

Feb 11 2007 7:53 AM

## **Some Internet postings could haunt students** **Off-color comments left on Web sites like Facebook may** **jeopardize students' futures**

By Eugene Driscoll  
THE NEWS-TIMES

Students in California capture their teacher screaming bloody murder at the class, then post the videotaped tantrum on YouTube.

School brass in Toronto consider banning cell phones after learning students are posting homemade "fight club" videos on the Internet, The Los Angeles Times reported.

Administrators in Ridgefield probe Facebook after receiving a complaint that students posted hate speech directed at Muslims.

What are young people thinking? Certainly not about the consequences of their online actions.

Ridgefield Schools Superintendent Kenneth Freeston told The News-Times last week that the alleged Facebook comment could hurt the students' chances of getting into college, if they are ever caught.

The superintendent is correct, according to Janet Rosier, an independent college admissions consultant with Janet Rosier's Educational Resources in Woodbridge.

Rosier acts like a job coach for high school students and their families trying to navigate the competitive -- not to mention stressful -- college admissions process.

Rosier's latest advice for students: If you have a MySpace or Facebook account and you're applying to college, make sure your Web site is "grandmother friendly," because you never know who is watching.

"If someone posted hate speech, I would not be going out on a limb saying that person would be cutting off their chance of admission at most colleges," Rosier said.

The National Association for College Admission Counseling, based in Virginia, has a

section of its Web site called "MySpace in College Admission."

"Most colleges are not surfing the Web for your profile. However, when other people bring students' blogging to their attention, schools do respond," the site reads.

A student rejected from a college because of an online posting would likely never know that is what led to the rejection, said Steven Roy Goodman, an independent college admission advisor with TopColleges.com in Washington, D.C.

"No one wants to say 'Yes, we spy on our applicants.' But the fact is the whole admissions process is designed by the colleges for the colleges to collect as many facts about the student as possible," Goodman said. "The old-fashioned way was to simply call the guidance counselor at the high school. . . Now you don't even need to pick up the phone."

Officials at Western Connecticut State University said the school does not screen applicants by checking social networking sites.

There are thousands upon thousands of innocuous teen Web pages on MySpace and Facebook. The Web sites are cheap and highly effective ways for high school bands to promote their gigs, college students to stay in touch and for fledgling young writers to express themselves.

Search Ridgefield on Facebook, and you'll quickly see groups such as "If Ridgefield is so boring, why are we all here" (262 members); "I'm from Ridgefield and I DIDN'T hang out in parking lots" (78 members); and "I'm from Ridgefield and I DID hangout in parking lots" (36 members).

Then there is "(expletive) RHS," described as a group for those who hate Ridgefield High School. A few posters there complain about classes and other happenings in school.

Poke around MySpace looking for greater Danbury natives and you'll find teens posting pictures of themselves with alcohol, along with messages about marijuana. One Danbury teen often posts about going "tagging," which is spray-painting graffiti.

A disturbing trend on YouTube -- teen violence. Enter "street fight" into the site's search box and your mouth will drop at the results -- hundreds of videos of young people from around the United States beating each other senseless.

It is the "Jerry Springer effect," according to the writings of Frank Farley, a psychology professor at Temple University. By the "Jerry Springer effect," he means more and more Americans, including teens, are willing to let it all stand out on the Internet and on reality television.

He helped develop the idea of a "Type-T" personality -- the thrill-seeker, a trait that can be bad when the person is in their teens.

Teens often have blinders on when posting on the Internet, said Rosier, the independent college admissions advisor.

"What they consider a diary and personal is being read by people they did not expect to read it," she said. "The kid perspective is that this is like a diary. The adult perspective is that this is online, it is like you published it."

Suzy Sousa, a 20-year-old junior at Western Connecticut State University, has a MySpace account. She blogs on it, sometimes writing about current events or music she's into.

She said young people often post things to the Internet for shock value.

"Some people are looking for attention or page views," Sousa said. "They just want people to look at the things that they've done. I don't think they think about whether it's bad."

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