Oberlin College Guidelines on Electronic Social Networking

Statement Of Purpose

The Oberlin College statement on electronic social networking serves as a guide for the campus community to better inform students, faculty, and staff of the opportunities and consequences associated with electronic social networking. These issues could include policy and law violations, student privacy rights, reputation of self/other/institution, peer harassment, safety concerns, and impact on professional development. This statement will guide the campus in developing an appropriate educational response and materials.

What Is Social Networking?

Social networking generally refers to the use of such online websites and or applications as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr that help connect friends, groups, businesses, and others. These sites offer great opportunities to connect and communicate, but the hazards they present are often not clearly documented. Oberlin College urges all users of online social networking sites to be cautious about posting personal information and to be aware of the potential risks associated with making personal information public.

Managing Your Online Presence And The Risks Associated With Belonging To Social Networking Sites

Most members of any campus community have an online presence through e-mail, websites, blogging, or online social networking sites. All of these sites present certain common risks that are often not considered or sometimes ignored.

Legal Liability: Be aware of the potential for wide distribution of your information and comments. You may be held legally liable for any comments made about other people. You could subject yourself to defamation or libel suits if information or images you post about someone else is proven to be false or damaging. The college reserves the right to discipline students for acts of misconduct wherever they occur. While staff and faculty do not "police" online social networks for possible violations, staff are obligated to answer all complaints and reports of alleged misconduct whether on campus, off campus, or online. You also are responsible for complying with any site's terms of service upon signing up for a social networking site.

Privacy/Safety: Some sites allow students to post phone numbers, class schedules, hometowns, and birth dates; information that could be used for stalking or identity theft. Read any site's privacy policy before creating a profile. Again, remember that people you don't know may be reading your information. Trust your instincts if contacted by someone you don't know; ask a lot of probing questions before allowing anyone to see your profile. Ask permission of others before you post about them.

Future Employment Problems: Your digital footprint is larger than you are. Potential employers often search for information on prospective employees online. Information posted on personal websites and social networking sites may be readily available and should be considered accessible. It is remarkably easy for people you don't know to gain access to social networking sites and profiles you may consider private. In addition to checking the personal interests of potential employees, some employers check sites for poor grammar and writing skills.

YOUR WORDS HAVE IMPACT: Just as your positive reputation can be an asset in the job search process, negative statements you may have shared about a company, a particular person, or an issue could come back to haunt you in an increasingly global and networked world. If you're not absolutely sure you want it read, don't post it. Communication is very contextual, a pejorative word or phrase used in playful conversations with friends can easily be misconstrued.

THE INTERNET IS REAL: Social interactions on the web are akin to social interactions in person. Even if you're not sitting face-to-face and conversing, there is a person sitting on the opposite side of your words, and context, tone, and jokes are easily overlooked when projected online. Consider your online relationships to be a supplement to your in-person relationships, and don't hesitate to take a conversation offline.

USE OF PSEUDONYMS: When some people are uncertain about how an online profile might affect their student experience or future career, they stay anonymous. Oberlin College's Rules & Regulations suggests that "members of the college are expected to take responsibility for their expressions; anonymous expressions are inimical to the free and open exchange of ideas." Posting anonymous comments about other people that are incorrect, false, or hurtful, or photos that are misleading or damaging, is not only unethical but also illegal.

THINK TWICE BEFORE POSTING: Once it's out there, it's out there. Even in the fleeting seconds between posting something and deleting it, your content could be seen or saved by anyone. Deleting content does not remove the possibility that it has been seen.

THINK TWICE BEFORE SHARING: Think twice before sharing other people's information, posts, and pictures. Be sure to obtain permission first before sharing other's content and updates. Your social media postings affect the lives of others as well

IT COULD BE HARD TO UNSUBSCRIBE: Caching means that anything posted on a social networking site may remain accessible long after it has been deleted. Google has a policy process for removing information from their caching technology but this can take time and may require many steps. If you no longer want to be part of a social network site, ask to cancel your membership. This does not eliminate the cache, however. If a social networking site goes out of business, content could be sold to others. Check the *Terms of Service* for any social networking site you decide to subscribe to. Some actually do offer ways to permanently delete your profile and personal information. Please note, however, that even eliminating your account does not eliminate your data from a site. A site might retain the data for legal protection.

TIME MANAGEMENT: Many students are unaware of how much time they spend on social networking sites and what impact this may have on academics and other student activities. If concerned about your use, call Student Academic Services (x58464), the Counseling Center (x58470), or talk with your class dean.

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