

LIS 550 - ASSIGNMENT 3

PRIVACY

Gabor Por - November 18, 2007 – <http://pgabor.com>

The primary mission of our school is to educate the students in a safe and stimulating environment. We recognize the growing importance of online social networking sites (SNS) in our constituencies' life. Therefore we issue this policy, designed to balance our mission, with the students' need and their parents' concern.

The policies contained in this document apply to all to students using the school's computers, or their own via the school's internet connection on our campus. We suggest following these as guidelines for home usage as well.

By "computer" we mean any electronic device that can be used to interact on the internet, including PDAs, cell phones, video game consoles. By SNS we refer to sites "designed to allow users to interact and share interests, attitudes and activities", including but not limited to MySpace and Facebook. For the purpose of this paper we also include in the SNS category social media sites that "are used predominantly to post, access and exchange content"; e.g. YouTube and Flickr. (Both definitions are based on OCLC report.)

The purpose of this paper is to create guidelines for self-regulation. Legal regulations always lag behind technology. We want to protect our students from potential harms, while at the same time we want to enable them to enjoy the benefits of new technologies. This policy paper is an attempt to combine these two goals.

In order to provide guidelines for SNS usage we need to know their effects on students. Our school needs to act as an equalizing force, enabling all students to have equal opportunities to enjoy the benefits of these sites. A prerequisite to achieve this is to have access, familiarity with, confidence in, and appropriate skills using the internet. The NCIS report on "Computer and Internet Use by students in 2003" showed that there is a digital divide along the demographic and socioeconomic lines. The same report also proved that schools help to bridge the divide, by providing access for those who otherwise would not be able to.

We acknowledge that the school is not in the position to address all issues of the digital divide, such as affordable access, language issues, and governmental support. However we address the first by providing access to computers and internet on our campus. We also lend laptop computers to students, because we understand that home use has additional benefits in terms of length, intensity, type and

frequency of usage. We are working with our faculty and students to make the school's own website multilingual, to provide support to students for who English is not the first language. We also provide training in our library to increase the students' digital literacy skills.

We understand that using computers, the internet and specifically SNS is beneficial for our students. Research (DiMaggio et al) suggests that people who use computers can tackle more complex tasks, work longer hours, but have higher wages. Therefore it is in the interest of our students, who we serve, to be skilled with computers. The same research also showed that computer use is related to children's reading and mathematics test scores. However it had a higher return for boys, whites and children from higher socioeconomic status.

OCLC's "Sharing, Privacy and Trust in Our Networked World" reports that "forty-two percent (42%) of social networking users agree these sites help maintain current relationships. An even higher rate, 47%, agree that social networking sites help build new relationships." Considering that socializing is an important aspect of education for our students, we consider these numbers positive.

Having established the beneficial nature of internet and SNS use we need to address how to avoid potential harm to students. The three intertwining issues in this regard are their privacy, security and questions related to anonymity. By privacy we refer to freedom from intrusion, control of information about oneself and freedom from surveillance.

The school's computers and internet access use filters to block access to websites that can be considered potentially harmful to children. Currently we do not block SNS. However if the "Deleting Online Predators Act of 2006" will be enacted we will have to do so in order to remaining eligible for receiving federal funds.

The school educates every student on how to use the internet and SNS as part of the computer literacy curriculum. We recognize that we cannot enforce what students do online at SNS. However at the end this module we ask them to sign a contract which contains the guidelines below to protect their privacy and ensure their security. By signing this document they promise to adhere to these standards. Every student receives a copy of the contract. It is also on the startup screen of the browser when they connect to the internet using the school's computer or internet connection.

- Read the privacy policy of the site before joining.
 - If you feel uncomfortable with any of the terms do not join.
- Use the maximum privacy settings the site allows and you are comfortable with.
 - For example disable the display of your email address.
- Do not post out personal information based on which you or your school can be identified.

- This includes, but not limited to your (and your family members) name, address, phone number, pictures, financial (e.g. credit card) information, and your school's name.
- Sites collect this type of information and may sell or share it with third parties. It may also be accessed by malicious or criminal users.
- Be aware that there is no true anonymity.
 - Technically savvy people and organization may be able to find you even if you believe you are connecting or posting anonymously.
- Consider using pseudonyms.
 - If you cannot post anonymously consider using a pseudonym to protect your identity.
- Be aware that any information you post online should be thought of as with sharing with everybody.
 - Once it is online it may end up places where you would not want it to be. For example college admission boards and employers can find whatever you post.
- Do not meet with stranger in person if you met them online.
 - If you really want to, ask your parents' permission. If they grant it meet at a public place (e.g. a café), take somebody with you and let your parents know where you are.
- Do not share passwords with others.
 - They may post content in your name which you do not agree with.
- Never give out passwords.
 - Sites and emails asking for a password outside the usual login process are usually not authentic. They are "phishing" to gain access to information to abuse it.
- Do not engage in cyberbullying.
 - Do not be aggressive online. If you feel uncomfortable or victimized in an online conversation leave, do not reply.
- Do not post sexually explicit or suggestive content.
 - The people you are talking online may not be who you think they are, e.g. they might be predators.

Some of the guidelines above are based on content from netsmartz.org and isafe.org. Both are recommended sites to learn more about using the internet safety.