

UCDA Script  
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**Slide 1:**

Hi everyone, thank you for joining me today. I'm Erika Forsack, my pronouns are she,her and hers and while my current role at Virginia Commonwealth University is as a social media strategist, I have a pretty atypical background for someone working in communications.

When I was asked to submit to present at this conference I wasn't sure exactly what I wanted to talk about, so I thought I would share a little bit about my journey and the antics that I've gotten into along the way.

Like many of you, I have roots in design.

**Slide 2:**

And here I am a sophomore at VCUarts in the Interior Design program.

After I graduated with my BFA I went right into doing recruitment for VCUarts. I attended National Portfolio Days, processed applications, all of your run-of-the-mill admissions tasks.

As time went on, social media began to have more of a presence in recruitment strategy and the folks from our communications office came to me and said, "Erika, you've experienced VCUarts first hand as an undergraduate student, you can speak on that student experience (which is something I think we do really well) and really showcase what it's like here and most important of all, you actually know how to use all these different social media platforms"

**Slide 3:**

So then all of a sudden, I was a social media manager in charge of the monitoring and posting on social media accounts for one of the top art schools in the country.

I had no formal communications or marketing training, just had my experience as a student, at that time just a small amount of experience as a recruiter and the knowledge of the tools as a millennial user.

Recently someone actually posted on the Higher Ed Slack channel asking if it was necessary to have a communications degree to work in social, and I (not having one) replied, no way.

We learn from our experiences, and can gain similar knowledge from them that may not be available in a classroom setting.

**Slide 4:**

In my opinion, social is a tricky thing to learn in a traditional setting because it does change so quickly, but we're very fortunate to have such a large network of peers that share their work, which ultimately improves the overall quality of the higher ed social-sphere.

Once social became a huge part of my job duties I started seeking out as many free resources, webinars and trainings as possible. I was also reading blogs and of course attending paid conferences like this one.

Working for a state university, resources were limited, and of course as time has gone on they're even more limited now, so seeing what's available at little-to-no cost is really important for a lot of folks and can make or break access to professional development opportunities.

Twitter chats are a great way to connect with peers in the industry. CASE hosts one on different social media topics on the second and fourth tuesday of every month, so there was just one this last week.

Inside Higher Ed has a whole list of hashtags you can check out if you're looking for information about a specific topic. I like to use #HESMa11y on content related to my accessibility work and research, HESM being Higher Ed Social Media and a-1-1-y being for accessibility (a is the first letter and there are 11 letters, y being the last letter).

**Slide 5:**

The other thing is that too often the person who manages social, it's only a small fraction of their job. I know we run into that at our university when you get down into the school and departmental levels. The more I got to know folks at other places, the more I really related to being pulled into so many directions. In that first position with VCUarts, I was doing admissions tasks, managing social, doing HR stuff, and because I had been there for so long was often pulled in on various other projects. I am really fortunate now that my job is 100%, well maybe 95%, social all the time.

**Slide 6:**

Now looking at some of the projects I took on to help strengthen the VCUarts social efforts during my time there. One of the tasks I took on was to write a style guide after attending the HighEd Web annual conference for the first time.

I saw a really great presentation by NYU about writing them, and made that my one thing I was going to take away and implement.

Establishing a unified voice + tone within your area really makes a difference.

Within the School of the Arts we have 15 different departments and programs all trying to do their own thing on social.

By taking the time to create a style guide to set some parameters around what your brand would/wouldn't say on social helps the audience know what to expect and will also put some guardrails up for your social admins.

One thing that we do really well at VCU is we have an established governance structure over all of the social accounts within the university. There are regular meetings on the university level, but I also set up regular meetings just for folks who worked on social accounts within the School of the Arts about once a semester. This will not only help strengthen the community in your area, but it will strengthen your overall brand message.

**Slide 7:**

This will also allow your audience be able to better recognize spam, which is an issue that comes up as so many accounts inside and outside of higher ed have been getting hacked lately. For example earlier this year when someone created a spam account of our university president.

This is actually a screengrab of the real VCU President account for Dr. Rao. It has a legitimate looking bio including a link to his blog, but so did the fake account. Our president isn't super active on Instagram, so I think that's why this person decided to make a fake account.

For some reason I couldn't find screenshots of the troll account, but they were using really old photos of him that you could find on a Google image search and posting really weird captions.

To get this account taken down, I reported the post under an Intellectual Property violation. This will actually connect you with someone at Instagram, which is a relatively impossible thing to do, but they do actually take copyright seriously.

Because they were using photos from VCU sites, we were able to have all of the photos deleted from the account and it ultimately got taken down.

