

It's Time to Face the Music Book!

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Alexander Astin (1993) found a “. . . tremendous potential that student involvement has for enhancing most aspects of the undergraduate student’s cognitive and affective development.” (p. 394). Well, talk about student involvement, it’s growing exponentially! A new form of Internet communication has literally millions of America’s college students logged on. What is it? It’s Facebook. Students, faculty, and staff write, post, journal, and develop peer-to-peer sites.

Facebook was launched in February of 2004. Today, over four million people on more than 1500 college campuses subscribe to the electronic service. At Concordia University Wisconsin (CUW) there was no involvement in mid-August 2005 but a short two months later over 50% of the undergraduate student body had become registered users.

For those who have had little or no experience with this new Internet resource, Facebook “. . . is an online directory that connects people through social networks at schools” (www.facebook.com). Blogging and subscribing to Facebook have quickly become the predominant way for students to connect, “hook up,” or electronically “hang out.” The dramatic increase on our campus prompted CUW Student Affairs Staff to begin discussion about the issues surrounding this new electronic tool. After networking with several colleagues at other institutions, we also found that we were not alone in our concerns over student safety, community respect, civility, and ethical behavior. Being a faith-based institution, we were distressed with reports of questionable “electronic conduct” by student Facebook subscribers.

Confronted by many opinions and some facts, we decided to first get more information before leaping into policy formation. For us, the writing of this article became a therapeutic way to explore many of the issues that are being considered within higher education.

The three authors of this document represent a divergent experience with electronic communication. The opinions stated herein represent our individual personal philosophy regarding the place and use of this media in today’s modern academy. **Therefore, the purpose of this article is not to give the reader the definitive answer to all the questions but to form a framework to stimulate discussion at your respective institution.** We chose to present this information in the form of a conversation – like what may now be occurring on your campus. The writers below are listed as they might appear in Facebook.

Name: Andy Luptak, Ph.D.

Birth date: 04/25/1943
Occupation: Vice President of Student Life,
School: Concordia University Wisconsin
Academic Program: Director of Master's Program in Student Personnel
Administration
Internet Use: Daily Email, List Servs

About Me: I enjoy the two list servs I subscribe to, but I must admit, when I am busy (frequently) I just delete the unread posting from my email. I don't have the time or the desire to become active in the world of blogs and Facebook. However, I am now questioning if that might become a necessity in the future?

Name: Crystal Faledas
Birth date: 07/03/1981
Occupation: Resident Director
School: Concordia University Wisconsin
Academic Program: Student, Master's Program in Student Personnel
Administration
Internet Use: Daily Email & Instant Messenger, Weekly use of Online Games, occasional Facebook use

About Me: Like many of our current students, I entered college using cell phones, emails and instant messengers as my primary means of communication with friends and family world-wide. I've stayed up to date as personal websites, blogs and other virtual communities have gained popularity and as a result, I understand how valuable these tools can be to students.

For over a year now I have viewed this online world from a different perspective – that of a student affairs professional. Seasoned colleagues have turned to me wanting to know more about students' online behavior. Initially I didn't understand their shock and concern about the amount of information students reveal on the Internet, but it didn't take long for me to see what a complex issue we faced. Everywhere I looked articles appeared, cautioning administrators to stay current with the changing technologies.

Name: Marissa Engelhard
Birth date: 04/24/1986
Occupation: Sophomore Student/Resident Assistant

School: Concordia University Wisconsin
Academic Program: Elementary Education
Internet Use: Daily Email, Instant Messenger, Facebook, weekly use of personal blog

About Me: I have always had a computer in my household, even from the time I was very young. By the time I was in middle school, I had my own e-mail account and was introduced to the world of instant messaging (AIM). In high school, AIM and e-mail became a part of my daily routine. As a college sophomore, I have high-speed Internet at my fingertips at all times. I get up and check my e-mail before going to class or even brushing my teeth. I use on-line library catalogs for papers. My professors prefer e-mail to phone calls, because they have a “paper” trail of my questions. I also use my e-mail, on-line journals, and instant messaging to stay in touch with my friends and family back at home.

Six months before Concordia University Wisconsin was added to the Facebook, my friends and I e-mailed the website administrators asking them to add our school to their website. This fall, my request was granted! Facebook was mine! I signed up and began to search for all of my friends that had already been on Facebook for months. I encouraged people at my school to join, and they did!

