



## **Framing and exploring the issue of brand compliance on Radford University affiliated social media accounts with the Web Communications and Strategy team at Radford University**

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**DSN 700 Advanced Design Studio III**  
**Project 2**

## Problem Statement

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### **In what ways might Radford University Web Communications and Strategy increase brand compliance on Radford University affiliated social media accounts?**

Radford University Web Communications and Strategy is dedicated to the strategic development of Radford University's web presence. The team consists of Meghan Williams Spraker, Director of Digital Communications and Marketing; Jessica Fowler, Web Content Producer and Editor; and Alexa Nash, Social Media Coordinator & Web Content Assistant Producer. The team works closely with the campus community to develop effective, appealing websites. They also support the development of Radford University's online brand, which includes managing the university's official social networks. I contacted the team to see if there was a problem the department is facing that could be better understood through the use of the strategies focused on in this assignment. The team told me of a problem regarding social media brand compliance among Radford University affiliated social media accounts.

The university's social media networks are intended to be tools used to engage the university community, alumni, parents, fans and prospective students and be used as a platform to tell the Radford story. Web Communications and Strategy helps Radford University departments and organizations develop their own social media strategies and has social media guidelines established and published on their website. They also offer social media consultations upon request. The team provided me with the current tools used to provide support to departments and organizations. After having a couple of discussions with individual team members, reviewing their current tools and looking at various Radford University social network profiles, I scheduled an interview with the Web Communications and Strategy team to gain more insight into the problem.

From the interview, I learned that the Web Communications and Strategy team follows Radford University affiliated social media accounts, not as an intentional means of monitoring activity and brand compliance, but to stay engaged with the campus community and obtain content for the university's official social media networks. In doing so, they constantly come across social posts and accounts that violate the university's brand guide. This includes: improper use of the university logo lock-up and Athletics logo; use of the old logo, which is one of the more prevalent violations seen; low quality, untimely content; content that does not adhere to the Radford voice and brand; posts that link outside of the official Radford University website; grammatical errors; poor choice and use of imagery; and lack of a defined strategy and authenticity.

They want social media administrators to be aware of, and follow, the social media guidelines created by Web Communications and Strategy. The team understands that many people running the social media sites for departments and organizations are not knowledgeable in social media and marketing strategy. It is a second job for them and not their primary focus. However, they want social media administrators to understand the importance of social media, its impact, what it is meant for, and know that they are a resource for them. They have seen some improvement with more people reaching out for assistance with branding, but they would like to have more of a ubiquitous plan in place that everyone would be following. Violations of social media guidelines are seen across all social accounts not managed by University Relations, although some are

better than others. Facebook has the most Radford University affiliated pages established and is the most popular social media platform used by departments and organizations, because of familiarity. However, brand inconsistencies are seen across all social media platforms. Stakeholders recognized to be involved in this problem include the Web Communications and Strategy team, the people running the social media accounts and their supervisors. Web Communications and Strategy doesn't currently have a policy in place to enforce brand compliance on social media, but believes if they have the support of the supervisors of those running the accounts, it would help them to do so. I learned that social media is always evolving and requires dedication. Since there, typically, is not a designated person focused on maintaining and developing social media for the departments and organizations, this is believed to attribute to the inconsistent branding.

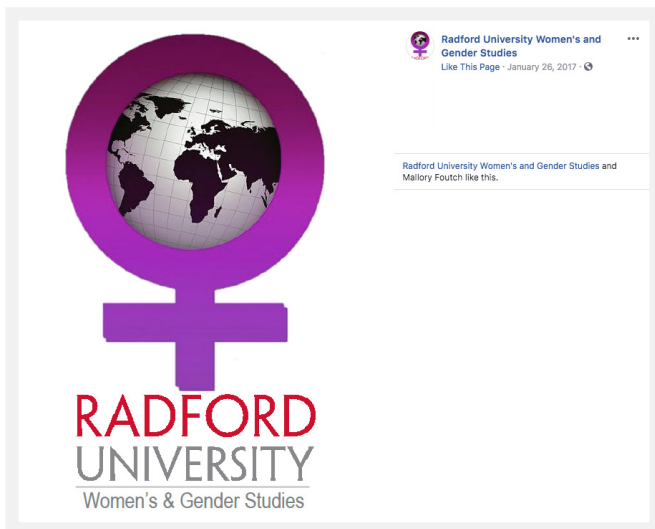
The team believes there is an overall lack of understanding and knowledge about branding and social media. Web Communications and Strategy have a few ways they go about educating social media administrators on social media best practices and university brand guidelines. One of those is through the social media guidelines and the university brand guide published on the Web Communications and Strategy website. The university brand guide does not go into detail about web and social media brand standards, but provides overall university brand standards to be followed and insight of the importance of brand consistency. They also provide in-person social media consultations upon request. During social media consultations, people are supplied a social media strategy layout, which takes them through the process of setting their goals and objectives, identifying their audience, determining page/group roles and site maintenance. The team mentioned this document is not publicly shared because it only provides basic information on developing a strategy and there is a lot of secondary information involved that it is best explained in-person by someone on the Web Communications and Strategy team. They said the document would need to be more developed in order to be shared in a public way. The team recommends free resources to aid in designing social media content, such as Radford University Creative Services and Canva, a user-friendly online design tool. Another way people are educated is through the Social Media Users Group (SMUG), which is a list of individuals on and off campus who are responsible for running Radford University affiliated social media accounts. The purpose of SMUG is to disseminate information about social media best practices. They do this through in-person meetings and e-mail newsletters. SMUG is introduced as an educational resource during social media consultations, where people are invited to join. Another way the campus community is made aware of this resource is by word of mouth; people can be added to the group by request. I was able to obtain copies of previous e-newsletter issues to see what users receive, one example can be seen at the following link: <https://mailchi.mp/52f48f4dd756/smug-july-newsletter?e=3f5a0b10d6>.

The Web Communications and Strategy team is not always alerted or aware of social media accounts affiliated with Radford University. There is no formal approval process to create a Radford University affiliated social media profile and they do not control or impress the social media guidelines upon student-run accounts and Radford University Athletics. The way the team goes about addressing the violations seen on social media accounts is by sending a direct message to the account on the platform the post was seen on, in which they explain the branding

issue and provide them links to resources for fixing the issue. Web Communication and Strategy has evolved and become more familiar to the campus community and many departments and organizations have contacted them for help, but they believe there is more that could be done to be more widely known as a resource in this specific area.

