

Appendix B. Scenarios

SCENARIO I: FACEBOOK

The Facebook social networking tool offers new ways for individuals and groups to interact and keep in touch with, and learn about, one another. Ideally, in a true social networking system, divulging private information begets trust and social currency in a feed-forward fashion. Facebook's default privacy settings are intended to optimize access to personal information for this purpose.

At the same time, Facebook creates vulnerabilities by exposing personal details across contexts: what we might want to share within a circle of friends may differ from what we want to share with family, colleagues or total strangers. But as different social groups and purposes permeate one's online identity, it becomes increasingly hard to control expectations and contexts of behavior. Our actions on Facebook may also expose the privacy of others in unexpected ways; and those seeing information not directly meant for them often results in discomfort and ambiguity about how to react.

Facebook has resolved many of the situations most potentially infringing of privacy. Nonetheless, students, faculty and staff may not be wholly aware of the extent to which they may be exposing themselves, nor to the implications of seeing others' personal information. Yet, a quote from a student: "In the end, it's just Facebook."

Situation 1: Photos across different scopes

Facebook allows us to keep in touch and share information with family, friends, colleagues, co-workers and sometimes bosses. Recently, a friend posted a series of photographs from various events and tagged me in one of them. The photo was quite personal in nature. Now everyone in my Facebook was instantly alerted to that photograph—including my family and professors. Additionally, they could see all the remaining photographs in the album. While Facebook allowed me to untag that photo, many people have already seen it, and potentially copied it, or sent it further. Some have already made comments, alerting all their friends to it too. So far, this has been only a minor embarrassment, but I'm worried about whether this might affect being able to work for one of my professors this summer.

What can I do? How should I approach the friend who posted these photos? The others involved in the event? The professor I want to work for?

Situation 2: Professor

I teach a series of seminars, and over time I have become Facebook friends with many of the students. One of the students is falling behind in the course and is asking for extensions citing, complications at home, yet party photos that he keeps posting seem to indicate otherwise.

How should I react? Should I pretend I don't see what Facebook automatically tells me about him? What if some of the photos seem to show underage students consuming alcohol? Who can I consult?

Situation 3: University Privacy / privacy of labs/co-workers—is there a policy?

I'm an employee in a laboratory in which animal research is done. Some friends and I posted clips of the cute mice playing with us on YouTube. This was harmless fun, wasn't it?

Situation 4: Stalking

I have lots of friends—an average FB user has about 300—and most of the time if someone requests my friendship, I accept, sometimes even if I have never met them. One such “friend” turned into someone who began stalking me, using information about which classes I'm taking and where I live in the resident halls to “happen” to be where I am.

Situation 5: Identity theft

I have lots of friends—an average FB user has about 300—and most of the time if someone requests my friendship, I accept, sometimes even if I have never met them. One such “friend” turned out to be a thief, who then harvested a lot of personal information about me, opened new credit cards under my name, and ruined my credit history. Repairing it has cost me a lot of money, and the time needed and stress are affecting my grades.

Situation 6: Deleting accounts

I'm graduating from school, and will be looking for work. I don't want my potential future employers to see my party photos, and my private information, so just in case I want to delete my FB profile.

Is deleting my profile sufficient? What if I want to keep my FB profile active so I can keep in touch with friends?

Situation 7: Hiring

We are looking to hire a new employee and have been reviewing applications and resumes. Some of the applicants have publicly viewable Facebook profiles, so of course we look at them – it's only due diligence.

Can we use that data to inform our hiring decision? Are there restrictions on doing so? What is the University's policy in this area? How can I acknowledge I've looked at a potential applicant's Facebook profile?

Lessons to be learned

1. Once information is publicly available online, it can be very difficult to completely remove
 - a. Others may make copies and/or send it on.
 - b. Others may post information about me over which I have no control (and sometimes no knowledge).
 - c. Google and other search engines, and projects such as archive.org, maintain caches of now-defunct web pages.

2. Information can be taken out of context
 - a. Photos can be posed and/or digitally altered.
 - b. The appropriate context may be understood by the intended audience, but the rest of the world will be ignorant of such context.
 - c. What might be considered fun by some may be interpreted by others as inappropriate.
3. I am visible to many more people than might be possible in real life
 - a. The default privacy settings allow other members a group that I've joined to see my personal information, even though I have not explicitly granted any one of those individuals this right. This can be changed in the privacy settings.
 - b. Bad actors can use personal information gleaned about me through Facebook to steal my identity or stalk me.
4. Information posted in a work context is subject to many University policies
5. University employees must be mindful that due diligence in using "intelligence" gathered through Facebook must be seen in the appropriate context
 - a. Posting photos of individuals requires written permission, except in the context of a news release.¹
 - b. Employees must not represent the University – disclaimer... ECP

Resources

- Office of the Dean of Students, Sexual Harassment Prevention Officer and Title IX Coordinator, Staff Affirmative Action Office
- Campus Human Resources
- Office of the Campus Counsel
- Director, IT Strategic Policy (UC Electronic Communications Policy)

¹ University of California Electronic Communications Policy, Attachment II: Implementing Guidelines