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Fresno State spins a new Web presence on YouTube: *Other schools notice as viewers rave about student-generated videos.*

Article by Doug Hoagland ~ Photo by John Walker
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Fresno State is getting national attention on the vide-sharing Web site YouTube using student-generated clips that promote the university with humor, sentiment and song.

The school might be an education pioneer in its informational efforts on YouTube, where users can upload, view and share video clips. Other schools have noticed. Some viewers are raving about the videos.

The students' 30-second clips had snagged about 10,000 views by Sunday. The exposure comes cheaply – the university spent about \$3,500 on the project.



The clips were created for a campus-sponsored video contest called “I Am Fresno State.” Contestants filmed images that conveyed their good feelings for California State University, Fresno. There were 10 entries.

Peter Robertson, coordinator of the contest and director of annual giving at the university, said the clips weren't designed specifically to be used for recruiting new students or donors.

“If that happens, that would be great,” he said. “Some people at the university have asked if this is going to make us any money. I said it wasn't designed to make money. It was designed as a public relations campaign because Fresno State didn't have an official presence on these new Internet platforms.”

Being on YouTube makes the university look current and fresh, he added.

“YouTube is fashionable and trendy,” Robertson said, “It's like the Hula Hoop or the Pet Rock, but I think it will have a longer shelf life.”

Some viewers have gushed over the videos. “Haha, I love this,” one person wrote on YouTube. “I don't go to Fresno State, but I LOVE IT!”

Incoming Fresno State freshman Kelly Awbrey of Reedley said she hasn't seen the videos, but she likes that the university is using YouTube. It shows Fresno State is technologically savvy, Awbrey said, and it could influence high school students deciding between a community college and Fresno State.

Consumer-created advertising is a new trend. Marketing firms are using it to promote such big names as Frito Lay, but Fresno State appears to be one of the first universities to use the technique.

Said Sam Huxley, vice president of marketing at New Media Strategies, a marketing firm in Arlington, Va., “For a college, it's one of the first efforts I've heard of. It's definitely a smart move.”

Huxley said some YouTube videos get millions of views, but Fresno State shouldn't be discouraged by its smaller numbers. It can take months, even years, for videos on YouTube to find a bigger audience, Huxley said.

University of Georgia fund-raiser Jill Bateman heard about Fresno State being on YouTube from Robertson. She was intrigued for several reasons. “Live film showing you the campus and why people are proud of their institution gives you a connection that you just can't get from reading about it,” Bateman said.

She also said YouTube and social networking platform MySpace are good ways for universities to reach younger alumni who prefer communicating on computers.

Fresno State created an account at MySpace and a Web site (iamfresnostate.com) to spread the word about the video contest and the videos.

The videos got some extra national attention when a New York Times business reporter wrote about them in late May.

Some media members say the Fresno State students who did the videos are Internet celebrities, said Bryan Harley, who won the first place in the contest.

“I don’t know that I’d go that far,” said Harley, 22, of Fresno, a May graduate in mass communication and journalism. “We need more than 100,000 views to reach Internet celebrity status, and just being on YouTube doesn’t make you a celebrity.”

Harley’s video draws inspiration from the “I’m a Mac, I’m a PC” TV commercial in which cool Mac guy is pitted against nerdy PC man.

Harley’s video protagonists are button-down, stuffy UC (University of California) and casual, accessible Fresno State. Harley portrays UC in a blazer with perfectly combed hair and Fresno State in a sweatshirt with tousled locks. In the video, Fresno State brags about having the Save Mart Center, a commercial winery and cheaper tuition, leaving UC mostly speechless.



After filming himself in each role, Harley used editing software to create a seamless clip in which the two characters appear to be together.

Harley won \$350. As of Sunday afternoon, his video had 2,369 views, the most of the 10.

(The real UC is a good sport. “We recognize it as tongue-in-cheek and that’s the spirit in which we’re viewing it,” said Brandy Ramos Nikaido, director of UC Merced’s Fresno Center.)

Second-place winner was Nick Lopez, 24, of Fresno, another May graduate in mass communication and journalism. His video shows him putting up about 1,500 Post-it notes to spell I Am Fresno State. What took him 90 minutes to film appears in 30 seconds of speeded-up video as the chaotic “The Flight of the Bumblebee” plays in the background.

Lopez said he put himself through Fresno State taking six years to graduate after changing majors several times. “I love the school,” he said. “I’ve been there so long. It just grows on you.”

He won \$250.

Leslie Cooper, 24, of Clovis won third place with a nostalgic look at her journey through the university; she graduated in May as a mass communication and journalism major. Shots include her acceptance letter and Cooper wearing a cap and gown. A Fresno State song plays in the background.

Cooper, who won \$150, said all the videos have “heart.”

University officials picked the first- through third-place winners. About 80 attendees at the awards party in May watched all 10 videos and picked as their favorite the clip by Ryan Welch and three of his buddies, who also won a \$100 prize.

Welch, a 20-year-old history major, is from Tulare. His friends are Brandon Leong, a biology major from Clovis, Graham Wahlberg, a construction management major from Fresno, and Marc DiTirro, a business major from Lafayette. All are 19. Their video includes parklike scenes of Fresno State’s trees and rose garden. “We think campus looks really nice,” Welch said.

Wahlberg and Welch wrote the music and lyrics for a song that plays in the background. Welch describes the tune as upbeat, silly, catchy and singable. The first line is “Fresno State, I love you so.”

Welch, Leong and Wahlberg did the trilling; DiTirro the filming.

Overall, Welch said, “It’s a pretty silly video.”