Radford University social media network’s target audience is current and prospective students, ages 18-21. The team finds that one of the first instances of prospective students contacting the university is through social media, making it a key recruitment tool. Therefore, it is important Radford University affiliated social media profiles be brand compliant, so end users have a consistent experience on all platforms and are directed to the official Radford University website. It is also important that prospective students feel secure in knowing they are communicating with a university-affiliated person, as they often share detailed personal information as well.

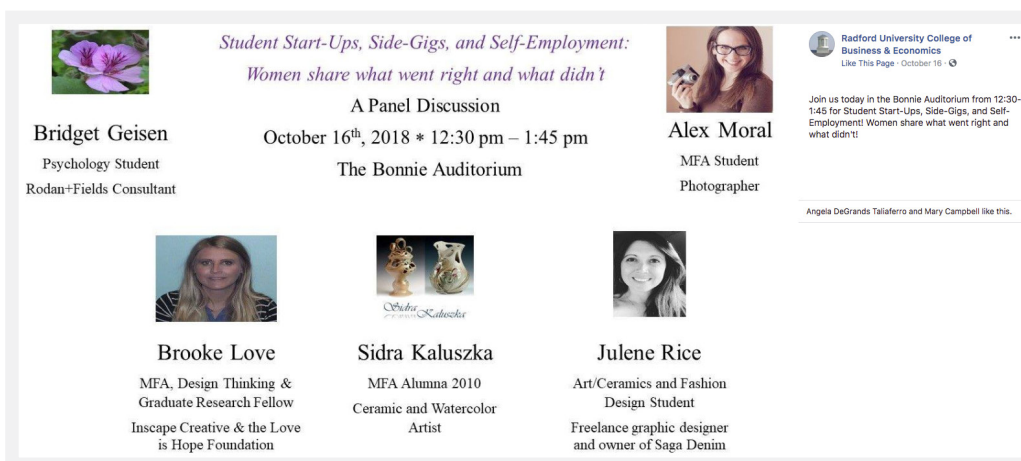
After the interview, to help in understanding the issues they have seen, I requested that the team send me examples of social media posts and accounts that violate the brand guidelines. The following images are screen shots of the most common violations seen.



*Improper use of the Radford University logo lock-up.*



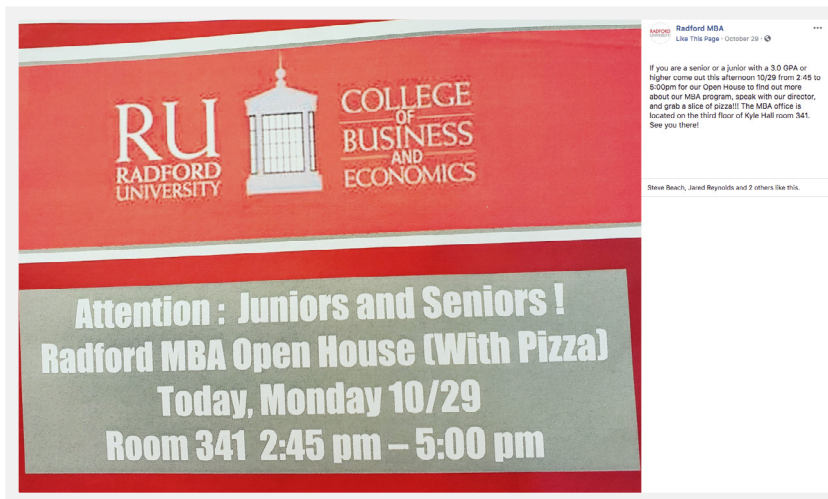
*Low quality content.*



*Low quality content—distorted photos, poorly written.*



*Improper use of logos. Unaffiliated Athletics organization using the Athletics logo. Using the old university logo.*



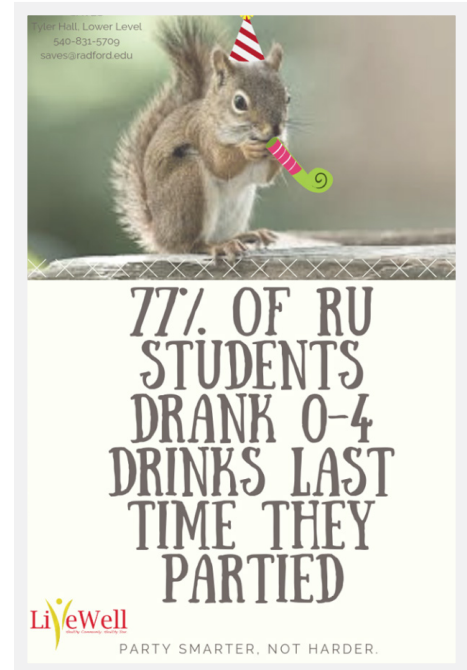
*Use of old logo/college icon and missing college name.*



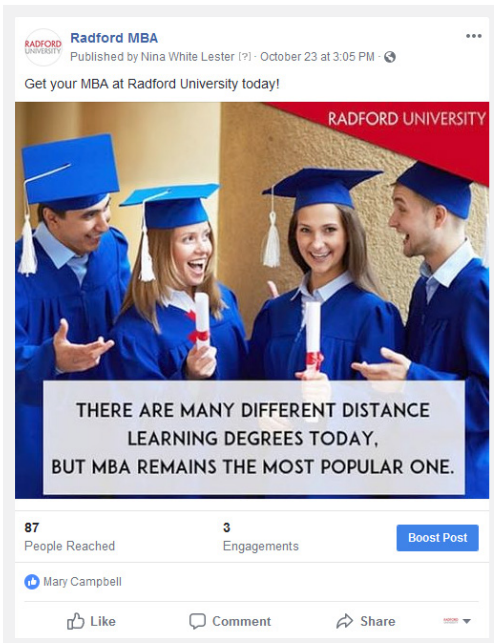
*Use of old logo.*



*Low quality content. Photo is pixelated and caption is poorly written.*



*Low quality content and poorly written: referencing the university as “RU” instead of “Radford University.”*