**Slide 8:**

Here's another example. At VCU, we have two campuses, the Monroe Park Campus and the MCV (or Medical College of Virginia) Campus. The Monroe Park Campus is named after this lovely victorian era park that was just reopened after two years of construction.

It's been a bit of a pain point on campus, but now that it's reopened, folks have been swimming in the fountain and it hasn't even been a week since the fencing and barriers came down.

In this news story I saw that this video screengrab was credited to an account called @CaryStreetGym, which is the name of the VCU gym. When I went to that page, there was one post and in the bio it said that it was the official page.

The page that encompasses the gym is actually managed by Rec Sports, so I knew something was up. Another indicator was the follower account.

**Slide 9:**

So I went ahead and messaged them from the VCU account, letting them know that we were on to them.

I didn't mention the news story, but if there had been push back I definitely would have brought it up. My main points were, please change your bio to say that it is an unofficial account.

They originally just made the bio say nothing, I said no, please make it say this is an unofficial account and they did pretty quickly all because I said I was going to report them to Instagram.

**Slide 10:**

One of the goals I was first given when I took over the accounts was to grow the audience. Even now with the university accounts I manage, we still have account growth goals every year, but in my time with the VCUarts Instagram I was able to grow the account by 95%.

I achieved that with a few tactics to really engage our audience, the first being Student Work Wednesdays.

When I was working solely in student recruitment, we always used student work as a way to give prospective students a feel for the programs and faculty. If you liked the work the students and faculty were making, it would likely be a good fit for you.

To gather more student work content that wasn't shot professionally at our end of year shows and had a UGC (User Generated Content) feel, I started promoting the hashtag #VCUartsWork and encouraged our students to use it on their posts with the

trade off of being featured on our account on Student Work Wednesday.

This was a huge driver for our account growth, now with over 3,500 posts using the hashtag.

**Slide 11:**

In August 2017, I left VCUarts and accepted a position with University Relations where my co-worker and I split operating the main level channels, with my main responsibility being the VCU Instagram.

UGC is still a huge part of my content strategy when operating the main VCU accounts. By sharing posts from your community, you build trust and authenticity with them. You can see it almost as a Yelp review for your campus.

This is why brands choose to use influencers, and it's a way to get that same influencer feel on your account.

A few places you can look for this type of content is on Instagram using geotags, hashtags or by looking for and identifying those influencer-esque people on your campus to refer back to.

Of course, there will be a lot of things you won't want to share, like party photos and for some reason on our geotag and hashtags there has been a huge uptick in eyelash extension photos.

One way to try and filter that kind of unwanted content out is by creating specific hashtags and promoting their use, like #VCUartsWork but of course the trolls may continue to latch on to the new ones as well.

**Slide 12:**

With user content you want to make sure you get permission before reposting to ensure you're abiding by copyright laws.

As higher education institutions, we don't want to violate our own honor codes. What I usually do is when I'm scrolling through looking for content is I use Instagram's built in save feature and organize photos I like in an album of things to choose from when I need something to post.

I will then message the original poster saying something like, "Hi there, great photo! Could we repost this to our timeline (With credit of course!)" and then wait for their reply. Most of the time you will get a reply pretty quickly, but some never reply and you can't use those photos.

This is because Instagram doesn't have a native reposting option like Twitter does for retweeting, or Tumblr for reblogging, so you could be in violation of their terms of service and face some serious repercussions for reposting without consent.

There are those third party repost apps, but again, they're third party. That doesn't mean that they are compliant with Instagram's rules and regulations.

One copyright myth is that you must officially register for it to hold any weight. This not the case, everything is copyrighted and permission to use it is needed!

**Slide 13:**

The example some of you may be familiar with is the article that came out ["No, you can't use my photos on your brand's Instagram for free"](#) where a skateboarding company took a photographer's photo and reposted it without consent.

When he confronted them about it he asked for essentially a licensing fee the brand freaked out on him a bit responding with:

"Seriously? We don't pay for Instagram shares and we always give proper credit, I mean, who pays for Instagram shares lol."

**Slide 14:**

The photographer responded with something we as creatives are all familiar with, and probably have run into ourselves, justifying why he should be paid for his work.

"I cannot buy plane tickets or pay my rent with photo credits. If you guys are going to use my work to help sell your products, you need to pay for it."

In Richmond there are a few drone companies that take really beautiful photos and they'll tag VCU in their posts, but I usually steer away from contacting them about reposting because I'm fairly certain that they charge an "Instagram licensing fee" which is totally fair but isn't really something that I think would be in our budget right now even though the photos are gorgeous.

**Slide 15:**

While we're talking about copyright I want to touch on memes since they do go viral so fast and sometime higher ed institutions do hop in on the fun.

