Faculty discuss recommendations for navigating the informal waters of social network connections with students and alumni.

If a tree falls in a forest...you can count on the entire social media world knowing about it.

According to faculty at various universities, there are two main ways that social networking sites are causing new concerns and considerations for faculty and institutions: frictionless sharing and context collapse.

In a report by Cassidy Sugimoto, assistant professor at the School of Informatics and Computing at Indiana University; Carolyn Hank, assistant professor at the School of Information Sciences at the University of Tennessee; Timothy Bowman, graduate student at Indiana University; and Jeffrey Pomerantz, information scientist at the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; these terms are defined as:

**Frictionless sharing:** Passive sharing on social media sites, like Facebook. It is a sharing of one’s online behaviors by default. “With these new features, one is always ‘on,’ leaving a trace of what is happening anywhere on the Web and at any time—not simply when one is logged in,” said the authors. It is a “panoptic knowledge of one’s Facebook friends’ activities,” and quite different than the traditional relationship between student and faculty member.
Context collapse: When the online persona of an educator is both personal and professional. Because of this context collapse, it is also hard to limit audience, especially on social media networks.

If both of these new considerations aren’t navigated carefully, say the report’s authors, “Facebook regret”—or the not just reputational risk for the social media subscriber or their friends (whether faculty, student, or other institutional member), but also a potential risk to the reputation of an institution—can occur with often-negative consequences.

This rapidly expanding social networking concern for higher-ed faculty “begs the question of where the boundary is drawn between professional conduct, communication and obligations, and personal conduct, communications and obligations...the question may be more appropriately positioned as to why there is not a boundary,” said Sugimoto.

(7 recommendations from faculty)

“Honor codes, codes of conduct, and policy and procedure manuals are standards in institutions of higher education,” emphasized the report. “However, explicit social media codes are the exception rather than the norm in higher education.”

In the absence of what the report’s authors say are social media policies, as well as in consideration of the confusion as to where the boundary exists between professional and personal lives in the online, social networked space, the authors detail seven considerations and recommendations for “negotiating and navigating formal and informal interactions in these digital environs”:

[Listed in no particular order]

1. Try to differentiate personas: If it’s a non-academic account, say so: “For example,” said Sugimoto, “in a study of scholars’ blogs, 26 percent of the blogs analyzed were found to have disclaimer-style statements. Of these, 18 percent made clear that the opinions expressed were the bloggers own, hence, ‘personal communications,’ and not representative of those of their home institutions, funders, or others.”

2. Don’t ignore cultural norms: Just because things used to be a certain way, doesn’t mean they’ll be the same on social media. “In consideration of impression management, responsibilities and behavioral norms” explained the report, “academics and associated institutions must react to the public and semi-public sphere that now mediates these relationships.”

3. Consider the implications of using social media as a class tool: The authors note that, in regards to using social media in the learning environment, administrators and faculty might want to consider whether or not forced participation in these platforms may create “an uncomfortable environment for students,” if they are required to agree to the provider’s terms of service agreements and leave digital traces of informal conversations.
4. Be proactive, not reactive: As more and more public instances of social media mishaps occur, it’s critical that institutions try and draft fully-developed standards around the institutionalization of social media expectations, in order to curb public apologies, suspensions, and censures.

5. Never forget the First Amendment: Drafting standards of conduct must take into account whether or not the language used could be seen as restrictive of the First Amendment, say the authors. “Given that the U.S. National Labor Relations Board found [OM 12-59] that numerous social media policies in the business sector contained provisions that we not legal, academic institutions in the U.S. and elsewhere should take care in their construction of new policies.”

6. Consider the multiple levels of student-faculty interaction: “Policies created to protect the institution and facilitate learning should be sensitive to the differing needs of the various strata of students,” said the report. “There are strong differences in the relationships, and expectations for these relationships, among faculty members and undergraduate, graduate, professional, and doctoral students. These differences should be taken into account when creating policies to mediate formal and informal relationships on social media networks.”

7. Open a dialogue and get consensus: Sugimoto explains that even a code of conduct will not prevent all errs in social media interaction, since faculty are humans, after all. As recommended by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), universities should engage faculty and students in an “open dialogue about norms of behavior; expressing the expectations and values of both groups.” However, the report emphasizes that “policies have little effect without consensus and buy-in by the community they regulate.”

For more detailed information, read the full report here. Article taken from eCampus News - http://www.ecampusnews.com
URL to article: http://www.ecampusnews.com/top-news/faculty-social-media-381/

Please review Gadsden State’s Social Media Policy, found online in the Employee Handbook or click the link below

Gadsden State’s Social Media Policy