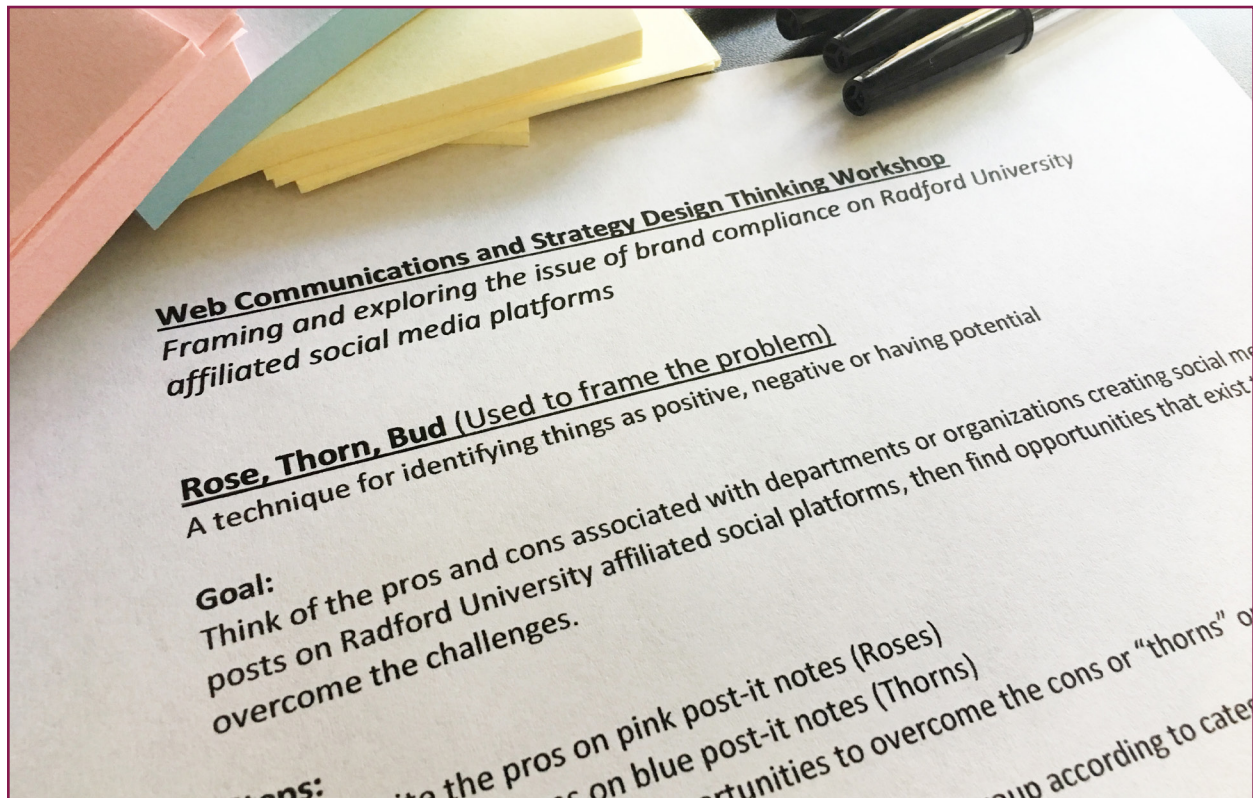


*Improper use of the logo lock-up. Logo does not have the minimum clear space around it and is pixelated. Poor image choice, violates photo brand style—using stock image when there are photos available with Radford University students.*

## Research Participants

I facilitated a design thinking workshop featuring the Rose, Thorn, Bud; Statement Starters and Visualize the Vote methods to help Web Communications and Strategy frame, explore and prioritize the issue of brand compliance on social media. Participants in the workshop included the Web Communications and Strategy team: Meghan Williams Spraker, Jessica Fowler, and Alexa Nash; along with their social media student intern, Alexandria Kinsey. Everyone participated in implementing each method. I created instructional handouts to aid in facilitating the workshop and implementing the activities.

## Documentation of Process & Final Method Implementations



### Rose, Thorn, Bud

The goal of the method was to think of the pros and cons associated with departments and organizations creating social media posts on Radford University affiliated social platforms, then find opportunities that exist to overcome the challenges. Materials provided for participants to conduct the method were the Rose, Thorn, Bud instructional handout, post-it notes, pens, dry erase markers, and a dry erase board.

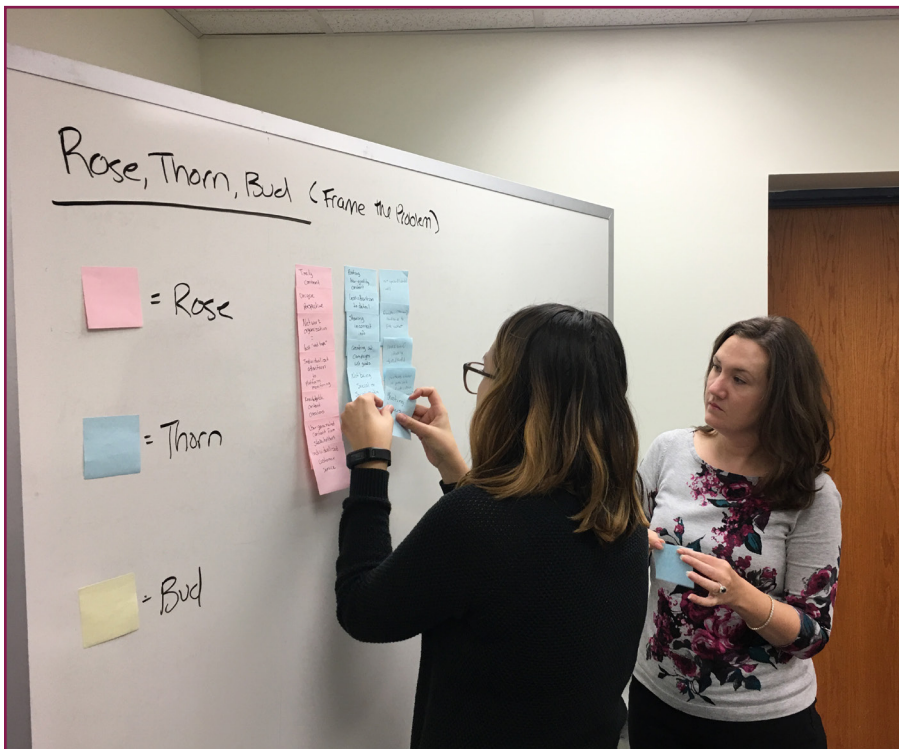
The instructional handout stated the following:

1. Write the pros on pink post-it notes (Roses)
2. Write the cons on blue post-it notes (Thorns)
3. Write of all of the opportunities to overcome the cons or "thorns" on yellow post-it notes (Buds)
4. Place post-it notes on white board
5. Group into categories via affinity clustering as a team

A productive discussion proceeded with participants sharing insights gleaned from conducting the activity.

