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Google's #freeandopen Campaign: Using a Documentary to Raise Awareness of Internet Regulation among University Students

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GOOGLE'S #FREEANDOPEN CAMPAIGN:
USING A DOCUMENTARY TO RAISE AWARENESS OF INTERNET
REGULATION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By:

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Western Kentucky University
2015

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ABSTRACT

The internet was founded as a non-proprietary tool by which computers could connect and share information reciprocally. This philosophy has allowed the internet to become a fundamental resource in higher education and provides a window by which students can experience the world around them. The primary focus of The #freeandopen Documentary is to maintain an uncensored web by raising awareness of the forces that act against the freedom of the internet and of the resources available to contribute to the cause. The short, 13-minute documentary is funded by Google's #freeandopen Microgrant of \$2,000. It features interviews from students who are activists for the free and open web and reinforces the power of the internet at the hands of university students to fight the forces that act against its philosophy of freedom of expression and contribution. The documentary is amplified by an AdWords campaign tailored to catch the attention of its target audience and by promotional materials such as stickers and T-shirts. This document details the development and implementation of this project.

Keywords: advertising, social media, documentary, internet, technology, market research

Dedicated to my friends and family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my first and second readers, Mark Simpson and Kelley Coppinger, for sacrificing their time and energy to allow me to thrive both inside and outside of the classroom. Their eagerness to recognize and adapt to the needs of their students is what I value most about my experience in the advertising department here at Western Kentucky University.

Furthermore, I appreciate the effort that my third reader, Dr. Clay Motley, has invested in the final stages of my work. I have discovered that he—along with the majority of faculty and staff members at Western Kentucky University—is willing to go the extra mile to support any student in their academic endeavors.

Finally, I offer a special thanks to my family and friends for being my security. The higher I reach for my goals, the more aware I become of the soft couches available to land on should I fall. Thank you all.

VITA

September 19, 1992.....	Born – Charleston, South Carolina
2011.....	Bullitt East High School, Mount Washington, KY
2013.....	Google Student Ambassador, Western Kentucky University
2013.....	Google’s #freeandopen Campaign Microgrant Recipient, \$2,000
2014.....	IT Consultant, Western Kentucky University
2015.....	Web Designer, WKU Imagewest

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Fields: Interactive Digital Advertising and Spanish

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Universities initiated the World Wide Web as a method of transferring research and data reciprocally among researchers. Its potential to transfer information quickly and efficiently between users provided a stimulant effect on scientific advancements and discovery. As the versatility of the web as a social and commerce platform was recognized, its scale increased to the general population and the technology consequently became the focus of regulatory forces, including governments. The unadulterated spread of ideas and information was a benefit to some, but a detriment to others.

Ultimately, the internet has become a source of great benefit and an integral part of the university student's educational experience. Modern higher-education not only relies on internet as a resource, but is a major contributor to its advancement. So when the web's potential is threatened by internet legislation, why is it that the majority of university students do not even know about the fight for a free and open web, let alone advocate for it?

This highlights a major obstacle in fighting internet restrictions: a lack of awareness of the threat among the population, specifically college-level students in the USA. Students must be informed of any attempts at censorship of the web in order to move forward with a defense. The collegiate population holds the power to fight against

closed-door meetings of government organizations who wish to restrict the web, if only they were aware of its personal effects and of their influence on the matter.

In an attempt to raise awareness of the internet policy debate, Google's #freeandopen Campaign made 10 microgrants available to fund projects proposed by Google Student Ambassadors across the globe. Google Student Ambassadors such as myself are tech enthusiasts that represent Google at their home universities for the term of a year. As a recipient of one of these grants, I developed a 13-minute documentary with the goal to raise awareness of the forces that act against the freedom of the internet and of the resources available to contribute to the cause.

While my documentary project fell short of its goals, the project successfully exposed several hundred students and professors to internet policies and opened the subject to further discussion in multiple universities. Additionally, the process of developing the documentary and the adjunct promotional campaign allowed me to grow professionally and to develop a knowledge of internet policies that are vital to my future in digital advertising. In the following pages, I document the process of developing and implementing this documentary campaign.

The Campaign and Grant

The #freeandopen Campaign is a social movement designed by Google with the purpose to ensure that the internet remains a place where everyone has the freedom to participate, freedom of expression, and freedom from unwarranted intrusion.

