

Technology Competency Application to Practice



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About the Author

Jose David Melendez is a first-year Master's student in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program at Indiana University, where he serves primarily as a Graduate Supervisor within Residential Programs & Services (RPS). Jose David holds a practicum with the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life, where he researches history specific to IU's Greek chapters and presents leadership workshops to current Greek students. He is a brother of Phi Delta Theta fraternity, where he is one of the founding members of his undergraduate chapter at Florida International University. Jose David studied public relations and sociology during his undergraduate studies and was heavily engaged in civic engagement opportunities through a service-learning organization known as Alternative Breaks.

Jose David is proud to call Miami, Florida home and he aspires to positively impact his community as a professional in the future. He enjoys exercising, connecting with music, going on nature walks, and gaining new knowledge on a wide variety of topics. As a first-generation student, Jose David has had to learn about technology primarily on his own and has taken courses throughout his education that have taught him foundational skills in this area. He considers himself to be digital educator thanks to his experience across a variety of programs and through observing trends across digital spaces.



Introduction

We have entered a new age of society where technology has not only become intertwined into everyday life, it could be seen as essential to the accomplishing of a variety of tasks and responsibilities. Technology is dynamic and influential in nature, its constant changes have an impact in the way that higher education is approached (Jones, Schuh, and Torres 2017). As American society continues to move forward along with other societies around the world, issues that involve diversity, access, innovation and civic responsibility are still at the helm of important conversations that need to continuously happen (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). Technological approaches can be bridged with student affairs practices in order to meet students where they are at and continue to tackle concerns hindering student education.

With the growing influence of technology in today's modern age, The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) recently added technology to their competencies. If student affairs professionals and the field itself are to effectively deliver student learning and development, all parties involved must be able to understand current trends and practices in technology and learn how to incorporate it into their daily work (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). As a rising student affairs professional that has grown with the digital age, I have seen technological and social media use to be crucial to the work that I do because it is a language that connects with the current pace and culture of today's student population. My digital comprehension is a way for me to meet students where they are at and mold learning opportunities into a language that can be easily understood.

Systems of higher education already imbed technology into their daily operations that can include orientation presentations, admissions processing, enrollment management, marketing, dining and hospitality, student support and student learning. As technology and the use of social media continues to grow, student affairs professional should also aim to understand how these systems work so that they can use it as another avenue in their approach to student learning and development (Jones, Harper, and Schuh, 2011). Technology is in the culture of today's students, it is a driving force on college campuses that gives insight into the characteristics of student populations (Renn and Patton, 2017). This report will aim to explain the integration of technology to the student affairs field by examining competency outcomes that professionals should meet and how to understand if one is mastering it along the way. This report will then breakdown the author's own understanding of how a digital identity influences work in student affairs, along with an introduction to his digital footprint.

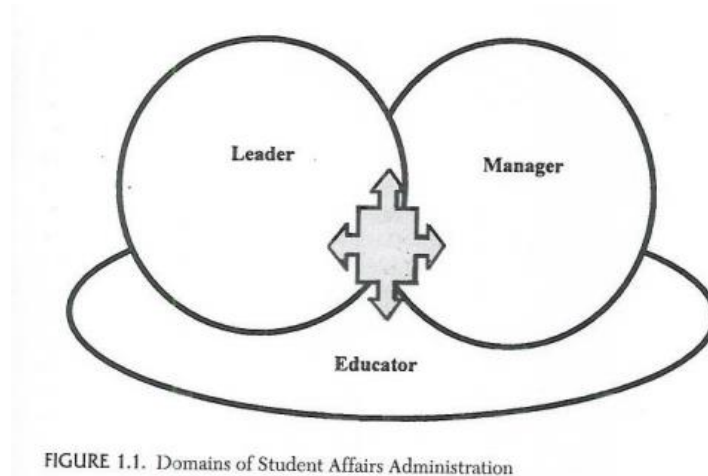


Application of Technology to Student Affairs

Technology is an important complement to student affairs because of all the avenues of engagement that it can open up. “Digital and social technologies have the power to reimagine the student experience” (Cabellon and Junco, 2015, p. 51). Technological integration can be used to organize and store countless amounts of documents, it can increase channels of communication between students and other professionals, and it can be used to give new life to institutional culture. “Student learning and success spans environments that are both physical and virtual; thus, student affairs educators must proactively engage students within these settings” (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 5). In Miller and Prince’s (1977) work, *The Future of Student Affairs*, they argued that the mission of the institution is to educate the whole student, not just their intellect. If student affairs is to educate students holistically, then approaches to education should also be holistic through the integration of a variety of platforms and tools that students are able to comprehend best.

