

This issue of the journal contains a paper that explores the influence of social network services. The range of influence of social network services, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, spans the educational, personal and professional arena. How have these services affected optometric education? What are the benefits? What are the risks? Are these services utilized at your institution?

Optometric Educators Respond

Jane Ann Munroe, OD
Director of Admissions

Southern California College of Optometry

Here at Southern California College of Optometry (SCCO), Facebook is the networking tool of choice for the Office of Student Affairs. As Director of Admissions, I started a Facebook Group in 2006. It now has more than 1,900 members. All issues related to the admissions process are discussed in forums hosted by me along with SCCO students. The most commonly discussed topic is preparation for the Optometry Admission Test (OAT), with pre-optometry students seeking specifics about how to successfully manage the task of taking the OAT.

On Facebook, I post links that serve to drive applicants to SCCO's Web site. I advertise admissions open houses and workshops and announce recruiting visits to pre-optometry clubs. I host links to videos about SCCO student activities and other campus events, all with content that has proven to be of interest to pre-optometry students.

SCCO has its own YouTube channel, and Facebook is the vehicle I use to promote the latest video uploads. We

host a video series on YouTube, "What You Should Know — Optometry Admissions and SCCO," which features various topics designed to increase applicants' competitiveness as they plan a successful admissions strategy.

During a rolling admissions cycle, newly accepted applicants are added to their individual class Facebook Group. They get to virtually "meet" each other, find roommates and have their questions about student life answered by experienced upperclassmen. This process has been very useful in bonding students to SCCO as they wait out the long rolling admissions cycle. By the time orientation day arrives, the class has already bonded, having enjoyed a whole summer of various interactions facilitated by Facebook, such as "meet-ups" and group chats.

The only problem I've had implementing social networking has been to keep spammers off the site. To prevent this, I now require a message from applicants about why they want to join the group before I admit them. The reason I've had so few difficulties is that Facebook requires one's identity to be revealed. Pre-optometry students know they have high visibility when posting on this public forum; therefore, they

are conscientious.

Some may consider the amount of time spent monitoring the pre-optometry Facebook Group a drawback. However, it gives group members the feeling that someone is always available should they need help. I monitor the group 24/7 with my iPhone. The constant monitoring is what makes my group so successful. It gives the feeling that "the lights are on and somebody's home." I perform this level of monitoring only for the pre-optometry student group. The incoming class Facebook Groups are virtually self-monitoring by class members' interaction. I check in weekly to make sure the momentum is maintained.

Best of all, when I make recruiting visits at various campuses, pre-optometry students have already "met" me on Facebook. I don't need to be "friends" with them on Facebook. Rather, I use Facebook's Group format to help them get to know me as an admissions officer. This creates an instant rapport with them and breaks the ice for a very effective campus visit.

Facebook has been the best tool in my toolbox when it comes to creating SCCO's public face and maintaining its Web presence.

Laura Falco, OD FAAO
Assistant Professor

Nova Southeastern University
College of Optometry

Social networking has grown exponentially over the past decade and has become a mainstay in today's culture. It is reconnecting people from earlier generations, helping to build both social and business networks and, for the current Millennial generation, is simply how people communicate. This is a powerful tool, and perhaps slightly misunderstood by the younger generation, as they may not realize that personal information put on these sites can become available to others and sometimes misconstrued. Many children in middle school, and perhaps elementary school, are already creating their own social networking pages.

The Good: At Nova Southeastern University College of Optometry, students, faculty and administration all develop Web pages for social networking. Faculty use Web pages as blogs to keep students in the loop on a range of information, from schedules of events to links to podcasts that make explanations of problems or answers to questions instantly available to the class as a whole. The administration developed a Web page to connect with current students and faculty as well as alumni to inform everyone about the current achievements of the college. Students maintain their own class pages for similar reasons. They, too, want to have a central location where they can log in and get up to date.

A social networking page can be designed to convey a certain image. It may convince someone that the images seen represent reality. Perception of a Web page and the reality of what really occurs are often not the same. This can be beneficial, or it can be a negative. What the user perceives is critical. The perception is often hard to change once it is made. These perceptions are most of the time inferred via uploaded images.

The Bad: From an educational standpoint, we have some concerns regarding the social networking sites that are run by students. We do not get to monitor class social networking pages for accuracy. We hope that misinformation is not disseminated. Clearly these sites give students the opportunity to share test questions and tips for getting through a course by cheating. We are leaving it up to the students to police themselves. Across the country, students have also set up blogs for the purpose of evaluating their schools and colleges of optometry. We worry that some students who are disgruntled by a certain event may choose to lash out online. Such posts, when left online, can be used by other students to make decisions and, even more disturbingly, could be used by optometry schools themselves as a mechanism for evaluating professors.

