

Social media: a creative outlet or a career move?

This University of Florida senior launches her own career as a YouTube content creator.

By Carly McCullough

The ringing of an iPhone alarm fills the air of a once-silent bedroom. It's 8 o'clock on a Monday morning, and the rest of the world is preparing for a busy week ahead. While most Gainesville residents are getting in their last moments of solitude before heading off to class, this University of Florida senior sits down with a coffee in hand to map out the week's worth of filming, editing and dreaming.

For Allison Schaper, college life is just one half of the story, as she has created a career path of her own through soaking up all of the knowledge she can as a telecommunication production major and putting it into building her own art form as a content creator on YouTube.

With more than 27,000 subscribers to her channel, Schaper has been active on YouTube for several years now – and has fallen in love with it.

“The more I film videos, the more I want to film videos,” she expressed with nothing but passion in her eyes.

While the social media influencer has a multitude of inspirations, being a University of Florida student is what undoubtedly nudged her into really running with the idea of creating her online persona.

“Having a YouTube channel was always something that I wanted to do, but when I got to college, one of my professors made a comment saying ‘If you don’t have a YouTube channel, what are you doing?’” she shared.

“That was really the push I needed.”

And more specifically, that push was UF professor Houston Wells.

The telecommunications lecturer strives to teach skills that are truly applicable in the real world and have a wide range of places where those skills will take you to the next level in whatever you do.

And Schaper is no exception of that.

“Allison is the perfect example of what I mean when I tell students I want them to get out there and establish themselves in the real world as an individual in the realm of whatever it is they want to do,” Wells exclaimed.

Wells is well-aware of the fact that the industry of communications is expanding and changing so vastly. In talking about Schaper’s future in the field, it’s clear to him that she’s already successfully on the way to personalizing what it is she dreams of doing, and he truly believes YouTube can make for a successful career.

“She’s always a pleasure to work with in class, and it’s rewarding as a teacher to see students take something you’ve shared with them and really grow from it.”

It’s not unusual for college students to have some sort of presence online in the social media atmosphere, but to interpret that as more than just an outlet of entertainment

and turn it into a career-building platform is something Schaper has managed to take by storm.

“When I started YouTube, it was really just a creative outlet, and it still is very much so,” Schaper shared. “It never feels like I’m working, but it is really cool when your hobbies do become part of your career.”

The concept of being able to make a living off of simply being active on such a social media platform left Schaper feeling mind blown.

“It truly is my dream job”

Schaper has created a community in this online era in a society where it is becoming easier to interact with other individuals online.

In reaching out to her own specific audience, the YouTuber and college student realized that her viewers are the most important part of her entire career move. It’s as if each one is personally rooting for her in watching her succeed in what she loves most, explaining that she really wouldn’t be able to pursue YouTube as a career backed by a college education if it weren’t for her subscribers.

“Knowing that so many kind people tune into my videos and cheer me on throughout life makes me so happy – indescribably happy,” she voiced.

A spark of gratitude ignites in Schaper every time a subscriber approaches her to share acknowledgements and kind words about her latest upload or the lip color she had on in her latest Instagram, also noting that it happens in place where she’d least expect it.

“I’ve been in the grocery store before or simply heading to the library when someone’s asked me if I’m ‘that girl on YouTube’ or that they’ve seen some of videos,” she recalled.

Schaper likes to get involved in interacting with the people who watch her videos by chatting in the comment sections and taking feedback on what they personally like and dislike about the way she’s done something.

“It’s like a two-way street,” she says, “in that they’re helping me do what I love in the greatest way possible, and they’re getting to watch the stuff that they want to see most.”

Her latest idea has been to send out hand-written, individualized Valentine’s Day cards to a handful of viewers simply to show her admiration for their support – something that sets her apart from other influencers who lack that shared communication.

While it isn’t hard to assume from watching a few of her videos that Schaper has the heart of an angel, one of the people closest to her maintains that she truly is an exceptionally kind person.

Brandon Bickerstaff, her boyfriend of nearly six years, speaks of Schaper with the utmost admiration and love. When you grow up alongside someone, it is only inherent that they shape who you become as a person, and Bickerstaff is the first one to admit how much they mutually influence one another.

“She’s always doing little acts of kindness,” he notes. “It’s very inspiring to watch, and I learn a lot from her.”

The rareness of being able to say you've turned your greatest passion into your central focus in a career is something that inspires her to take all of her greatest interests and achievements and mesh that into one incredible life.

"The idea of having an individualized job is very, very appealing to me, so if I could be able to keep growing it and one day be able to support myself fully off of that, that would be phenomenal," she expressed.

Turning her real-life experiences into a visual end product is one of Schaper's favorite parts of why this is such a meaningful career-path. Whether she's filming an average "day in the life of a college student" vlog or a travel diary documenting her trips to Disney World or the Bahamas, she's creating visual memories for herself to be able to look back on.

"It's like a diary on steroids."

The hardest part in choosing a path where you're essentially paving the way for yourself is that it's immensely time consuming, and that's something Schaper is not ashamed to admit.

"It can be a little draining because it is a process, but it's so rewarding, and that's how I want and choose to spend my time," she shared.

"I never see myself not doing YouTube."