FACEBOOK FOR DUMMIES

The old adage that a student often teaches the teacher is true. The two younger authors of this article educated the senior administrator under the title of “Blogs and Facebook for Dummies.” Consequently, we thought that it might be worthwhile for others to also understand some of the “lingo” related to this new form of communication. Below is a brief lesson for those who need it.

Registering for a Facebook account is simple; understanding it may be more difficult. Upon entering the website www.facebook.com you will have the option to either “Login” or to “Register.”

As a first-time user, you can click on “REGISTER” to begin the process. You are then asked to provide three required pieces of information about yourself: 1) name 2) status (student, alumnus/alumna, faculty, staff or graduate student) and 3) Your email address; you must have a valid college/university issued email address ending in “.edu” to be eligible.

If your school is already listed on the site, you will receive an email verifying your registration. From this point, any additional information contained in your profile is optional. Most students choose to post a picture of themselves. Many add their birthdate, sex, major, residence hall location, hometown, relationship status, campus involvement, jobs, special interests and even a listing of their class schedule.

Here is a list of commonly used Facebook terms:

- Profile:** Personal information about the user that is displayed for other users (ie. Contact information, interests, classes, etc); optional.
- Privacy:** A range of settings that monitors the amount of information seen by other users.
- Friends:** People that have mutually accepted each other as friends; when other users view your profile they can click on a link to request that you join their list of friends; you have the option to accept or deny them; if accepted they have more access to your profile if you have privacy settings in place.
- Groups:** Allows user to create/join a group of people who share similar interests, hobbies, backgrounds, etc.
- Parties:** Allows user to send invitations to parties over the website; type of party, location and RSVP are all publicly shown.
- Messages:** Private messages can be sent between individuals, similar to email.
- Wall:** A public arena to post a message; each user has a wall that is displayed on their profile similar to a discussion board.
- Poke:** A feature unique to Facebook, choosing to poke someone is having one user let another user know they have viewed their profile.
- Facebook Announcement:** For about \$10 a day, users can post a message to their school on Facebook in a banner-like advertisement.

Once you have registered and understand what Facebook has to offer you can search for anyone globally by name/location or you can select specific criteria, such as academic major, to search the users within your own school.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

- Q1: How do students view faculty, staff, or administration using or viewing blogs and the Facebook?**

Marissa: A couple students have reacted negatively to the thought of administration viewing their Facebook profiles because they think it is an invasion of their privacy. What can I tell them about that?

Crystal: Recently a local high school suspended student athletes for pics of them drinking which they [the athletes] posted on the web; could something like that happen at a university?

Andy: When staff members become aware of rule violations, they cannot look the other way. However, after saying that, I have no desire to become the Internet police on this campus. But I also know that students talk! It's highly probable that students will tell someone when they see offensive, racial, or risky behavior. They are unlikely to come to me, a vice president, but more likely to come to staff like yourself, an RA or hall director. What would you do? . . . Look at the site to verify the concern or the report?

Q2: **Is a Facebook posted announcement of a potential student conduct code violation (e.g. underage drinking party) the same as, for example, overhearing a similar conversation in the cafeteria?**

Andy: Well, if you are frequent users, as you are of the cafeteria, you may run across it, but to go out in search of it is where we run into an ethical dilemma. I would not encourage hall staff to run around putting a glass to the door of residents to listen in on their conversations. But, if they overheard something in a public place, I would expect them to take appropriate action.

Marissa: In response to that though, as students, we do frequently use Facebook and I run across [alcohol] party announcements...

Crystal: Then as an RA, what would you do if you became aware of an underage drinking party on your floor?

Marissa: I would go to my RD and this is where I am actually unclear about the legalities, but for me it is the same as someone putting up a poster advertising a party [underage drinking] in my hall.

Crystal: I look at it very similarly, it's a posting, it is not a private conversation. Students knowingly post this on the Internet for others to see. They may not intend faculty/administration/staff to see it, but the thing is, we can, just like a physical bulletin board in a hallway or an invitation on a room door, or a message on a dry erase board, etc.

Q3: **How do free expression and self-regulation play into postings on Facebook about a campus?**

Crystal: Part of me really likes the groups that are set up for students to give their input/concerns about the campus, but part of me doesn't. It isn't always productive with the way students phrase their comments. Thankfully there are some students who are self-regulating the conversations and pointing their peers in the direction to make the change or be more productive with their concerns.

Andy: With your experience, Marissa, do you think that students, as they type messages, self-edit themselves versus a group of students conducting a verbal "bull session" late at night in the residence hall room.

