

To post or not to post: Internet tips for college hopefuls

June 19 2017, by Jocelyn Gecker



This June 16, 2017 photo shows social media app icons on a smartphone held by an Associated Press reporter in San Francisco. Google yourself. Curate your online photos. And as one private high school advises its students: Don't post anything online you wouldn't want your grandmother to see. AP spoke with experts on the role of social media in the college admissions process. They offered tips for students on what to post - and not post - if you're trying to get into college. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

Google yourself. Curate your online photos. The general rule of thumb,

as one private high school advises its students: Don't post anything you wouldn't want your grandmother to see.

Guidance counselors have warned [college](#) applicants for years to mind their [social media](#) posts but can now cite a [high-profile example at Harvard University, which revoked offers](#) of admission to 10 students for offensive Facebook posts.

Colleges rarely revoke admission for online offenses, but social media's role in the college admission process is a growing reality. Here are some experts' tips on what to post—and not post—if you're trying to get into college.

WHAT RESEARCH SHOWS

Research from Kaplan Test Prep suggests online scrutiny of college applicants is increasing. Of 365 admissions officers surveyed, 35 percent said they check Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites to learn more about applicants, according to a poll released in February. Kaplan Test Prep has conducted annual surveys on the subject since 2008, when 10 percent of admissions officials said they checked applicants' social media pages.

The Harvard case highlights that "admissions doesn't necessarily end at the acceptance letter," says Yariv Alpher, executive director of research for Kaplan, the test-preparation company.

The case included jokes about the Holocaust and sexual assault that were shared on a private Facebook group for incoming Harvard freshmen, according to The Harvard Crimson, which broke the news earlier this month. Harvard has declined to comment but says it tells new students

that admission offers can be withdrawn if their behavior calls into question their maturity or moral character.

THE GRANDMOTHER RULE

San Francisco University High School seniors are given a warning each fall to clean up their online presence—and nix any posts they wouldn't show Grandma, said Jon Reider, director of college counseling at the elite private school.

"The mythical grandmother is held up as an icon of moral standards," Reider said.

Another word of wisdom: Don't make jokes online.

"Unless you are certified as being the funniest kid in the class, don't be funny," Reider said. "A sense of humor can be dangerous online."

DON'T BRAG, ESPECIALLY ABOUT WRONGDOING

Colgate University admissions officers don't routinely cruise prospective students' social media sites, says dean of admissions Gary L. Ross.

"However, there are occasions, very rarely, where something might be brought to our attention, and it would be foolish for us, if the matter is serious enough, not to check that out," Ross said.

He cited a case from a few years ago where a student bragged on social media that she applied early to Colgate and another institution, which

violates an agreement students sign to apply early to only one school.

"That was brought to our attention. I was in touch with the other dean of [admission](#), and we both agreed it was in violation of each institution's rules, and the [student](#) was denied at both."

EDIT ONLINE USERNAMES

Make sure your email address is appropriate, says Nancy Beane, associate director of college counseling at The Westminster Schools in Atlanta, and president of the National Association for College Admission Counseling.

Silly, vulgar or otherwise unprofessional usernames might look good to teenagers but send the wrong message to adults.

Beane also advises students to be mindful of how they treat others online, including comments and trolling of other accounts.

MORE DO'S AND DON'TS

The Princeton Review offers social media tips for college applicants, including "Google yourself" to see what turns up.

"Maybe you've made a comment on a blog that you'd rather not have show up, or a friend has tagged you in an unflattering photo," Princeton Review says in a tip sheet on its website.

It also advises students to check their privacy settings to know what can

be seen publicly, and to edit their online photo galleries.

"A picture is worth a thousand words, so make sure you're OK with what those words might be."

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Citation: To post or not to post: Internet tips for college hopefuls (2017, June 19) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-06-internet-college.html>

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