

Increasing Visibility and Student Engagement

through Strategic Recommendations



Prepared for
THE FORUM

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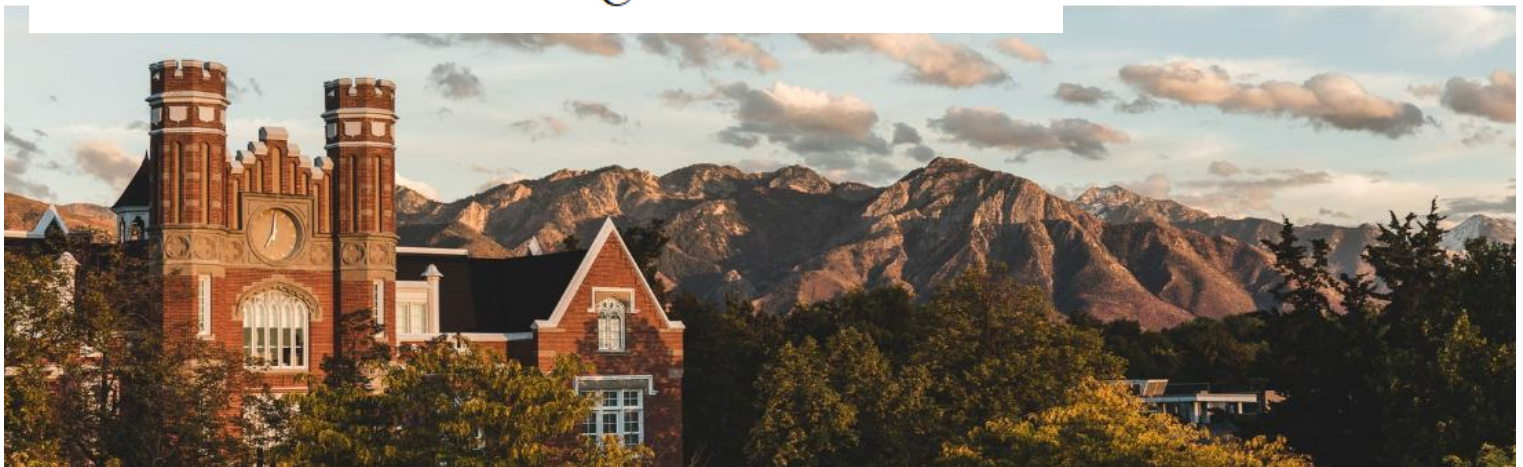


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Executive summary

Introduction

This report investigates why The Forum, Westminster's student-run news media, is struggling to engage students and maintain campus visibility despite students having an interest in consuming news.

While students desire relevant news and news about campus life, they'll find and share these stories almost everywhere except through The Forum's traditional channels. This report will provide **concrete, data-driven insights** to help The Forum connect with students and **increase** their **visibility** on campus.

Background on Problem

From our in-depth research and analysis we've identified **two root problems**:

The Forum's traditional news distribution channels do not align with students' preferred ways of consuming content, and the **limited amount of staff and resources** The Forum has to work with, as well as **unpredictable posting schedules** as a result of the amount of staff.

Research Methods

We found these root problems and planned for potential solutions by engaging in a **competitor analysis** of other similar universities as Westminster, conducting on campus **in person interviews** with *The Forum* and students, and gathering data through a **campus wide online survey**.

Recommendations

We recommend The Forum undertake several strategies for increasing their visibility on campus:

- launch **campus-wide QR code campaigns** for instant visibility and feedback
- **diversify contributor recruitment**
- **develop predictable, themed content schedules**

By continuing to base stories off of the survey data gathered and utilizing student content preferences, coverage will align with student interests and habits and will likely strengthen visibility and relevance.

Conclusion

Our research makes one thing clear: The Forum has a **strong foundation**, but its future impact depends on **meeting students where they already are** and giving them more opportunities to see **themselves** within stories. By listening closely to student preferences, analyzing peer institutions, and engaging directly with campus units, we've identified a set of practical, data-backed strategies that can significantly strengthen The Forum's visibility and relevance on campus.