Student affairs practitioners have adapted to meet the growing demands of diverse student populations (Cabellon and Junco, 2015), which means that they should also be ready to adapt to the new technological integration that is currently at hand. With the approach of generation-z (gen-z) students, Rokkum and Junco (2017) claim that the profession is currently in a position where it is underprepared to meet students where they are at digitally because of how fast technology is evolving; there will need to be a proactive approach in ensuring that the field does not get left behind in the digital age. Rokkum and Junco (2017) also state that social media usage will need to increase among professionals in order to continue engaging with the today’s student population. Continuously meeting students where they are at is an approach that will give valuable insight on how to improve as a field moving forward.

To be successful in practice, a student affairs professional must educate, lead, and manage (Creamer, Winston, & Miller, 2001). Each domain needs an integration of technology in order to fully maximize engagement across multiple avenues with students. The following subsections will give breakdowns of each domain along with technological competency outcomes that correlate with each domain.



(Creamer et al., 2001).

The Educator

At the forefront of the work of student affairs professionals, the role of the educator is the most foundational (Creamer et al., 2001). Throughout all the interactions that professionals have with students, bringing new knowledge and perspectives to encourage critical thinking is an aim that helps support student development. As much as students are learning from educators, an educator must also be open to receiving new perspectives that they might not be aware of in order to continuously improve as an educator. According to competency report from ACPA & NASPA (2015), one should aim to remain informed on the patterns of technology use, its purposes, and the functionality of those technologies. Being informed on current technology practices that students are involved in can help educators understand the language that students are more familiar with and shape approaches off of that.

Phrases such as “Retweet” (I agree), “Slide in the DMs,” (Private message in someone’s inbox) and coded language through emojis/emoticon use are examples of terminology that students (including myself) are using to communicate thoughts and expressions. If a professional is able to understand the different contexts of these terms, then they might be more equipped to frame conversations with points that students will be able to easily pick up. Campus cultures can be complicated and require comprehension by skilled observers who can translate them into realities to parties that may need that insight (Creamer et al., 2001). The ability to pick up on the dynamic settings that are present on campus relates to one of the foundational outcomes of the technology competency, which is to demonstrate adaptability to fast changes in technology use (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). Educators can practice this adaptability by engaging with student populations through commonly utilized technological tools and platforms (ACPA & NASPA, 2015) that students are familiar with. Instagram is a social media outlet of particular interest since it is one of the most popular apps in today’s age along with its variety of functions; professionals can use Instagram to promote events within offices and share highlights of the work that is being done.

It is vital that student affairs administrators understand that education, no matter its form or host, can impact individual and community development (Creamer et al., 2001). Student

affairs has the potential to be a positive influence in society as it can empower generations of students to come (who will then empower future generations after them) with holistic growth needed to create active citizens for a better tomorrow. Integrating technology into the mission that educators are aiming to accomplish is a way that education can be enhanced.



The Leader

The leader is able to see the potential that a campus environment has and then act on shaping environments to enact this vision (Creamer et al., 2001). Leaders are informed on what the needs and demands of the community are and then focus their efforts on creating environments that promote sound learning. Leaders are also able to share the vision that they have for the community with followers so that other people are empowered to be a part of positive change (Creamer et al., 2001). By being educated on current issues across college campuses, student affairs professionals can enact equitable learning environments for students for equal opportunities of success. Leaders can stay up-to-date on current issues affecting higher education by engaging in personal and professional digital learning communities (knowledge communities, InsideHigherEd, webinars, social media, etc.), which allows them to expand their insight beyond just their own campus (ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

Even though the issues affecting students may parallel between campuses, leaders should also implement the foundational outcome of drawing upon research, trend data, and environmental scanning when infusing technology into their approaches (ACPA & NASPA, 2015) since student populations will vary from campus to campus. Leaders can create environments that empowers students to have their voices heard (including voices that are not as represented) in order to ensure that equitable representations of student bodies are able to be a part of the change making process (Creamer et al., 2001). This type of empowerment can encourage students and student groups to engage in heightened levels of collaboration that could result in a greater sense of community. By monitoring the campus climate, leaders in student affairs can motivate the populations of students that need extra attention and recognize the students that are contributing greatly to the community.

