

Students should use common sense when posting to Facebook.com, says expert

Think you know your daughter's potential college roommate for her freshman year? Think again.

Not to imply that your daughter will be rooming with an alien being, but as Facebook.com continues to gain popularity, it's become easier for students to post information that may or may not always be true, which can pose problems for professors, friends and future employers.

Students need to remember that a Facebook.com posting becomes public information, says Karen Levin Coburn, associate dean for the freshman transition at Washington University in St. Louis and a leading expert on the college experience.

"Students may post photos of themselves wearing crazy clothes or acting in a way that makes them seem more outgoing or more wild than they really are. But the persona you create online may be hard to maintain once you arrive on campus.

"Plus, you just don't know who's looking at your profile. It's not just students but employers and professors as well," says Coburn, talking about Facebook.com, one of the Internet's most popular sites.

Launched in 2004 by students at Harvard University, Facebook.com was designed to allow current and would-be college students with an .edu e-mail address to chat with each other, form online groups and post photos.

Now anyone with an e-mail address can sign up. The site has the largest number of registered users among college-focused sites with more than 30 million members worldwide. It is the seventh most visited site in the United States.

And it's not always what it seems.

Requires 'common sense'

"I think it's a great way for students to 'meet' each other before they arrive on campus," says Coburn. "But it requires a bit of common sense as well. It's very easy for someone to post fake information about themselves or even faked photos to make themselves seem 'cool' or different. Students just need to be aware."

Coburn is co-author of the acclaimed book, "Letting Go: A Parent's Guide to Understanding the College Years," which, in its fourth edition, has sold more than 320,000 copies. But since its last edition in 2003, much has changed, including the advent of sites like Facebook.com.

"These sites can be a great resource for helping students begin to adjust to life at college before they even get to campus," Coburn says. "Students just need to be careful and remember that not only their friends see what they post, but so can professors, campus security and future employers."

Source: Washington University in St. Louis

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