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1 Introduction

We're excited to share with you our team's follow through from our original proposal, focusing on **concrete solutions** to increase The Forum's campus visibility and student engagement.

You might be surprised to learn that while students want authentic campus stories, our survey results show they're not finding them in traditional print or online news. They're finding and sharing news almost **everywhere else**.

In the pages ahead, you'll see why a shift toward our proposed solutions isn't just a creative idea we came up with – it's a **data backed path** to give The Forum the audience it deserves.

1.1 Problem Statement and root problems

Despite students having an interest in campus stories The Forum still faces challenges engaging with students and their general visibility on campus. The Forum is experiencing two root problems here.

First, the **traditional news distribution channels** they use do **not align with students' preferred ways of consuming content**.

Second is the **limited amount of staff and resources** The Forum has to work with, as well as unpredictable posting schedules as a result from the amount of staff

2 Methods

The methods are **adapted** to each **group** and the specific **information** we aim to gather. The methods include

- **content analysis**
- **interviews**
- **survey results**

The section explains for each method why the research design was chosen. By combining these methods and analyzing the results, we will be able to **identify strategies** to increase students' interest in The Forum.

2.1 How We Gathered The Data

Our teams were able to gather 133 responses from students, staff, faculty and alumni over the course of a week.

We used tactics ranging from having professors ask their students to participate in class, tabling at events, and approaching students on campus. Overall, we were able to gather an **excellent sample** of responses and gain meaningful insights into how the Westminster community feels about The Forum.

2.2 Student Survey

To understand if students are interested in participating with The Forum and what content they want to see.

Method:

- Surveys in classes of different majors to get a random sample (help from professors is required: they should tell the students to do the survey in the class)
- Personally asking students on campus
- QR codes around campus
- Incentive: \$30 Amazon Gift card for more participation

The survey is the best way to gather data from a **large sample** in a **short time**. It is important to find out the opinion of students from many different majors.

Questions for Students:

- Are you interested in seeing spotlights on the Forum? (It is necessary to explain briefly what is meant by a spotlight.)
- Would you be interested in participating in a spotlight feature to share your story with the Westminster Community?
- What type of content would you enjoy spotlights most? Short Instagram posts, YouTube Videos, normal articles?
- What type of content would make you more interested in engaging with the Forum?
- How do you usually hear about the Forum?
- Would you be more interested in the Forum if the content was posted on social media?
- What content would you be most interested in engaging with?
- Which additional content categories would you like to see?

2.3 Interviews with Campus Units

To find out if **departments, clubs, and offices** are interested in collaborating with The Forum. The goal is to **identify barriers** (such as time, staffing) and opportunities.

Participants:

- Student Clubs
- Academic Departments
- Campus Offices

Method:

- Email outreach (interview) to club leaders, department heads, and office directors.

Interviews are a good choice if the goal is to get a deeper understanding of a topic; in this case, it is important to build understanding of the campus units.

Questions for Clubs, Departments, and Offices:

- Is your (club/department/office) interested in collaborating with the Forum? (It needs to be explained what collaborating could look like.)
- What format are clubs willing to participate in – videos, articles, social media posts?
- Does staff have enough time to do more work?
- How often could you (club/department/office) participate?

2.4 Interviews with the Forum Staff

Finding out if the Forum is willing to **collaborate** and if they have enough **time** to adapt new ideas.

Method:

- Meeting with head leaders of the Forum and the working staff to find out capacity on both levels.

Interviews are a good choice if the goal is to get a deeper understanding of a topic.

Questions for the Forum:

- How often is the Forum able to make updates and stories recognizing limited student employees?
- Are you open to collaborating with clubs? (It is needed to explain what collaborations could look like.)
- Would you be open to using pre-written content from clubs?

2.5 Interviews with Career Center

To get help regarding the research.

Questions for Career Center:

- What is most successful in Career Center survey research?
- How does the Career Center data tell you about the Career Center's visibility to students?

2.6 Email Outreach for Amlumi

To get to know if they would be interested in being part of The Forum.

Method:

- Email outreach and short interviews coordinated with the Alumni Office.

Questions for Alumni:

- Would you be interested in co-creating content with the Forum and being in a spotlight? (It is needed to explain what this collaboration could look like.)
- Would you donate to make the Forum better?