Appropriately utilizing social media and other digital communication tools to promote, market and engage students in activities is a strategy that could professionals apart in the community (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). My undergraduate university does a great job at

highlighting the successes and daily activities that go on around the campus, and I believe this increases campus affinity because it shows that the main page of the school engages with the lives of students. The social media team is intentional in notifying students about events that are happening throughout the week and showcasing the different elements of the campus that makes the environment unique. Leaders that combine technology into their work always be mindful of ensuring that the pulse of the college community is felt so that all can see the great work that is being put out on a daily basis.



The Manager

The manager is one who is able to commit to continuous quality improvement across the campus community by being open to feedback and to the voices of the people that make it up (Creamer et al., 2001). Continuous improvement requires eliminating barriers that hinders education and setting excellence as the standard that one must achieve (Creamer et al., 2001), it involves strengthening the shared vision that leaders create and educating all parties that are a part of the community on how to live the values that are embedded in the goal. Using technology is a way that managers can achieve continuous quality improvement by modeling and promoting “equitable and inclusive practices by ensuring all participants in educational endeavors can access and utilize the necessary tools for success” (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 33).

Managers in student affairs can also play a big role in the public relations side of university affairs, especially when crisis emerges. The University of Oklahoma faced a public relations crisis early in the year when a video emerged of a white student covered in blackface and using a racial slur. “Since this story has been published... the SGA and Panhellenic presidents have also advocated for steps to be taken to prevent further incidents such as these and the Black Student Association has given a list of demands to the university in response to the video.” (Allen, 2019, para 1). Not only was this issue brought to light thanks to technology, but managers in student affairs can use the wide coverage to learn information about the incident in order to properly address it in a timely manner.

Since most students are using social media to interact with each other and the community, managers can utilize these outlets as a way to conduct environmental assessments about the campus. Integrating technology into campus assessments allows professionals to make data-driven decisions that can carry more value with university officials (Creamer et al., 2001). Gathering as much data as possible can provide managers more insight on what areas of campus need adjustment, which departments could use more staff evaluations, and which areas of

campus are doing just fine the way they are. Campus cultures are being filled with multicultural communities, managers should be intentional in actively seeking to understand the forces that shape these environments in order to know how to approach them (Creamer et al., 2001).



Identifying Competency in Student Affairs

ACPA and NASPA's technology competency has different levels of proficiency, which allows for a dynamic comprehension of where one's engagement with technology is at. Proficiency throughout the various outcomes revolves around one's understanding, engagement and vision with technology in relation to student affairs. Below is a summary of some outcomes needed for competency within each section.

A professional who meets the foundational outcomes of the technology competency is one who:

- Has a surface level understanding of technology trends,
- Understands how that can affect student learning,
- Incorporates technology and social media in their engagement with their work.
- Has awareness of one's digital identity and how get others to talk about it

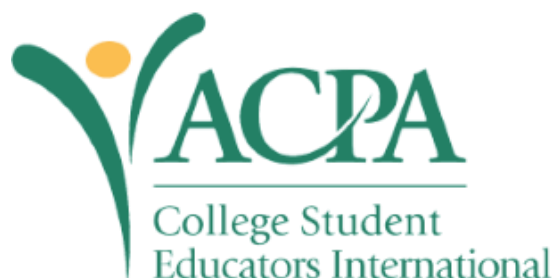
A professional who meets intermediate outcomes of the competency is one who:

- Understands current technology trends
- Is able to model/promote adaptation to its effect on education
- Has a more active digital presence within student affairs, and one who is able to create a variety of digital strategies on how to enhance education
- Can create a variety of digital strategies on how to enhance education

A professional who has a more advanced comprehension of technology is one who

- Can provide leadership and ongoing training for the creation of a genuine digital identity
- Can provide leadership and seamless integration of digital communication to customer service, education, marketing and community engagement
- Can provide leadership for the creation and assessment of technological tools

- Engages in practices that ensures that the community has access to technology and the education needed on how to use it
- Contributes to research and assessments on digital technology use



(ACPA & NASPA Logos)

Identifying My Own Competency

When it comes to the technology competency, I believe I have an intermediate level of competence based off of my current expertise. With my parents coming from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and little education, I was the first one in my family to have even a slight understanding as to how computers and technology functioned. In the beginning of the sixth grade is when I was introduced to my own desktop computer and my own cell phone; I was also introduced to the idea of having to explain everything that I did to my parents so that they could attempt to understand what was happening with the technology that now had. With the introduction of this kind of technology in my household, I immediately wanted to learn as much as possible about everything that I was presented with, and I believe this is what sparked my interest in learning about technology.

