COMMUNITY REPORT

September 2014

SOCIAL MEDIA
Social Media

**Charge:** Address challenges related to social integrity at Washington University within the context of online speech and social media use. The group will focus on two primary areas: encouraging civility in and setting community values for online speech and identifying when intervention in social media use may be required.

**Tasks:**
1. Develop a range of education initiatives related to online speech and social media use;
2. Review existing Washington University policies and assess how other institutions have handled online speech in order to make recommendations for policy updates.

**Outcome:** The group began its work by developing a set of values for online speech oriented around the principles of respect, reputation, privacy, and free expression. The values were used to inform a comprehensive set of educational and policy initiatives that promote these community values for online speech.

*Community Values for Expression*

**Respect:** Remember that your actions online affect other people.
- Words can wound: Consider the consequences of what you say on the larger community.
- It’s not just about what you say, but how you say it.
- Write it, but then read it before you share it.
- Respect goes both ways: be open to the opinions of others, even if they are different than yours.

**Privacy:** Respect other people’s boundaries, and establish your own.
- Just because something happens in public doesn’t mean that it should be publicized.
- Gossip hurts, and revenge isn’t sweet. Let people choose what they want to share about themselves, or keep to themselves.
- Some things don’t need to be repeated.

**Reputation:** You take care of your physical appearance; take care of your online appearance, too.
- Brand yourself the way you want to be perceived.
- Manage your privacy settings.
- Think before you share, because others can share it too.
- Remember that once it’s online, it’s permanent.
- Consider your social karma: negative actions online may return to you in unexpected ways.

**Free Expression** Exercise your right to free expression constructively and responsibly.
- Just because you can say something, it doesn’t mean you should.
- Choose your words wisely.
- Own what you say; don’t post anonymously.
- Respect other people’s rights to speak their mind, even if you disagree with them.
- Your voice has power, so use it to evoke positive change, thought, and innovation.
Educational Initiatives

Working with the First-Year Center, Office of Residential Life, Career Center, and Public Affairs, among others, our group has developed a series of educational initiatives to prepare students for life in our Digital Campus. These initiatives—developed in collaboration with the appropriate university units—include:

- Programming for first-year students to encourage early adoption of online leadership principles, including information in BearFacts and scenario-based activities at first-year orientation
- A variety of activities within Residential Life, including resident advisor training in modeling positive online behavior and best practices for online conflict resolution; activities based on online speech values at floor orientation and community engagement nights; and a digital signage campaign promoting online leadership
- A dynamic video campaign promoting responsible and thoughtful online behavior
- Reputation management training designed to encourage digital leadership, in coordination with the Career Center
- A guide that outlines both potential scenarios for challenging instances of online speech
- Development of a set of community best practices for responding to challenging instances of online speech, based on the principles of respect, reputation, privacy, and free expression

Proposed Policy Reforms

Our policy review identified two University Policies that are in need of revision in light of the emergence of the Digital Campus – the Student Judicial Code, and the University Computer Use Policy.

1. Student Judicial Code

The Student Judicial Code (SJC) is a living document that effectively manages the line between student responsibility and the University’s need for academic integrity, discipline, safety, and security on campus. [http://wustl.edu/policies/judicial.html] The University is of course (with the exception of the Campus Police) a private institution, which has broad legal authority to regulate activities on campus. It is not formally bound by constitutional rules like the First Amendment, which places substantial legal limits on the ability of public universities to manage activities on campus that have a substantial effect on the freedom of speech. Nevertheless, consistent with Washington University’s long-standing commitments to academic freedom, the SJC is highly deferential to student expression. Thus, the SJC begins with the broad declaration that:

“The primary purpose for the maintenance of discipline in the University setting is the protection of the campus community and the maintenance of an environment conducive to learning and inquiry. Freedom of thought and expression is essential to the University’s academic mission. Nothing in this Code should be construed to limit the free and open exchange of ideas and viewpoints, even if that exchange proves to be offensive, distasteful, disturbing, or denigrating to some.”

