

## **Association of Fraternity Advisors *Essentials***

### **An Overview of MySpace.com**

Lenny Chan, Carnegie Mellon University

By now, most student affairs professionals have heard of Facebook.com, some are familiar with the more specific TheGreekFacebook.com. MySpace.com is yet another online community that bills itself as “a place for friends” (MySpace.com Homepage, n.d.). Unlike Facebook.com, MySpace.com does not require a relationship with an institution to create a profile. This truly is an open community with people from all over the world and of different backgrounds.

Membership at MySpace.com has grown since January 2005 and now has more than 40 million members (Hempel, J. & Lehman, P., 2005). In doing a search, it was found that there are over 240 countries or territories to choose from when creating a personal profile. One can very easily become lost on this site as each click leads to a different aspect of this online community.

Getting started on the website is easy; to create a profile, new users need only enter their email address and select a password. MySpace.com is free and once a profile is set up a user is able to join groups, upload photos, send emails and instant messages, network and blog (About MySpace.com, n.d.).

The terms and conditions state that users must be “14 years of age or older and [their] use of the MySpace.com shall not violate any applicable law or regulation”; however, during the registration process a new user needs only to enter their birth date - no additional verification of age is required. MySpace.com does warn users that “Your profile may be deleted without warning, if it is found that you are misrepresenting your age” (Terms and Conditions, n.d.). Additionally, no other information entered during the registration process is verified; this process not only makes MySpace.com an open community but also a place where a user can remain anonymous or even misrepresent him or herself. When setting up a profile, new users are asked a series of questions; these include basic demographic information as well as the opportunity to select affiliations and memberships like a school or a fraternity/sorority.

There are many different sections to MySpace.com including a section for games, music, classifieds, forums, a place to rate members’ pictures, an event page that lists upcoming shows, parties and gatherings for your area, and even a place to buy MySpace.com clothing.

One of the main areas that student affairs professionals should be aware of is the ability for members to form groups. Groups may be public or private and are created by a member and listed under a specified category. Private groups require the approval of the Group Leader to become a member. Public groups are open for all to join. As of December 19, 2005, there were 13,041 groups on MySpace.com listed under the category of fraternity or sorority. A majority of the groups listed in this category are not affiliated with a national or local fraternal organization. Some groups under this heading include “Coolest Dudes Fraternity,” “The Hot Girls,” and “United Pot Smokers-UPS” (MySpace.com Groups, n.d.).

There are many inter/national fraternities and sororities listed. A search of several affiliations yielded results for various chapters around the country. One college's fraternity and sorority community had a group for all of its member organizations. Most of these groups contain pictures, some of which included alcohol or other conduct that is not only unfavorable to the image of fraternity and sorority life, but against community and institutional policy and/or the law.

MySpace.com brings forth a number of issues that student affairs professionals can educate their students about: personal information in a public place, identity theft, and risk management issues are only a few. Because of these issues, MySpace.com and other sites like it need to be added to the ever growing list of areas that student affairs professionals need to be aware of in order to stay in touch with their students. This website is more public than Facebook.com since anyone with an internet connection and email address can join. The public perception of fraternity and sorority life could not possibly be enhanced by some of the photos, blogs and forum postings that appear on this website under the heading of fraternity and sorority life. It is apparent from many of the groups or postings that the general public does not have a clear perception of what true fraternity and sorority life entails; a search on MySpace.com brought forth a number of non-affiliated groups that categorized themselves as a fraternity or sorority.

In many ways the information displayed by fraternity/sorority members does not help to curb these inaccurate public perceptions. Today's students need to be informed of ways to protect themselves as individuals and organizations when participating in such online communities. These online resources will only be further developed and enhanced over the years; therefore, it should be a goal for all student affairs professionals to help students understand how to use these resources for their enjoyment and benefit instead of fostering the stereotypical perceptions of fraternity and sorority life for all to see.

### References

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