

Facebook, MySpace, and other Online Communities:

Are You Putting Yourself At Risk?

- If you are a Facebook or MySpace user there are some important questions you should consider when posting information on-line. Yes, on-line communities are a great way to get to know new people and stay in contact with old friends. However, there may be people viewing your homepage whom you don't wish to share your personal information with (e.g. employers, teachers, parents, or strangers). Information you may have posted on-line could cause you the loss of a job opportunity from potential employers, get you into legal trouble with your University, or even affect your personal safety. Are you putting yourself at risk? Ask yourself the following questions, make any necessary changes to your account, and *most importantly*, learn how to set your privacy settings so that you can limit who has access to your homepage.

Am I sharing too much personal information?

Sharing too much personal information, including your address, telephone number, birthday, class schedule, etc., can put you at risk for identity theft, stalking, harassment, and other problems. Just because there is a field for certain information, does not mean you have to fill it in.

Are there things on my site (pictures, stories, etc.) that depict or describe inappropriate or illegal activity?

Pictures or other evidence of illegal behavior, such as underage drinking, could put you at risk for legal consequences, including violations of the Student Conduct Code and Housing and Residential Life policies. Some of the materials that you or others post on your site might be of an inappropriate or embarrassing nature and may reflect poorly on you, your friends, family, or on members of organizations with which you are affiliated. It is possible that current or potential employers may have access to some of these sites and may make decisions affecting your employment based on what they see.

Have I read the terms and conditions of use for the Web site I am using?

It is very important that you read the terms and conditions for any Web site where you create an account. Several sites, including Facebook.com, retain ownership of any information that you post on your profile and can use the material any way they want, whenever they want.

Should I just stay away from them completely? These online communities sound scary.

This information is not intended to scare you away from online communities. The University just wants to make sure that you make choices that allow you to experience the benefits of these sites and avoid the negatives.

Have I chosen the appropriate privacy setting for my account?

Many sites allow you to select different privacy settings so that you can control who can view your profile, postings, etc. You should make sure you choose the setting that gives you the privacy you desire. Remember that on Facebook.com potentially anyone with a "bemidjistate.edu" account (including all students, faculty, staff and alumni) can access your profile.

- **HOW TO CHANGE YOUR PRIVACY SETTINGS ON FACEBOOK:** Go to **My Privacy** on the left hand side of your homepage. Then select **Edit Settings** for each option given (e.g. Networks, Photos, etc.) so you can edit your privacy settings for every aspect of the Facebook website. You can create a limited profile for other users, allow only your friends to view your homepage, limit who can search for you, and even block people to make yourself "invisible". Take some time to look over the site and examine your privacy options. You can tailor your privacy settings however you want, so make sure to choose the appropriate settings for you. The 5-10 minutes this will take could keep you out of trouble and possibly help you get hired instead of rejected from your next job opportunity.

- **REMEMBER:** Your information is not private unless you make it that way by editing your privacy settings. Facebook is a network on the world wide web and is open to just that, the whole-wide-world.

- Information taken from the University of Minnesota, Office of Student Affairs. *Living in Online Communities: a User's Guide*. Retrieved October, 2006 from http://www.osa.umn.edu/safety/online_safety.html.