Marissa: When they post, there is some thought before they speak; they may have been able to reflect on the situation, discuss it with friends already and then go back and phrase their response online.

Crystal: From my point of view though, it is not as self-edited as it would be if they were writing a formal letter. It is still very conversational in nature and some "heat of the moment" remarks do still come out. But, when these remarks are posted online they are there permanently.

Andy: The bad part of verbal stuff is when somebody says something, the phrase can mutate itself and that's where you get rumors; the story gets a life of its own when it is retold. Online, the words do not change; they remain as the author originally phrased them and, unlike verbal exchanges, the author becomes responsible for them!

I also have a deep concern for the civility of these messages. When people demean a member of the college community they, in my opinion, step over the line. As a faith based institution, we recognize that people will disagree with another. But there are God pleasing ways to resolve issues. An electronic shot, either known or unknown by the target, is what I call guerrilla warfare. By that I mean it is one who shoots from behind the bushes and then runs and hides.

See Notes 2 and 3 (p. 9) for additional information.

Q4: Then, if students are experiencing negative consequences for their electronic behavior, does the institution have a responsibility to notify and educate students. If yes who???

Crystal: What do you mean by notify?

Andy: Does the school have the responsibility to notify students beforehand that administrators, faculty and staff will be on-line too and observed violations of the conduct code will be pursued?

Marissa: Yes!!! As both a RA and a student, I am unaware of the policies and rights concerning on-line behavior. Students would be more conscientious about what they post and the security settings they use.

Crystal: I agree that we should be up-front about our presence because students need to understand that their behavior is public in this setting. A university could address this in their policies and also through education on Internet use in general.

Andy: I have spoken with our director of our freshmen year experience program and asked him to consider a lesson(s) titled "Current Topics." Today, it may be Facebook, and tomorrow, it will be something else. He reacted positively to my suggestion.

Marissa: I think it is a good idea. This extends outside of my college experience and into my professional life. I have not thought of the fact that future employers can look at my on-line journals and profiles. On-line communications should also be discussed in classes that are preparing students to head out into the work force.

Andy: Marissa, at a recent conference, I had an opportunity to talk with friends at other institutions. They told me of accounts of prospective employers looking on-line [blogs, Facebook, etc.] at student's electronic records of themselves. So I agree with your observation that on-line behavior can affect your professional life.

Crystal: Something I've tried to do this year is educate my RA staff about their personal profiles and how they still serve as role models on the Internet. We've had discussions about the safety risks of placing personal information on-line. I'm hoping that they'll demonstrate responsible behavior and help educate their residents.

Q5: **Apart from conduct code violations, do students engage in other risky behavior? If yes, what forms of risky behavior do students engage in?**

Andy: First, when Crystal showed me some of the profiles students created for themselves, I immediately became concerned for students' personal safety. Do students recognize the risks of stalking and identity theft? You have showed me students posting personal information like room numbers, cell phone numbers, class schedules, hometowns, date of birth, where they work, and pictures of themselves.

Have either of you seen what I would call “enticement statements” that would catch someone’s unwanted attention?

Crystal: I immediately think of the different groups students can join on Facebook. I’ve seen some that classify its members as enjoying such activities as drinking, partying, flirting, and sex. There are even groups for depressed people. So, if someone is looking for vulnerable people, they can prey on people who may not be very happy and have an interest in risky behaviors.

Marissa: This reminds me of a group I saw that linked a wrestling team to drinking titled, “Drinking Team with a Wrestling Problem.” The picture of the entire team implied that all of the members were party animals. It was started by a member of the wrestling team, but what happens if someone was out to cause trouble?

Andy: Let me comment on the wrestling picture. From what you describe, the picture appears to be the official team picture. I would also assume that the college owns the rights to the picture; would this be a copyright infringement [rhetorical question]? Also, you have showed me pictures of students who post other people pictures [e.g. rock stars] as if it were the student’s picture - same copy right question!

Q6: **Then, what are issues related to students sharing personal information about themselves?**

Crystal: Personal profiles, websites and online journals are really a way for students to express themselves. They become very creative with painting a picture of how they want others to view them. It’s a way for them to call out, “Hey this is me!” . . . “Did you know I’m interested in poetry and love to go canoeing? I can be fun and adventurous even if I am quiet and shy in class...”

Andy: You said the magic word, expression!! Then would you say that this is protected by the first amendment? Let me ask you some what ifs. What if a student were to use profane language, place a provocative picture, or post copyrighted material. What would you say to the practice of a student posting a request for a term paper that the student was willing to pay for?

