

SLUG: FACEBOOK EDITING

Contact: John Dillon, journalism faculty, jad53@psu.edu

By Rebecca Mamola
Penn State journalism student

UNIVERSITY PARK-- Job hunters often are concerned about what potential employers will see on social networking sites, but now there is a new worry: What if you are already hired?

Leanna Licare, a pharmaceutical marketing major at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, encountered this problem when she started her new job at a CVS store in April. She sent her boss a friend request on Facebook to be friendly, but when her boss saw pictures of her holding a beer can and others of her at parties, Licare was told to take them down or she would be fired.

Licare said she was just trying to be open at her new job. "I decided to leave just because it was awkward and uncomfortable and just unethical," she said. "I didn't want to have to be sneaky."

With advances in technology, a person's privacy and the separation between different aspects of a person's life are growing smaller. Employers are able to see how their employees spend their free time and how they interact with friends and coworkers outside of the workplace.

One example is Dan Leone, who was an employee of the Philadelphia Eagles when he changed his Facebook status to include a negative comment about the team after they traded a player. He was fired shortly afterward.

Stories like this are sparking a debate about whether employers should have the right to fire an employee because of something that happens outside of work.

For many college students entering the workforce the tug-of-war between employees and employers over employees' personal social networking accounts will become a major concern.

Students at Penn State University have mixed views.

"I think it is ridiculous," said journalism major Diana Rodriguez. "A person's personal life shouldn't affect their job. It's an invasion of privacy."

Labor and employee relations major Drew Taucher said he thinks that once something is placed on the Internet it's everyone's business.

Education majors are especially at risk for potentially being fired for something put on a social networking site because they work with children. The Pennsylvania State Education Association has rules, regulations and guidelines for teachers and education majors on what is acceptable when it comes to online postings.

According to the PSEA Legal Division, a school employee must exercise extreme caution when blogging and using other forms of Internet communication like social networks. It also reminds educators that their First Amendment rights can be limited because of their position as a school employee.

“If we found out a teacher had inappropriate material on his or her Facebook account, we'd have to talk with the person and have it removed immediately,” said Debra Latta, South Building principal of State College Area High School.

“Teachers can be fired for not being of ‘good moral character,’ according to the PA School Code. We talk to our newly hired younger teachers all the time about this kind of thing,” she said.

Facebook users have more to worry about than just employers seeing their information. High schools are beginning to use Facebook and other social networking sites to check on students if they sense a potential problem.

According to Latta, State College Area High School’s security and administration has its own “fake” Facebook account so they can pull up students’ personal accounts when needed.

Coaches also are watching what their players do in their free time.

Scott Richards plays in Britain's equivalent to NCAA basketball and knows the extent to which coaches will go to keep an eye on their players. In October 2007, Richards went out with teammates the night before a game. He said he knew to avoid cameras, but other teammates were not as careful.

"I had already started to realize you need to be on the ball with your Facebook [account] to avoid getting in trouble," said Richards. But other players posted pictures from their night out, including one with Richards in the background. The result was a two-week suspension from playing basketball.

"I don't even drink any more," said Richards, "but my coach still says to me, 'Good night last night?' every time I look slightly tired or anything like that."

Penn State undergraduate Matthew Radle said it doesn't matter who the person is or what they are doing: "If a person can't put something on their profile, then they probably shouldn't be doing it in the first place."