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Will Your Facebook Page Help or Hinder Your College Chances?

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However, what about more simple matters-like writing to your friends about how much you long to be admitted to your first choice school when you have just composed a sincere, heartfelt letter to your second choice asking to remain on their waitlist and promising to accept an offer of admission the moment it is offered. No matter how private you think your site is, think again, and take care about what you (and your friends) post.

According to Jackie Burrell, The 5 Dangers of Facebook and other Networking Sites (About.com) "business and medical school admissions officers surf social networking sites in even greater numbers than their undergrad brethren...as do prospective employers." If this is true, then they are not impressed with posts that shout "Par-tay! Woo-hoo!"

Admissions officers can use any publicly available information to make sound decisions about candidates in order to strengthen the quality of their entering freshman class. So use social media to enhance your image. If you are an artist post a link to photo galleries. If music is your passion, post clips of your performances. If volunteerism is your deal, post a link to an article that was written in the local press about one of your service projects.

Consider building your own website. By doing this well, you can display your computer skills as well as your graphic design talents at the same time. Take the time you usually use to post birthday party or prom photos to create an on-line presence that supports rather than detracts from your college or graduate school application by adding substance to those skills, talents, abilities which you can only write about on your application.

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Many parents can recall the days when students applied to one, or perhaps two or three colleges, got accepted to their first choice school, and were done. Colleges too can recall the days when prospective students could be identified, contacted and wooed all for the price of postage. But those times are long gone and college admissions offices around the nation and the world are embracing social media "with more than 80 percent of colleges using Facebook to connect with, recruit and research potential students." (US News and World Report, Colleges Bring Campuses to Facebook, April 7, 2011) This profound change in communication between colleges and prospective applicants is a very big deal. Several billion people engage in social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) and many of them are applying to college.

Today's students have grown up with the Internet, and feel comfortable with it as a means of socializing and communicating with their friends. What many fail to realize is that their on-line presence is now their on-line resume. Just as students can learn a great deal about a school by logging onto Facebook and following the conversations, so too can a college admissions office learn about an applicant. Do admission officers really have the time to check into their applicants social media identities to learn more about them? Yes, they do. And although they do not have the time nor the need to check up on every student who applies, when a selective university is down to the wire on limited seating for their most popular majors, scarce resources and scholarship awards, the information that they find on-line can persuade the admission committee one way or the other.

Here's what our students can do to make their on-line presence work in their favor:

It's a no-brainer now to clean up your Facebook page and take care not to post dicey photos or racy prose on social networking sites.