

CYBER SAFETY: INFORMATION 4 U 2 REMEMBER!

OFFICE OF RESIDENCE LIFE & JUDICIAL AFFAIRS
FRAMINGHAM STATE COLLEGE

When you turn on your computer and log onto the internet, you have the ability to become a member of the fastest growing communities in the world, online communities that encourage people to interact through virtual environments on the World Wide Web. Whether you have a profile on a directory-type site (e.g. facebook, MySpace, etc.), use a journal-type site as an outlet for your thoughts, post photo albums, or chat with classmates through "chat" programs, you're part of the growing trend of using virtual communities to build real relationships!



*Is what you mean what you say?
Is what was said what you meant?*

Exercise caution and good judgment in communicating online. Writing something is just as serious as (or even more serious) than SAYING it! Some people feel less inhibited online and may say or do things they might not do or say in the "non-virtual world." Ask yourself... what do my words mean? Would I say these words face to face? What message am I trying to send? How might someone interpret what I write?

Potential Benefits of Online Communities

- Provides a way to connect with other students on campus.
- Learn about activities.
- Advertise events to a wide audience.
- Meet people in your classes and/or area.
- Quick and easy way to communicate with friends.
- Meet and interact with people.
- Convenient form of communication.

Potential Risks in a Cyber Community

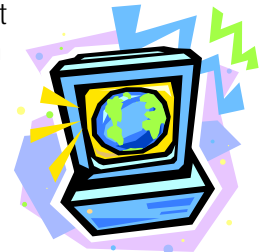
- Information provided by others may not be true or sincere.
- Personal and often private information may be available to a large unintended audience.
- Spending too much time online can interfere with schoolwork.
- False sense of privacy.
- Personal safety and security can be compromised.
- Potential identity theft issues.

Virtual Communications

Since the nature of online interaction doesn't allow you to understand tone or see non-verbal cues, it can be easy to be misinterpreted or to misinterpret another person's meaning. In school we are taught to interact directly with other people. Yet, some people find it easier to interact online. It's good to be able to communicate effectively online, but not at the expense of losing interpersonal skills! Verbal communication and confrontation remain important, especially responding to conflicts or situations when you are upset, sad, or angry since tone and non-verbal cues help facilitate clear communication.

Just Among Friends?

How many people can see your profile? The profile community facebook has over 7.5 million registered members! You may think you are just among friends, but your information could be forwarded by others and there is an electronic record of material posted. Our advice? Don't post anything you wouldn't want to appear in the local newspaper!



Risky Business: Online Safety

Personal Safety and Security

- **Think before you write!** Just because a profile asks for a piece of personal info doesn't mean you must provide it! Do you really want your class schedule or whereabouts available as public information? How about your cell phone number? Be sure you aren't placing yourself at risk for crime by providing detailed personal information online.
- **Check privacy settings.** Many online communities give you the option to make part or all of your profile accessible only to friends, while leaving other parts public. The default setting is usually ALL PUBLIC. Take some time to enhance your privacy settings.
- **Be vague about your location!** Why list where you live? Some people only list their city or state. Listing your room, apartment, or house number provides a specific address for someone to find you, which could leave you vulnerable to identity theft, a stalker, unwanted visitors, or unsolicited mail. In most cases people let those close to them know where they live and what their phone number is, eliminating the need to post this information online.

Reflect on Your Involvement in Online Communities...



- Could you jeopardize your opportunity to obtain a leadership position on your campus or in your community by posting personal information in your online profile?
- Is it possible for potential future employers to see a photograph of you engaged in unethical, dangerous, or even illegal activities?
- Would you be proud to present your online journal entry to members of your family?

Know Your Responsibilities

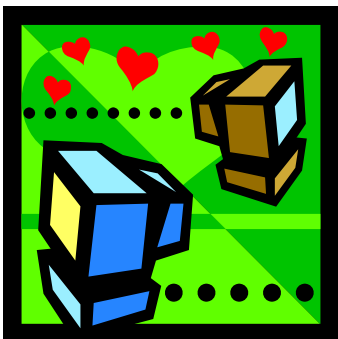
- **Be careful what you write.** Not all speech is protected "Free Speech." Laws and policies apply to online behavior as well as other forms of communication. Threats, hate crimes, illegal file sharing and/or other behaviors can potentially be harmful, and consequences may occur.
- **Think before you Upload/Download.** Students are held accountable for their online behavior in the same way they are held accountable for their non-virtual behavior. With the ease of printing and saving information produced online, students sometimes create a written record of policy violations. Online behavior can affect your judicial status as a student, just as your behavior off-line does.

Online Danger Zones

- **Report Crimes and/or Concerns!** Sometimes you will view something that makes you uncomfortable or that you believe is unsafe. It may be an Instant Message, Away Message, or a blog entry. If that happens, it's a good idea to let someone know right away! You can save or print the information that concerns you and bring it to the attention of FSC PD, a Residence Life staff member, and/or the virtual community administrators. Cyber threats, harassment, aggression, and stalking are real problems that take place in both the virtual and non-virtual world.
- **Internet Addiction Warning Signs.** Choosing to spend more time online than with friends or family, checking e-mail and away messages repeatedly, using the internet to escape from problems, jeopardizing school, relationships, or career because of time spent on the Internet, denial of amount of time spent online, inability to spend any length of time away from the Internet. If you recognize these signs combined or happening repeatedly by yourself or someone else, please contact the counseling center and/or a Residence Life staff member.

Meeting online acquaintances in person *can* be an exciting way to meet well-intentioned people.

At the same time you should help protect yourself against a person not well-intentioned. If you decide that you do want to meet an online acquaintance in person, choose a public place like a coffee shop for your first meeting. Set a time to meet (5-7 p.m.) so that your time together has a definite end point. Have a plan to leave with others. Let someone know where you will be and make a plan to check in with that person at an agreed upon time.



This guide has been created by Keith I. Kozak, Residence Director, Framingham State College. AIM, Blackboard, Facebook, Friendster, LiveJournal, MySpace, and Yahoo! Groups are registered trademarks, used with permission.
© 2006 Keith I. Kozak