Recent Newspaper Headlines

Women’s swim team investigated for hazing. Athletes are punished after a Web site posts photos for questionable behavior (Los Angeles Loyolan, April 19, 2006).

Campus police using Facebook to curb illegal behavior (University of Buffalo, April 3, 2006).

Facebook photos a useful tool for police, UW officials to track student alliances (University of Wisconsin, April 5, 2006).

Networking Web sites cause stalking, privacy concerns at university (University of Tennessee, April 13, 2006).

ASU student evicted from dorm after appearing on Web site (Arizona State University, April 20, 2006)

The University of Houston is an EEO/AA institution.
Online Social Networking

Using commonly used online social networks are great ways to make new friends and keep track of the old. Commonly used online networks are targeted to high school and college students and are accessible to anyone with an .edu email address. The ease of acquiring access to these networks may mean that the information you post may be available to more people than you may think.

We at the University of Houston want you to have a full and rewarding university experience in and out of the classroom. In an effort to educate students against identity theft, harassment, stalking, and other potentially dangerous or criminal activity, we are offering the following points of caution about online social networks.

CAUTION: You may have limited control online.
Your privacy settings may block some access to your profile, but it does not mean your postings are one hundred percent secure. Posting photographs online may make them public property and subject to reproduction. Because some sites may not use secure encryption to protect your information, there is a chance unauthorized individuals may gain access to information in your profile through the use of malicious software and use such information for harm.

CAUTION: Deleting may not be enough.
Web transmissions are not foolproof unless they use secure forms of authentication and encryption. The internet is an open and available source of information where posting is very easy. Deleting potentially incriminating or personal information about yourself does not always mean you have removed it from cyberspace. If you shared it with other people who have printed or saved your profile or pictures, your information may still be accessible to others. Additionally, many internet service providers and servers back up or duplicate the information, retaining it indefinitely.

CAUTION: Employers are on online social networks.
Your “girls” or “guys” night out pictures may prevent you from getting your dream job. The activities you engage in after hours and publish on the web may be viewed by potential employers. Reportedly, many employers have begun looking at online profiles of potential candidates before granting interviews or extending job offers. Some images may be available for view by simply “googling” a name and not necessarily registering for a site.

CAUTION: Police use online social network sites.
Police departments are increasingly using online social network sites as tools to identify potential suspects in crimes. In some circumstances, an investigation has been started solely on the basis of information obtained on the Internet. Arrests have been made and students have been prosecuted. If your site contains language or images that indicate you have engaged in a violation of law, appropriate action may be taken against you.

CAUTION: Predators may be lurking.
Posting your personal contact information such as cell phone number, apartment location and class schedule online may seem like a great way to make sure your friends can reach you. However, be aware that this information is also available to people who may not have the best intentions. There have been instances of stalking and harassment that have originated from online Web sites. Protect your personal information by not posting it.

CAUTION: Responsibility rests with you.
Just as you are responsible for the content of your resume and your public image, you are ultimately responsible for your profile. You may have some control over who sees your online information and you can take action to influence how you are perceived. Use privacy settings to help control who can access your information. Many sites allow you to restrict the availability of your profile to certain individuals. While these settings provide no guarantees, they can be a useful tool in gaining some control of your private information, including photos. Remember that pictures “tagged by others” or messages “posted on your wall” become a part of your online persona.

CAUTION: You are who your profile says you are.
Your online profile may be the only impression someone has of you. Make sure the image you are projecting online is one that accurately represents you.