

Social Media Storytellers: On Academic Freedom

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Project Summary

Social Media Storytellers: On Academic Freedom created a cohort of undergraduate student storytellers to research, analyze, and explore academic freedom through multimedia content. Students were a part of a two-quarter class, which included one quarter dedicated to traditional seminar discussions around academic freedom and one quarter dedicated to developing media projects. As part of a culminating assignment, the cohort created a media series that speaks directly to their peers on this pressing campus issue. The class included faculty from across the School of Humanities as well as communications staff across UC Irvine and humanities alumni.

Impact

It's still early days in terms of the impact on the campus community. But we do have some outcomes to report:

1. In terms of the undergraduate course, we had a very involved cohort of 12 students who took all two quarters of the class (one additional student joined us for winter quarter but not spring quarter). The class community was strong, and the students developed close working relationships with one another—with almost 70% of them choosing to collaborate on their final projects.

2. We did launch one student-generated social media project this quarter, and it has performed exceedingly well.
 - a. Video 1 (Do UCI students know what academic freedom is?) has been viewed 88,300 times, received 1,266 likes, was shared 479 times, was reposted 22 times, and received 33 comments. That's a lot of engagement!
 - b. Video 2 (Do UCI students agree with these academic freedom statements) was viewed 28,200 times, received 530 likes, was sent to 446 other accounts, and had 41 comments. So less far of a reach, but it inspired commentary from the campus community.
 - c. Video 3 will go live sometime in the next week or two.
3. The reception on campus has been quite strong too! We've heard from colleagues that our academic freedom social media series has been inspirational in terms of research-driven communications work that centers the student perspective. The article on academic freedom that we wrote was included in Hal Stern's monthly newsletter as well as being sent across campus via a Zotmail (by way of our monthly newsletter).

We are still very much at the beginning of seeing the impact of the class on the campus community, however, because most students are still submitting their final projects (we will have a total of around 8 final projects). These final projects will be uploaded to our website in early July and will be included in a special edition of our monthly newsletter in August. Most, if not all, of these projects will be shared on our social media in the fall. We will have more impact to share by the end of summer and into the middle of fall.

This class has been far more successful than we could have hoped for. We had an impressive group of students show significant growth in terms of how they understand academic freedom, and how they can communicate it to a more general audience.

We have supported our students to create a series of interesting, innovative, and well produced media that addresses the topic of academic freedom from the student perspective. The media produced is diverse, too, including original fiction inspired by the class content, a 6-part podcast series, a video essay on the history of academic freedom, a website page that showcases the work, and original art to accompany each of the student contributions, among other projects!

We had several tiers of participants represented in our project:

1. Undergraduate students participated in the fellowship
2. Faculty from 4 departments participated as seminar leaders.
3. Staff from 3 different communications offices across campus participated.
4. Alumni participated in sessions and feedback
5. The social media reached thousands of individuals across our IG platform as well.

At this point, I'd argue that we've at least reached 85,000 people with just one of our videos. Assuming that no new people watched the second video, that number holds. But assuming we reached some new people with our videos, we're above the 85,000 number. Our immediate next steps are to take the content created by our VOICE fellows and upload to our website/send out to our community. Beyond that, we hope to run this fellowship again next year.