Digital Community

Content Creation Manual

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The Digital Student Experience: Your Space to Thrive

Digital Community Overview

The Student Experience Digital Community is an interactive space for students to voice what matters to them so that they can co-create an online place where they can thrive. Content is developed for students, by students with the help of staff who play a role in supporting students' experiences. The digital community aims to create authentic connections among the Western student body and between students and the university to enhance, highlight, and effect positive change within the broader context of students' experiences.

Vision & Values

Students have a strong voice and presence in their relationship with Student Experience. There is active learning, brave conversations, and authenticity in all of our interactions. Through these interactions, our student community can better understand who we are together. Our mutual values are: **joy**, **courage**, **curiosity**, **equity**, **decolonization**, **empathy**, **hope**, **humility**, and **integrity**.

Goals

Our intended goals for the content of the digital community are to:

> - **Celebrate:** We want our audience to share in the joy of successes shared by other students.
> - **Educate:** We want to inform students about issues, events, conversations, etc. that may be meaningful and relevant to their lives.
> - **Engage:** We want to deliver content that is diverse, relatable, and interactive.
> - **Entertain:** We want our content to be fun and exude
> - **Relate:** We want to the entire community of Western students.

All content in the digital community should aim to engage with at least one of these goals. These goals function independently and in tandem to increase engagement of all Western students on-campus and in the community by raising awareness of issues affecting students; sharing stories of hope, struggle, determination, and thriving; and providing a platform for digital engagement that students find compelling.

Content Categories

Category	Suggested Topics (listed content is not exhaustive)
Academics	Study skills, exam prep, note-taking, favourite spaces for study, time management, talking to profs/TAs, online learning, etc.
Awareness	Citizenship, sustainability, social justice, equity, current issues, etc.
Career	Job searching, interview tips, work integrated learning, career planning, employment fears, etc.
Culture & Community	Arts, trends, music, film/tv, pop culture, relationship building, things to do with friends, photography, etc.

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Finances	Saving money, financial aid, budgeting, taxes, investing, etc.
Grad Life	Graduate student-specific experiences such as: research, working with your faculty supervisor, TA-ing, non-academic career paths, etc.
My Experience	Personal student stories that meet one of the 5 content goals.
Wellness	Physical health, mental health, exercise, nutrition, compassion & empathy, sleep, etc.

Types of Content

- ➢ **Storytelling**
    - A story is an account of an event or events, told from a particular perspective, and for a particular purpose. You are the very best person to tell your story. Don't be afraid to allow your personality to shine through, as it helps the audience connect with your story.
- ➢ **Interviews**
    - Do you know of someone at Western who is engaged in something extraordinary, either in or outside of the classroom? An interview piece is an excellent way of spreading the word in an informative and entertaining way.
- ➢ **Lists**
    - According to BuzzFeed, there are three main types of "listicles" for engaging your audience.
        - **"The Listicle"**: A non-narrative list, heavily laden with images and/or graphics. E.g. 30 Breathtaking Photos of Western's Campus
        - **"The Definitive List"**: More exhaustive coverage; requires research. E.g. The Ultimate Guide to Navigating Wellness Resources on Campus
        - **"The Framework List"**: A list that supports the narrative and speaks to audience directly. E.g. 10 Off-Campus Study Spots You Need to Try This Exam Season
- ➢ **Quizzes**
    - Quizzes are not only fun, they're interactive! Who wouldn't want to know which Spoke bagel matches their personality?
- ➢ **Vlogs**
    - Everyone loves a good portmanteau, don't they? In this case, video + blog = vlog, an easy and engaging way to connect with your audience and increase traffic to your site.

Things to Consider

- ➢ Who is our audience?
- ➢ What makes us different?
- ➢ What matters to students? And why?
- ➢ What is at stake?
- ➢ What is the context? How does the topic relate to other issues that are relevant to the cultural context of the university and does that require a shift in approach or tone?
- ➢ Who is being represented?
- ➢ What do we currently do well at Western? What could we be doing better?

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Telling a Story

In order to write a good personal story, you must set up the stakes in order to engage your reader early on, so they become invested in your story and want to continue reading. Through vivid description, not only of the details but also how your experience made you feel, you can create an impactful story that differs from a fact-based journalistic story.

Voice (Who?)

Your post should be written in your voice. Try to avoid addressing the reader directly using "you," as it may come off as attempting to assume the reader's experience with your topic. Speak from your own experience, but don't try to come off as an expert if you're not. Try to also avoid an objective facts-only journalistic tone. We want our audience to engage with your story, not just hear a report of what happened.

Tense (When?)

To reinforce the relevance of a post, always aim to write in the present tense. However, it is important to note that content you submit may not be posted immediately, so try to avoid including dates (e.g. next Tuesday, this month, etc.) Content submissions will be uploaded to the digital community throughout the academic year, at a time when it will resonate with students.

Description (What?)

Always aim to be as descriptive as possible with your writing. Try to avoid vague wording that forces the reader to guess what you mean. Since you are sharing your own experience, which you may not have a lot of distance from, try to put yourself in the reader's position to discern what needs to be explained in order for the reader to understand the stakes. Try having a friend read it over to make sure it's clear before you submit.

Purpose (Why?)