2.7 Website and Social Media Content Analysis

To find out what strengths we could work on and what weaknesses exist.

Analyse:

- The Forum website
- The Forum social media
- Other well-doing websites of student media to get ideas

Method:

- Content analysis of the Forum's website
- Content analysis of "The Stanford Daily" (has personal stories and different sections like sports)

Questions:

- What content do successful student media platforms have? What can be adapted?
- What are the strengths from the Forum we could work with?

2.8 Competitor Analysis

Introduction

This memo will detail my findings from analyzing **three other student newspaper publications**. The schools used were Augsburg University, Whitworth University and Saint Martin's University due to their similar size and range of programs to Westminster.

Below, you will find several observations from conducting this research as well as ideas The Forum may be able to implement.

Wordpress & Websites

All the university publications used Wordpress and were a bit “**cleaner**” than the way in which The Forum's Wordpress is set up. When I say cleaner, I mean that the front page was not jam packed with images, but rather there was **more space** on the page.

The categories at the top of the page were set up similar to The Forum's, but I think that on **The Forum** page, there is simply **too much information** and imagery being thrown at the reader at once.

As I have learned in Erin's classes, some blank space is ok, and actually helps the reader to orient themselves. Overall, I think cleaning up the website is a good place to start for The Forum.

Subscription Button

Saint Martin's University's paper, The Belltower, utilizes the **subscription button** at the **bottom righthand corner** of their website.

I thought this was a really interesting idea and something The Forum could utilize. You put your email address in (this would work for students, alumni, and community members), and you get a copy of whatever their newsletter or monthly publication is. I think this could work for The Forum and create better audience retention. I also believe that many alumni would be interested in this program.

Social Media Content

One thing that none of the student newspapers I looked at did well was social media content.

The Forum is very **active** in their social media presence, even if the engagement is not entirely there. Augsburg University's The Echo posted very bland graphics on their website that got no engagement.

Whitworth and Saint Martin's seem to have abandoned their Instagram accounts altogether.

I believe that The Forum does a better job than any of these universities of tapping into Instagram content, as we know that many students prefer to consume any kind of content through social media.

Conclusion

All in all, I believe The Forum can benefit from a few website tweaks and maybe a subscription button, but in general you are doing a good job. The Forum is tapping into Instagram content better than any of the other universities I researched, and I believe by making some small changes to the website, The Forum's audience will be more excited about the publication.

3 Findings & Analysis

We're excited to share some **emerging patterns** from the recent campus survey we conducted.

It has already shown practical ways for boosting The Forum's visibility and making it more responsive to campus interests. We're making **real progress** as you read this and anticipate deeper insights as we keep analyzing and expanding participation.

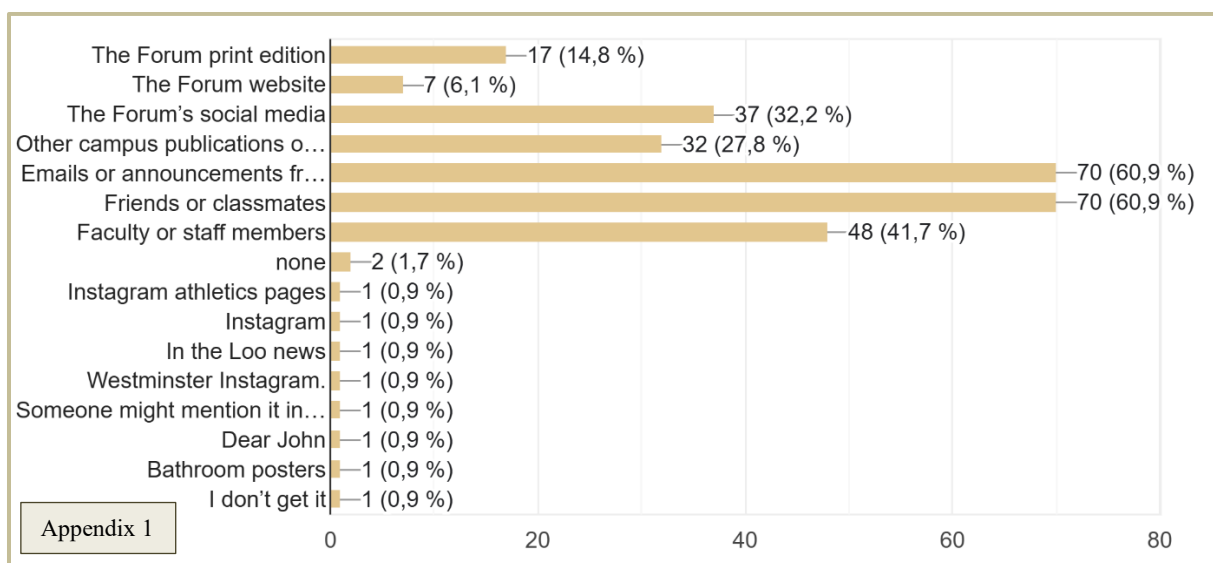
As of today, we have 133 valid responses, giving us a substantial early dataset and strong momentum moving forward.