**Below are photos of participants implementing the Rose, Thorn, Bud method:**

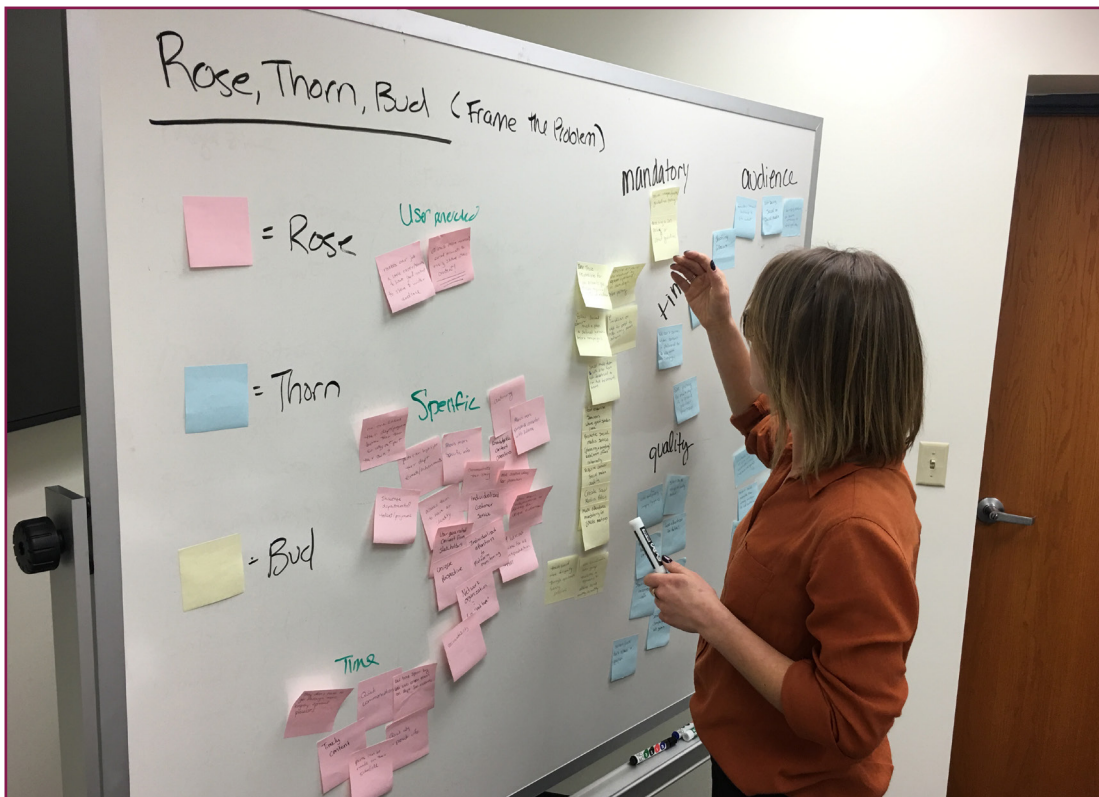
*Participants individually writing out issues, insights and ideas on post-it notes.*



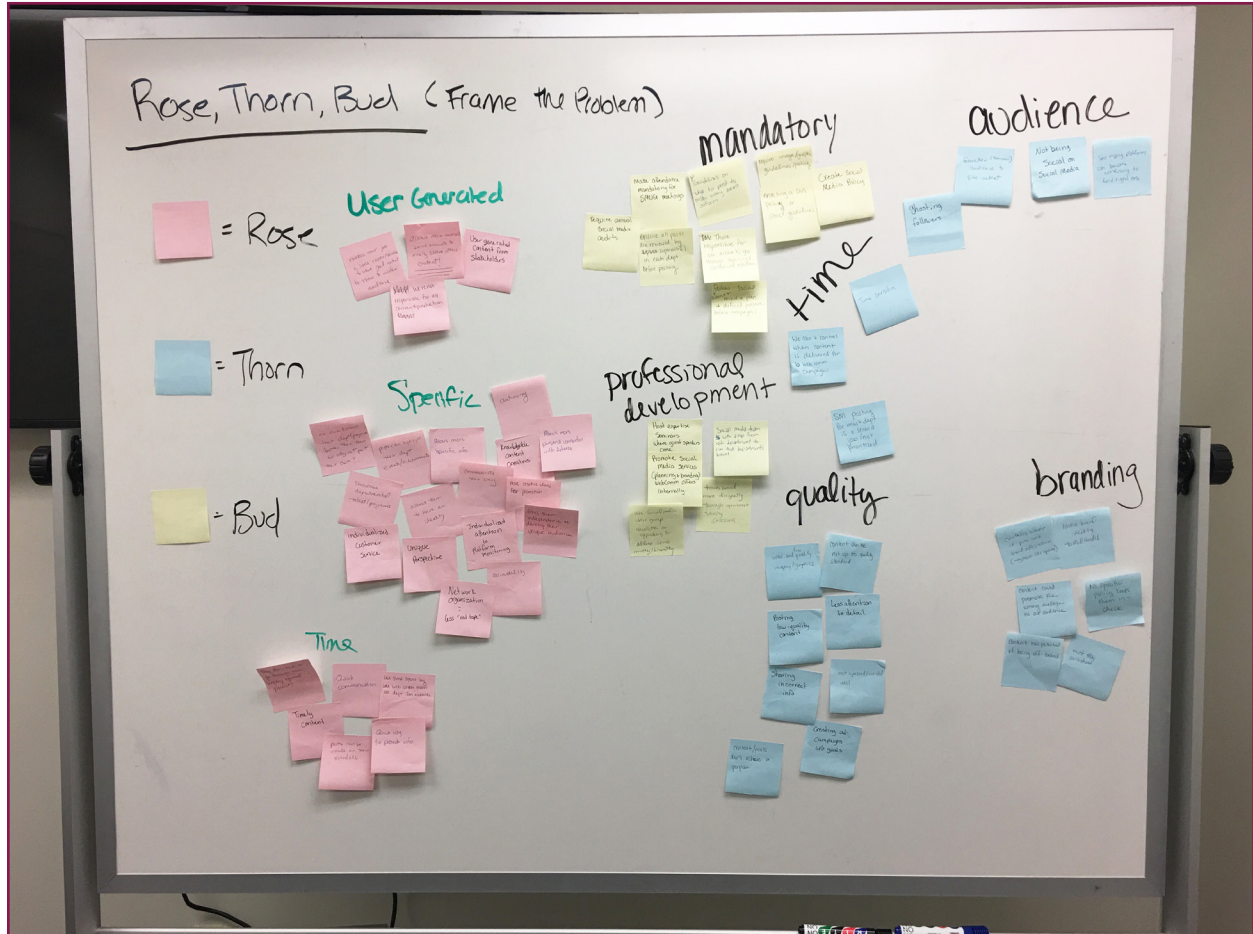
*Participants sharing thoughts with the team.*



