

Association of Fraternity Advisors
Essentials

A Review of Facebook.com

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Technology has become a significant part of the undergraduate student's community in recent years. Oftentimes, when college administrators refer to the millennial generation college student, it is often quickly followed by statements regarding this generation's high use of cell phones and iPods. In addition to this phenomenon, TheFacebook.com has become one of the pinnacle developments in the millennial generation's college experience.

The Facebook came about from two juniors at Harvard University who, as a half-hearted joke, created a web based directory system to keep people at school connected. From the Facebook's meager beginnings at Harvard, the website has spawned one of the largest and fastest growing web based directories known (Read, 2005). In less than two years, the Facebook has grown to encompass a membership of over 3.85 million college students (roughly 85% of all college students) and is now expanding to include high school students (Arrington, 2005). Out of the millions of people who have joined the Facebook, 67% view the site at least once a day, which is a major reason why the website has become one of the most popular sites of this nature (Toomey, 2005).

The Facebook has become its own privately run business with a headquarters in California and over 50 employees. The company has seen offers to sell in the upwards of hundreds of millions of dollars (Toomey, 2005). The rapidly growing success of the Facebook has caught the eye of other big areas of industry in the United States, from higher education to the sports industry. The Facebook and similar sights such as MySpace.com are crafting a market niche that is impacting several aspects of society. In a recent article in Sports Illustrated (2005, December 14), Vince Young, Quarterback for the University of Texas, spoke about the influx of messages he had received on his page after joining the Facebook. The Facebook stir that was created around Young was not only because of his position on Texas' football team but also because of some of the famous pictures he had on his profile. Young's profile included pictures he had taken with celebrities such as Nick Lachey at various sporting events. As students began to view Young's Facebook account, buzz grew rapidly around campus about the celebrities who were pictured with the Texas athlete. Like many college students, Young did not realize the number of people who randomly look at other people's Facebook pages. The naiveté that some students have in approaching online social communities like the Facebook has proven to be a costly mistake for some (Haskins, 2005).

A generation of students has now grown up with online personal sites such as the Facebook, Blogspot and MySpace making them susceptible to judicial sanctions at many colleges and universities. In recent news, there has been more and more documentation on colleges and universities sanctioning students for things that are revealed on websites. The University of Mississippi has recently taken action against inappropriate things found on online sites. Earlier this year, three students were suspended from school because of a Facebook group that was created about seducing a faculty member (Jaschick, 2005). The University of Alabama has gone one step further than Mississippi by creating a parent access website called myBama Family Connection; it

allows parents access to students online sites. The main premise for the parent site is to allow parents insight in what their children are doing while they are away at school (Epstein, 2005).

Since Alabama's launch of the Family Connection, thirty other schools have since created similar parent access sites (Epstein, 2005). The hope of many administrators across the country is that sites like the Family Connection will deter students from posting inappropriate behavior online. Parents are enjoying these sites as a way to better understand their students while at the same time some students are seeing the use of "Facebook prowling" as an invasion of privacy (Steele, 2005).

The question of what level of privacy should be afforded a student on the internet is up for debate. Many students find online journals and sites such as the Facebook as great ways to communicate with friends and peers. Conflicts arise between administrators and students when the information posted by students conflicts with the organization's values or policies. At Duquesne University a student discussed his anti-gay views on his page on the Facebook. When students got word of the homophobic views and statements posted, they turned their classmate into judicial affairs and now the student is facing academic dismissal (Steele, 2005). The largest challenge facing college and university administrators today comes in the question of whether we are stopping poor decision making through the monitoring of sites such as the Facebook or are we simply taking poor behavior off the internet allowing it to still occur just now out of the sight of faculty, and staff administrators (Steele, 2005)?

In just two years the Facebook has become a dominant force for change among college students and administrators alike. One of the Facebook creators, Mike Hughes, told the Chicago Sun Times that the Facebook is "something we are having fun with." The fun that Hughes and his partners have created in the Facebook is becoming a phenomenon of significant proportion (Toomey, 2005).

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