With emphasis on the college-level demographic, the #freeandopen Campaign designed a microgrant worth \$2,000 that was available exclusively to the 2013-2014

Google Student Ambassadors. It provided 10 ambassadors around the world with an opportunity to develop a defense against internet censorship and restriction by funding projects that protect freedom of innovation and privacy, battle against excessive censorship, and work to open up access to scientific knowledge online.

As a Google Student Ambassador at the time, I was always happy to take advantage of the opportunities that were presented to me. When I was notified by the Google team about the microgrant program in September of 2013, I was aware that a grant program offered to hundreds of Google student employees around the world would be highly competitive. My peers had a diverse range of talents and many of them had more experience than I did in the technology realm. Despite this challenge, I submitted a project proposal. The subject of campaign greatly interested me and working on the project would double as a chance to learn about a subject matter that was highly relevant to my field of study and career interests in technology.

The proposals were selected based on the following criteria:

- Potential impact (if you're successful will it make a difference?)
- Feasibility (can this be practically accomplished in a school year?)
- Scalability (could others learn from and repeat this?)
- Creativity (is this approach new and exciting?)

On October 3, 2014, I received an email acceptance into the grant program from an educational program manager for the #freeandopen Campaign:

“Congratulations!

Google is excited to announce that we have chosen to fund your proposal as a part of the Google Public Policy Micro-Grant Program for Student Ambassadors!

*Google will be awarding you **\$2,000 USD** as well as matching you with a Google Mentor who will be available to assist you in implementing your proposal. You can expect to meet your Google Mentor in late October/early November [2013].”*

My project appealed to the judges due to its potential to reach a wide audience over the internet—the medium which the documentary is designed to protect—and its relatively low cost of production, which was initially projected at just under \$2,000.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Developing the proposal focused heavily on the criteria presented by the official rules: potential impact, feasibility, scalability, and creativity. My initial proposal for a mobile app that interacted with the audience turned out to not be very feasible, but when I was granted the opportunity to resubmit my proposal I was able to change the medium of communication to a documentary.

A successful documentary would reach a wide audience and expose essential information about the internet policy debate. This information would develop a foundation upon which viewers may not only build a deeper understanding, but would have the ability to act. A video would be feasible in that it would be easily adaptable to any obstacles I may encounter during production and there are many methods upon which I could complete the project. This adaptability also reflects the amount of creative range I would have with the interview collection, editing, and promotion processes. Posting the video to free sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo would make it extremely scalable.

Defining the Audience

Beginning the process of production, I had to define goals and research the target audience. Reviewing the materials provided to me by my #freeandopen mentors, it was

clear that my objective was to raise awareness of the internet policy debate: especially to students within the educational institutions that created the internet and are major benefactors to its freedom of use. University students within the USA represent a powerful population with more pull than they realize in government decision making and my video would need to demonstrate how students have proven that they can make a difference that affects their peers.

Using skills I had already learned in my advertising curriculum, I defined the target audience as traditional college-level students in the USA. While the project would endeavor to motivate anyone that was exposed to it, I would focus primarily on the population that was emphasized by the microgrant program description provided by the program's limited-access Google site. The #freeandopen Campaign acknowledges that there is a disproportion between the perceived influence and actual influence that students have on internet policy at the university and governmental levels.

Planning Production

My proposed project boasted high-definition, on-site video from interviews that would incur high travel and hosting expenses. Shortly into production, my primary Google mentor suggested that we instead use Google Hangouts to collect interviews and to avoid unnecessary expenses. While the project I envisioned focused heavily on professional production quality, we agreed that erring on the side of cost-efficiency for this project would allow us to collect more extensive and diverse interviews from across the country. With a \$2,000 budget, collecting on-site interviews from universities on the West Coast would leave few funds remaining for promotional materials. This adaption

would better suit our goal to accurately represent a diverse target audience, but later on it would become obvious that with this change in direction should have been followed by a major reconstruction of the entire project. Instead, I would attempt to implement this change while retaining the original project structure which would negatively impact the results.

All of the required technical resources—cameras, audio equipment, tripods, video editing and design software, etc.—are available for rental and use from the Western Kentucky University technology labs throughout all semester terms. I also have access to professional support in video editing. Most of these resources are free with my tuition, so there was no need to worry about budgeting for equipment rental.