Participants sharing, plotting and clustering shared data points.

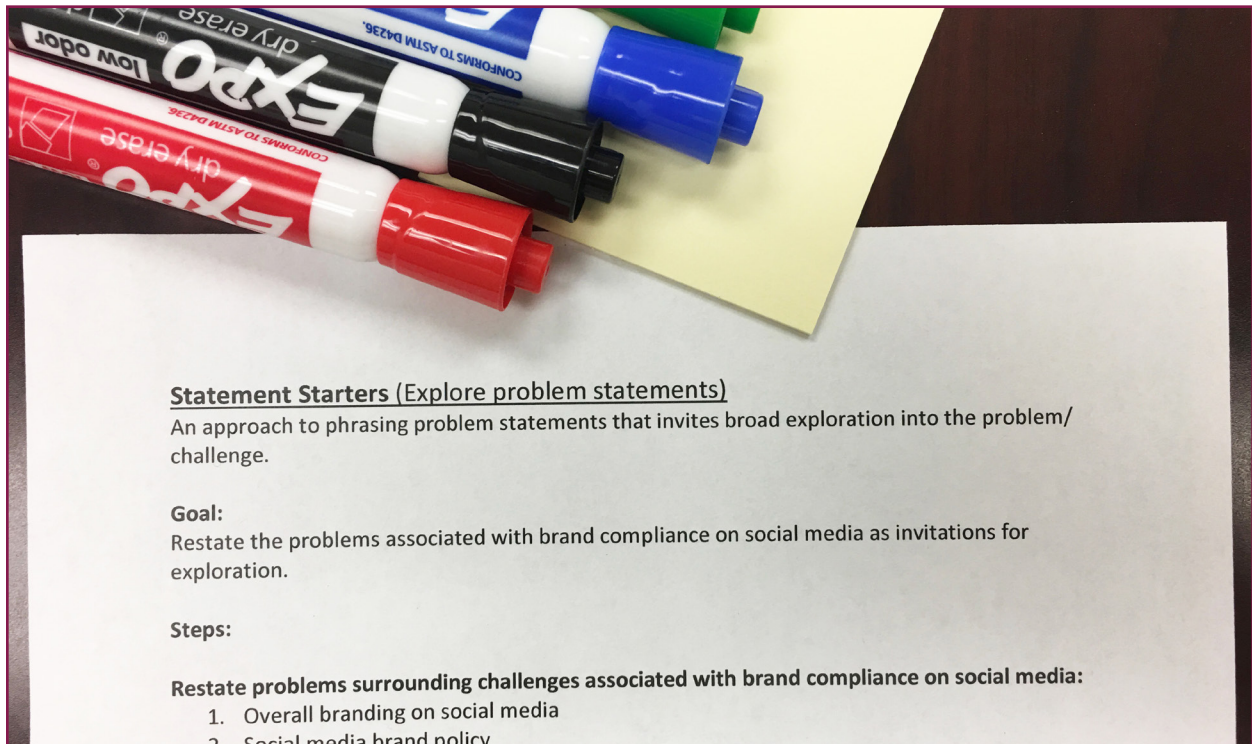


Final Rose, Thorn, Bud implementation.



A close-up video of the final Rose, Thorn, Bud concept can be viewed at:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kATvdYMivYFXk8\\_UZ13WA41MAuREjxgG/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kATvdYMivYFXk8_UZ13WA41MAuREjxgG/view?usp=sharing)



## Statement Starters

The goal of the method was to restate the problems associated with brand compliance on social media as invitations for exploration. Materials provided for participants to conduct the method were the Statement Starter instructional handout, post-it notes, dry erase markers, and a dry erase board with challenges and “starters” listed as prompts for developing problem statements.

The instructional handout stated the following:

**Restate problems surrounding challenges associated with brand compliance on social media. The following challenges were identified from the interviews and research conducted prior to the workshop:**

- Overall branding on social media
- Social media brand policy
- Education on social media brand standards
- Tracking and measuring
- Strategic plan for social media branding