3.1 Student News Habits: What the Data Tells us so far

Our initial analysis focuses on **four core questions**:

Question 1:

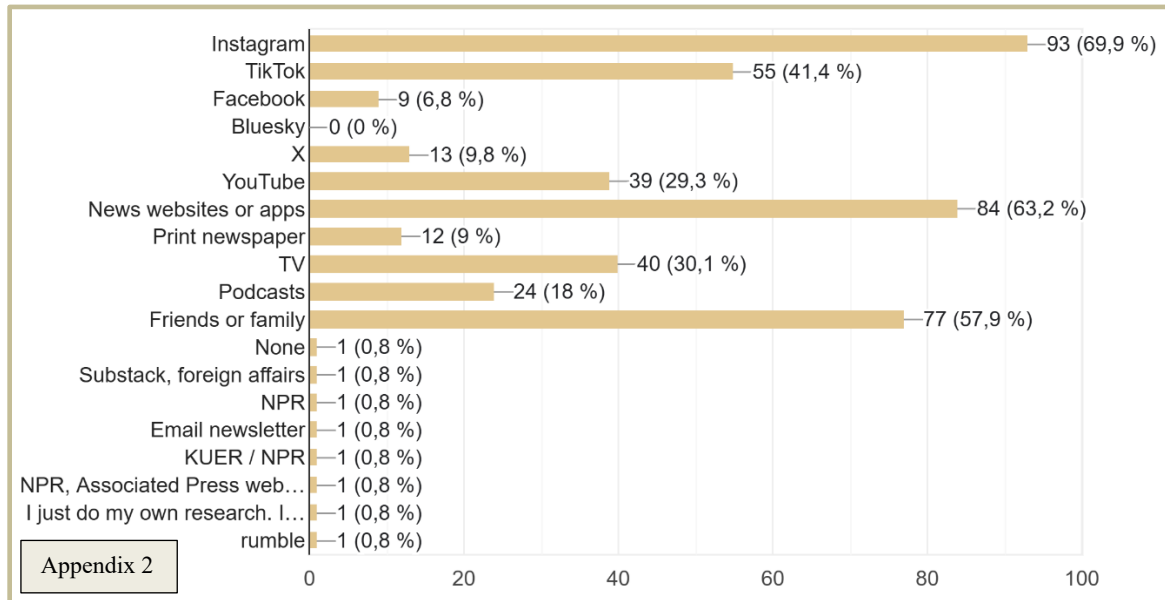
Where do students usually get campus news?



The majority of students (61%) hear about campus news through **friends or classmates** and **emails/announcements**, while The Forum's **print edition and website** see relatively little traffic (15% and 6%). On the other hand, social media channels are substantially better at 32%.

