We’re like maybe at the beginning of the day, or the end of the day, if you’re an one-person team. Just check it – and like I said, we shoot for a 24-hour response window. So as long as you get it within that timeframe, or – as long as we get it within that timeframe, we consider that successful, so that’s kind of what we do.

Audience 2: Okay, thank you.

Nicole Callahan: Sure. All right, we’ll go to the front.

Audience 3: Nicole, if you don’t mind, could you just go back to the last slide? There was something on that Twitter account. If you – now, using Twitter on the bottom, you always have Reply, ReTweet, et cetera, but I don’t think I’ve seen Storify, and what is Buffer?

Nicole Callahan: Oh, sorry. Those are – that’s actually a great question. Those are plug-ins that I have on my personal computer. That’s why those show up. So because we use Storify, have like a little Storify plug-in that allows me to – I can just click that one button, and it will send that Tweet to Storify, so that I can use it later in a Storify post. So it’s – I use Google Chrome as my browser, and there’s a lot of really cool plug-ins that made things easier.

Same thing with Buffer. Buffer’s actually a really cool app, if you’re using Twitter. If, say, you find five articles on financial aid.

You don't want to Tweet out five Tweets in a row about – with articles. What Buffer allows you to do is it kind of goes out and figures out when the most of your followers are online. So you say, "Buffer, I want these five Tweets to go out today," and Buffer will then post them out at the time when they think the most people will be able to see them. So, it's pretty cool, and if you use HootSuite, HootSuite actually has a Buffer integration, which is kind of cool, as just some of the other social media monitoring tools, if you use those.

Audience 3: Does it know when your followers are most likely to see it, or just in general?

Nicole Callahan: I'm not quite sure of how they use the algorithm, what the algorithm is behind it, but I think it tries to just figure out, from what I understood, I think it may have been your followers, but someone in the audience may know better than I do.

Audience 3: Okay, thank you.

Audience 4: I have a very general question, in regards to the infographics, as well as the video. Love them, and wondering if they're available in Spanish as well?

Nicole Callahan: Great question. The videos, we have Spanish captioning, and we are currently working with an organization who we're hoping will be able to translate some of the videos for us. So right now, they're not available in Spanish, but we are looking to make those available, so just keep checking back. The infographics, we don't have in Spanish right now, but again, we may leverage the same partnership, to try and do something like that, but know that it is on our mind, and that's a great suggestion, and I'm definitely going to take it back that someone asked.

Audience 5: I just wanted to comment on the concern about getting negative feedback on social media, and that like scaring people away from participating in social media. What we found is that it's very self-policing. So for every person who has a negative comment, another student will come along and respond with a contradictory, positive comment. So the students really self-police the social media, I mean, because someone – of course, a lot of people have it bad experience in your financial aid office, but there's plenty of students who have had a very positive experience there, and those students, you'll be surprised, will step forward and kind of stand up for you. So, we just found that it really works itself out, and we

don't get involved and deal with the negative feedback, but I wouldn't let that dissuade you from participating.

Nicole Callahan: Absolutely. That is a fabulous point. The self-policing. We see it all the time on our Facebook page. We get some negative comments, and then other people will jump in and counteract at, and that really helps, because they're not seeing not from you, but from their peers. So, it's a great point. That actually brings up another topic about the response times and things.

We post things on Twitter and Facebook, and sometimes people will Tweet questions at us, or write on our Facebook wall, and sometimes people out in the community, whether it be a financial aid administrator who's on their personal Facebook page, will get to a question before I will, and they'll send a response. So as long as you know the right answer, other people seem to be giving each other on our Facebook page, and we encourage you to do that if you're interested.

Audience 6: Hi, Nicole. I think it's a great idea to add the FSA feed to our school's Twitter page. What advice would you give to a school or a social media advocate whose school feels like advertising the Federal Student Aid stream is just going to give a student an avenue to complain about their school's financial aid office directly to ed, and what do you do when a school complains about – when a student complains about their school's financial aid office on social media.

Nicole Callahan: Sure, great question, and this is a – kind of a – one of the things that we're still kind of figuring out ourselves, because at Federal Student Aid, we do dictate a lot of things, but a lot of financial aid and policy, and things, are left to the schools, so a lot of times we find ourselves just directing people back to their schools for information, and so that's a great point.

In terms of posting the feed on your site and thinking that people are going to respond back negatively about your financial aid office – was that the question? Just want to make sure.

Audience 6: I think it's adding visibility to the fact that there is a Twitter for Federal Student Aid, and rather than utilizing our own internal dispute resolution mechanisms, they'll complain right to you, so we want them to encourage our own internal dispute resolution first before they go and complain to the Feds.

Nicole Callahan: Oh, sure. That's a –

Audience 6: _____ and then they'll just say, "Oh, well, let me go here and post my question here to make it elevated."

Nicole Callahan: And I think that's actually a really interesting point, and I've never really thought about it, but I think it's kind of like a – kind of got to weigh the pros and the cons, and that may be one con that you don't them to come straight to us first, but then, there also may be that student that has that question that's pretty general that we can answer, that maybe is Federal Student Aid related, that's not school related, and they come to us before they go to you, and they save you from having to – having another person in line at your financial aid office.

So, I don't know if I really have a solution for that, but I think that there is a lot of benefit in just getting the information, and the Twitter feed, if you put it in your site, it's just kind of like a stream that flows, and there's really no way that they can – like, they'd have to click on the Twitter stream and find our website, then find our contact information, but yeah, we're happy to help, and if students do come to us with something that's more school related, we always just direct them back to you guys, so sorry.

