

'Influencer' degrees spark debate on college campuses

BY KAITLYN HUAMANI
AP TECHNOLOGY WRITER

Ask a teen what they want to be when they grow up, and there's a fair chance being an influencer is on their list.

Digital media and the people who star in it have been cultural mainstays for teens' entire lives, so creating social media, video or podcast content seems a natural, albeit nontraditional, career path. And now they can earn a college degree in that very field.

Arizona State University recently launched a new bachelor's degree in content creation, offered through its Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. The curriculum overlaps with that of ASU's mass communication and media studies degree, with the major departure being a slate of specialized electives on podcasting, studio production and on-camera presence.

ASU's announcement was met with swift criticism from many sides — from people who feel content creation is not a legitimate profession to those who question the value of a college degree in launching a social media career.

But the ASU program is not the first of its kind.

And the university, which declined an inter-



Rebecca Noble/AP Photo

Phoenix-based content creator Aiesha Beasley films herself at The Escape Game in Gilbert, Ariz. on Thursday.

view request about the new program, is not the first to offer content creation courses.

Universities, eager to compete for a shrinking student population, are rolling out new majors intended to prepare students for today's careers. Whether they lead to jobs can be up for debate.

COLLEGE COURSES IN CONTENT CREATION HAVE RILED CRITICS

Many higher education institutions have started offering classes focused on the burgeoning content creation industry over the past couple years, and several have certificate or minor programs.

Syracuse

University, Quinnipiac University and Colorado State University offer minors, and St. Bonaventure University announced a content creation major last winter.

To Brooke Erin Duffy, a communication professor at Cornell University, these college programs represent an inflection point. During the past year, Duffy said, institutions in education and beyond have been acknowledging content creation as a viable career path — even if the term “influencer” itself hits a nerve.

On social media, influencers are everywhere, sharing shopping recommendations and

lifestyle content or promoting beliefs about health or politics. Because even influencers with relatively small followings have loyal audiences, brands also often pay them to talk about products.

The image of a prototypical influencer, Duffy said, is usually a “young girl who is snapping selfies and just reaping in tremendous rewards for seemingly not doing anything.”

But that's not the reality for many content creators, who are working on media production, audience retention strategies, brand partnerships and business relationships associated with their online pres-

ence.

“It is a time-consuming, labor-intensive job that often doesn't pay well — at least in the beginning,” Duffy said. “But a lot of that gets concealed behind ... this assumption that it's a dream job.”

THE CREATOR ECONOMY IS BOOMING, BUT NOT EVERYONE REAPS THE RICHES

Even if someone has the skills to make it in content creation, it isn't easy to break in.

Social media is already a crowded field, and it's going to get even more competitive in the coming years, said Max Willens, a principal analyst at Emarketer who covers the creator economy.

Emarketer forecasts that social media creator revenue in the U.S. will climb above \$20 billion this year, but Willens said it's important to contextualize what that means for individual creators.

“The overwhelming majority of that money is not going into creators' pockets,” he said, even though their content and their followers form the foundation of the lucrative field.

Influencers can earn money from social media platforms, which reward high engagement, and some earn commission if people buy a product

they're promoting. But the largest share of influencers' earnings comes from sponsored content — getting paid to talk about a brand or product. Willens said he expects the amount brands spend distributing and amplifying creator content will eventually surpass the amount creators earn making it.

The idea that a specialized college degree will “suddenly turn people into viral content machines deserves a bit of a reality check,” Willens said.

Duffy noted that becoming an influencer often is perceived, incorrectly, as a path to get rich quick. Colleges that introduce content creation degrees may be hoping to attract new students — and their parents — who are looking for “a job that will pay off,” Duffy said. “Whether or not it does is another story.”

A degree's price is also a factor: At ASU, base tuition for Arizona residents is about \$12,000 per academic year, excluding scholarships, but the total cost of attendance can exceed \$37,000 after factoring in room, board and other fees. For students from outside of Arizona, tuition is more than \$35,000 and the total cost of attendance is around \$60,000 before scholarships.

