

UC SANTA BARBARA

Your Insider Guide to UCSB, Only on TikTok

2023 Circle of Excellence Awards

Communications: Digital Campaigns (Student-oriented)

Provide a concise overview of your entry that summarizes what you did, how and why you did it, and the results/impact.

In the fall of 2021, as TikTok rapidly grew its user base and #CollegeTok began to carve out a comfortable corner of the platform, our social media team in the Office of Public Affairs & Communications was determined to bring our placeholder profile to life and join in the fun this platform offers. In order to connect with our Gen Z student body and prospective students in a more authentic way, we hired a multifaceted team of paid student creators in early 2022 that could keep up with the platform's demand. With their help, we built for UC Santa Barbara an approachable presence that entertains and engages students in a digital version of our laid-back campus environment.

Through a combination of regular meetings and a freelance-style working arrangement, we provided our student content creators with both the structure and autonomy needed to inspire creativity and keep moving the needle forward. The result, evident after just one academic quarter, was a cool and carefree TikTok persona that embodies the classmate with insider knowledge who can help students maximize their campus experience and get the most out of UCSB.

By mixing original series and one-offs with the adoption of trends, we developed content that celebrates our vibrant community, appreciates our natural environment, and highlights what makes our campus unique.

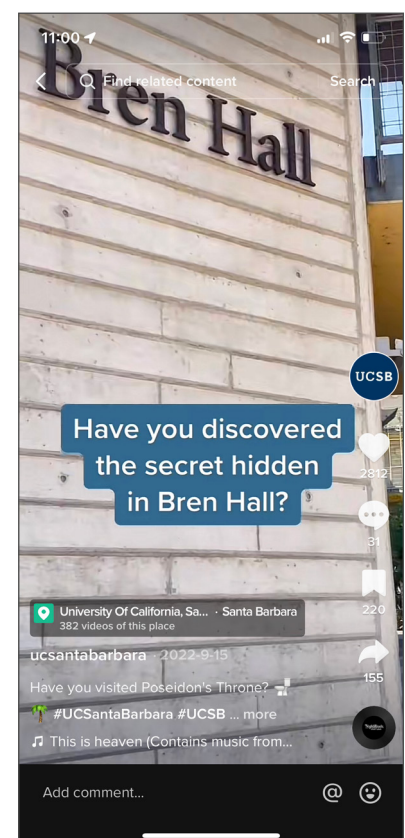
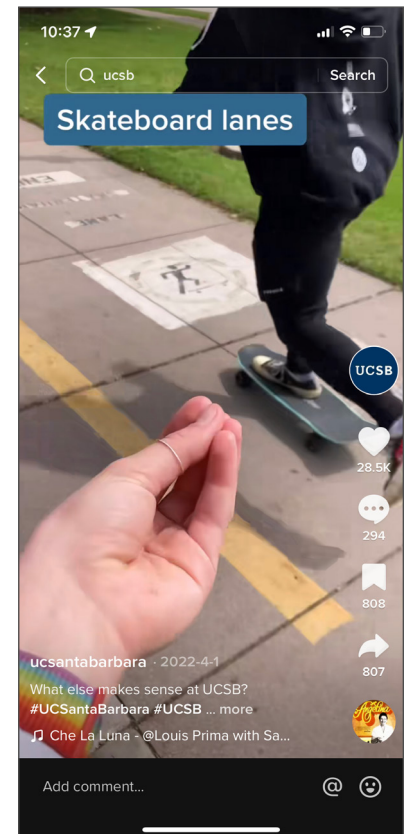
In 2022, our team produced 120 videos, achieved 2.4 million views, and earned more than 250,000 engagements — all while surpassing several of our UC counterparts and other peer institutions in follower count.

What makes your entry distinctive?

The Office of Public Affairs & Communications is leanly staffed and lacks a regular social media operating budget. At the time we began this undertaking, the regular social media contributors for the flagship channels of our top 10 public university consisted of a content marketing manager, a multimedia producer, and three paid student assistants. With just two full-time staff already working on social media content strategy and production, we knew the key to our success on TikTok would be the recruitment of a separate, paid student creator team who understands our audience and can help maintain a consistent posting cadence supported by the algorithm.

By onboarding a well-balanced group of both domestic and international students with different majors and extracurriculars, we began to highlight a wide range of student life and tell a campus story from their perspectives: one to which current Gauchos relate and prospective students are attracted.