As discussed earlier, Google Hangouts would be the software used to collect online interviews from students and internet rights activists within the USA. While it may seem obvious to choose Google's video chatting software over Skype's software for a project that was funded by Google, there were several other factors considered. As a Google Student Ambassador during this project, using Google Hangouts was a great opportunity to introduce interviewees to the program and to utilize the recording feature that saves the video to YouTube. I would be able to take advantage of Google's consistent video and audio quality while actively promoting their software as part of my responsibilities as a Google ambassador.

Meanwhile, Skype is notorious for having glitchy video and audio. Common problems reported with Skype include poor frame-rate, pixelation, and robot voice. Google Hangouts has similar reports, but I noticed that Hangouts appears to opt for a lower resolution in order to reduce the amount of patchiness in the output. It best suited

the project needs to have Hangouts' consistent quality video and audio over Skype's higher-resolution video at the sacrifice of more glitches.

Furthermore, Google Hangouts is but an extension of a wide range of Google products that can all be accessed by one account. Google has a larger amount of users than Skype so the likelihood of the interviewee needing to set up a new account was lower. Even if they did have to set up an account, they would then have access to a suite of other Google programs that will be useful to the project such as YouTube.

The software I opted to use for video editing was iMovie, which was already installed on my personal Macbook Pro (early 2011). I have been using iMovie for years on class projects in high school and college so in my experience I was confident that I would not encounter any editing issues. This software was also free and readily available on my own laptop so I could work on the documentary even when the university video labs were closed. While iMovie is not as extensive of a program as Final Cut Pro or Adobe Premiere, its light-weight software was more than sufficient to produce high-quality films in the hands of someone like myself who is familiar with the product. As for the software used for the stickers, t-shirts, and AdWords campaign, I used Adobe Illustrator and Google Adwords. Though I had little choice on what program to use for the AdWords campaign, I selected Adobe Illustrator based on its relevance to my career and academic goals. The Adobe Creative Suite is essential to any degree in advertising and digital design and experience with Adobe programs is highly sought after in my field of study. Illustrator is a powerful tool that would allow me to develop the graphics necessary for the project's promotional campaign. The resulting graphics would also be

easily scalable and adaptable to any other needs that may arise throughout the production process.

With Google AdWords, I would be able to tailor my campaign to reach a specific sector of Google's wide audience. In my spare time I had already researched Google AdWords and how to use it in preparation for entering the job market. My preparation would allow me to easily pick up on the AdWords software for the purposes of this project and provides extensive reports on the effectiveness of the campaign.

Selecting the Interviewees

With a change in direction from on-site video to streamed interviews with Google Hangouts, I was allowed to broaden my search for a diverse range of interviewees. Based on the goals of the campaign, I searched for people that were representative of the target audience in order to allow for the audience to better associate with the interviewees. The selected students needed to have experience with either advocating for internet rights or with having been restricted from exercising their internet rights. In addition to the student interviewees, I sought a professional in the field to be an expert testimony.

The interviewees are described in Figure 2.1.

	<p>Adi Kamdar Alumni of Yale University Electronic Frontier Foundation Activist</p>
	
<p>Alec Foster, New York University Founder of the Student Net Alliance</p>	<p>Matthew Dierker, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Google Student Ambassador and subscriber to UI Memes page</p>
	
<p>Saagar Gupta, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Creator of the University of Illinois Memes page on Facebook.</p>	<p>Laura Harper, Western Kentucky University Public Relations Manager for Student Government Association.</p>

Figure 2.1

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

AdWords Campaign

In addition to utilizing skills that I already had, I was able to use the documentary as an opportunity to gain experience launching a Google AdWords campaign. I used Google resources and discussion boards to learn about how to navigate the product and monitor my campaign. When new keywords or groups were suggested by the software, I usually adopted them into my campaign in order to expand the AdWords campaign's reach.

The campaign ran for several weeks and produced the results shown in Figure 3.1.

