



## DII ADA | CORNER

### SOCIAL NETWORKING: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

As far back as 2008, there were “Blogs” written about the positives and negatives of social networking sites. An overview of those discussions follows. If a student-athlete is pressed for time — and what student-athlete isn’t? — social networking sites are a tool to keep parents, family and real friends updated without spending hours on the phone. This is the good of social networking. And it has other things about it that make it good; it’s a great way for the student-athlete to market herself/himself, as many companies now use social networking sites to announce job opportunities.



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The bad of social networking: a student-athlete’s online profile lives forever. Many social networking site users went into an uproar when a particular site announced that it owned the material on the student-athlete’s profile, even if the profile had been deleted. While many social networking sites changed this policy, the legal reality is that a social networking site owns the material posted when the policy was in place. In addition, tweets would appear to last forever and cell phone companies will probably have access to texts for at least the foreseeable future. It doesn’t take a computer wizard, only a little bit of computer savvy, to find material someone thought they deleted from their site, to find tweets that went into “website land” and texts that went into “cell phone land.”

The ugly: many of our new student-athletes have had access to social networking sites since the start of college, and athletics department are just now devising ways to warn student-athletes about appropriate online behavior. How many 18 year olds know what they want to do when they grow up? There are not many. How many 18 year olds understand the ramifications of their actions? There are far too few. It is the very, very rare college student-athlete who understands that their take on partying under the quotations section of a social networking page can torpedo employment ambitions, or the naked texts they sent to a boyfriend or girlfriend at another college can show up on their homepage after they are solo practitioners. “Sexting” is not like drunk-dialing; it lasts forever. Firms don’t hire people who post pictures of themselves lying in vomit after a night of binge drinking. We all know a student-athlete that has engaged in such behavior. We should be warning them that it’s dangerous when they engage in that activity, but just as dangerous when the questionable activity is posted on a social networking site.

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What should we do? We all have heard the old adage, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” If a student-athlete’s online profile is not clean, education is one prong that may start the fix:

- Initiate a program that reminds student-athletes of the potential long-range consequences of their questionable online profile. Of utmost importance is the need to give examples of the problems associated with thoughtless posts: Lost jobs, damaged reputations, public embarrassment, etc.
- Initiate a program that encourages student-athletes to choose wisely when allowing someone to “friend” them. Yes, a student-athlete can erase offensive posts from his/her wall and “uncheck” his/her name on a picture, but those posts still live forever in someone’s memory. A “friend” may gain enough information to steal an identity.
- Initiate a program that affords student-athletes a look at the bigger picture: would they want their mom (or dad or little sibling), grandmother, significant other and/or future employee to see questionable activities as they are surfing the web (“googling”).

At Chowan University, we have begun this process by hiring an outside agency to monitor student-athlete social networking sites. Shortly after this decision was announced, athletics received a commitment from the Student Athlete Advisory Council (SAAC) to be a test group that actively participates in the monitoring process before it is introduced to the total student-athlete population. The SAAC also was asked to define and revise the guidelines used to monitor the process. And finally, the SAAC was asked to participate in all remedial training recommended for a particular student-athlete who may have violated the principles of appropriate social networking usage.

Chowan University is moving slowly; however, proper education takes time. We may make many mistakes in the formative years, but hope in the long run we create a program that makes sense, is supported by our student-athletes and ensures our student-athletes enhance the good and negate the bad and the ugly of social networking sites.

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