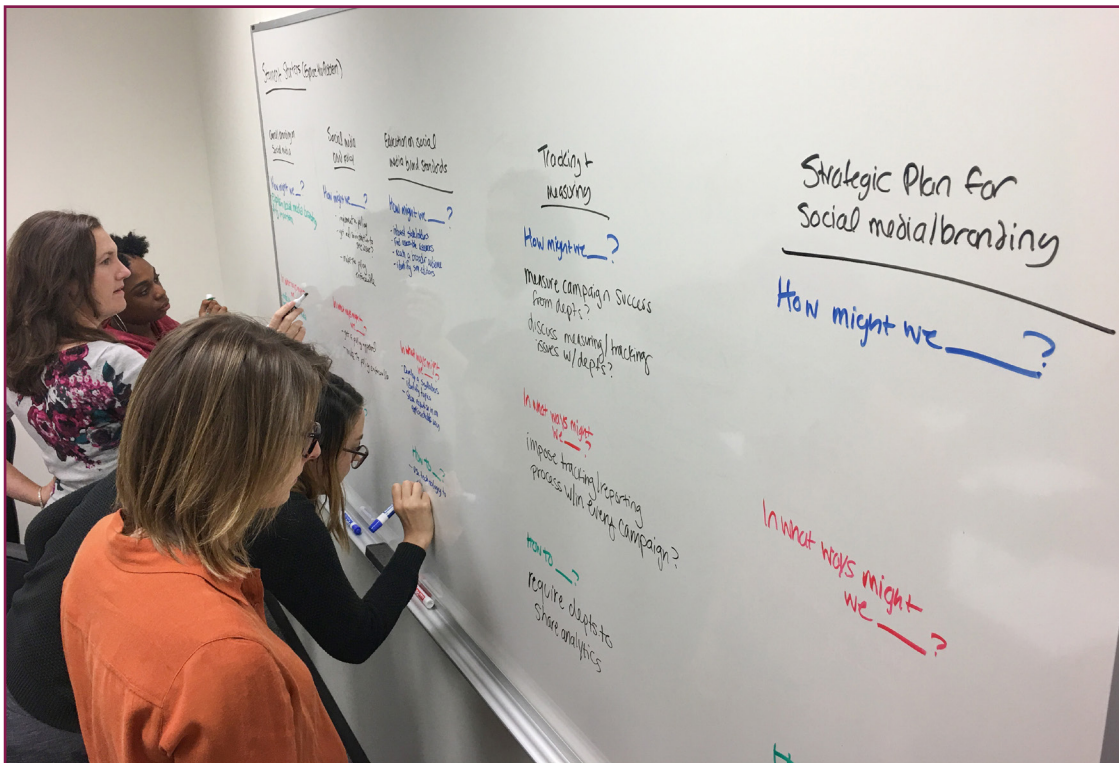
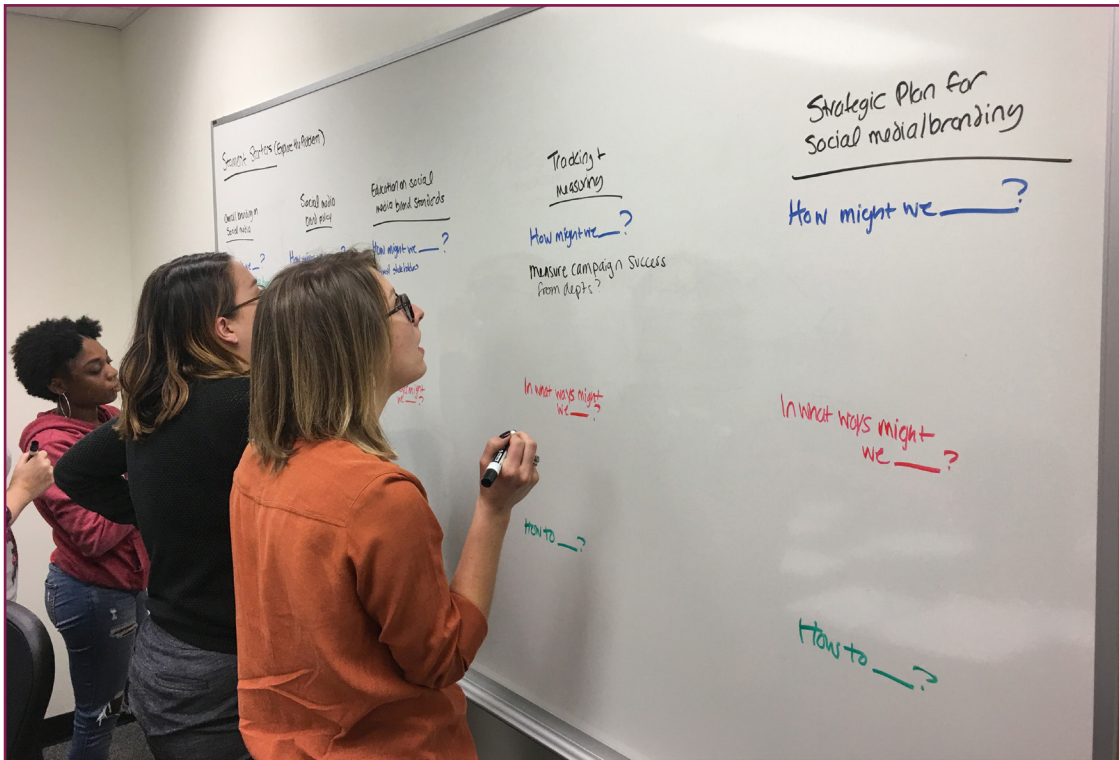
List as many phrases under each statement starter as possible related to topics listed above. Fill in the blank to each of these starter phrases listed below:

- How might we \_\_\_\_?
- In what ways might we \_\_\_\_?
- How to \_\_\_\_?

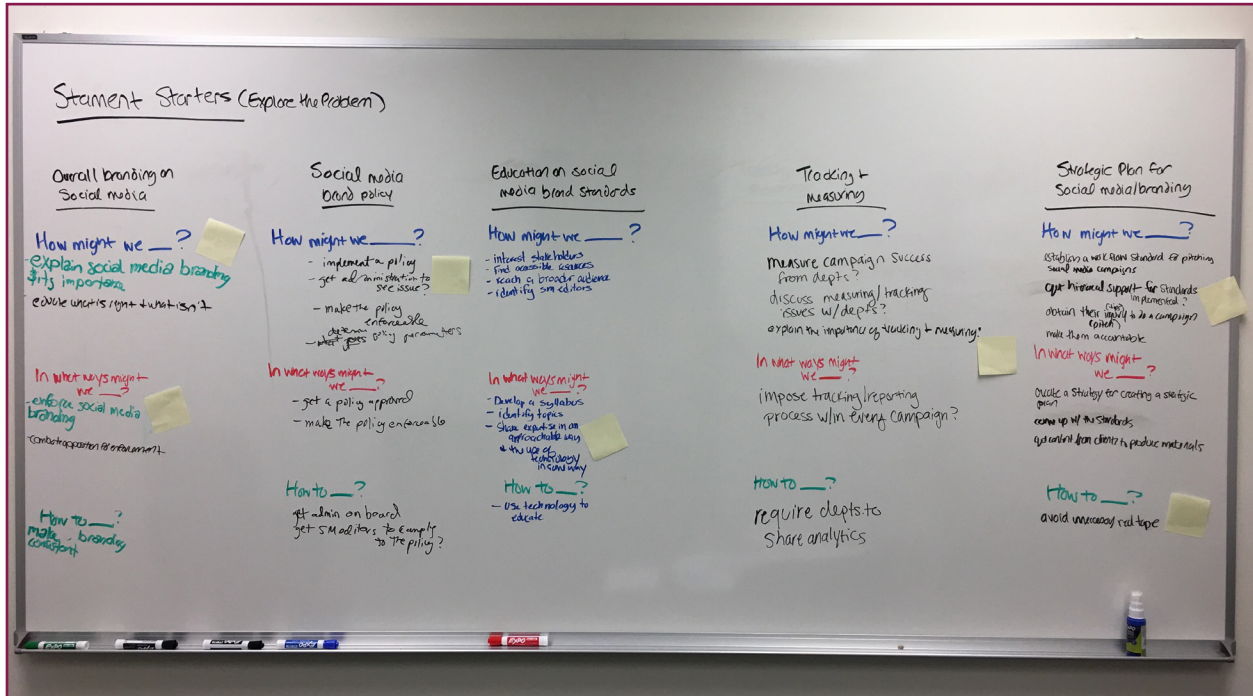
Using yellow post-it notes, pick the best statement starter for each of the 5 challenges.