At the foundation of my learning is Microsoft Office and Adobe Creative Suites. Microsoft Office is used all throughout systems of education and I saw it as step one on my path towards understanding how systems of computers work. I started off learning Microsoft Word, followed by PowerPoint, then Excel, and now Outlook. Outlook is the latest Microsoft application that I have added to my arsenal as I was introduced to it in the start of my graduate school experience. Outlook's calendar system syncs to the calendar on my phone and my computer, so it is easy for me to be aware of all the notifications and tasks ahead of me. Adobe Creative Suites is the following area of digital tools that sparked my interest and I was able to use this resource for creative designs and presentations. Photoshop was complicated at first, but I was able to pick up on the basics through YouTube videos, and then eventually self-teach myself tools that I would need. I would go on to pick up InDesign (a more in-depth method of creating documents from scratch) and Acrobat Reader (a tool that helps you edit and pick apart PDF

documents). I believe I have the knowledge to teach others about simple functions of these systems to the point where they can freely explore the rest of the tools without confusion.

With some of the technological approaches mentioned here, as well as my social media usage that will be discussed in a later section, I believe my understanding of technology aligns with the following outcomes:

- Generate a wide and varied array of digital strategies for enhancing educational interventions with multimedia, interactive tools, and creativity-enhancing technologies.
- Design and assess outcomes that utilize social media and other digital communication and collaboration tools for promoting learning focused interventions and engaging students in these activities.
- Proactively cultivate a digital identity, presence, and reputation for one's self and by students that models appropriate online behavior and positive engagement with others in virtual communities.
- Model and promote adaptability among students, colleagues, and educational stakeholders in the face of fast-paced technological change and demonstrate openness to the introduction of new digital tools by others.
- Provide leadership for the seamless integration of social media and other digital communications with broader educational, customer service, marketing, and community engagement efforts that communicate and develop dialogue and community around shared common institutional values (*An advanced outcome*)

Digital Identity as a Student Affairs Professional

I believe it is important for me to present my authentic self in the different spaces that I put myself in, including the digital world. I am a firm believer in not separating parts of who I am from my social media and my digital spaces because of how it would invalidate my story and my expression of self. I enjoy showing the work that I do for my students and for my institution, but I do not want to show only one dimension of who I am as a person. By combining elements from my personal life and my professional life into my digital identity, I am able to showcase all the good that I do for myself and for my community in a manner that allows others to see my authentic self. This public representation of my holistic self will be presented in a method that exemplifies values of excellence, responsibility, and institutional pride.

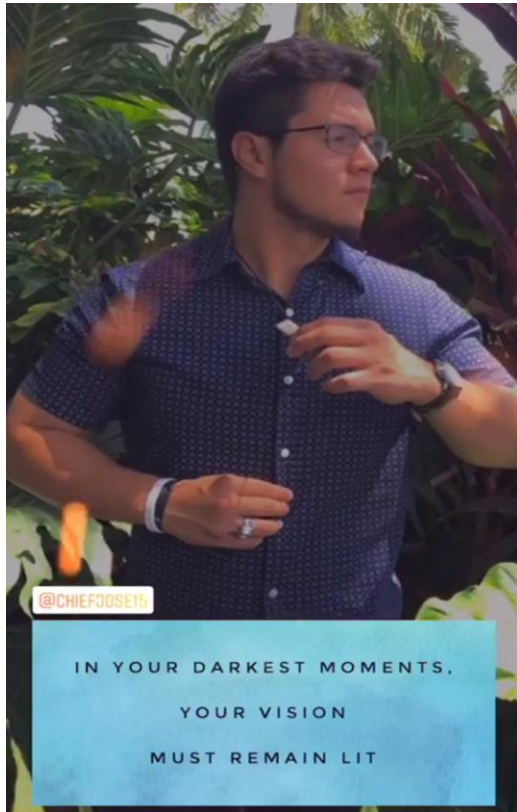
Along with the technology competency, I find myself constantly exploring the competency of personal and ethical foundations. The foundational outcomes in this competency emphasize “awareness and understanding of one's values and beliefs, especially as related to professional codes of ethics and principles for personal wellness” (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, pp. 12). This competency speaks to me since I believe it is important to develop a strong understanding of the morals that set the foundation for who one is as a person. Kohlberg's theory on moral development speaks to my digital identity journey because of how I was able to move across the different levels of moral reasoning (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). When my digital identity was first created, I was not aware of societal expectations for how I managed that side of me and I just focused on what I wanted to put out in cyberspace. As I grew throughout

my education, I was able to exit the preconventional stage (level one) and move into the conventional stage (level two) where I was aware of societies expectations and used that as a guide for how my digital identity was approached. I believe that I am currently in the postconventional stage (level three) where I am molding my digital identity based off of my self-chosen principles and where I no longer depend on society's expectations for direction (Patton et al., 2016).