Ad group report (Default max: \$0.25)						
Ad group	Clicks	Impressions	CTR	Avg. CPC	Cost	Avg. position
Ad Group #1	71	24330	0.29%	0.2	14.53	4.3
Ad Group #3	26	5928	0.44%	0.2	5.07	4.7
Documentary	16	2151	0.74%	0.19	3.11	4.8
Documentaries Online	3	213	1.41%	0.2	0.59	4.5
Watch Documentary	0	52	0.00%	0	0	4.3
Free Documentary	0	25	0.00%	0	0	3.9
Documentaries Online Free	0	39	0.00%	0	0	4.2
Documentaries	3	552	0.54%	0.13	0.38	5.1
Total - All	119	33290	0.36%	0.2	23.68	4.4
Total - Search	119	32843	0.36%	0.2	23.68	4.5
Total	119	33290	0.36%	0.2	23.68	4.4

Figure 3.1

YouTube Video Analytics

As can be predicted for consumers in the digital media age, a 13-minute YouTube documentary did not hold attention for long. When posted on May 4, 2014, I used Twitter, Facebook, promotional materials, and word of mouth to gain awareness. While people appeared interested in the subject, many who viewed the video did so for only an average of 3 minutes. It was obvious that a documentary was not an effective tool to cater to the Millennial generation whose attentions are overloaded with information. Consumers on the web have a vast amount of information from which to choose so it is essential to hook the viewer as early as possible in order to retain their attention.

Because the average viewer stuck around for 3 minutes out of 13, it is safe to assume that the documentary's message was not entirely received. This has taught me the importance of scripting content so that it grabs attention immediately, but it has also given me the opportunity to review the YouTube analytics and see what the response to my video was through engagement and demographics. YouTube provides an extensive analytics platform by which to measure as shown in Figure 3.3.



Figure 3.2

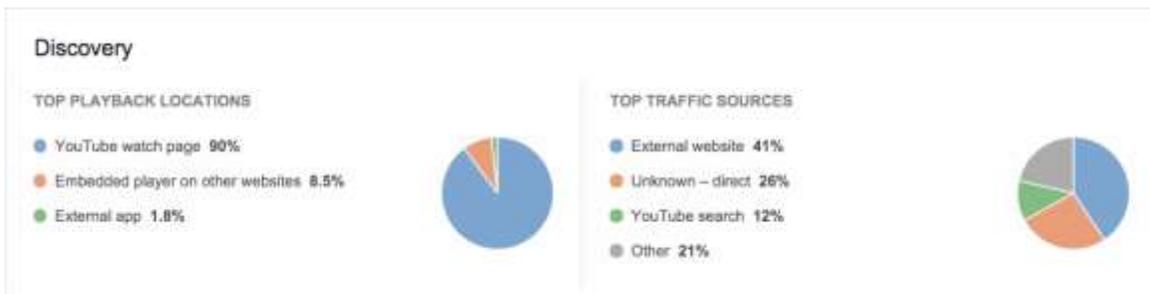


Figure 3.3: A glimpse of the tools available in YouTube analytics.

Promotional Materials

Alongside the AdWords campaign, I produced a T-shirt design and stickers using Adobe Illustrator. The stickers were dispensed at the Kentucky Honors Roundtable conference as well as throughout clubs on campus. The stickers incorporated a QR code as shown in Figure 3.5, but the T-shirts directed the viewer to YouTube because QR stickers are not effective on clothing. It is not reasonable to expect someone to wear a shirt that encourages people to stop them in order to read the QR code or to attempt to do so unannounced. Therefore the finalized design in Figure 3.4 excluded the QR code graphic.



Figure 3.4



Figure 3.5: The finalized sticker design.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Overall, the #freeandopen Documentary project was an excellent opportunity to broaden my skillset and to reach a variety of students about the importance of internet rights and legislation to their university experiences. However, due to a lack of clear direction and planning, the project fell short of anticipation. It was not only a lesson in the field of internet legislation, it was a lesson for a creative in advertising on the essential function that planning plays in executing successful campaigns.

Future of the Campaign

Following the grant program's conception in September of 2013, the digital landscape has changed. Internet regulation efforts must attempt to keep up with this ever-changing landscape and therefore the need for net neutrality advocates will not diminish. This documentary project's relevance is both lasting and temporary in that it promotes the protection of the internet as a free and open resource, yet focuses on issues that may become obsolete in the coming years.