Our copyright librarian recently shared this example with our social admins in a training session. For those of you who are versed in the meme-world, you probably recognize the awkward penguin meme, which was actually quite a big deal when it comes to copyright.

This particular penguin came from a larger photo of lots of penguins that was owned by [Getty Images](#).

Anytime they saw the image on the web they were sent out cease and desist letters with a bill for the duration that the person had been using the image. Eventually an artist drew over the penguin and said this is fair use, anyone can use my penguin and awkward penguin went to live on. But authorship is something I often think about with the content of memes.

**Slide 16:**

The awkward penguin meme was a peak fair use situation. Another example of fair use in a meme context is keyboard cat. Charles Schmidt, who created Keyboard Cat was trying to sue Warner Brothers for profiting from his meme content.

Some things to note about fair use situations, they are usually fact specific and case-by-case. Also the holder of the copyright can disagree with your analysis of fair use and still sue you. You likely have librarians on your campus, like we do at VCU who can help you navigate copyright laws, and of course your legal counsel as well.

**Slide 17:**

In my current role at VCU, I am in charge of registering accounts and organizing training for over 600 social media administrators.

I've found that a lot of schools doesn't have an established structure (or as established of a structure) for social media governance, which is important to have in situations like when a crisis happens on campus or when you have a new university wide policy that everyone needs to be trained on.

For example, last fall we were under review for accessibility compliance. If we didn't already have our social media leaders and administrators identified for the most part, of course there's turn over that needed updating, it would have been much more difficult to get everyone through training what they needed to do to be compliant.

We hold regular trainings about once a month on various topics to keep everyone in the know on industry changes and internal changes.

**Slide 18:**

I usually present on the topic social media accessibility, which is one of my primary areas of research, so of course I wanted to touch on it here to a room full of primarily visually driven folks.

The biggest thing that has changed in our workflow after our accessibility review is

adding image descriptions to photos, flyers and graphics and captions to videos.

Some of you may be familiar with alt-text, that's more of a web term and with alt-text it's typically more sanitized language and limited to 100 characters.

Image Descriptions are more of a social media friendly term and can be longer, although we try to keep them brief and to the point, but they can be much more descriptive.

Here's an example from one of the recent posts on the VCU instagram containing an image description.

Something to be mindful of is making sure you're using inclusive language, neutral pronouns unless you're aware of what someone's preferred pronouns are, not mistakenly commenting on someone's identity.

VCU is a very diverse campus, so this is something that is really important to us.

### **Slide 19:**

Addressing image descriptions in a completely visual context when we're talking about things we've created can be complicated when they're often made with just the sighted audience in mind.

Flyers, print pieces or when we are sharing student or visiting artists' work it can be tough to know what to write.

For example this flyer here for the 2018 Fashion Show, all of the information from the flyer is relayed in the caption so an image description isn't required, but how would you go about describing this to someone without sight?

Someone that is blind or low vision would have the event information, but they wouldn't have the same experience of this flowing, intense color.

As I mentioned a lot of image descriptions, especially alt text, are written from this very sanitized perspective, really devaluing the art we are creating and we are doing a disservice to those that can't physically see it.

And then there's the more controversial work that may be ok to sneak by posting, but if you actually have to spell out what's happening it gets a bit uncomfortable, like artwork with nudity for example figure drawing.

These are the kinds of things we're running into now and are starting to ask what is the best way to communicate the message, the image while ensuring everyone has equal access to our content which should really be the priority.

If you're interested in learning more about accessibility on social media, let's talk after.



**Slide 20:**

Depending on where you live and how much you pay attention to the news these days, I know I try to tune it out for my own well-being, you may or may not be aware that Hurricane Florence just came through the East Coast.

It originally was forecasted to impact Richmond, so of course we started getting a lot of messages like this...

**Slide 21:**

And before we knew it, there were hundreds of messages on Twitter, Facebook and in our Instagram inbox.

It was getting even worse because other colleges and universities in the area were announcing closures, some even further inland and out of the path of the hurricane.

**Slide 22:**

We didn't reply to every single tweet, but for the ones that were directly tagging us, we replied with this crafted message from our central office letting people know where to go to get the most up-to-date information and that we are in fact monitoring the situation and that we're not just leaving them hanging.

A lot of these students want to be acknowledged and heard, so by responding, you're letting them know that. Of course, that's not always the case, there are plenty of trolls out there who want to just cause trouble.

In those situations, you can usually tell what their motive is and if it's something you should just let stand and monitor. We did end up closing the university for the remainder of the week and then the path of the hurricane changed and had no real impact on us, although we did have some tornadoes come through the area a few days afterwards.