The Ugly: Based on conversations with numerous faculty members and students, the most worrisome part of social networking involves individuals who post private and personal information that is not fit to publish online. This can include inappropriate pictures of students or slandering certain classmates and instructors. Student interns may see a patient and proceed to post inappropriate pictures to their social networking accounts. It is conceivable that a patient could see these and become upset. Once students affiliate themselves with a university, what they post is a representation of not only themselves but also of the university. Also, future employers may decide to observe what an individual posts online and make an employment judgment based upon it. Therefore, it is crucial that individuals carefully consider what they post online.

Tiffenie Harris, OD, FAAO
Associate Professor

Western University of Health Sciences
College of Optometry

The Millennial generation of students readily engages in social media, specifically Facebook. I have seen the benefits of social media in terms of student recruitment and admissions. The students put together a Facebook group once admitted to the program. They motivate each other and maintain a level of excitement in their choice of optometry school. In addition, I have learned that they organize social events and network housing options all prior to arriving on campus. Utilizing Facebook while in school continues the close ties and support needed during the rigors of the curriculum.

In my opinion, the downside of social media is the addictive nature of it. It seems that students can't help but "check their status" whenever possible. My concerns lie in students' ability to manage their time wisely. The hours spent socializing on Facebook certainly must conflict with the time needed to study and/or practice clinical skills. Overall, I can appreciate the support system and networking that students can achieve using social media. Yet I will be optimistically cautious in their ability to multitask and stay focused.

Send Us Your Comments

Do you have any thoughts or insights related to how social network services have affected optometric education? Send your comments to Dr. Aurora Denial at deniala@neco.edu, and we will print them in the next edition of the journal.

More Feedback on the Previous Think Tank's Ethics Scenario

In the previous Think Tank, readers of the journal responded to a real-world situation described by an externship supervisor. (Student's Behavior Raises Questions. *Optom Educ.* 2011 Fall;37(1):17-18.) As the supervisor and a fourth-year student reviewed the chart of a patient the student was about to examine, they observed that the staff doctor who had seen the patient last had noted a nevus with "drusen-like" deposits in one of the eyes. Upon examining the patient, the student also made note of the nevus, specifying that it contained "drusenoid" bodies. However, when the supervisor asked for more details and a diagnosis, the student had no response. The supervisor examined the patient himself but found no nevus or lesion. After asking the student to point out the nevus, which the student was unable to do, the supervisor concluded the student reported the lesion simply because it had been noted — apparently erroneously — in the past.

The supervisor attempted to discuss the incident with the student, including explaining that such behavior on the part of a practicing optometrist could lead to liability in the perpetration of fraud, fines, prosecution and/or licensure consequences. The student refused to provide any explanation or comment.

Knowing that this was not the first bad encounter staff had had with this student, the supervisor reported the incident to a superior. Nothing more was said and no action was taken. The student finished the externship, graduated, received a license and was accepted into a residency program.

An additional response to this scenario follows.

Michael J. Giese, OD, PhD Oakland Park, Fla.

In response to this scenario, multiple concerns arise. First, were the actions of the student unethical? Were they unprofessional? I would venture to guess we all agree that what the student did is not how we want our students to act. Regardless of what one calls the student's actions, the important question is why the student behaved in this way. Was it lack of skill and knowledge, timidity, fear, a combination of many other possibilities, or worse, that the student just does not care!

The second faculty attending correctly reported the misadventure to a superior, who should have discussed what transpired with the student. However, it is my impression that some students are not very mature and do not take constructive criticism well, and this poses significant challenges for all faculty. Effectively dealing with students who exhibit undesirable behavior requires support from superiors and ad-

ministrators. What might prevent such support? In today's educational milieu, it seems as if everyone wants to be liked by the students. This is evidenced by the extraordinary importance and value placed on student evaluations in the clinic and classroom. Therefore, unethical activity and bad behavior by students and faculty might go unreported and thus unpunished. Even if a complaint about a student or faculty member does "go up the ladder," decisions sometimes are overturned and the reporting faculty member may even be reprimanded.

Should what occurred have been discussed with the original faculty member? In an ideal world where faculty are experienced, mature and capable of taking constructive criticism, by all means. The case should have been reviewed with both faculty members. However, this can be difficult for the person in charge if he or she is younger than both faculty members, or when faculty members have an "I know it all and don't correct me" mentality, or when there is high yearly turnover of

clinical faculty and residents. Another issue may be how different faculty members perceive this type of behavior. Faculty A might report an occurrence, while Faculty B does not. In these situations it is hard to be consistent, and this creates significant issues, from both the faculty and student perspective, that are also hard to manage.

From a professional standpoint, the student demonstrated a complete disinterest in learning from mistakes. Optometry is a "learned" profession and thus requires students to be intellectually curious. However, I do not totally blame the student. Intellectual curiosity must be demonstrated by faculty early in a student's professional education. If faculty do not demonstrate a curious mindset, how does one expect students too?