DEBATE

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about potential data center sites.

Under the current zoning ordinance, data centers are not specifically listed as a permitted use. As a result, proposals are treated as an unlisted use, leaving uncertainty about where such facilities may be located.

“We do need to have some guidance on data centers,” Britton said. “We're getting a lot of inquiries on sites.”

A significant portion of the meeting focused on proposed setbacks and buffers between data centers and residential areas. Britton presented

maps showing how three different standards would affect industrial properties throughout Hopkinsville.

The first scenario applied a 300-foot residential buffer with a 100-foot setback from property lines. According to Britton, most industrial properties remained viable for future development.

A second option increased the buffer to 500 feet and setbacks to 200 feet. While some parcels became more restricted, most industrial parks still retained sufficient space for data center development.

The most restrictive proposal, a 1,000-foot residential buffer and 500-foot setbacks, dramati-

cally reduced the amount of land available, eliminating many potential sites.

Britton said the maps illustrated the tradeoff between protecting nearby neighborhoods from noise and preserving industrial property for economic development.

One of the committee's longest discussions centered on whether data centers should be classified according to electrical demand.

Committee member representing Crofton, Barney Bishop, questioned using megawatt consumption as a zoning standard, arguing that electrical capacity should remain the responsibility of utility providers rather than land-use regulators.

Drawing on what he said was his decades of experience in manufacturing and utility relations, Bishop compared data centers to other large industrial employers.

“I don't see what makes this really any different than any other business that's coming to town,” Bishop said. “We need to stay out of the way of our utilities. Let them do their jobs.”

Hopkinsville Electric System's general manager, Jeff Hurd, said the utility carefully manages available electrical capacity and would not jeopardize service reliability for existing customers.

Hurd said new high-demand customers are

required to pay for any infrastructure improvements necessary to serve them.

“We're not going to jeopardize that for any new customer, whether it's a data center or any facility,” Hurd said.

Hurd added that attracting large electrical users can help spread infrastructure costs across more customers while reducing pressure for future rate increases.

Committee members also discussed whether data centers should be permitted by right in industrial districts or require conditional use permits reviewed by the Board of Zoning Adjustments.

Some members argued that conditional use per-

mits would allow each proposal to be evaluated individually because no two data centers are identical.

The committee ultimately agreed to continue refining the draft ordinance rather than forward a final recommendation. Staff will present updated maps and discussion points to the full planning commission before another public hearing is scheduled.

Britton said the goal is to develop a proposal that reflects public input while providing clear standards for future development.

“We want to get the best recommendation,” he said. “If that takes another month or so, then we're going to take that time.”

CROFTON

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received preliminary approval from the Department for Local Government for that grant, and she anticipates that it will come to fruition.

“It'll probably be another six to nine months before that project will actually start,” Frogue said of funds she noted are part of the Recreational Trails Program.

Frogué said the funds can be utilized to either create new trails or make improvements to existing motorized or non-motorized trails.

She noted that the Recreational Trails Program requires a 20% match from communities applying for those funds, and Frogue said that program is currently open through Oct. 30 for interested applicants.

“If we have additional communities out there that are interested, we would love for them to give us a call so we could help them put something

together,” she said.

The mayor noted that the grant funds that his city is receiving are a godsend given a really low tax base in the community and low-income families.

He said Crofton and its residents, along with residents of surrounding communities, are fortunate to receive funds that he said will improve their lives.

Lacy recognized the efforts of Christian County Judge-Executive John Bruce, who initially shared information about House Bill 900, as well as Rep. Jason Petrie

and other state officials that he said helped Crofton obtain the recent grant funds.

The mayor notes that it was Christian County Judge-Executive Jerry Gilliam who informed city officials that Crofton had been awarded House Bill 900 funds.

He further highlighted the contributions of volunteers in the community, along with the Crofton City Council, the board of the Gordon Park and of resident Barney Bishop, who he said maintains the city's veterans park.