Those few days were definitely stressful, as some of these messages were threatening of course aimed at the person behind the illusive curtain that is social media, but we kept all the balls in the air.

When these chaotic situations arise, we use a reporting system called VOST, Virtual Operations Support Teams that's often used for things like natural disasters. It's a spreadsheet document shared among the monitoring team where we can track all of the social chatter and it makes it easy for us to share with our VP, our Police Force and other folks in the Public Affairs office that are on call.

**Slide 23:**

There are lots of social media tools out there, these are a few that I like and recommend. I've tried a lot of them, and what works for me, may not work for you and your workflow.

I am a big fan of [Buffer](#) and [TweetDeck](#). Both are compatible with Twitter's accessibility features and allow you to schedule content.

TweetDeck is really great if you want to track hashtags, I especially like to use it when I'm at a conference or participating in a Twitter chat, or look for tweets from a certain location, so it can come in handy when you're doing any kind of crisis communication monitoring or just when you're looking to see what's happening on campus.

For editorial calendars, we just started using [Airtable](#) and are loving the flexibility so far. It's like your classic excel spreadsheet on steroids.

[Google Keep](#) is another new favorite of mine for notes and lists. It integrates with my email inbox, so I have it open all the time to jot things down or check things off on my to-do list. By far one of my favorite apps of this kind.

And of course [Google Drive](#) keeps me together. This is my favorite way to share photos between our photographers, my computer and my phone since they have an app I can easily grab them and put them up on social when I need to.

If you choose to use a scheduling tool, what you don't want to do is take one message and blast the same exact thing out to every platform. Identify who your audience is on a platform and write your copy for them. You're also going to have different peak activity times on different platforms because of the difference audiences. Instagram will actually tell you when your followers are the most active so you can have a better idea of when to post.

**Slide 24:**

Lessons learned: Some words of advice

**Slide 25:**

"It's magical, not magic. Creativity is sort of a catch-all idea that encompasses so many things. It's hard to nail down, but you know it when you see it.

One thing it isn't is a superpower you're just born with. It's not exclusive.

Anyone can tap into their creative energy to make something special with hard work & a little bit of luck."

**Slide 26:**

This is from a book called "[Things Are What you Make of Them](#)" by Adam J Kurtz. I like to keep this book on my desk and flip through it when I need a little inspo or a pick me up.

While viral content does happen overnight, most of the time it isn't created at the drop of a hat.

A lot of us feel this pressure to be creating this content constantly, and it's ok to accept that it's not magic.

I think the last line, about having a little bit of luck is very relevant when it comes to working in social because sometimes you never know what's going to take off.

**Slide 27:**

Take time to stop all the tasks you're doing at once, and focus on one thing at a time. Our brains and our browsers have too many tabs open at any given time.

I just started using a tool called [The Great Suspender](#) to at least let my computer have a break by putting all those tabs with articles I've been meaning to read for weeks to sleep.

Our jobs are so critical making sure there aren't any typos, especially on Twitter which is a platform where you can't edit your post, that your images are sized correctly, and that things are being posted at the right time.

**Slide 28:**

Friday morning I opened Twitter and saw one of the local news channels had posted this copy with this link on Twitter. Classic going to fast move and unfortunately involves a very sensitive subject for a lot of us right now. We wouldn't want the same thing to happen involving something related to our students.

Without the right level of focus, we're constantly running on overdrive and our work isn't as high quality as it should be.

**Slide 29:**

Don't be too hard on yourself. Yes, it will feel like people are yelling directly at you, but maybe the most important part of this job is self care.

Mental Health has been in the news a lot lately, and I don't think many people realize how much of a toll the job of being a social media manager can take on those of us behind the scenes on brand accounts.

**Slide 30:**

There was a really insightful post on LinkedIn from June by Thea Neal titled "Should you ask your social media manager if they're okay".

Anyone who manages social has stories to tell similar to those outlined in Neal's article. If you haven't read it, I highly recommend checking it out.

Make time in your date to meditate for 5 minutes, take a walk, do some desk stretches, whatever makes you feel good and doesn't let the dark side of the internet get you down.

If you're not in charge of posting on social, send your social team some dog memes and bring them baked goods because we're out here keeping everything afloat.

**Slide 31:**

So you're probably wondering, how do I stop the angry tweets from coming in? And the thing is that

**Slide 32:**

They won't stop coming. Someone will always be upset about something.

This generation has been trained to air their grievances on social media and unfortunately that leaves us to sort it out.

But by preparing messaging to get ahead of the things they're going to throw at you, taking breaks, and focusing on your mental health, it will make your job a little bit easier.

**Slide 33:**

Thank You

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