**Below are photos of participants implementing the Statement Starter method:**

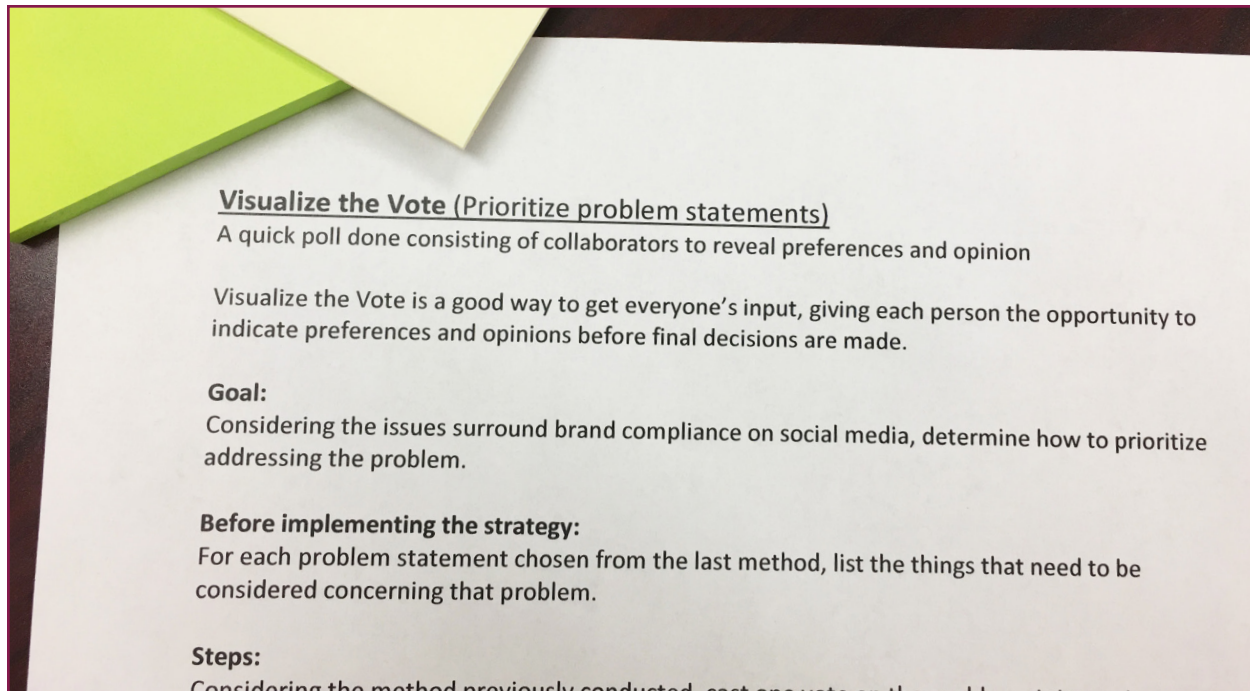
*Participants writing in as many phrases as they could think of to the statement starter prompts listed under each challenge identified.*



## Final Statement Starter implementation.



A close-up video of the final Statement Starters developed can be viewed at:  
[https://drive.google.com/open?id=15P3vxtPKpAaw3anJ62Nmga8VVL\\_\\_iJf](https://drive.google.com/open?id=15P3vxtPKpAaw3anJ62Nmga8VVL__iJf)



## Visualize the Vote

Keeping in mind the challenges mentioned in the Statement Starter method, the goal of this activity was to determine which challenge to focus on moving forward. Materials provided for participants to conduct the method were the Visualize the Vote instructional handout, post-it notes, and a dry erase board with challenges listed. The instructional handout stated the following:

