

Episode 145: Student-run Instagram meme accounts feature real UMN life

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As the student admins of the FarstoolGophs account prepare to step down after this semester, OneBuzzMinnesota will continue to keep the memes alive.

ALEX LASSITER: Hello, lovely people! It's Alex Lassiter with The Minnesota Daily, and you're listening to In The Know, a podcast dedicated to the University of Minnesota.

Now, like quite a few college students with an Instagram, my school spirit also shines through in the accounts I follow. Of course, that includes official University of Minnesota sanctioned activity, like the main account and the RecWell's social media page, but sometimes I like to get a little silly-goofy with it.

That is why I also follow a good handful of gopher meme pages. Y'know, Instagram accounts that are run by UMN students, for UMN students, but aren't associated with the University at large. They're a fun way to get a look at real student life here. For every campus tour group, there's a cluster of dysfunctional drunk people, and those meme accounts do a great job of directing college humor towards college students.

One of those accounts is @farstoolgophs. It's an Instagram page run by two seniors at the University of Minnesota. The admins behind the account said they wanted to remain anonymous for the interview.

They plan to do a face reveal in their own time on @farstoolgophs, but for now, they said they'd prefer to continue keeping up the anonymity of the account. For the remainder of this story, we'll call them Maroon and Gold.

Maroon said she and Gold met through a University Facebook group before fall semester in 2020, when they were both incoming freshmen.

MAROON: I think we just like exchanged Instagrams and Snapchats and we kind of just clicked. We bonded over like music, and we really liked the same TV shows. And then once school started and COVID happened, we kind of met and I think especially because COVID you couldn't really interact with that many people.

LASSITER: Gold started the FarstoolGophs account in September of her sophomore year at the University.

GOLD: My format was like, I would make a Tweet draft and then I would take a screenshot of it and I would post it and it was ugly and not a lot of people would reshare it and not a lot of people would like them. And like the most interaction I would ever get is like maybe a hundred likes.

LASSITER: Gold said Maroon would help her come up with content ideas during class, and as they kept talking, Farstool would come up more and more frequently in conversations between the two.

GOLD: And so then eventually I was just like, do you want the password? And it's so much easier to manage with like two people, cause there's days where like I'll post more, but there's a lot of days where she'll post a lot more.

LASSITER: The name "FarstoolGophs" drew obvious inspiration from BarstoolSports. The name was a mishmash, using Barstool as a base and the trend of a "finsta," or "fake Insta(gram)." So FarstoolGophs was a kind of fake Barstool. And, as the name would suggest, the account turned into a sort of antithesis of Barstool.

Maroon and Gold said as the account grew in popularity, they wanted to define it as more of a women and queer centered account, separate from the athletic, Greek lifey-vibe that Barstool put out.

GOLD: When we like first started, it was very like U of M specific, like the point, I was like, okay, this is like a U of M account. Everything has to be like U of M related. And then, we got a little bit of explore page clout, and that is like a drug because now the more vague you make something, the more shares it gets. And that's so fun.

The other day you were like, "annotated bibliographies low key suck," over a picture of like Mindy Kaling in a rainbow dress. And it has like 7,000 likes from random a** people. But it's just like, it's fun to do stuff that's more vague while still being school related, so it's not meaningless to the U of M people that actually do follow us, but it's fun to get engagement from other people.

MAROON: We got a DM last week that was from this girl who doesn't even live in America. She goes, "oh Farstool, I don't even live in America, but I love your content." So I think at this point too, we've kind of, obviously it's predominantly U of M students or Twin Cities area, but I think that's definitely helped.

LASSITER: After taking their time to set up the account and find the style of content that worked best for them, Maroon and Gold wanted to find unique ways to interact with their followers. Eventually, Gold landed on the idea of holding a giveaway after reaching a new account milestone, like hitting a certain number of followers.

GOLD: Our first giveaway was for 400 followers, and we put together a giveaway bag of literal, like, sh*t that we like accumulated. It was like a half smoked pack of cigarettes, and one random shooter.

MAROON: Packs of Advil.

GOLD: I don't know, very random stuff, but it was like fun, and then that kind of became our tradition. And now our tradition is like bedazzled giveaway gifts.

LASSITER: While FarstoolGophs has been a mainstay in the University of Minnesota social media game for a while, a new social media brand is taking the University scene by storm.

OneBuzzMinnesota, a submission-based Instagram account run by University of Iowa sophomore Colin Speiker, has surged in popularity since the brand first launched in December of last year.

The OneBuzzMinnesota and OneBuzzUlowa accounts, which are both currently managed by Speiker, are just two of 26 total platforms under the up-and-coming brand name "OneBuzz."

