

Instant Connections

TECHNOLOGY HAS CHANGED HOW WE COMMUNICATE. And communicating with students abroad is no exception. In these seemingly faster-than-the-speed-of-light times, education abroad advisers need to master new technologies if they want to communicate effectively with their students. Being able to reach out to students employing their preferred way of communication can be a tremendous advantage to education abroad offices.

Instant Messaging vs. Twitter

Twitter is all the rage, but instant messaging has been around for some time and is still being used by today's students. There are two major differences between the two applications: privacy and message size. Instant messages can be long and are private between two parties. Twitter limits messages to 140 characters so that it can be converted to SMS and texted to a mobile phone and (depending on your security settings) can be seen by anyone. One of the best attributes that both of these technologies share is that they are free.

Instant Messages (IMs) (service from AOL, MSN, Yahoo! ICQ, etc.) are real-time messages between two or more parties who have "friended" each other. No one else on your friend list can see messages you've sent directly to another person; the conversation can only be seen by the parties sending the messages and is not publicly displayed. The message can be as long as it needs to be, sent from any computer or mobile device.

There are numerous instant messaging programs available that allow users to chat with people anywhere in the world. The more popular programs are MSN, Yahoo!, and AOL, but some countries have their own specific instant-messaging software. To chat with someone, you must both be using the same program; a student using MSN couldn't instant message an adviser on AOL without combining their accounts in one application. For an adviser to be accessible, they should have an account with AOL, MSN, and Yahoo, preferably with the same username. There are sites that will combine your IM





Join the Movement for Study Abroad

IN APRIL OF 2008 NAFSA launched “Join the Movement for Study Abroad,” a Facebook group dedicated to building support for the Senator Paul Simon Study

Abroad Foundation Act. Thousands of students, educators, and others have joined together to support the Simon Act, which would ensure that many more American college students have the opportunity to study abroad in high-quality programs across the globe.

Facebook’s growth, and its evolution into a recognized avenue for political organizing and communication, has been remarkable. The site recently surpassed 150 million users, 70 percent of whom joined in 2008. Half of Facebook’s users are on the site every day, and the largest rate of growth in Facebook users is among those over the age of 35. More than 400 members of Congress have Facebook pages. Facebook isn’t just for checking in with friends and showing off pictures of kids and pets. The site has become an important space where individuals and organizations can share information, engage in a dialogue, and mobilize action and support on behalf of important policy issues.

To date, more than 3,200 people have joined NAFSA’s “Join the Movement” group, and it has become an important way for NAFSA’s public policy team to reach Simon Act supporters and their extended networks of friends, family, and colleagues at critical times in the legislative process. This fall, NAFSA will be making significant upgrades and changes to the site to improve its functionality and create even more channels for our Facebook community to get involved, share information, and help us advance the Simon Act in Congress. Join us at www.nafsa.org/jointhemovement.

accounts into one log in that will allow you to access to all of your accounts simultaneously. Platforms like Trillion or Meebo allow you to open one application, but be able to chat with anyone who has an account with the four major instant-messaging providers—MSN, Yahoo, AOL, or MySpace. (For a listing of some of the instant-messaging programs available, visit www.go2web20.net/.)

Twitter limits messages to 140 characters, called “tweets;” they are usually short statements about what a person or group is doing. On Twitter, users follow other users, which means they can read their messages or “tweets;” and people who follow you can read your “tweets.” When a user sends a message, anyone following that user will see that message. Users can also send a direct message (DM) to anyone on Twitter and the message will not be seen by anyone but the intended recipient. DMs are the equivalent of an instant message. Users can protect their tweets so that only their followers can see them; if user tweets aren’t protected, anyone can find them by searching for keywords or by username.

Unlike IM, users don’t need multiple accounts to use Twitter. Users only need one Twitter account to talk to another person on Twitter. However, if a user follows a large number of people/organizations/etc, there are applications like Tweetdeck that can help you organize them by topic. Although Twitter user numbers continue to grow (thanks to recent celebrity endorsements by Ashton Kutcher, Oprah, and Barbara Walters), not everyone is using Twitter yet. (For more on Twitter, check out the *Ultimate Guide for Everything Twitter*: www.webdesignerdepot.com/2009/03/the-ultimate-guide-for-everything-twitter/.)

IM Uses

According to an informal survey that was conducted in October 2008, few international education offices are taking advantage of instant-messaging services. Only 22 of 95 respondents said they were using an instant-messaging program and they were usually only using it for personal chats. Most people were not using instant messaging because they were using other forms of communica-

tion like an e-mail listserv, or they did not see a need to use this form of technology or did not know how to use it for anything other than personal messages. This is unfortunate since there are a number of practical uses of instant-messaging software for the international education community.

Some of the innovative ways education abroad advisers can use instant messaging include using them to save time and answer students questions without them having to make an appointment or stop by the office and to also answer students’ questions as they are looking at materials. In addition, it is possible to send links to students and colleagues through instant-messaging programs so that if someone forgets where something is located, or if they have a question about a specific program, advisers can send them the link instantly. This also means that advisers can work with students on their application materials and answer their questions while students are at home talking to their parents, while they are overseas on their program, or while they are in their dorm room attempting to fill out their applications.