Marissa: I think I would inform the professor of the class what I read, but I’d be hesitant because I don’t know if they mean it or if they are joking. I also don’t know if the average student (non-RA) would say anything, they might just read it and think that it is dumb and never think twice about it again.

Andy: Would they post test questions...

- Marissa:** I don't think so, they know better than that and would be risking too much (expulsion), they are more likely to email it to friends if they were going to share that information.
- Crystal:** So then where is the line? They will post information about drinking parties in their room, knowing that it is against the policies.
- Merissa:** I think students truly believe that other students will not get them in trouble for posting information about a party. They believe it is a freedom of speech that they have.
- Andy:** Not all speech is truly free, and student's actions have consequences when university and law enforcement officials become "in the know." (They're online, too!)
- Crystal:** Some of this is outlined in the site's terms of use agreement.
- Andy:** Do students read the user agreement before they sign up for it?
- Marissa:** NO, the main thing we check for is whether or not we have to pay for the site.
- Andy:** You've just shown me a very negative, demeaning comment about one of our students, which was posted in a Facebook group called "Sex Addicts." Was that posted by another student wanting to degrade this woman's reputation?
- Marissa:** Probably not because the woman was a member of the group that made the comment about her. This implies that they are choosing to be "friends" or linked. Chances are she has already read that post.
- Crystal:** But we don't know for certain.
- Andy:** Does Facebook monitor this type of behavior?
- Crystal:** "Do they?" or "Could they?" is the catch. In the user agreement Facebook outlines their right to monitor and remove anything that may "be offensive, illegal, or that might violate the rights, harm, or threaten the safety of Members." I personally have not seen any evidence of them actually doing this, though.
- Andy:** When you registered for Facebook did you read the user agreement?
- Marissa:** Nope. I didn't read through it. Other friends had been using it and said good things about it so I just joined.
- Q6:** **Is there any other behavior that concerns you?**

Crystal: A concern for me has always been reading comments made by a student that imply, not directly state, self-harm or depression. Since the comments are made online and can be vague, it is hard to understand the manner in which they were made – serious or joking.

Andy: If it comes to the attention of professional or paraprofessional staff (RA's), I would expect them to take any comments seriously until they have direct evidence otherwise. I believe we have a duty to protect all our students and I also feel that students have to understand that their public statements will be taken seriously. It's like a person walking into an airport and saying loudly, "I have a bomb in my suitcase!" Even if he were kidding, airport authorities would take the statement seriously and there would be consequences for his actions.

Marissa: If I saw this type of online behavior I would first go to the student and inquire as to the meaning behind it. This is a topic that is personal and I believe it is easier to discuss it with someone that they may be closer with. However, I have also had the training to know that I can go to a counselor or a Resident Director if necessary.

Andy: This is certainly a way that you (RA) can connect with counseling and health services, but I have the following concern. If we have a campus where several people know a small part of a student's picture it is probable that the case may be overlooked. We have to find an environment where we can accumulate the pieces of the "big picture." Another concern I have is about students threatening other people. Have you seen any of this online?

Marissa: I can't say that I have. However, it's important that all parties involved stay safe, including myself, so depending on the severity of it I would go to either the student or my Resident Director. I could even see the potential for going to campus safety if the situation seemed immediate.

Crystal: I have not seen direct threats or violent behavior from our students on Facebook, but I have seen some strong opinions that could lead to an escalated argument. I would just be concerned about a student offending the wrong person who might take further action.

NOTES RESEARCH AND OPINIONS FROM THE FIELD

Note 1: Recently on the ASJA (Association for Student Judicial Affairs) list serv there was discussion about Facebook. One staff member "stumbled" across a student's page which documented his hatred for "certain religions" and "people of color." The exhibited behavior allegedly took the form of racist

cartoons and photos of his Nazi daggers assumed to be in the student's resident hall room.

At another institution, staff found pictures of at least 20 students drinking at a fraternity house which included a large quantity of alcohol and participation in drinking games. Allegedly the fraternity has a previous relationship with the staff member.

The list serv discussion centered on the question, should this type of behavior result in a formal complaint against students and/or the fraternity chapter?

Note 2: In Wagner v. Miskin the Supreme Court of North Dakota sustained a lower court's decision to award a university professor \$3,000,000 for a student's alleged electronic behavior. The professor sued the student when she, in part, used the university computer network to send harassing and sexually explicit emails to the professor. Also, in Urofsky v. Gilmore, professors at a public university had to comply with a state law regulating the use of state owned computers. The professor's free speech and expression claim was not upheld by the 4th Federal Circuit.