Consistent with this commitment to the free exchange of ideas, and given the SJC’s role as a disciplinary, quasi-judicial policy, our committee has two recommendations with respect to the SJC.
First, the working group does not recommend the addition of broad new categories of offenses for student expression. After studying this problem in detail, working group members believe that the best way to deal student expression that is at odds with the goals of the Mosaic Project is proactively through curricular development and community programming. When offensive student speech occurs (which is inevitable in a complex, diverse, and vibrant Digital Campus), it should be counter-acted in the first instance by prompt and measured messaging rather than University judicial proceedings under the SJC.

Second, the working group does recommend amendment to the SJC to provide greater definition to the University’s role in the adjudication process and more clarity to students about what is acceptable and what is sanctionable under the SJC. The University is fortunate that we currently have an administrator in place who possesses great experience and good judgment in questions of this sort, but best practices mandate that we have clear rules for students that do not depend on individual discretion, and which make transparent the sorts of activities that are prohibited. Our current Code does not do this as well as it should.

The working group understands that the University needs to have discretion to deal with the wide variety of misconduct that our student body will, from time to time, engage in. The working group is also mindful of both the difficulty of crafting specific offenses and the need to have flexibility in a time of rapid technological change. Just as the Code proscriptes “Use or possession of a hookah on the Danforth Campus or in any Residential Life managed facility” in Student Judicial Code III.A.9, it should give consideration to threats to the dignity and equality of all of our students, regardless of race or gender. It is therefore recommended that consideration of reforms along these lines be added to the charge for the next round of revisions to the SJC.

2. University Computer Use Policy
The Washington University Computer Use Policy was drafted in 1997 and adopted by the Faculty Senate to “provide guidelines for appropriate use by students, faculty, and staff of computer facilities and services at Washington University.” (http://wustl.edu/policies/compolicy.html) It was then revised and approved by the Faculty Senate Council in 2007. The Policy governs use of University-owned computers, servers, and computing facilities, but does not govern non-university-owned technology, except to the extent that such devices are used to access and use University networks. The Policy is divided into four “Principles and Guidelines,” which are:

- Respect the rights and sensibilities of others;
- Be aware of the legal implications of your computer use;
- Respect the mission of the University in the larger community;
- Do not harm the integrity of the University’s computer systems and networks.

The Policy was remarkably forward-thinking at the inception of widespread popular adoption of the Internet, but its provisions show its age. For example, the policy has no discussion of mobile connectivity to the university network (though this is covered in the Network Security policy), no
discussion of social media usage, and it contains dated language such as “Electronic mail should adhere to the same standards of conduct as any other form of mail.” (Computer Use Policy Principles and Guidelines A.1.)

The working group recommends that the Faculty Senate Council be charged with amending the Policy to reflect the new technological realities and capabilities of the Digital Campus in the twenty-first century, using technology-independent language when possible.

**Embracing the Opportunities of a Digital Campus**

Most fundamentally, our work has heightened our awareness of the difficult and persistent issues raised by the use of digital technologies both on campus and in broader society. These problems transcend our narrow charge to consider digital and social media usage as part of the Mosaic Project, but they deserve equally sustained and thoughtful attention going forward. The rapid pace of technological change and adoption ensures that new questions and challenges will continue to emerge, with the ongoing potential to impact the WUSTL community and beyond. Like many institutions, WUSTL is currently without an obvious mechanism for staying on top of, let alone ahead of, these trends. With these concerns in mind, the working group proposes a pilot project called “The Digital Campus” that will not only advance the initial efforts of the Social Media Working Group, but further examine WUSTL’s potential to be a leader in addressing the larger and inevitable problems posed by the ongoing digital technology revolution.