Audience 7: Hi, my question is related to that. Do you resources and/or advice for sort of pitching social media integration to IT departments and/or operative administration who may be sort of reluctant to jump on the bandwagon? I think that's been a struggle, at least at our university. It's sort of saying like, "This is important, and this is a good thing," and do you have any sort of online resources or advice, in general, for making the pitch?

Nicole Callahan: Yeah, sure. I actually started at Federal Student Aid as an intern, and the last time I was here, I was still an intern, and I used to call myself the Powerpoint Coordinator. That was my title, because I would just spend all day, every day, making Powerpoint after Powerpoint to try and prove why we needed social media. So I feel you. I feel you.

I would say that one thing I learned is that you have to have small wins. People in our office weren't comfortable with it either, and so the other thing is you have to try and think about it from their perspective. They're trying – so for us, like they're trying to protect the organization and they don't want anything to go wrong, but just show them how it can be useful in small ways.

So, we started with that small Twitter account, and they were like, “All right, we’ll let you do the Twitter account, but you cannot respond to any questions,” and we’re like, “Okay, fine, just let us go out there and we’ll do it,” and then we started coming back to them and saying, “Hey, we’re finding that someone’s having a problem on this website through social media,” and slowly but surely, our biggest critics became our biggest advocates, and they’re really – I look at some of my colleagues who used to be like, “Nicole, you’re crazy. We can’t be on this stuff,” and now they’re like, “Ooh, how can I get – can you Tweet something out for me please?” So, I feel you, but just try and get those small little wins, and also try and put yourself in their shoes, ‘cause don’t just attack them. I kind of started out that way, but – and then I learned that you have to – they’re trying to protect their interests as well, but just show them how they can do it in little ways. Use some examples from other schools. Show them a screenshot of a Facebook post that another school did, and how that engagement worked, but examples really help, I think, too.

Audience 8:

Later this afternoon, the graduate and professional schools are going to be getting together to talk about issues that are specific to us, and I was anticipating we would have a conversation about social media, and I was also anticipating we might bring a question to you after our meeting, but I decided I’d do a preemptive strike and ask you ahead of time about..;

One of the things that has – that I’ve thought about is I’ve thought about how do we integrate this, all this information, and it’s wonderful, and I’m super impressed with what FSA has been doing over the last couple of years. It’s really excellent work. However, it is here primarily to undergraduate programs, or at least it seems to me, and I know that trying to create two channels is going to be a tremendous, and whether or not you can do that, I don’t know, but I thought I would at least raise the issue. I mean, the obvious one’s – they don’t get Pell grants, they don’t get subsidized loans, and so running them through a process that is designed primarily to educate undergraduates is, in some ways, a lot more information than what they want. So, the question is this, ____ general, and that I’m asking myself, and we’ll be talking about it this evening. What are your thought about how we could possibly make a channel, or deal with the fact that we have a demographic that really is much more a subset of this one. Just some thoughts you might have.

Nicole Callahan:

Sure, absolutely, and that is a great question, and an area where I agree. I think that we can do a lot better. I will make a shameless

plug. Last year at the conference, we heard similar things, that we weren't putting enough focus on graduate students. So one of the things we did was we created a brand new publication that's dedicated just to graduate students. So, we actually brought copies with us to the conference, and if you go to the studentaid.gov, fafsa.gov resource center, you can see that publication, and we have instructions on how you can order that, and it's available in PDF on studentaid.gov. Okay, shameless plug over.

In terms of graduate students, we've also been thinking about that a little bit, in an area where we could totally do better, even in terms of our messaging. We do get that question a lot. "I'm a graduate student. What kind of financial aid can I get?" One thing we definitely want to consider, we would love to do an Ask FAFSA Office Hours for graduate students only. Like, I think that can be a really great way to get people's questions answered. That's one thing that we can do, and I would love to pick your brain, and I don't know if you're around later, but definitely come and talk to me, and we can work on that, and I will absolutely bring this – I have a whole list of feedback that I've gotten this week. It's been really great for me to learn from all of you, that I'm going to bring back and see what we can do to really make improvements. So, I appreciate your feedback and I totally think it's an area where we can improve.

Audience 9:

My question is regarding a website called Clout, and if you're familiar with it, is that a good way to measure your social influence?

Nicole Callahan:

Sure, so, Clout is a way to – exactly that. It kind of has an algorithm that measures your social influence, and what you do is you kind of plug in all your different social media profiles – Facebook, Twitter – and it gives you a number, and it says, "This person, on a scale from 1 to 100, is this important," and Justin Bieber is a 100, and I'm probably like around at 20, but – and she asked if that's a good way to measure influence.

I think Clout is the best we've got, in terms of social influence, and you do bring up a good point about how can you use influencers. FAFSA, we – I mean, we have 11,000 followers. That's really not too, too much. There are lots of people out there that have more. So, it's all of – I think that that's the next place we're going at Federal Student Aid, is really trying to reach out to those influencers, and those people who have real clout in their communities. I mean, we're trying to partner with someone for Ask FAFSA Office Hours, who does financial literacy and has a

huge following, in terms of financial literacy, so that we can kind of capitalize on that, but I think Clout is a good way to get an idea of if you're looking for influencers, how much social influence they have, but one thing I found, for us personally, is sometimes the people with the least amount of clout are the ones who we really are focused on wanting to help, because they're the everyday people, but in terms of if you're looking to really get a message out, absolutely. Clout's a great way to at least figure out, generally – it's not perfect, but how much social influence someone has.

Any other questions? All right, well, thank you so much for spending your lunch hour with me. I'll be here. *[Applause]*
Thank you. I'll be here after the session if anyone has questions, and if not, you can come see me in the resource center.

[End Audio]