



Summer 8-24-2007

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Recommended Citation

Sherman, Teresa, "Facebook Brings First-Year Students Together" (2007). *News and Events*. 3220.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/3220>

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Facebook Brings First-Year Students Together

August 24, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Before students in Illinois Wesleyan University's class of 2011 even step into a campus classroom, statistics say they have already spent hours in front of their computer screens, intently researching the one subject they all have in common – each other.

Of the 572 incoming first-year students at Illinois Wesleyan, 456 of them have already joined the social networking Web site Facebook. With more than 1,600 wall posts and 123 discussion groups generated, IWU first-years have connected sooner than ever, discussing topics such as majors, the summer reading program and long-distance relationships.

"I'm not sure what advice to give you," joked Kelly Petrowski, student senate president, addressing the students at the New Student Convocation on Tuesday, August 21. "What more can I tell you that you haven't already found out?" added the senior, letting them know more than 78 percent of them had already met through Facebook groups.

For the generation who turned "Google" into a Merriam Webster Dictionary-approved verb, "Facebooking" has become a preferred way to keep in touch. The international trend is so pervasive that Nicole Brown-Davis, director of Multicultural Student Affairs at IWU, thought to create a Facebook group to promote this year's ALANA (African-American, Latino American, Asian American and Native American) student orientation week, held in mid-August. "The Facebook group was a very useful tool, allowing incoming first-year ALANA students to connect with students who've already participated in the program," said Brown-Davis.

In total, 3,725 students, alumni, faculty and staff have joined the IWU Facebook network, their profiles detailing everything from their political views to their favorite movies and music. Even IWU's team mascot, Tommy Titan, has his own profile, with more than 400 friends.

Facebook was created in February of 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, then a 20 year-old Harvard student. The Web site caught on regionally, spreading from Harvard to other east coast colleges and beyond. Currently, Facebook is an international Web site open for anyone to join.

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