With the UCSB TikTok account, which can be viewed at [tiktok.com/@ucsantabarbara](https://www.tiktok.com/@ucsantabarbara), we carefully select the latest trends and deliver everything from street interviews to day-in-the-life videos and throwbacks, to study tips and how-tos. We have even found ways to make campus and research news entertaining to our student body. But what has set our content apart is our multiple series that are unique to our community, including Secret Gems on Campus as well as a new character, "Storkey," named after our iconic campus landmark, Storke Tower.



Goals and Outcomes

With the addition of our TikTok team, our goals were to stay within our monthly budget of 45 student hours, post 2-3 videos per week while prioritizing quality content, and strike a balance between highlighting our community and our oceanside campus environment. In 2022, we met all of these goals with an average frequency of 2.3 posts per week and a visible balance of content on our profile. Additionally, we set a goal for one-third of our published videos to reach 10K views. Last year, 38% of our videos exceeded that bar and 9% received over 50K views.

(If applicable) What was the total amount spent on the project/initiative?

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Describe and detail how your resources (budget, people and time) were used (or attach a project budget below). Do not include staff salaries, but describe the number of staff and how they participated.

In its first year, the oversight of our TikTok student team was led by two full-time staff in the Office of Public Affairs & Communications: our content marketing manager and our multimedia producer. Their efforts included the facilitation of bimonthly meetings, weekly coordination and communication, and ongoing mentorship and guidance. Our content marketing manager wrote or edited post copy and published, as needed, and our multimedia producer edited videos and published, as needed. On average, each staff member spent about three hours per week.

Additionally, for the first few months of this effort, the onboarding and ramp-up of our team were managed solely by our multimedia producer while our content marketing manager was on maternity leave.

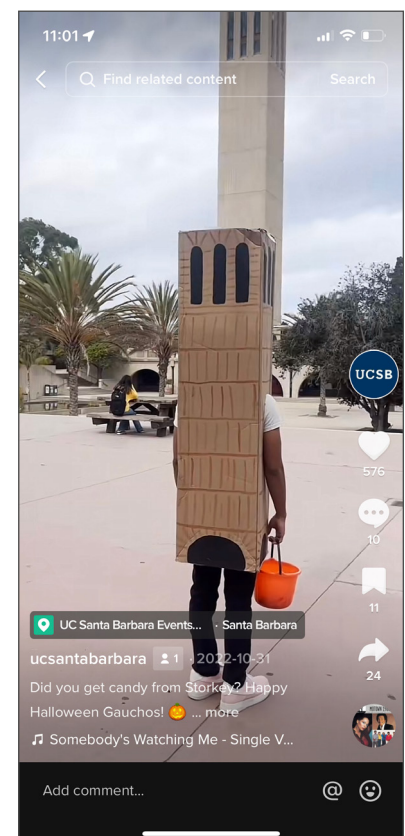
Our part-time student workers on the team collectively spent no more than 45 hours per week planning, filming, and editing videos as well as attending creative meetings.

How did you accomplish your goals?

A significant amount of time went into following higher education hashtags and accounts, researching TikTok's algorithm and best practices, and learning from personal experience on the platform, which helped inform our goal for posting frequency. By staying connected and on target through regular meetings, a group chat, and a spreadsheet for cataloging ideas and maintaining our content schedule, we maintained an average posting frequency of 2-3 videos per week.

An ongoing goal for content production in our office is to find a balance in showcasing our community and academic experience with our oceanside campus environment, which is arguably the most widely known aspect of our university. Thanks to the constant cycle of trends and our diverse content team, we were able to find a pretty natural balance. Our videos had a higher focus on the community during the academic quarter and often highlighted ocean and mountain views and sunsets during seasonal breaks.

Our percentage of high-performing videos with 10K views and beyond can be attributed to a combination of factors. Not only did we maintain a consistent posting frequency, but with every project, we also considered if and how we could utilize a sound or video trend. To increase sharability, we made a point to choose relatable topics for both our student body and the broader college audience. Lastly, we focused our post descriptions and on-screen text in a way that seeks engagement and invites commentary.



Additional Information

Our selection of TikTok videos in our supporting materials shows the range of styles our account incorporates; from trending sounds to aspirational and community-oriented visuals. The variety of posts also highlights the diversity of our student team and their insight into the TikTok platform. These videos have all performed incredibly well with engagement from current students and potential applicants, as well as alumni and community members.

A complete picture of UC Santa Barbara's TikTok presence can be viewed at tiktok.com/@ucsantabarbara.