The mayor noted that efforts to improve aspects of the city are a work in progress.

“We've got other things I think we've talked about doing too, just trying to make it a good community and a safe community,” Lacy said of future plans.

Among those efforts are discussions about upgrading Gordon Park's splash park with hardwiring, a technique that essentially connects any electrical equipment to the park's power source.

Lacy noted that his community pinches

every penny it gets, and he said officials want to do the best they can in utilizing the grant funds they've received.

“It's just not all for Crofton,” the mayor

emphasizes again of the attention his town draws. “We accommodate a lot of people (that) comes in here from out of town, and they really enjoy it.”



LEGAL NOTICE

THE FOLLOWING APPOINTMENTS OF GUARDIANSHIP WERE MADE IN THE MONTH OF JULY 2026

MINOR	REPRESENTATIVE	ATTORNEY	DATE APPOINTED
RODNEY HARRISON 26-P-00262	ZANETA ORZOL 41 FERNWOOD SR CADIZ, KY 42241	SAMUEL J. WRIGHT 4975 ALBEN BARKLEY DR. STE 1 PADUCAH, KY 42001	7/13/2026
MAURICE D'VON THOMAS 26-P-00275	OLIVA RENEE THOMAS 608 EAST 2ND ST HOPKINSVILLE, KY 42240	NONE	7/27/2026

PAIGE PARKER, PAIGE PARKER, CLERK, CHRISTIAN DISTRICT & CIRCUIT COURTS



LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF THE FOLLOWING PROBATE SETTLEMENTS FILED WITH THE CHRISTIAN COUNTY CIRCUIT CLERK FOR THE MONTH OF JULY 2026. A FINAL SETTLEMENT WILL BE ORDERED BY EITHER JUDGE LINDSEY ADAMS OR JUDGE FOSTER COTTHOFF UNLESS AN EXCEPTION IS FILED WITH THE CIRCUIT COURT CLERK WITHIN 10 DAYS OF THE DATE OF PUBLICATION.

LINDA CAROL FARMER, EXECUTRIX FOR THE ESTATE OF JAMES GLENN FARMER, DECEASED, FINAL SETTLEMENT (23-P-00523) (JULY 1, 2026) ATTORNEY—WHITNEY WESTERFIELD, PO BOX 340, HOPKINSVILLE, KY 42241

NORMA GIBSON, EXEUTRIX FOR THE ESTATE OF CHARLES THOMAS GIBSON, DECEASED, FINAL SETTLEMENT (25-P-00255) (7/16/2026) ATTORNEY—SANDS M CHEWNING, PO BOX 955, HOPKINSVILLE, KY 42241-0955

THERESA CLARK, EXECUTRIX FOR THE ESTATE OF KATHRYN A. STEINMEYER, DECEASED, FINAL SETTLEMENT (22-P-00054) ATTORNEY—HAROLD MACK JOHNS, PO BOX 746, ELKTON, KY 42220

LINDA MEACHAM, ADMINISTRATRIC FOR THE ESTATE OF EULA WEST, DECEASE, FINAL SETTLEMENT, (24-P-00220) (7/22/2026) ATTORNEY—TRAVIS B. NEWMAN, 2420 FRANKFORT AVENUE, STE 300, LOUISVILLE, KY 40206

THE FOLLOWING SETTLEMENTS OF GUARDIANSHIP/ CONSERVATOR MADE DURING THE MONTH OF JULY 2026

LINCOLN AND JANE DAVIS GUARDIAN/CONSERVATOR FOR THE ESTATE OF JAMES CAR DAVID, FINAL SETTLEMENT (10-P-0021) (7/20/2026) ATTORNEY—JOHN C. WHITFIELD, 29 EAST CENTER ST., MADISONVILLE, KY 42431

PAIGE PARKER, CLERK, CHRISTIAN DISTRICT & CIRCUIT COURT