

Should universities censor students on social media?

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Huge increases in the use of social media by students have posed difficult ethical questions for Universities. Comments posted on sites such as Facebook are often 'stream of consciousness' thoughts, expressed with little regard to their potential impact. Sometimes, they constitute serious transgressions, including racism, homophobia, violent threats and admissions of plagiarism. Do Universities have a duty of care to intervene for staff and student well-being? Should freedom of speech be upheld?

John Rowe's latest research offers a concise summary of the [ethical problems](#) faced by universities trying to protect their staff, [students](#), and reputation. Rowe also proposes a practical method for categorising online comments about teachers, students, classes, and institutions.

Students and teachers were shown a number of [social media](#) posts of varying degrees of offensiveness. These were real posts from real university-related student-run sites:

"Did u c that toby did the assignment already? He said he'd do mine as well if I want! Score!"

"That Chinese chick in our group is so lame. She is just freeloading on us cos she can't speak English. Stupid b****."

"I wish Gina would die!! Aaaargh! I think I might kill her tomorrow!"

They were asked to rank them from 1-4 (trivial to serious) and write what they thought the university should do about each.

There was a wide consensus that the most serious comments were about cheating and plagiarism and those that threatened violence, and/or were racist, sexist, and/or homophobic.

However, 'no' remained the definite answer when asked whether universities should monitor student-run sites.

Comments of this nature can seriously threaten the well-being of students and staff at university. So what can be done to protect them, while maintaining [freedom of speech](#)?

Find out more about the ethical implications of university involvement by reading the full research online. It's reader-friendly and offers fascinating points for discussion and exploration.

More information: The complete study is available online: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01587919.2014.899054

Provided by Taylor & Francis

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