

facebook

Introduction

This resource is written to provide guidance to academic staff considering the use of Facebook for university-related purposes (e.g. pre-induction activities, the organisation and promotion of course-specific social events etc.). The guidelines are meant to provide practical advice and should not be considered hard-and-fast rules or policy. They have been informed by both evaluation of pilot projects in the use of Facebook in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences as well as emerging research into social network sites globally (boyd 2007; boyd & Ellison 2008; Jones & Lea 2008; Madge et al. 2009; Mazer et al. 2007; Merchant 2006; Selwyn 2007; Selwyn 2009).

What is Facebook?

Facebook is currently the world's most popular social network site. Here's the best-known definition of social network sites:

... web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (boyd & Ellison 2007)

What are Facebook's key features?

Key Facebook functionality includes:

- profile pages for users to list personal details, interests and activities;
- 'granular' access controls enabling users to fine tune their own privacy settings;
- communications tools such as email, instant messaging or chat, a "wall" (asynchronous and similar to discussion board forums) enabling interaction between users;
- document upload facilities for sharing videos and images;
- the ability to incorporate a range of other applications (e.g. wikis, games like FarmVille).

What is a Facebook group?

A group is a space within Facebook enabling users to come together about a common cause or area of interest. Facebook groups enable users to exchange information and share content with one another without the intimacy implied by becoming 'friends'. All the Facebook functionality listed above is possible within group pages.

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How do I create a Facebook group?

To create a group go to facebook.com/groups/create.php and then complete the information about the type of group, and decide if it is open to a particular network (such as a University network) or 'global' (i.e. all of Facebook). We'd recommend that you select 'global' as many student accounts will not have been created using their Kingston University email. You can set permissions on groups so that they are either open to anyone, closed (where users must get administrator approval to join) or secret (invite only). We'd recommend the creation of closed or secret groups for University initiatives. Groups have administrators that manage the group, approve applicants or invite others to join. Administrators can also appoint 'officers' who have certain additional administrative rights over ordinary group members. If student helpers have been recruited to facilitate a group, we'd recommend that they are made 'officers'.

Will students in a Facebook group of which I'm a member be able to see my personal content?

No. The only content students will be able to access is that which has been added to the Facebook group itself (e.g. wall posts, images, videos, links posted within that particular shared space by group members). All content from your personal Facebook account is unavailable to the group members. The only way students would be able to view content from your personal pages is if your privacy settings have been enabled to allow more open access. Web tools are available that check on how private your Facebook settings are.

How do I check my privacy settings on Facebook?

There are free web sites that scan your privacy settings in order to identify potential risks. We'd recommend ReclaimPrivacy (<http://www.reclaimprivacy.org/>). Bookmark the link to the site then sign in to Facebook. Once signed in, open the bookmarked link and the ReclaimPrivacy Facebook scanner will launch at the top of your Facebook window. Within seconds, ReclaimPrivacy will scan through six areas of potential privacy concern and enable you to fix them usually with a single click.

The screenshot shows the ReclaimPrivacy scanner interface with the following items:

- secure** (green): you are opted-out of the Instant Personalization feature
- scanning** (blue): scanning personal information...
- caution** (orange): some of your contact information is exposed to the entire Internet, you should tweak contact settings and then **Re-scan**
- scanning** (blue): scanning friends, tags, and connections information...
- insecure** (red): your friends can accidentally share your personal information. **Prevent friends from sharing your data**
- secure** (green): you have blocked all known applications that could leak your personal information

ReclaimPrivacy scanner

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As a staff member, should I accept friendship requests from students?

Our recommendation is that it is inadvisable to accept friendship requests from students. Research would indicate that students prefer to keep personal and curricular spheres separate (Jones & Lea 2008; Selwyn 2007) every bit as much as staff. Facebook groups create a more neutral space, a walled garden within Facebook's larger walled garden, enabling interaction without compromising users' privacy.

Should I encourage students to use the Facebook email system to communicate with staff?

Unless they are of a personal nature, we would advise staff to encourage students to use the Facebook group wall for posting questions about course-related topics and to respond to these questions via the wall. This enables all students to benefit from both the original post and any responses. Communication of more private matters might be better directed through Kingston University email.

Do I sign away copyright protection for my work if I upload to Facebook?

Use of any externally-hosted social networking sites to deliver course-related materials has intellectual property implications for individual teaching staff as well as the University. This is certainly the case with Facebook. On a more positive note, the author owns all of the content and information posted on Facebook and can control how that content is shared through privacy and application settings. However, authors also grant Facebook a non-exclusive, transferable, sub-licensable, royalty-free and worldwide licence to use any content posted on Facebook. Our recommendation would be to use Facebook's communication tools in the main and to be sparing in the amount of content (e.g. videos, images) posted directly to the site.

Should I use Facebook as a substitute for StudySpace?

No. We think that Facebook works well as a semi-formal space and is therefore better suited to such activities as pre-induction and induction week support, student societies and other informal groupings. We do not consider Facebook to be a substitute for StudySpace but an additional resource which is especially useful in particular contexts. Moreover, given Facebook's copyright policy, we feel it is an inappropriate digital environment to host academic content (e.g. lecture notes, student work).

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