



May, 2009

## ACADEMIC SUPPORT COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL

# *Guidelines for Faculty and Students using Internet Social Networking in the Academic Context at the University of Saskatchewan*

### ***Introduction***

The following guidelines were developed by a Subcommittee of the Academic Support Committee of Council. The Subcommittee agrees that existing University of Saskatchewan policies cover in general the use of Social Networking websites in an academic context, but that a set of guidelines could be of use to both faculty and students in using these websites for instructional purposes. It should be noted that the guidelines are intended to address the use of social networking sites in an academic context but are not intended to cover business practices such as fundraising or promotion of the university to prospective students.

### ***Preamble***

Chatting, texting, blogging and spending time on Social Networking websites like Facebook and MySpace are part of everyday life for many students. Social Networking websites allow users to construct a public or semi-public profile on the website, develop a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and communicate with those other users<sup>i</sup>. Universities are exploring the potential of social networking web sites for purposes such as teaching, learning and collaborative research.

Use of the Internet for social networking applications includes posting on blogs, instant messaging [IM], social networking websites, e-mail and listservs, posting to public media sites, mailing lists and video-sites<sup>ii</sup>. Social networking web sites such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and Twitter which are external to the University of Saskatchewan can form part of the technology toolset used to enhance teaching and learning in the classroom or online. In an educational context, social networking websites can be used for collaborative activities, connecting students (including local to global relationships), peer tutoring, improved communication skills (reading, writing, creative expression of ideas via other media, etc.), knowledge restructuring and co-creation, among other activities.

The University of Saskatchewan wishes to provide the best learning experience possible for its students. It recognizes that social networking is a large part of the social and learning life of students as they attend the university. Social networking can provide a rich experience for collaboration and the sharing of knowledge, ideas and experiences. Where possible and advantageous to the successful pursuit of learning, social networking activities are encouraged.

The unregulated open and public characteristic of the internet presents rich opportunity to interact with and learn about others. It also provides a potential for less positive experiences. To fully experience and use the good potential of the internet it is necessary always to be cognisant of its dangers. It is important to have good judgement about the kind of information shared, as well as to understand how and with whom information is shared.

Social Networking technologies may form a major component for meeting one of the strategic directions of *Toward an Engaged University: The University of Saskatchewan Second Integrated Plan (2008/09 to 2011/12)*:

“... to recruit and retain a diverse and academically promising body of students and prepare them for success in the ‘knowledge age’.”<sup>iii</sup>

### ***Instructional guidelines***

Course instructors need to be aware of the University’s responsibilities and obligations to protect personal information and ensure privacy and confidentiality of students, as well as to protect the reputation and image of the university when using these technologies. Such use may include giving assignments that employ these technologies as part of the activity and assessment criteria. The following guidelines help address considerations for web-based technologies in teaching and learning:

1. Avoid posting personal information about a student or require students to post such information on an external social networking site, and caution students not to post personal information online. This includes information in textual, oral or recorded form, where the information identifies an individual or for which it is reasonably foreseeable in the circumstances that it could be utilized, either alone or with other information, to identify an individual.
2. Be aware of the impact of intellectual property rights and copyrights on information being posted. Always ensure that proper permissions have been obtained for any course or research material being posted to web sites. Where images and videos are posted, it may be necessary to obtain permissions from individuals identifiable in the image or video.
3. Information which represents the University of Saskatchewan or makes reference directly or indirectly to the University of Saskatchewan, its activities or human community should follow published communication and corporate image guidelines. This applies to all web sites where information is posted whether university or non-university web sites. For more information, please read the university communications web site<sup>iv</sup> and policy web site<sup>v</sup>.
4. Collaborative or social networking interaction with peers and individuals from other institutions should always be of a professional and respectful manner as such interactions reflect on the quality and professionalism of the University of Saskatchewan.
5. Faculty should clearly distinguish between personal views and views expressed on behalf of the university. University logos and mastheads should be used only for official university communications.

6. Be aware that not all students embrace technology in the same way and therefore student training in the technology may be required. If social networking technologies are to form a component of the course, especially for assessment purposes, this requirement must be included in the course outline. It is also necessary to discuss with students how and why it is being used and to what extent the technology and its use will impact individual performance and academic success.
7. To maintain student privacy, instructors should endeavour to use the social networking functions provided by the university like PAWS and Blackboard which offer secure electronic classroom space. In addition the university offers a Wiki service which allows the user to define who has access to the material posted. It has been suggested that ITS should undertake to provide an annotated list of software, with information on its utility for instructional purposes

### ***Social Networking in relation to existing academic policies***

The University already has several policies which cover student and faculty practices and which also apply to social networking:

1. Policies on academic dishonesty and misconduct may be breached by sharing examination questions, attributing work of others to oneself, collaborating on work where specifically instructed not to do so, as covered by *Academic Integrity and Student Conduct*<sup>vi</sup> policies and *Student Academic Dishonesty Rules of the University of Saskatchewan Council*<sup>vii</sup> whether these activities occur on line or not.
2. Use of and behaviour on social networking web sites are governed by applicable provincial and federal laws.
3. Use of university facilities and equipment is also governed by university policies such as the Computer Use policy<sup>viii</sup> and the email policy<sup>ix</sup>, by departmental policies, by the PAWS terms of use agreement, and by the policies of funding agencies such as NSERC.