Baxter Magolda's self-authorship theory is another perspective that helps to explain how my digital identity has grown. Magolda defines self-authorship as "the internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity and social relations" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 371). Magolda states that there are four phases in the journey toward self-authorship: Following Formulas, Crossroads, Becoming the Author of One's Life and an Internal Foundation (Patton et al., 2016). Trusting the internal voice and securing internal commitments are elements that are essential in the process of feeling self-authored (Patton et al., 2016). It has taken me a long time for me to come to terms with that my internal beliefs are, but I believe that all the years of following other formulas and then challenging all that I have learned has truly helped me discover what it is what I personally choose to live by, based on my own moral compass.

Social media can be an excellent platform for personal development and learning, but it can also be destructive in its nature based on what kind of content people put out into those spaces. As I continue to interact with so many different students and professionals throughout my journey, I am mindful that people will be curious as to who I am as a person and will want to search me. Understanding the nature of today's society, I craft my accounts to be presentable so that I do not have to worry about backlash from others. Some professionals choose to separate their personal accounts from work accounts since they could be separate lives, but all my accounts carry all the elements of my life since it is what I do. All of my social media platforms are used to connect with friends, family and associates, but the type of engagement that I deliver varies from platform to platform

My accounts are public and open to viewing by anyone, and I am comfortable knowing that because I believe I have nothing to hide that would hinder any future opportunities for me. There are different etiquettes and/or unspoken language on how one should communicate with others through different social media platforms, and this is knowledge that guides my interactions with different people across different platforms. I aim to educate the students that I work with on how to maintain their digital identity in a way that promotes mindfulness and authentic expression of self in a presentable manner. I also aim to continue educating myself on current evolutions to technology and social media, so that I can continue to serve as a leader with knowledge that is up-to-date. From Myspace, to Facebook, to Twitter, and now to Instagram, these are the social media platforms that I have engaged with that have helped me develop my digital identity.



Personal and Professional

When it comes to connecting with professionals and other graduate students in the field with my digital identity, I choose to maintain a bit of a more formal tone in my communication approach since the conversations that I have are mostly in public domains where many other people can see. As a public figure that represents many areas of a university (both in my past and in my present), I personally choose to have my social media platforms as public spaces where anyone can stumble upon them. I understand that I might have some type of relationship with these people, but I also understand that I want communication tactics to be presentable because there could be some opinions that generate in the minds of others if the conversation is viewed; private messaging is a great feature through social media since you can connect with others in a more personal way.

Another factor that professionals should keep in mind is what their personal philosophy is for following/be-friended the students that they work with on social media platforms. I am personally open to allowing my students connect with me on social media since that is an opportunity for them to understand me better, but that is something that I do not go out and seek. My social media handles are shared across the pages that I have, and I will allow students to take the initiative if they wish to connect with my digital presence. This practice sounds promising to me because it allows students an opportunity to create that conversation for themselves whenever

they are ready, and it does not force them into a situation where they have to give an immediate response if one asks them.

Social media engagement has become a big part of my every day routine because it gives me an opportunity to connect with the ever-growing society around me and because it provides a quick medium through which I can interact with my peers and colleagues, even from afar. Social media engagement has helped me develop social capital with a variety of college students and administrators, and it has helped me feel validated in moments of need. When it comes to managing a digital presence, I have always been advised to be mindful of the content that I share because it can be seen as a direct representation of who I am as a person. From football coaches, student affairs advisors, public relations professors and close friends, I have received a variety of advice on how to manage my digital presence, and I am always open to receiving feedback at any time. Now more than ever as a rising student affairs professional, I understand that I am seen as a public figure throughout all parts of my daily work. I represent the university and the department that I work for everywhere that I go, my information is easily accessible to others and I need to remind myself to compose myself in a presentable manner to those I come across.



