The Good, the Bad, the Ugly: Virtual Social Network Communities

Faculty and Staff Training and Awareness
North Dakota State University
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Outline of Training

• Background of virtual communities
• Motivations to create online profiles and continued use of virtual communities
• Pros and cons of virtual communities
• Ethical issues
• Examples of profiles
• Online student education suggestions
Virtual Social Networks

- A community of individuals sharing common interests, ideas, and feelings over the Internet or other collaborative networks.
  - Facebook.com
  - Friendster.com
  - XuQa.com
  - Collegehumor.com
  - MySpace.com
  - Xanaga.com
  - Livejournal.com
What is Facebook.com?

• Established in 2004 at Harvard by two students
• A virtual community reserved exclusively for members of institutions of Higher Ed, and most recently high schools
  – Only members with an .edu e-mail address can join.
  – Members can only view profiles of friends or those who attend the same institution
• Supported by advertising
• Seventh most active site on the Internet
Facebook cont.

• Connects more than 2,600 colleges nationwide, and an unknown number of high schools.
• Tallies 250 million hits everyday.
• Has 12 million users worldwide.
• The average member spends 18 minutes a day on Facebook.
Uses of Facebook

• Create a profile
• Share pictures
• Join groups
• “Poke” people
• Send messages
• Be reminded of upcoming birthdays
• Stay in touch with friends
• Meet new people
What is MySpace.com?

• A social networking Website offering an interactive network of photos, blogs, user profiles, groups, and an internal e-mail system” - Wikipedia

• Founded in 2003 by a Berkley graduate; recently sold for $580 million

• Open to all ages – currently has 90 million members

• Supported by advertising

• Supercedes Yahoo in terms in number of hits per day
Why do students use VNCs?

- Peer pressure/friend recommended.
- To meet fellow students
- Class schedule and learn who classmates are
- Use message tool as a meeting reminder
- Birthday reminders
- Communication with high school friends
- More structured than other online communities

- University of South Carolina Virtual Case Study Results
Positive Reasons to use VNCs

• Easier to have a social life
• Freedom of expression
• Easy method to keep in touch with old friends
• Page is a personal reflection of the person
• Create groups (shared interest, study, etc.)
• Advertise campus events
Negative Aspects of VNCs

• Internet stalking/harassing
• Security/safety
• Internet privacy
• Identity theft (Sensitive data exposed)
• Inefficient use of time/procrastination
Negative Aspects of VNCs

• Potential future problems with profile content (employers, post-graduate program, professors)
• Class distraction
• E-mail spamming
• Facebook shares member information with 3rd party vendors (Privacy Policy)
Other negative uses of VCNs

- Inefficient use of time – coursework is not completed
- Personal reputation and impression
- Future employment
- Teachers and administrators
- Possible judicial repercussions

  - Note: According to Janna Stoskopf, it will be NDSU’s policy not to “search” profiles but will take actions if something inappropriate is reported.
Facebook Examples

• Statement on a profile about a student’s work experience at Target:

  “get shit, print shit, get paid shit. But i can still afford beer”.
Facebook Examples

Profile Pictures
Facebook Examples

• Profile Pictures

![Profile Pictures Example](image)
Discussion Points to Cover For Students

Discussion to be by instructor/res life staff member/career services person

Ask why they like to use VCNs
- Focus on positive reasons
- Enforce common responses & why students continue to use VCNs

• Safety/security concerns of VCNs
  - Internet Privacy Concerns
  - Web is public domain (What happens in Fargo does not stay in Fargo)
  - Personal information
  - Internet stalking/harassment/predators
  - Personal identity theft
  - Personal possession theft
Topics to Touch on

• Phone numbers
• Address
• Screen names
• Adding class schedule
• Joining offensive groups
• Posting pictures (intoxicated, illegal substances, sexual)
• Privacy settings – how private is it
• Tagging others & being tagged
• Messages sent & received
Discussion on Setting up a Profile

• Questions to pose
  – Who do you want to view your profile?
  – What do you want your profile to say about you?
  – What image do you want to portray online?
  – How would you feel if your Facebook profile was put on a poster on campus, in the local newspaper?
  – Consider your future: Is there anything on your current profile that you may regret later?
Thoughts for Discussion

• Invincibility: What you post or profile today could haunt you tomorrow.

• Caching: What is posted online is hard to remove from online.

• NDSU IT Policy: Freedom: Do not monitor network content
Thoughts for Discussion

- NDSU Policy: Responsibility: No limit to authorized viewers from your profile or other Internet expressions of your identity.
  - No expectation of privacy

- The Law
  - Privacy of others
  - Watch what you say!
    - You may be held liable for damages under either defamation or libel.
    - Posting photographs of others can be considered an invasion of privacy.
Interactivity

• Discussion as posted on prior slides
• Ask students to print off their profile or “wall” and do an honest critique of it. After the discussion, what would be good to change on their profile and why. It might be a good idea to form groups and have the groups critique the profiles
• Create a brief scenario and follow with multiple choice and true/false questions
• Students receive a pass or fail
Sample Questions

• As per their privacy policy, VCNs can pass your information to third party vendors for marketing purposes.
• Anyone with a computer and an Internet connection can be a member of a VCN.
• Students are immune from judicial repercussion by NDSU for their profile’s content on VCNs.
• You should always list all of your personal information even if not required when creating an online profile for a VCN.
Methods to Disseminate Information

• Blackboard – online tutorial and quiz
• Websites – Student Government, ITS, Student Life, Residence Life, Career Services, etc.
• Online video created and directed by students with students serving as actors
• Article in the Spectrum written by students
• Training for faculty and staff who work with students
Resources

• “Thoughts on Facebook:”, Cornell University:
  http://www.cit.cornell.edu/policy/memos/facebook.html

• http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MySpace

• “Special report: www.BeCareful.com”
  http://www.statepress.com/issues/2006/06/26/arts/697062

• “Virtual Fun with Real-World Consequences”
  http://www.campussafetymagazine.com/Articles/?ArticleID=17

• “Keeping Students Cybersafe”
  http://www.universitybusiness.com/page.cfm?p=1119

• “Outside-the-Box Recruiting — Using MySpace.com as a Recruiting Tool”
  http://www.ere.net/articles/db/F6E6AD84DB8D4345BF46E55A706BA317.asp

• “For Some, Online Persona Undermines a Résumé”
Questions?

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