

A Tale of Two Students

by Justin Goldsborough

Meet Tyshawn Taylor and [Angela Hernandez](#). Chances are they've never met before, but they have some things in common. For starters, both are college students.

There's a good chance you've heard of Tyshawn before, especially if you're a college basketball fan. Tyshawn is a big part of the University of Kansas Jayhawks basketball team that is ranked No. 1 this season and favored to win it all. He also played on a U.S. under-19 team this summer that won the 2009 world championship. And one day he'll likely play in the NBA.

There's probably less of a chance that you know Angela. She doesn't play college basketball—at least not that I could find a record of—and she's not featured on ESPN at least once a week. But she is an up-and-coming young PR professional who serves as president of the PRSSA chapter at Central Michigan University. And last week she co-moderated one of the most popular social media chats on Twitter—[#prstudchat](#)—with successful author and social media thought leader [Deirdre Breakenridge](#).

#PRstudchat, a monthly Twitter conversation between students and PR professionals (not a conversation about good-looking PR guys and gals) is monitored by Breakenridge and [Valerie Simon](#), and usually finds its way into the Twitter trending topics, which are the 10 most popular subjects being discussed on Twitter at any given time.

So what's the point of comparing a future NBA star with an ambitious college senior? Well, Tyshawn and Angela are great examples of how social media can help, or hurt, a student's personal brand.

A couple of months ago, the [Kansas basketball and football teams made headlines for all the wrong reasons](#). There was a fight between the two groups on campus that several people witnessed, and Tyshawn actually got hurt during the incident. The fight itself was disturbing, but whether we care to admit it or not, fights happen on college campuses. What was much more disturbing than the incident itself was the social media tirade Tyshawn unleashed afterward on his Facebook page:

(Note: the comments below are a screenshot of exactly what was posted on Tyshawn's Facebook page.)



What was your reaction after reading those comments? Would they change the way you look at or feel about someone? Tyshawn's case is an exception to the rule. Because of his ability to dribble, pass and shoot a basketball, his Facebook status posts that day likely won't harm his reputation too much.

But what if he was a "regular" college student? I don't mean regular in an average way, just regular as in "not soon to be a professional athlete" regular. What would have happened then? When Tyshawn went to interview for an internship or his first full-time job, would these posts have come up? The chances that they would have are increasing every day. In fact, 45 percent of respondents to a [recent CareerBuilder survey](#) said they use social networking to research job candidates.

A couple of days after his Facebook diatribe, Tyshawn apologized for the posts. He [told the *Lawrence Journal-World*](#): "I felt I made some comments I shouldn't have made. I didn't have intentions of it being bad."

Tyshawn also later shared that his posts were actually rap lyrics from some of the music he listens to. But the question is—did anybody hear that part of the story? We live in a fast-paced world with information coming at us from every direction. And so often with social media, initial perception is reality.

Keeping that in mind, what would HR departments across the country find if they researched our friend Angela? They'd find a college senior going through much of the same uncertainty and asking many of the same questions about the future her peers are asking.

But Angela is using social media to ask questions and share advice about her career path. As some of her recent blog posts note, as head of her school's PRSSA chapter, Angela often answers questions from her peers. When one student told her a few months back that they still weren't sure if PR was the right field for them, she blogged: "GASP! A college student who is undecided on a course of study...wait, that happens all the time."

In order to help her friend and any others who were experiencing the same indecision, Angela tapped her network for advice, something seasoned professionals do all the time.

What resulted was a five-part blog series titled "Is PR Right for Me?" Angela sought out PR thought leaders like Breakenridge and [Lauren Fernandez](#) and asked them everything from how they ended up in PR to their least-favorite college course to what unexpected skills they had used on the job.

"Angela Hernandez offers a fantastic example of how to use social media to begin building a brand for yourself while still in school," Simon said via e-mail. "Angela has used her blog, [In the Lede](#), to not only share her classroom experiences, but to reach out and inspire conversation from professionals. She understands that social media is not just about talking, but about listening and engaging."

Social media also helped her develop relationships, and it was those relationships that earned her a chance to guest-moderate the November #prstudchat. Breakenridge and Simon took note of Angela's blog series and thought it would make a great topic for their monthly Twitter event, which made perfect sense because one of the goals of #prstudchat is to start a conversation where students and professionals can learn from each other.

There's nothing like facilitating a chat between hundreds of folks at all levels who are interested in PR to expand your network and open potential employers' eyes to what you bring to the table. After the chat, Angela blogged about the overwhelming support she'd received (see below) and separately she shared some advice she'd learned about how students should and shouldn't use social media:

"One piece of advice that has always stuck with me is, If you wouldn't want it published on the front page of the newspaper, then don't publish it online. I once heard of a professor who looked up each one of his students on Facebook and put together a slideshow of all of their profile pictures for the first day of class. It was a big wake-up call for a lot of people who didn't realize just how public some information really is."

Solid advice for all of us—college students and professionals.



About the author

Justin Goldsborough recently joined Fleishman-Hillard Kansas City, where he specializes in social media strategy and education. Before that, he was at Sprint for two years where he managed the company's employee social network, Sprint Space, and led efforts to improve customer outreach via social media, specifically Twitter. Goldsborough is a huge Bon Jovi fan and once won third place in a karaoke contest at Chicago's John Barleycorn's with a rousing rendition of Livin' on a Prayer.