Leveraging the existing strengths of our world-class research university, the working group proposes that the “The Digital Campus” project explore educational, research, and administrative solutions to the problems inherent in a digital society. Under the oversight of the Office of the Provost, the project could initially be developed and facilitated by a working group composed of key players identified by the Social Media Working Group with responsibility for continuing their initiatives; additional members of the university community, including as yet identified faculty and staff with a vested interest and expertise in issues related to new technology use and adoption; and students who will serve as both advisors on and barometers for technological change and adoption. While the specific initiatives of the project will be at the discretion of the Office of the Provost and the proposed working group, the chairs of the Social Media Working Group have identified the following areas for consideration:

**Education**

- Continue to evaluate and oversee educational programming to promote digital leadership based on the social media values established by the Social Media Working Group
- Expand the reputation management training curriculum (to be offered to students through the WUSTL career center starting in the Fall of 2014) to a broader curriculum in digital leadership
- Explore ways to integrate digital and social media literacy into the academic curriculum
- Provide professional development opportunities in the areas of digital identity and social media education for faculty and staff
- Develop a community lecture series on topics related to the digital society
- Hire more teaching faculty with expertise in the study of digital issues more generally, including but not limited to the initial group of hires in sociology.

**Research**
- Identify existing faculty whose areas of interest extend to digital society topics (these may include faculty in law, film and media studies, psychology, business, engineering, English, and history, among others)
- Continue to facilitate ongoing collaboration amongst faculty on digital society topics, including discussion groups, cross-disciplinary courses, and potential interdisciplinary programs of study
- Pursue faculty hires whose research addresses and examines digital society concerns
- Identify and develop a mechanism for technology trend forecasting, where emerging technologies are identified, the manner in which they are being adopted and used scrutinized, and their potential impact and scenarios that might emerge from their use assessed

**Administration**
- Identify a central individual or individuals responsible for oversight of all WUSTL digital society initiatives
- Determine who will advise on and provide a coordinated administrative response when issues related to new technology use arise
- Provide resources to individual administrative sub-units of the University so that problems can be better diagnosed and remedied as they inevitably arise in the course of university operations
- Assess and benchmark WUSTL policies to ensure they are nimble and responsive to new technological uses and trends

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Problems of inclusion and problems of the Digital Campus are thorny enough on their own terms, but in combination they present Washington University with a truly Big or “Wicked” Problem. We know with certainty that this set of issues is not unique to Washington University. But we also know that they are inevitable, and Washington University needs to be prepared to confront and manage the viral digital expression that will only expand in the future. We need to think hard about the problems of the Digital Campus, we need to devote substantial resources to it, and we need to have a plan. This report suggests such a plan – substantial educational efforts to forestall many of these problems, measured reform of the relevant policies, and substantial investment in the human capital, most notably faculty and administration, to respond to crises of digital expression when they inevitably arise.

Yet although the working group has identified a substantial problem, our ultimate recommendation is optimistic. The problems of the Digital Campus identified in this report represent a real opportunity for Washington University to take a national and international leadership role in solving them. Universities exist to educate and to solve the concerns that face our human societies, and there are few greater areas of promise and peril than those posed by our rapid and widespread adoption of digital
technologies. We are thus ultimately hopeful that we can do innovative work as a University in this area, and make a difference in a manner that is consistent with Washington University’s commitment to interdisciplinary excellence and leadership.

Next Steps:
The University will convene a standing committee on social media and online speech.

Members:
Chair: Sahil Patel, College of Arts & Sciences, Class of 2014
Chair: Neil Richards, Professor, School of Law
Chair: Betha Whitlow, Curator of Visual Resources
Dahlgren Baker, College of Arts & Sciences, Class of 2017
Trevor Dawes, Associate University Librarian
Steven Harowitz, Coordinator of Student Involvement, Student Involvement and Leadership
Gokul Krishnan, School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Class of 2016
Jessica Martin, Executive Director of Strategic Communications, Public Affairs
Ryan Miller, Assistant Director for Special Facilities and Programs, Residential Life
Bisma Mufti, College of Arts & Sciences, Class of 2017
Cassaundra Sigaran, Director of New Media Strategy, Public Affairs