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Is your personal info up for grabs on the Internet?

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When you need to find the name of the girl in your psych class, you Facebook her. When you need to get an e-mail address of a friend to get an assignment, you Facebook them. When you need to find someone's friends, clubs and place of residence, you Facebook them.

Facebook.com, launched by Harvard students in 2004, has swept college campuses nationwide as a means of communication and procrastination and as a provider of information. And while many people feel comfortable putting all types of personal information - phone numbers, home addresses and e-mail addresses - on a Facebook profile, they may not understand the implications of making their information so easily available.

Last week, however, the University of New Mexico made that decision for its students, shutting off access to Facebook.com on its university network, partially due to concerns about privacy.

"There are people out there whose intent is perhaps not as socially desirable as it could be," University of New Mexico computing and information resources and technology security administrator Jeff Gassaway told the university's newspaper.

If placed in the wrong hands, personal information may help people who wish to harass or techno-stalk someone. As stated in a packet received by freshman orientation leaders at Tufts, techno stalking is any "situation in which someone repeatedly attempts to contact another via the Internet - through e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, bulletin boards and/or Usenet Groups - so that this pattern of behavior results in the victim feeling threatened or harassed."

Elaine Theodore, the Violence Prevention Education Coordinator at Tufts, believes many people may not realize the dangers in putting information on the Internet.

"Many relationships online can be fun and even sexy, but there are a lot of unknowns when communicating with someone you don't know and can't see," Theodore said.

While there have not been many reported techno stalking issues at Tufts, and none have been highly publicized, the possibility does exist for the type of information found on Facebook to aid in harassment or stalking.

According to the same packet for orientation leaders, "incidents have been documented where stalkers have found individuals addresses, class schedules, phone numbers, etc. and targeted harassment ensued."

Theodore said that "there was one film clip shown at [orientation panel] 'In the SACK' this year about a student who was repeatedly stalked by her ex-boyfriend in Florida. A friend at Tufts had been feeding the ex-boyfriend information that was on Facebook."

Many Tufts students are unaware of recent incidents regarding harassment through Web

sites including Facebook.

"I probably don't feel a big danger in revealing too much about myself," senior Melissa Fiorenza said. "I haven't had a run-in with someone who could put me in danger. Maybe if I heard scary stories or experienced a slight one, then I'd think twice about it. I guess that sounds pretty lame, but it's the truth."

Other students said they have been contacted through instant messaging software or through Facebook by unknown people, but did not feel threatened. "I have had many drunken Facebook messages and many random people IMing me," senior Jon Godsey said. "But it is just more embarrassing for them when I find out who they are."

Some students even enjoy receiving messages from unknown people. One such student is senior Ilan Behm, who had "one person that messaged me to tell me that they liked my hair. I was really weirded out at first, but then I realized that I enjoyed it."

The bottom line is that while students may or may not enjoy random communication through Facebook, not many seem to see the danger involved. Even if sent a crude or nasty message, the students interviewed tend to brush it off without feeling any real danger.

"I know people who have been threatened on Facebook, which I think is the most passive-aggressive way to confront someone," Godsey said. "I think that they considered doing something but didn't."

The problem of cyber-stalking has become so widespread that the Women's Center is holding a workshop called "Stalking 101" on Oct. 25 at 7 p.m. in Eaton 201. The workshop will be hosted by Cheryl Darisse, a local woman whose sister was stalked and murdered. She was responsible for new legislation on stalking laws in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, Theodore said.

The most important element of preventing online harassment is to pay attention, Theodore said. "There is no one piece of advice, but trust your instincts."

Another key piece of advice is to use the different options that Facebook offers. "You can set your default to people who can see your info," Godsey said. "I have it so only my friends can see my info."

Other steps can be taken if harassment or stalking continues after adjusting privacy options. Along with contacting the local or Tufts police, there are many Web sites that give advice about preventing online harassment, including Working to Halt Online Abuse (WHOA) at <http://www.haltabuse.org>, Cyber Angels at <http://www.cyberangels.org> or Feel Safe Again, Inc. at <http://www.feelsafeagain.org>.

"Facebook is a handy tool, and it's a fun socialization method," Theodore said. "We know Tufts students can make intelligent, great choices for themselves and we just want to give them the information to do so."