Question 2:

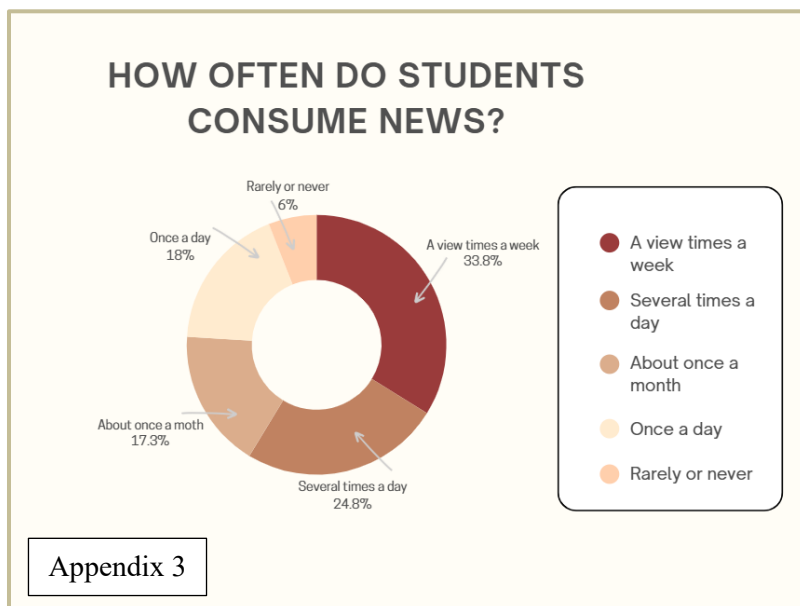
Where do students get local, national, or international news?



By no surprise **Instagram** dominates at 70%, **news websites** at 63%, friends/family at 58%, and **TikTok** at 41%. Printed newspapers and TV are much less common.

Question 3:

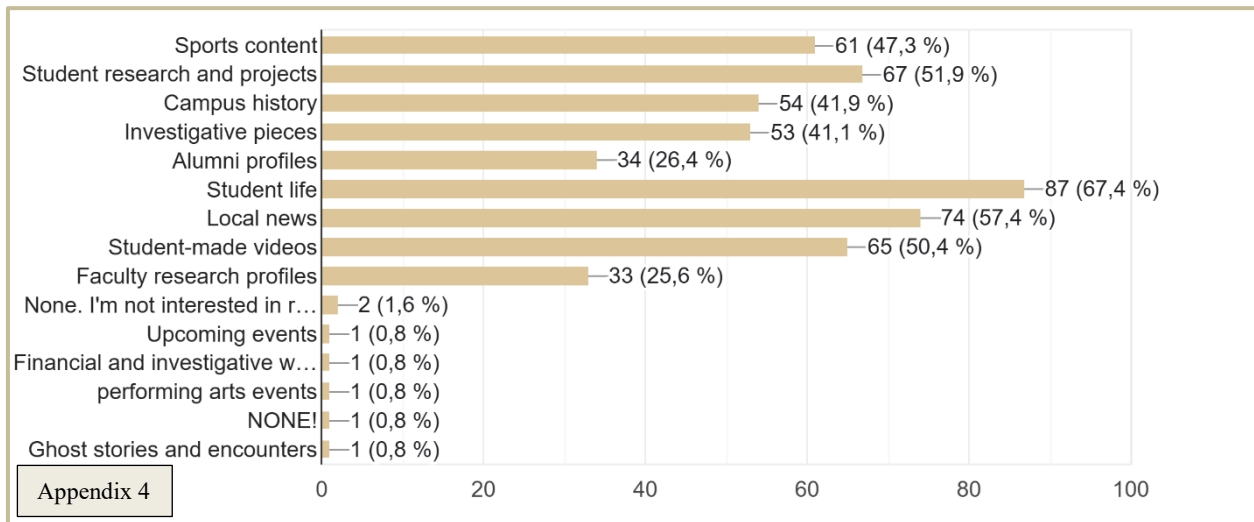
How often do students consume news?



Over 60% of people consume their news at least a **few times per week**, with about 25% doing so **several times a day** and about 18% **once a day**. About a third say they consume news about once a month and only 6% rarely to never consume news.

Question 4:

What content would increase student interest in The Forum?



The highest interest categories are **student life** (67%), **local news** (57%), **student research/projects** (52%), and **sports content** (47%).

Also notable is a desire for **upcoming events**, **investigative pieces**, and **campus history**.

3.2 Connecting the dots: The Story the Data Tells

If The Forum wants to make a splash, it can't just dip a toe in the digital pool—it needs to dive where the **students already are** and ride the current of their **interests**.

