

Friending Facebook

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Background

Facebook is a social networking site that's existed in its present form since 2005. There are 300 million users of Facebook, making it the most used social networking site in the world.

Disadvantages

- Heavy Facebook use may correlate with lower collegiate GPAs (Karpinski, A. S. and Duberstein, A. "A Description of Facebook Use and Academic Performance Among Undergraduate and Graduate Students," Poster presented at the American Education Research Association annual meeting, April 16, 2009)
 - Correlation; Reverse causality may explain
- Students may perceive professors as less authoritative when students know that professors have Facebook accounts (Barber, L., and Pearce, K. "The Effects of Instructor Facebook Participation on Student Perceptions of Teacher Credibility and Teacher Attractiveness" Paper presented at the International Communication Association annual meeting, May 21, 2008)

Advantages

- Students who are Facebook friends with professors report higher levels of motivation than students who are not Facebook friends with professors (Mazer, J. Murphy, R., and Simonds, C. (2007). "I'll See You On "Facebook": The Effects of Computer-Mediated Teacher Self-Disclosure on Student Motivation, Affective Learning, and Classroom Climate," *Communication Education*, 56(1):1-17.
 - Correlation; Reverse causality may explain
- Heavy Facebook users have increased social capital and stronger ties to their college community than do non-Facebook users at *Michigan State University* (Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook "friends:" Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), article 1.)

Research at Morningside College

A convenience sample survey was administered using SurveyMonkey. This survey was approved by the Institutional Research Review Board at Morningside College. Limitations: Those more adept at social networking and internet applications may be disproportionately likely to choose to participate in this survey. Approximately 1/4 of the Morningside student body (N = 303) participated in this survey. Survey participants were representative of the overall student body in terms of demographics.

Findings

- 96.4% (n = 291) of respondents maintained Facebook accounts
- 77.8% (n = 215) have had their current Facebook accounts for three years or longer
- 41% (n = 123) of respondents reported spending 1-2 hours per day on Facebook, while 41% (n = 124) reported spending 3-6 hours per day on Facebook. 10.3% (n = 31) spent more than 7 hours per day on Facebook.
- Half of the respondents (n = 152) did not care either way whether professors had Facebook accounts; 31.6% (n = 95) were in favor of professors maintaining Facebook accounts
- 41.8% (n = 126) of respondents reported being "Facebook friends" with at least one of their professors
- Getting to know professors on a personal level, having professors better understand students' personal lives, being able to clarify assignments via Facebook chat, and maintaining contact with professors after graduation were reported by participants as the key advantages of being Facebook friends with professors.

Points for Discussion

Advantages of communicating with students using Facebook

- Accessibility and Mobile Devices: Many survey respondents noted that students check Facebook more frequently than they check their school e-mail accounts. Facebook is accessible using most mobile devices, while the majority of school e-mail systems are not, or are so only through a clunky interface.
- Bonding with students: Status updates about or photographs of student accomplishments may help to convince students that you sincerely want them to succeed. “If it’s not on Facebook, it didn’t happen,” is a common sentiment among students who use Facebook.
- Teaching about professionalism: A key disadvantage of professors having Facebook accounts reported by survey respondents is that professors may then be privy to information students prefer professors not to know about them. This concern can open a valuable discussion about prudence.

Applications of Facebook

Classes

- Set up discussion groups
- Post fun quizzes related to course content
- Share files
- Photographs of travel-related courses (such as Interterm, May Term, etc.)

Advising

- Invite students to campus events
- Keep in touch with students after graduation
- Increased knowledge of students’ personal lives can facilitate better counsel during academic advising

As a recruiting tool

- Access to professor Facebook pages
- Access to college’s student Facebook groups

Maintaining a Facebook account as a teaching tool: Considerations

- Content you post on Facebook
- Privacy settings
- Accepting friend requests from students
- Response to inappropriate content on Facebook
- Some students are strongly opposed to Facebook

Conclusions: Thoughts on the likely future of Facebook

- Facebook will become an increasingly professional, non-student social networking site as more student Facebook users graduate and move into careers.
 - This may cause a student migration to another site, but this is unlikely in the near future.
 - For this reason, student understanding of appropriate content on Facebook will become increasingly important to their success.
- Mobile devices will become the dominant, and then likely the exclusive way that students communicate online.