**SOCIAL MEDIA — APRIL FOOLS 2015**

**Executive Summary**

The following social media proposal was uniquely crafted for a Champlain College April Fools joke. Many large brands such as Google, Youtube, Virgin America and Kayak have created content or modified their websites to participate in this holiday. Successful campaigns have generated media attention, inclusion in blogs, social media mentions, and increased traffic to their websites.

The following proposes a faux website designed to mimic Champlain College’s main homepage, using photos both found online and digitally manipulated of Taylor Swift to replace the images in each of the homepage panels. The images would suggest

While this website would look and feel like Champlain’s homepage, it would not later Champlain’s real homepage in any way.

**Situation Analysis**

April Foolspranks are popular, especially in higher education. Many schools that have participated have been listed in blogs and on websites recapping that year’s pranks:

<http://collegewebeditor.com/blog/index.php/archives/2014/04/01/top-5-fishy-april-fools-day-highered-web-homepages/>

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/tweed/its-april-fools-day-believe-nothing/28484>

<http://www.mstoner.com/blog/design-and-usability/college-university-april-fools-homepages-2014-edition/>

*Opportunities*

From our research, nothing similar to this campaign has been done before. There is a big opportunity to gain media attention for Champlain on blogs, websites, as well as social media. It is a way to gain the attention of prospective students, and a chance to demonstrate our “out of the box” thinking approach at Champlain and the fun, human side of our brand. And, as all the CTAs on the faux website will still click through to real pages on the real site, there is an opportunity to increase traffic to our site as well as many other internal pages.

*Subject Reasoning*

Using a pop music star will make this campaign relevant and interesting to our target audience. Additionally, Taylor Swift has been praised for her use of social media and marketing, her own pranks and fun activities on social (<http://www.boston.com/ae/celebrity/gallery/celebrity_pranks?pg=10>), and her continuous effort to build connections and brand relationships with fans. Recently, Forbes praised Taylor for her marketing strategy: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/robschwartz/2014/10/21/a-master-class-in-marketing-taught-by-taylor-swift/2/>

Taylor Swift not only appreciates fan-created artwork, tributes, etc…, but actively shares them and publicly shows her appreciation for the dedication. When one fan created a video mashup of Taylor Swift songs and music video clips, Taylor shared the video with her fans on her own social media channels, but also went a step further - by sending the fan a hand written note and a check to help her pay her student loans: <http://www.etonline.com/news/156321_taylor_swift_treats_her_fans_like_her_own_bffs_here_s_proof/>

*Social Influence & Reach*

Taylor Swift has 54.8 million followers on Twitter, 24.7 million followers on Instagram, and 71.2 million likes on her Facebook fan page. If Taylor were to share or repost this mention, the potential reach would be in the millions, building awareness and raising visibility of Champlain College. Taylor has a large social influence and an even larger reach that could be tapped into with this campaign.

We believe, based on Taylor’s history of publicly appreciating her fans, utilizing social media to actively build relationships with her fans, and her sense of humor, and her relevancy and popularity among our target market, she is the perfect candidate to leverage for this campaign.

**Strategy and Tactics**

The strategy of this campaign is simple - create a replica homepage of the website (that would live at a separate URL, such as champlain.edu/Taylor or champlain.edu/AprilFools) with the panel images replaced by photos of Taylor Swift, some of them doctored to appear as if Taylor is on Champlain’s campus.

The headlines of the panels would be changed, parodying Taylor Swift song lyrics and album titles but still maintaining a “university” style language. The Calls to Action titles within each panel would also be changed in the same style, but the click through links would remain the same. Each click through, while having parody copy, would still click through to our real website pages.

This faux website would be shared on all of our social channels, using shortened links to initially hide the URL as to not immediately give away the joke. For example, if the URL of the faux website lived at [www.champlain.edu/AprilFools](http://www.champlain.edu/AprilFools), it would be shortened into an Ow.ly tracked link using Hootsuite, our third party social media management tool. When the user clicked on the link, they would be taken to the page, with the true URL displayed to identify the website’s true identity. This action is twofold - it not only hides the joke until the user lands on the webpage, but it also incorporates analytics to track the number of clicks, time on site, total traffic, traffic source, and subsequent pages visited. This will allow us to determine the reach and success of this campaign.

A fake press release on the News Blog would accompany this campaign to add to the story and to heighten the absurdity of it (which would also clue in the audience of its fake nature).

The bottom of the website, as well as the bottom of the press release, would note that the campaign was a prank in the spirit of April Fools.

The website would be made live on the morning of April 1, and subsequently taken down that evening. Our social media content that evening will also reveal the prank, leaving no confusion with the audience as to whether it was true or not.

**Risks**

Pushing the boundaries always includes an elevated risk; in this particular case, it could mean a negative response from Taylor Swift and her management with a request to remove the content, as well as negative feedback from our audience. However, with great risk comes great reward. Should Taylor Swift choose to share our efforts with her audience (or even comment on our activity), our reach and potential shares, traffic, and visibility will be increased exponentially. And, as this does not affect the actual homepage of the website, it will not interfere with other Champlain audiences who may not fall within our target audience or understand the prank nature of the campaign. Instead, it will be limited to our social channel audiences, who already have a knowledge of our brand and brand personality. Any direct visitor to Champlain.edu or its portal pages will not be affected.

**Goals and Outcomes**

One goal of this campaign is to show the fun, human side of our brand. Past content on our social channels has shown that our audience appreciates and responds well to humor, and has had a generally positive sentiment towards humorous posts from the from our brand. Other goals include increased social media engagement, media mentions, as well as a positive reception from our audience, increasing brand affinity.

We expect successful outcomes such as social shares, positive comments from our audience about the campaign and/or our brand, mentions on blogs about our campaign, or accepted or prospective students citing it as a reason they want to attend or apply to Champlain.

All actions will be tracked via analytics to determine the success of the campaign, and social media will be monitored during the entire duration of the campaign to watch for negative sentiment. Should the campaign not be successful or cause a negative reaction, the Digital Community Manager will unpublish the website and end the campaign. A report will be supplied after the campaign to report back on its success.