Social platforms like Instagram and TikTok, as well as **direct conversations**, are clear leaders for local, campus, and larger scale news.

You may be surprised that there is actually a **strong desire** for **original, student-centered stories, projects, and sports**... but The Forum's traditional formats and channels just aren't reaching the target audience correctly.

We also notice a distinct separation between how students say they value “original, student-centered stories” and how they access them. This distinction reveals that fulfilling their preferences will require **meeting them on their preferred platforms**, not just offering the right topics.

This insight strongly suggests to **shift The Forum's attention to social media channels**.

4 Proposed Solutions

1

Boost Campus Awareness with QR Codes

Pros

- Easy, Low-Cost Implementation: Anyone associated with The Forum can create and place QR codes.
- Versatility: QR codes can lead to Forum social media, feedback surveys, story submission forms—expanding beyond simple promotion.
- Increased Visibility: Fast, physical reminder on campus for students who may not follow The Forum online.
- Channel for fast feedback: Students can instantly suggest story ideas or provide recommendations, supporting direct engagement.

Cons

- Limited Reach: Only as effective as placement and visibility so high traffic areas matter.
- Dependent on Follow Through: If QR codes aren't regularly updated or actively promoted its effectiveness will drop fast
- Potential for Low Engagement: Scanning rates may be low if students don't see immediate value meaning they need incentive or benefit.
- Requires Someone tech knowledgeable : Content behind QR codes (forms, social posts, surveys) must be well-managed and mobile-friendly.

2

Optimize Website Management

Pros

- A visually appealing and well structured website attracts more readers
- Easy navigation makes the website more accessible for students
- A professional website builds credibility
- Integration of multimedia content keeps readers engaged
- User engagement can be tracked

Cons

- New expenses due to website redesign and ongoing updates
- Ongoing maintenance leads to a lot of work
- Technical knowledge needed
- A class or group must be willing to care for the site

3

Utilize Student Surveys for Content Direction

Pros

- Provides insight into what the audience wants
- Likely boosts reader engagement
- Supports data-driven decision-making
- Helps ensure broader campus representation

Cons

- Survey sample represents only a small portion of the student body
- Risk of relying too much on popularity when choosing stories
- Possibility of misinterpreting or overgeneralizing survey data

4

Reallocate Print Resources to Digital Platforms

Pros

- Reaches more students
- Content can be created and shared faster
- Enables interactive content (Polls, quizzes)
- Not much investment needed

Cons

- Limited staff
- Time intense due the consistency of posts required
- New equipment and training

5

Expand Sports Coverage

Pros

- Engage a larger portion of campus, especially student-athletes
- Create opportunities for student-athletes to contribute content
- Align with competitor practices—other schools regularly cover sports
- Build sports-journalism skills for student reporters
- Produce a wider range of photo and video story formats

Cons

- Risk of over-prioritizing athletics at the expense of other coverage
- Staffing/resource challenges (weekend or irregular game times)
- Potential for low interest or reader fatigue if sports coverage underperforms (refer to survey data)

6

Plan Themed and Predictable Content Timelines

Pros

- **Builds Anticipation & Habit:** Regular schedules (like “club spotlight” or “sports highlights”) give readers a reason to return.
- **Broadens Audience:** Planned themes invite new story types—student life, research, events—helping attract different campus segments.
- **Supports Contributor Involvement:** Clear themes and schedules make it easier for outside contributors to join in.
- **Competitor Success Indicator:** Top college papers consistently use planned themes and frequent updates.

Cons

- **Requires Consistent Staffing:** Predictability means deadlines; with Forum’s limited staff, missed posts are a risk.
- **Risk of Repetition:** Overly rigid themes may lose appeal or fail to capture campus events that don’t fit schedule.
- **Needs Quality & Variety:** Regular posts must remain fresh. Reused formats can lead to reader fatigue.
- **Initial Setup Work:** Creating timelines, recruiting contributors, and communicating expectations takes up-front effort.