Social Media

Facebook: I use Facebook as a place where I share life updates and current issues that are important to me. One of the highlights of using Facebook for me is that I belong to a variety of group pages where I am able to interact with specific audiences of people based on interests or similar pursuit. Some of the groups that I belong to include: IU HESA Class of 2019 & 2020, Millennials in Student Affairs, Student Affairs Graduate Students, First-Generation/Low Income Folx in Student Affairs, and Future Student Affairs Grads. The connections that I create throughout these groups allow me to stay up-to-date with current challenges and highlights in student affairs, as well as hearing about how others are experiencing the field

Twitter: I use Twitter as a place to unwind by scrolling through the endless comedy that the page presents, and I also use it to stay informed on topics that are important to me. I do use Twitter to connect to professional resources on occasion, but this social media platform is more of a self-care medium for me since it provides me with more humorous content compared to the other platforms that I have. I understand that some content may not be understood by some audiences with its pop culture / comedy references, so I am mindful of what I publicly share on my timeline. At the end of an intense work day, Twitter allows me to reconnect with the world while getting to share a much-needed laugh at the same time.

Instagram: Instagram is a platform that I use for my own creative/story expression, and I also use it to stay informed on trends that current students are engaging in. As a past public relations student, I take the presentation of my page and any other page that I work with seriously because I know that Instagram is a tool that is used by a large number of students across different areas. I use Instagram as a way to learn about campus and department cultures that different places have by following engaged accounts. The type of engagement that these different accounts have with their students gives me an inside look to the type of relationships that are present in the different spaces that I enter.

GroupMe: This platform is the most recent out of the different tools that I use, and I feel that it is one of the most crucial ones that students can use since it is a user-friendly method of group conversation. GroupMe is a groupchat application that allows users to create group conversations with tens to hundreds of participants at once, and a phone number is not required to be added into a conversation. I use groupme in order to communicate with my building staff as a Graduate Supervisor, I use this app to communicate with other graduate students across the country in a “Graduate Students of Color” groupchat, and I use it in communication with my fraternity. I enjoy using GroupMe because of its color scheme, the ability to not include my personal phone number when communicating with others, and because of some of the interactive features included in the chat options (calendar events, polls, and likes).

YouTube: This video/music streaming platform is a way for me to integrate more creative expression in the work that I do, and in the self-care that I partake in. On the music side of things, I use YouTube as my go-to streaming platform because I love the wide variety of searchable music that is present. A genre that gives my mind and body the best form of energy is instrumental music that comes from either movies or video games; this type of music is harder to find on other streaming services such as Pandora or Spotify, but it is more accessible to me through YouTube. I also use YouTube to present informative videos and/or videos that complement the message that I am giving to students.

Conclusion

Technology usage, being in control of that technology usage, and educating others on their digital footprint are important talking points that students should be further educated on. Reflecting on how I have grown with technology over the years, I notice that I have always maintained a keen eye on the growing patterns that I and other students engage with in the digital world. Patterns will come and go, but it is a language that students are able to understand as they engage in digital spaces. I feel connected to the digital age with my Apple products (phone and laptop) and I feel that I have the world at my fingertips when I combine the connectivity capabilities that these items have together. Student affairs professionals must integrate digital and social technologies to engage students in new ways, market the value of the university’s opportunities and teach students how to take advantage of these tools to adapt to the 21st century (Creamer et al., 2001). A lack of fluency in digital and social technologies could mean that student affairs professional are not fully aware on how to meet students where they are at, which indicates a lack in the understanding of the student’s overall experience (Creamer et al., 2001).

It can be challenging working with students who do not understand the importance of having a presentable digital presence (D. Gowin, personal communication, January 29th, 2019). I aim to make it a priority of mine to have intentional conversations with the students that I work with on this topic, and then educate as needed. As time has progressed, my impression management, which is the idea of monitoring how one presents themselves out to others, has changed in the wording of posts that I create as well as the content that is shared. As I have moved along my path towards where I am now, I have archived content that is no longer necessary to be viewed, I have removed content that I thought to be inappropriate for digital spaces, and I have also been more intentional in being selective with the content that I choose to see.

As I continue to rise as a student affairs professional, I will continue to be mindful of how I can present my genuine self on digital platforms while still furthering my development as a learner throughout the process. I anticipate that technology will further evolve with the next generation of students and I will need to learn new approaches to technology use, so I am committed to having a dynamic nature in my approach to technology in student affairs. I will be mindful of a seamless learning model approach when it comes to technology since learning can result from any moment in the college experience with limitless (Manning, Kinzie and Schuch, 2017). I want to educate the students that I work with on promising practices for using technology for positive results instead of just exploiting the system for likes and retweets. I want to walk alongside other students as we strive to create more equitable and inclusive systems of higher education, so that diverse communities of students can feel valued and represented in society.

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