In order to keep maintain relevance, more projects would need to be done to combat the issues that are current. What I have learned through this capstone experience would guide me to producing a significantly more effective campaign, were I to participate in a similar program in the future.

First and foremost, I would design the project focusing more on the end goal and not on a set of criteria established to select grant recipients. Had I focused on how to most effectively address the issue at hand, I believe that I would have still received the grant and would have been more successful.

A project designed for traditional university students within the USA would be shorter and sweeter than a documentary. As revealed by the YouTube analytics, the average viewer did not retain interest in the video for longer than 3 minutes. I can safely conclude from this statistic that an effective video will be under 3 minutes. This means that an effective campaign should be short and to the point, providing the viewer with other resources that they can pursue should they desire further enlightenment into the subject.

Additionally, the AdWords campaign would be supplemented by Facebook advertisements and other paid media outlets. Facebook is a great way to not only capture an audience through text, but through motion when the video automatically plays in the user's viewport. Peoples' eyes are attracted to movement, which is not supported by AdWords search results.

As for the content of the 3-minute video, it would need to be a concise overview of one vital aspect of the campaign. In the final documentary, I had 13 minutes to cover several issues within the net neutrality debate. Even with the extra time, each issue was not extensively delved into and competed with other issues within the documentary. Selecting one major issue and highlighting it for a short period of time would provide a stronger direction for the campaign while still effectively supporting the larger goal of raising awareness of the internet policy debate. It would also allow the viewer to more

easily digest the information without risking information overload that could deter the viewer from following through with the call to action.

Ultimately, the #freeandopen Documentary was an extremely valuable learning experience that has provided me with insight into all outlets of developing and implementing a campaign. Each facet of a campaign must carefully be considered when producing a product that is effective. Neglecting any facet such as planning can result in a response that is less than desired.

THE #FREEANDOPEN DOCUMENTARY TRANSCRIPT

[Introduction]

(Alec Foster)

What I love about the Internet is that it's a place where you don't need anyone else's permission to – to learn about anything that interests you or publish your views and it removes, uh, barriers that gatekeepers might try to impose. That might include governments. Might include your own universities in some instances.

The great thing about the Student Net Alliance is that it wouldn't be possible without the Internet and, uh, I know we're going to succeed because of the platform we are trying to protect.

What is the Student Net Alliance? We're a grassroots student-run organization that's dedicated to advancing the student voice in the Internet policy debate and promoting our digital rights in a time when often times our rights are being encroached upon by companies, by media conglomerates and ISPs, and even by our own governments.

What we need are the students that recognize, 'Yes, my digital rights are important to me. Yes, it is terrible that net neutrality rules are being stopped upon by greedy ISPs and corporations which are setting their own rules and cutting deals that eliminate the possibility for, say, the next Facebook or Google to come about.

So we really rely on these students that otherwise would not have the time to show up for say, a one hour meeting or go flyering in their dorms because that's not what we're about. All we need is, say, two minutes of every student's time once a month. That will be enough of a ruckus to, to really, uh, take back our rights and freedoms from the NSA and greedy corporations and from dictators that wish to censor the Internet in other countries.

Yea, there's never been a – a more dire time to have an organization like this and unfortunately the student voice has been remarkably absent from the Internet policy debate.

(Laura Harper)

When somebody can look into your email, whether they do or not becomes irrelevant. Um, it's almost assumed that they, that they do to some level.

Here at WKU, we have come under scrutiny for some of the policies that have been in place. Particularly the foundation for individual rights in education raised a red light

warning, which essentially means that we have one or more policies that, um, substantially limit free speech and that policy is an Internet use policy.

What it talks about is our email communication. The problem lies in the way that one of these policies is phrased and it says is that students cannot transmit anything via email that can reasonably be perceived as offensive.

This is an issue on several different levels particularly because speech codes like this have been ruled on by the Supreme Court before and it's a form of prior restraint. So there's a lot of legal complexities that go into this, but essentially in the past through case law it has been shown that these things are unacceptable. The original intent for the policies that are, um, problematic here at Western was to be able to stop hate speech and stop problematic language like that that causes controversy between people, but they actually end up limiting more than they had originally intended.

But I do think that there needs to be more cooperation between students and administrators to help ensure that our policies are fair for everyone while still accomplishing goals for both sides.