### ***Guidelines for Users***

Most of us post information about ourselves to stay in touch with friends. We think about our personal sites as private, when in reality, many of them can be seen by friends, employers, university officials, and even parents. It is important to remember that our information may be seen and used by someone we don't even know, in ways we did not intend.

Social networking sites rely on connections and communication, so they encourage you to provide a certain amount of personal information. When deciding how much information to reveal, people may not exercise the same amount of caution as they would when meeting someone in person because<sup>x</sup>

- the internet provides a sense of anonymity
- the lack of physical interaction provides a false sense of security
- users tailor the information for their friends to read, forgetting that others may see it

The following guidelines are adapted from Government of Canada recommendations<sup>xi</sup> to help you protect your privacy online:

1. **Never expect absolute privacy.** Know what you're getting into by reading the privacy statement and policies of the web site. Many sites allow all registered users to view all the information you post on your site with no exceptions. Other sites may have default settings that make public what you would want private.
2. **Find out if the site allows others to see your profile without your consent.** Before you join a site and post your profile, find out if you can join a closed network, where only those with an email address from your school can register, for example.
3. **Choose the highest and most restrictive security setting available.** Do not give out information like your birthday, full name, phone number, Social Insurance Number or address.
4. **Remember that what you post could be online forever.** Take a second to think about what you're posting about yourself and your friends. Is it something you would post if your professor, boss, kid sister or arch rival were standing right behind you? Would you post the same information to a billboard along the highway? Even though we tend to think about our personal sites as private, in reality, many can be seen by just about anyone. Is there information about you that is embarrassing or that fraudsters could use?
5. **Keep in mind that even sites with extensive privacy options may be required to make your personal information available to certain authorized persons, including law enforcement agencies.** NOTE: Many social networking servers are located in other countries and so are subject to their laws; for example, the US Patriot Act allows access to personal information stored on a US server.

As with any technology, being mindful of the risks in its use helps the user to have a positive experience and benefit from the positive aspects of that technology.

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**Approved by University Council at its May 21, 2009 meeting**

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<sup>i</sup> Adapted from Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), article 11.  
<http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Referenced from

[http://www.schulich.uwo.ca/education/pge/documents/policies/guidelines\\_for\\_appropriate\\_use\\_of\\_the\\_internet.pdf](http://www.schulich.uwo.ca/education/pge/documents/policies/guidelines_for_appropriate_use_of_the_internet.pdf), on Dec. 21, 2008

<sup>iii</sup> [http://www.usask.ca/vpacademic/integrated-planning/resources/cycle2/draftplan/IP2\\_vFINAL\\_May2008.pdf](http://www.usask.ca/vpacademic/integrated-planning/resources/cycle2/draftplan/IP2_vFINAL_May2008.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.usask.ca/communications/index.html>

<sup>v</sup> [http://www.usask.ca/university\\_secretary/policies/index.php](http://www.usask.ca/university_secretary/policies/index.php)

<sup>vi</sup> [http://www.usask.ca/university\\_secretary/honesty/index.php](http://www.usask.ca/university_secretary/honesty/index.php)

<sup>vii</sup> [http://www.usask.ca/university\\_secretary/council/reports\\_forms/reports/09-27-99.php](http://www.usask.ca/university_secretary/council/reports_forms/reports/09-27-99.php)

<sup>viii</sup> [http://www.usask.ca/university\\_secretary/policies/operations/4\\_11.php](http://www.usask.ca/university_secretary/policies/operations/4_11.php)

<sup>ix</sup> [http://www.usask.ca/university\\_secretary/policies/operations/4\\_42.php](http://www.usask.ca/university_secretary/policies/operations/4_42.php)

<sup>x</sup> Referenced from <http://www.us-cert.gov/cas/tips/ST06-003.html> on Dec. 21, 2008

<sup>xi</sup> Referenced from [http://www.privcom.gc.ca/fs-fi/02\\_05\\_d\\_35\\_sn\\_e.asp](http://www.privcom.gc.ca/fs-fi/02_05_d_35_sn_e.asp) on Dec. 21, 2008