

US university experiments with social media blackout

September 15 2010, by Chris Lefkow

Students and teachers at a Pennsylvania university are banned from "tweeting," updating their Facebook page, sending instant messages or visiting MySpace this week.

Harrisburg University of Science and Technology, a private school in the town of Harrisburg with an enrollment of some 570 students, has decreed a [social media](#) blackout for the week.

The week-long ban on social media, which began Monday, is not punishment but an exercise the university said is designed to "get students, staff and faculty to think about social media when they are not available."

The university is blocking IP addresses for campus network computers to shut down access to Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and [instant messaging services](#) such as AOL.

"Our goal is to challenge people to think about how they came to rely on (social media)," said Steve Infanti, Harrisburg University's associate vice president for communications and marketing.

"University faculty, in particular, use social media to communicate with colleagues about curriculum ideas, but what if they had to rely on face-to-face meetings?" Infanti asked in a blog post at Harrisburg.net.

"We wondered would the process take longer, or would the outcomes be

any different?" Infanti asked.

He stressed that the university, which was founded in 2001 and is located between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, was not anti-social media.

"(Harrisburg University) looks at social media as a fact of life for millions of people," Infanti said.

"So the real question we are addressing is not whether we connect, but where and in what ways we should connect to benefit from online networking's pluses and avoid its minuses," he said.

Harrisburg students will be asked to write an essay when the week is over on the experience of living without social media.

The university is also hosting a "Social Media Summit" Wednesday featuring experts talking about such topics as "Twittervention: Social Media and Legal Issues for Employers, Educators and Parents."

Eric Darr, Harrisburg's provost, told Inside Higher Ed, an online journal of higher education, that the social media blackout was inspired by observing his 16-year-old daughter multi-tasking between Facebook and iPhone conversations.

"I was frankly amazed," Darr told InsideHigherEd.com. "I thought, 'How do you live like this?' It struck me to think, 'What if all this wasn't there?'"

"It's not that, as an institution, we hate Facebook," Darr said.

"Rather, it is about pausing to evaluate the extent to which social media are woven into the professional and personal lives of the people on the Harrisburg campus, and contemplating what has been gained and what

has been sacrificed."

By unplugging from Twitter, Facebook and other social media for a week, "I wanted to make it real for people -- not to make it an intellectual exercise," Darr said.

(c) 2010 AFP

Citation: US university experiments with social media blackout (2010, September 15) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-09-university-social-media-blackout.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.