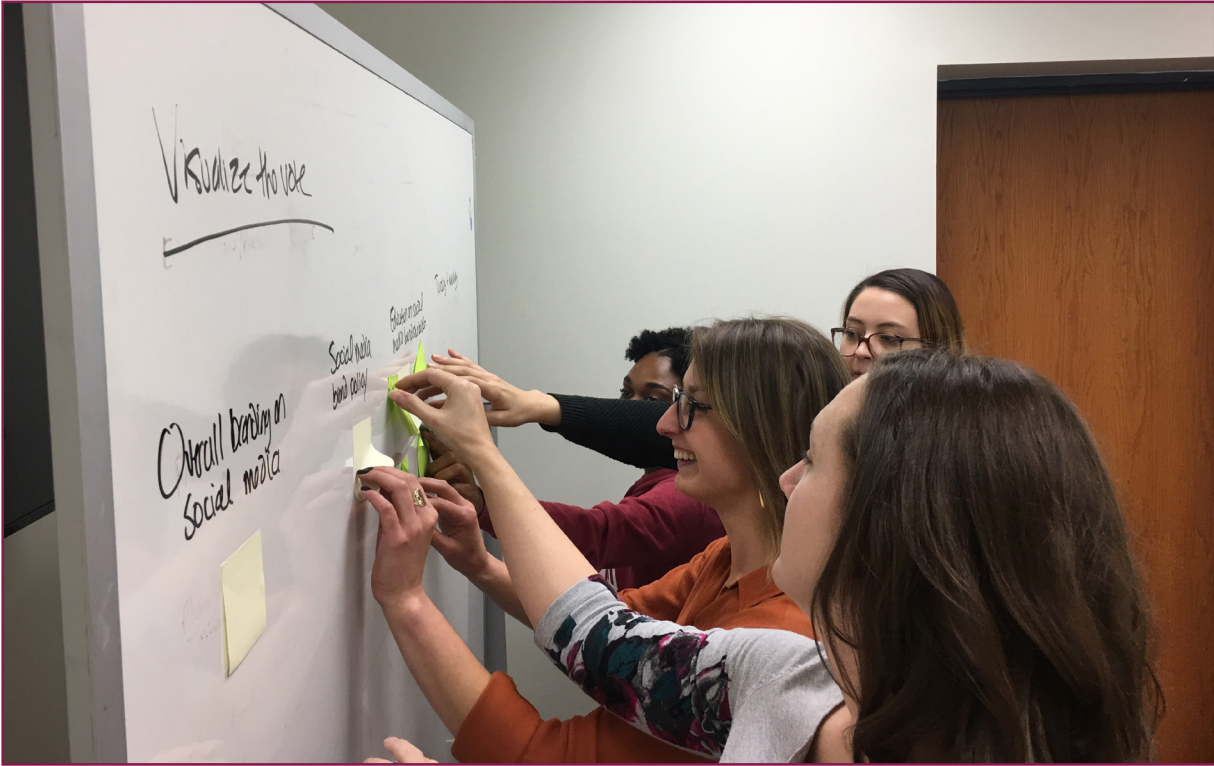
Considering the method previously conducted, cast votes on the challenge you believe is most important to focus on moving forward with regard to:

- Overall branding on social media
  - Social media brand policy
  - Education on social media brand standards
  - Tracking and measuring
  - Strategic plan for social media branding
1. Cast your vote on which challenge you believe is the highest priority that you can take immediate action on (green post-it note).
  2. Cast your vote on which challenge you believe has the best opportunities long-term, but may take longer to execute or implement (yellow post-it note).

Participants were given 1 yellow and 1 green post-it note for the vote. Everyone was instructed to vote simultaneously. After voting, participants discussed what they voted for and why.

**Below are photos of participants implementing the Statement Starter method:**

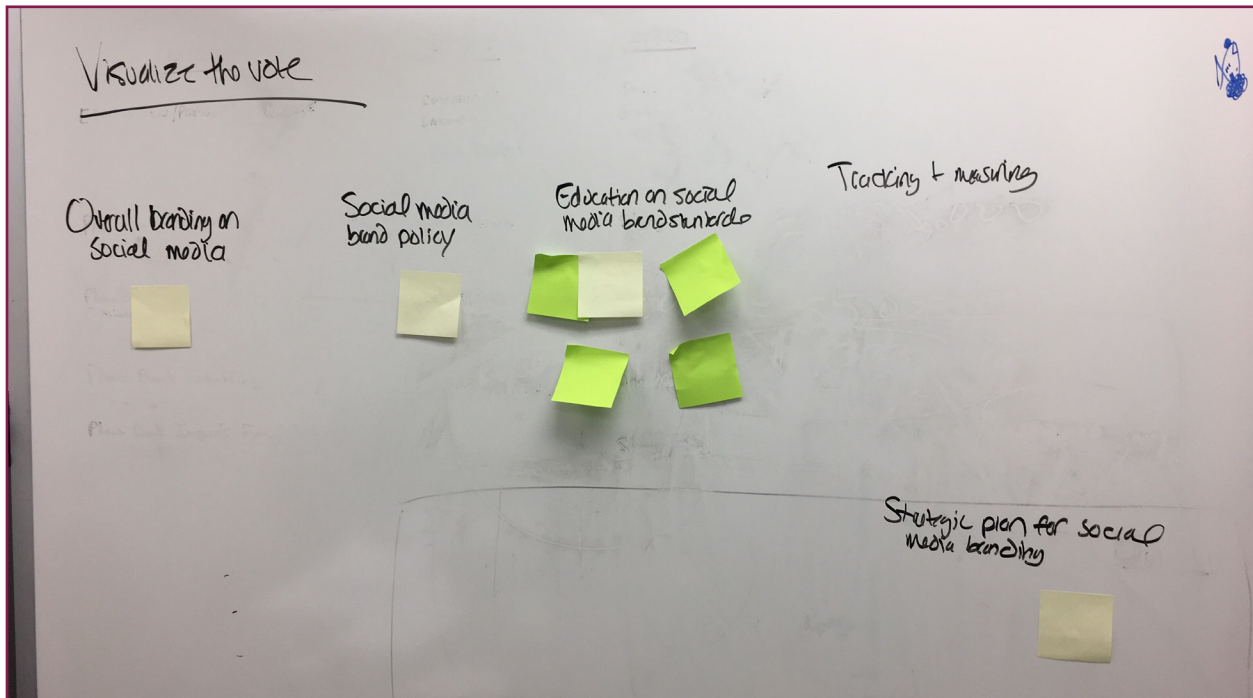
*Participants casting their votes.*



*Participants discussing what they voted for and why.*



## Final Visualize the Vote implementation.



## Closing Thoughts

There were several insights brought to the team with regard to the issue of brand compliance on Radford University social media channels after executing these methods. They were able to see, and productively discuss, the overall challenges they are faced with and discover opportunities existing to overcome it. The team understands the importance of educating users and would like to make this a primary focus. From my research conducted, there are several accounts that consistently violate the social media brand guidelines. I believe this is happening due to a general lack of understanding on how to make, maintain and produce brand compliant content. They may lack awareness of the purpose of social media and the role it has as a recruitment tool for the university. More importantly, because the people managing the accounts do this on top of their primary job duties, their time is limited. They lack time to devote to learning—even reading the SMUG e-newsletters, setting up consultations and attending training may be too difficult to manage. In my talks with the Web Communications and Strategy team in trying to understand the problem, researching what I could on their website, and looking at the current materials they are using to educate social media administrators I found myself getting lost in industry jargon. I can see how this could get overwhelming to process and understand. However, this along with other insights can be realized after researching and talking with the actual administrators of the social media accounts. Overall, the methods conducted in this assignment were a great way to facilitate productive discussion and was helpful in framing, exploring and electing ways the team could go about addressing this problem.