(Saagar Gupta)

The University of Illinois Memes is a Facebook page. It was created by me and a guy named Chris Riba. We were just friends sitting in class and we were looking at a meme about a different school and we were like why don't we make our own meme about the university of Illinois.

(Matthew Dierker)

It was just innocent memes about the university. Some of them were submitted by users and some of them were a little harsh against a certain race or a certain group of people, but in general, most of them were relatively funny and they got popular pretty quickly.

(Saagar Gupta)

I try to make sure it's not racist. Um, discriminatory against a religion or culture. Just because, again, my goal is to bring everyone together and that actually is counter intuitive to it. So, I deleted it just because, again, I don't want to create a huge controversy on campus.

Then what happened was they screen-shotted it. They posted it everywhere. It became viral. Uh, and then the student senate accused our page of being the racist pag- racist-um, part. So I had deans calling me. I had a lot of professors that were in charge of certain communities call me saying, 'You need to shut down this page as it is a center for racial discrimination.' I had been looking at it to make sure that nothing was, you know,

out of the ordinary. Um, make sure it didn't discriminate, er, didn't, um, insult a specific person, specific professor, specific greek house. Just because, again, I didn't want this individual to be across 5 or 6 thousand people looking at this. What happened after that was the Illinois Student Senate was going to vote to shut down the page for, um, a post that I did not create and, again, I am representing the page, and the page did not create. And I'm, I'm very against that. My parents were telling me to shut it down because they didn't want anything bad to happen, um, to me just as a student of the University of Illinois. Um, and that was also what was brought up in saying action can be brought against you if you don't do it at first.

(Matthew Dierker)

You know, people restrict things they don't like, they don't understand necessarily and that's going to lead to a biased perspective on the world.

(Adi Kamdar)

The EFF, or the Electric Frontier Foundation, is a civil liberties group. We are an organization that is a mix of lawyers and activists and technologists dedicated to protecting things like privacy and free speech online as well as tackling issue areas like copyright reform and patent reform.

So, I'm an activist at EFF and what an activist does is we're essentially one of the public faces of EFF. We turn a lot of our campaigns and a lot of our lawsuits into larger, public-facing campaigns. So, if we're fighting a battle around copyright reform for example, we'll be the ones who turn it into something where you guys can take action. Whether it's calling your congressmen, reading the latest, uh, legislative analysis, or joining a large coalition movement. We are the ones facilitating all of that.

We want a web that promotes free speech. That promotes privacy, that lets you be anonymous. Lets you, uh, create things. Lets you remix things. Uh, we want a web and a world where the Internet allows for, uh, the communications and the creativity that it has the, uh, capacity of foster.

Right now we live in a world where there are a lot of interests that are trying to take down the free and open web. Whether it's big content that's implementing, you know, harsh copyright regimes and trying to expand copyright, trying to prevent us from remixing content or using, uh, copyrighted content fairly for new and awesome projects. Or whether it's big publishers that are trying to prevent us from sharing important research with each other. Or whether it's, uh, large companies and large government entities that are spying on us online. These are all things that are really affecting the free and open web and are chilling the way we, uh, we act upon it and it's up to us as netizens – as people who are using the web – to, uh, to defend that.

I think there's a lot that university students can do to protect themselves from the things that are attacking the free and open web. Uh, the biggest thing is educate yourselves. Read up on these sorts of issues. Follow along when, uh, the latest NSA leaks come out or when, uh, the latest threat to free speech is coming out. There are a lot of organizations out there and the Electronic Frontier Foundation is one of them that write about these issues every day.

Uh, when I was a student one of my big issues that I cared about was open access to federally funded research. We wanted it so that if, uh, if research was funded by taxpayers, by the people, the people should have access to this and universities play a big role in the process. They determine how you guys access your papers. How you guys do research yourself. How you, uh, how good your professors are and, um, what sort of research they turn out as well as kind of larger issues. You know, if doctors have access to the latest medicine or if patients can understand what is going on with them. This is a large, large issue and we as students are right there at the forefront of this issue. We could, um, really make an impact. Really sort of ask our professors, ask our faculty, push our universities to adopt strong open access policies.

(Laura Harper)

It is really, uh, a window to the rest of the world. It just is a huge gateway of information and so not only be able to access that information, but add to it is a large goal of higher education.

[Conclusion/Credits]