5 Recommendations

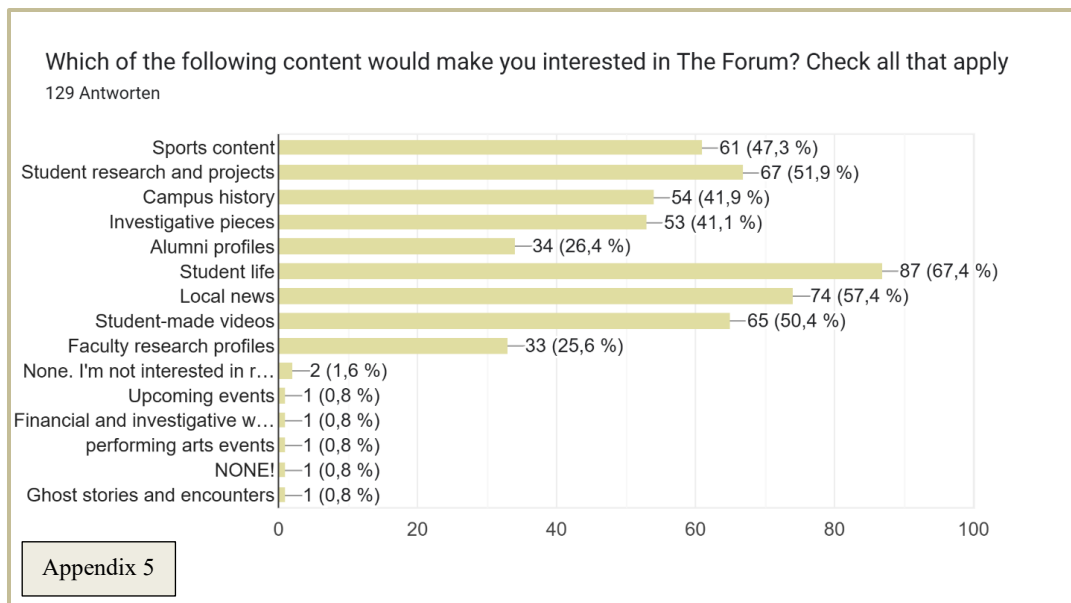
Utilize Student Surveys for content direction

Using **student survey data** to guide **content decisions** can help ensure that coverage aligns with what readers actually want, offering **clearer insights** into audience **interests** and increasing the likelihood of strong engagement.

It also supports more **intentional, data-driven editorial choices** and can improve representation by highlighting perspectives and topics that might otherwise be **overlooked**.

However, survey data has **limits**: results often reflect only a small segment of the student body, which can skew conclusions.

There's also a risk of prioritizing only the most popular story types at the expense of diverse or important coverage, and misinterpreting or overgeneralizing survey responses can lead to decisions that don't truly reflect the broader campus community.



Boost Campus Awareness with QR Codes

We're recommending The Forum implement **QR code campaigns across campus**—not just for promotion, but also to gather **feedback** and **story ideas**, linking students directly to social pages and surveys.

Incentivizing scans through prizes or recognition will encourage initial engagement, and updating the QR content regularly will keep their interest. Simultaneously, The Forum should roll out simple, predictable themed content schedules (like “Student Life Tuesday” or “Sports Friday”), involving various clubs and contributors to lighten the workload and ensure diverse coverage. By monitoring results and adjusting both QR codes

and content strategies based on feedback, we believe The Forum will see more engagement.

Plan Themed and Predictable Content Timelines

We recommend to implement themed and predictable content timelines. This strategy increases visibility because students know when to **expect new content**, which builds a **habit of returning** to The Forum.

It also raises the likelihood that posts will be shown to **new audiences** through the **algorithm**, because consistent posting improves reach on digital platforms.

This solution is achievable with The Forums' small staff size. In the beginning, it is enough to post every two weeks. This is possible even with a small team, and it will build a routine which will allow more posts in the future.

6 Conclusion

Our research makes one thing clear: The Forum has a **strong foundation**, but its future impact depends on **meeting students where they already are** and giving them more opportunities to **see themselves within stories**.

By listening closely to **student preferences**, **analyzing peer institutions**, and **engaging directly with campus units**, we've identified a set of practical, data-backed strategies that can significantly strengthen The Forum's visibility and relevance on campus.