Note 3: According to "Inside Higher Ed News" a number of students had to face authorities for their Facebook and other electronic behavior. Three students at a university were sanctioned through the school's conduct process for creating a Facebook group of people who wanted to sleep with a specific professor. At another public university, a student was investigated by the Secret Service for posting comments about assassinating the President of the United States in a Facebook group titled "Bush Sucks." And, at a small private institution, a student was arrested on felony charges for inviting other ". . . students to kill the police who were making drug busts on campus." The student claimed to be joking.

Note 4: The following is from the Facebook User Agreement (www.facebook.com):

"You are solely responsible for the content, photos or profiles Content that you publish or display (hereinafter, "post") on the Service, or transmit to other Members (collectively the "Member Content"). You understand and agree that Facebook may review and delete or remove any Member Content that in the sole judgment of Facebook violate this Agreement or which might be offensive, illegal, or that might violate the rights, harm, or threaten the safety of Members."

"By posting Member Content to any part of the Web site, you automatically grant, and you represent and warrant that you have the right to grant, to Facebook an irrevocable, perpetual, non-exclusive, transferable, fully paid, worldwide license (with the right to sublicense) to use, copy, perform, display, reformat, translate, excerpt (in whole or in part) and distribute such

information and content and to prepare derivative works of, or incorporate into other works, such information and content, and to grant and authorize sublicenses of the foregoing.”

”You may remove your Member Content from the site at any time. If you choose to remove your Member Content, the license granted above will automatically expire.”

Note 5: At a recent meeting of private colleges, senior student affairs administrators reported that contacts were made with Facebook. In one case the administrator reported that Facebook quickly responded to their concerns. However, another senior administrator reported that Facebook had not responded after several requests.

Note 6: Other Electronic Behavior: The reader may be interested in a site that posts pictures of parties and drunk students (www.drunkuniversity.com). The site shows students in very compromising situations. Did these students give permission for their picture to be posted on this site? Are all students shown of legal drinking age? What would mom or dad say if they saw the pictures? Are these pictures posted for all time so that future boyfriend/girlfriend or potential employer can access?

FINAL THOUGHTS

After spending several sessions discussing the pros and cons of Facebook, we end this article the way that we began it, a quote from Alexander Astin (1993, p. 394). He found a “. . . tremendous potential that student involvement has for enhancing most aspects of the undergraduate student’s cognitive and affective development.” Consequently, the three of us have come to the consensus that Facebook and other similar sites are neither friend nor foe to the Academy. Each is a tool. In the hands of civil, respectful people communities like Facebook can be tremendous instruments to facilitate and enhance student interaction and communication. However, in the hands of inconsiderate, intolerant, and thoughtless people, these sites can do much harm and damage.

So what should Student Affairs staffs do? We ask that you answer that question for yourself. But, we are willing to share what we are going to take to our respective campus colleagues (students, faculty, and staff) to consider.

Education: 1) We will recommend to the Director of First Year Experience to include education on electronic communication in all first year seminar courses. Because every section is taught by a faculty/student affairs staff member and by a peer leader (student), we will recommend that the peer leader do the teaching.

- 2) We will recommend that appropriate on-line behavior becomes part of the University's orientation program and that sessions be presented to both parents and students.
- 3) We will recommend to the Director of Residence Life that resident hall staff (Resident Directors) and paraprofessional staff (Resident Assistants) be educated on all University policies regarding on-line behavior and that these staffs become familiar with the dangers inherent to inappropriate use of Facebook and other similar sites.

Policy:

- 4) We will work with our Instructional Technology Department (IT) to revise the current computer use policy to include on-line behavior which uses the university computing network and/or university e-mail address. This would include a statement that on-line behavior is a venue subject to our current conduct code (e.g. sexual and racial harassment, statements of threat, academic dishonesty, underage alcohol consumption).
- 5) We will not restrict the use of Facebook from professional (e.g. hall directors) and paraprofessional staff (e.g. resident assistants, graduate assistants) staff. However, we will make it clear that, when on-line, the person is not acting as an agent of the University. All individuals will be cautioned about the use of University or other copyright material and that the institution will confront use of on-line copyright infringement similar to other forms of copyright abuse.
- 6) Educate the campus community on the "state of student on-line behavior" and communicate to campus professional and paraprofessional staff the university's policies and procedures. New procedures will have to be written.

Discussion: 7) Continue to discuss the ethics of on-line behavior.

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