Some things to consider:

- ➢ Why should the reader care about your story enough to invest their time in reading it?
- ➢ What is at stake for the person in the story?
- ➢ What can the reader take away from the story?
- ➢ How can they see themselves in the story, even if their experience is different?

Sources (Where?)

Any information you include that is not your idea or your experience, or any time you reference a service or product, direct the reader to the source using a hyperlink. That way, they can explore the topic you are discussing in more detail if they so choose. You will want to ensure that all links open in a new window, though, so that readers aren't taken out of your story. And **always** cite your sources!

Visuals 101

We always need at least one high quality image to go with your post. You can provide us with one (see below) or let us know that you need help and we can work on getting something for you.

<u>Using Your Own Photos/Graphics</u>

- ➢ Photos should be landscape orientation, not portrait (especially for article thumbnail pictures)
- ➢ Photos should be good quality (high resolution, in-focus)
- ➢ Provide alternative text describing the image(s) for readers who use assistive technology to access the site

<u>Using Someone Else's Photos/Graphics</u>

- ➢ Photos may only be used with permission from the original creator
- ➢ If using images found online, ensure they are royalty-free (see Resources section for link to open source images)

Length

There are lots of opinions about how long a good blog post should be, but the truth is that there is no perfect length. It all depends on what your goals for the post are.

- ➢ **Do you want back and forth comments and engagement?** Your post should be framed around generating discussion, and should include a prompt for readers to respond to. These should be shorter (around 75-300 words).
- ➢ **Do you want social media shares?** You need posts that are good quality, highly relevant to your target audience and is medium length (around 500-1,250 words).
- ➢ **Do you want traffic from Google?** SEO can be tough, so it doesn't do to only write posts that will be used to garner search traffic, however, it is true that deep, researched posts of more than 2,500 words are better at getting noticed by search engines. You just have to write about something that people are searching for!

Best Practices

- ➢ Be brave! Write about that topic you are afraid to write about. Your vulnerability and authenticity will shine through and grab the attention of readers.
- ➢ Related to above, consider how you frame something. For example, did you have a challenging experience with a professor? Instead of writing a scathing review of the course and the teaching style, engage the audience by sharing how you successfully navigated the conflict or asking for feedback on how other students have handled similar situations.
- ➢ Do not refer to any person by name without their express written consent (i.e. an email to the Digital Engagement Team prior to submitting a draft.)

Sample Blog Post

We all know that post-secondary is a time for personal growth, but what about other measurements of change?

Have you ever had an exam proctor do a double take when comparing your smiling OneCard photo to your current disheveled state—full blown study mode, sweatpants and all? Maybe you uploaded your photo the night before SAO, not pausing to consider how different your fourth-year self would look when compared with your high school grad photo or that picture from prom featuring the shoulder of your cropped-out friend. Maybe, like me, you realized that bleach is not kind to your hair.

Whatever the case may be, in light of all the #10yearchallenge posts on social media, I thought it would be a fun exercise in humility to share my own then-and-now photos for comparison.

1st year   4th year

When I look back on my time at Western, it seems daunting to count the ways I've changed. Yet, these changes have been largely positive, and I have accomplished things I never imagined I could. While in four years, I likely won't remember the different between a metaphor and a metonym, I will carry with me all that I've learned about myself, how to be an informed and engaged citizen, how to think critically and take nothing at face value, and how far hard work and determination can take you. I can't wait to see what the next four years has in store.

Have a photo you want to share? Tag us @westernustudentexperience on Instagram to be included in our story!

Editing

It is very important to check your own work for typos, errors, inconsistencies, and tone of voice. Errors in writing can impact the level of credibility the audience will afford you. Some things to look for:

- ➢ Spelling and grammatical mistakes (remember that autocorrect doesn't catch everything!)
- ➢ Shifts in verb tense (past = I walked, present = I walk, future = I will walk)

- Stiff, formal tone (this isn't an academic paper or a newspaper article—write like you are talking to a friend)
- Length – while a well-researched piece can be long (some are over 2500 words), you should assess your post to make sure it's not rambling. Conversely, make sure you have enough "meat" in your post to make it worth reading!

Once you have revised your own piece, ask a friend or peer to read it over to make sure you didn't miss anything!

Submission Process

- All content will be submitted to the Digital Engagement Team for review, before being checked for spelling and grammatical issues.
- We understand that telling authentic stories sometimes means writers are sometimes making themselves vulnerable. In order to maintain a safe space, we will accept anonymous submissions. Anyone who is interested in contributing content while remaining anonymous should contact the Digital Engagement team, who is professionally bound to adhere to confidentiality standards that protect the privacy of individuals, while still allowing an outlet for the individual's voice and experience.
- All content must engage with at least one of Student Experience's communication goals.

Things Not Eligible for Posting on the Digital Community

- While we want contributors to feel free to write about topics that are personally meaningful to them, we will not accept any content that contains hate speech, abusive or threatening language, or that which could cause harm to others.
- We will also not post content that does not meaningfully support at least one of the Student Experience communication goals.
- All final decisions about content posting are made by the Digital Engagement Specialist.

Resources

- Grammarly
- Grammar Book
- Readability Test Tool
- Unsplash
- Western Web Accessibility Guidelines
- Western Web Style Guide

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