Instant messaging can also be an effective tool to aid students while overseas with

any problems they may have. For example, if a student needs to know if a course will count toward their major or program at their home institution, they can have a conversation with their education abroad adviser or academic adviser while she or he is in that country so they can make a decision quickly. In addition, if a student has a crisis or feels extremely homesick, he or she can talk with people back home and the people back home can guide them and/or refer them to the appropriate people for assistance.

Instant messaging can also be used between colleagues across the globe in collaborating on programs or projects or even to simply stay current on the latest trends. This is an inexpensive way to network with people within your area of expertise and also receive immediate feedback on an issue or problem that may arise. In addition, it can be a great way to let people know what is happening in your part of the world. For example, if a crisis happens in a country, people in that country can send messages to the home institutions letting them know what is happening. It is also something that can be accessed anywhere in the world, which makes it extremely mobile.

How to Get Started with Instant Messaging

1. Decide on a user name that your students will recognize and will be easy to remember.
2. You will need to decide if you want to use just one instant-messaging program or create accounts for several and combine them using something like Meebo.
3. Start promoting your account information at events, in e-mails, at meetings, and on your business cards, brochures, and flyers.

Twitter

In October 2008, few international educators were using Twitter. Only 2 people out of 95 who completed the survey said they were using Twitter. Many did not know what Twitter was or how they could use it within their office. But the international education presence is growing on Twitter—more than 30 people and organizations had self-identified as being part of this community as recent as May 2009 in a recent blog post (<http://blog.academic-solutions.com/?p=121#comments>).

Colleagues are finding out that Twitter is a useful tool and resource. They are using it as a news source to be kept up-to-date with what's happening in the international education field as well as the world. They are sharing information by announcing recent blog posts, current program location news, and conducting instant surveys for research. Advisers announce deadlines, scholarships, education abroad fairs, contests, and information sessions. They are sending out information like office hours or news about their office and campus activities. Twitter can also be used to conduct job searches by subscribing to postings by companies, headhunters, and employment agencies. Users can even update their Facebook status from Twitter (using Tweetdeck).

Twitter can also be an effective tool in crisis management. For example, when UC Berkeley student James Karl Buck was arrested in Egypt for photographing a demonstration, he tweeted that he was arrested using his cell phone. His followers quickly contacted the U.S. embassy, UC Berkeley, and a local lawyer who got him released the next

day. Although this is an extreme example, Twitter could be used in other situations, like directing students to a group meeting point during an emergency or simply reminding them their field trip has ended and the bus back to campus is leaving in five minutes.

How to Get Started with Twitter

1. Decide on a name that will be easily recognized by your students and is easy to remember. Use the same name as your IM or other social media accounts.
2. Set up a schedule to post regularly.
3. If you are a multiperson office, give others access to the account so they can tweet too.
4. Start promoting your account information at events, in e-mails, at meetings, and on your business cards, brochures, and flyers.

Start by following information resources:

1. Follow the news media (@bbcworld or @cnnbrk). This is especially helpful if you have programs running in a variety of countries.
2. Follow internship supervisors, admission offices, faculty, program directors, etc. to

International Education on Twitter

Accademia dell'Arte: @Accademia
Al Jamiat Magazine: @aljamiat
Amigos de las Américas: @amigoslink
API - @API (Academic Programs International)
AIFS: @aifs
Arcadia University Abroad: @ArcadiaAbroad
AustraLearn: @Austalearn
CEAstudyabroad: @CEAstudyabroad
Cross Cultural Solutions: @volunteerabroad
David Comp: @DavidComp
GeoVisions: @GeoVisions
Global Citizens Network: @gcnetwork
GoAbroad.com: @goabroad
Go Global: @Go_Global
IES Abroad: @IESAbroad
InternationalStudent.com: @intstudent
Manitou Heights: @ManitouHeights
Miami University Abroad (Ohio): @MiamiUabroad

NAFSA: @NAFSA
Noambit Audio Guides & Practical Advice for Travelers in Europe: @noambit
Penn State Altoona: @PSUaaAbroad
Penny Schouten: @PennySchouten
Radford University International Education Center: @RUIntlEdCenter
Semester at Sea: @SemesterAtSea
Study Abroad in Italy: @StudyAbroadItal
STA Travel: @statravelers
StudyAbroad.com: @StudyingAbroad
UC Davis Summer Abroad Office: @UCDSummerAbroad
University of Maryland Study Abroad Office: @umstudyabroad
Wandering Educators: @WanderingEducators or @jessiv

keep up with what's happening on locations hosting your students.

For a current list or to add your name to the growing list visit: <http://blog.academic-solutions.com/?p=121#comments>.

3. Use the following hashtags in your tweets: #studyabroad, #internationaleducation, or #volunteerabroad so colleagues can search for them.

Promotion is crucial to the use of these two forms of technology. Without promoting accounts to students, university, and colleagues, advisers will have a difficult time getting people to use them as an additional form of communication. Advisers can also learn by watching others—they can set up an account and follow people without actually sending any messages themselves. With instant messaging, students will contact advisers if they have a question. With Twitter, advisers can observe other colleagues behaviors and learn from them. Both technologies are a great means of communicating with students in spaces they are already in and also a great way to save time, if managed properly. **IE**

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