Speiker says his plan is to hire people to run the individual university accounts while he and his two business partners focus on managing the brand.

COLIN SPEIKER: We've got like seven or eight big accounts that are over 5,000 followers and continuing to grow. And then we're trying to bring up the other half with hiring and some compensation strategies for our interns.

LASSITER: Out of all of the OneBuzz pages, OneBuzzMinnesota has the largest follower count: a whopping 16,000. That's more followers than even the main OneBuzz account.

Speiker said getting the brand off the ground at the start was hard work. He and his business partners would try to drive up engagement by posting multiple times a day on each account, following people from each university, responding to comments, and posting polls and other content on their stories.

SPEIKER: I remember being on Christmas vacation in Scottsdale, Arizona, and just working, like posting four times a day. We wanted to really get as much content out there as possible.

Once they started to pick up traction, we got a few viral videos. The algorithm really is starting to take care of us now, and you've got to pay the price up front if you want to see growth on the long, on the backside. So I think we did a pretty good job of that.

LASSITER: Speiker said OneBuzzMinnesota wants to differentiate itself from Barstool and other similar brands by taking social media engagement off the app.

He said he and his buddies are planning on holding in-person campus events that would be unique to each university, hosting bar crawls, and reaching out to concert and event spaces to host other events under the OneBuzz name.

SPEIKER: I think a lot of Instagram pages are just, “oh, we’re an Instagram page and we’ll do some paid promo for like some side income.” We see this as something bigger than that, and we want to make it real. We want to bring it in-person and start a movement.

LASSITER: As the brand grows, Speiker said he could see it turning into a recognizable, nationwide brand like Barstool or LineLeap.

SPEIKER: It’s the fact that we’re a small company, we can take a lot more risks than them, like you would never see Barstool putting on a bar crawl just because of all the liability and the legal stuff.

We’re young. We’re just getting started. We can take a lot of risks to really get our name out there. I think next semester you’re going to see us a lot more on campus.

LASSITER: While OneBuzzMinnesota is just getting started, activity on FarstoolGophs will be winding down as both of its admins wrap up their senior years at the University and graduate this spring. Gold said even after they stop posting regular content, they plan to leave the account up as an archive of their time at the U of M.

GOLD: I think we both feel too protective over it to give it to someone else. And also there’s just a lot of people that talk to us in the DMs, that it would be weird to be like, “okay, here’s a random person logging in and seeing all your stuff that you’ve talked to us about for the past two years.” And then we might face reveal, and that might be our final hurrah.

LASSITER: Gold said she hopes someone will pick up the torch once they’re gone and usher in the next era of Farstool under a new name.

Maroon said one of her biggest takeaways from running the account is that as long as someone enjoys what you’re posting, it’s worth posting. She encouraged any budding content creators to focus on making things they would give a like if it came up in their feed or post to their personal accounts.

MAROON: I’ve always had kind of a messy public story on Instagram. I’ve always posted things, and I had gotten messages from people where they’re like, “oh, this is so funny,” and so I think even before going into it, don’t be afraid to just kind of make jokes on your main account and see what kind of works for you.

I’m not saying you need to share your life story nor am I doing that, but I think you can kind of test the waters on things and just make jokes and see if people like it.

LASSITER: Maroon also said running the account taught her a lot about herself. She said looking back on it helped her realize where she was at the start of the account's activity, and how much she's changed up to the present day.

MAROON: I was really going through it my sophomore year of college. I was a mess. And so I think a lot of the content that I make now, it's me reflecting on those experiences that I had. You know, sometimes you kind of need a bit of hindsight to be able to laugh at it because when you're going through it, it's pretty bad.

And it's funny because we'll get DM's from like disgruntled men that will go, "You need to stop, you know, going out and getting drunk and hooking up with all these people." And it's not even necessarily what we're doing. We're just looking back at a certain time.

LASSITER: University of Minnesota Instagram meme accounts aren't my Roman Empire, but they are my Library of Alexandria. Whether new or old, branded or niche, stepping out or stepping back, they serve as both a chronicle of University of Minnesota culture, and the personal journey of the people behind them. The lessons both learned and imparted from them could never be taught in a university classroom. And even as they come and go alongside their student admins, the experience of them will never be lost.

You can follow both the accounts mentioned in this story on Instagram at [@farstoolgophs](#), that's f-a-r-stool-g-o-p-h-s, and at [@onebuzzminnesota](#), all one word, spelled how it sounds.

This episode was written by Alex Lassiter and produced by Kaylie Sirovy. As always, we appreciate you listening in and feel free to send a message to our email inbox at podcasting@mndaily.com with any questions, comments or concerns. I'm Alex, and this has been In The Know. Take care, y'all.