

VIEWPOINTS



Online resources both socially and academically beneficial

W Zoe Ljubic
Editor in Chief

Have you ever rolled your eyes when your teacher gave you a Moodle™ assignment? How about when you had to complete your lab report via Google Docs™?

I know I have. After completing a Spanish homework assignment on Moodle™ last week, I couldn't help but realize the number of students that did not enjoy posting homework on Moodle™. Similarly, I noticed the annoyed comments from my peers in chemistry class when teacher asked us to complete virtual labs and shares our lab reports via Google Docs™. Rarely have I heard students praise any of these resources.

Why is this? Why are resources that are designed to make students' lives easier and to make teachers more accessible seen as such a burden.

Part of the reason may be the vehicle itself.

From its infancy until the past couple of years, the Internet was regarded by students primarily as diversion, a refuge from the stark realities of school, parents and the adult world. Through social networking sites, instant messaging and You Tube™, just to name a few features, students used these tools as a distraction from homework and other responsibilities.

Furthermore, believe it or not, Facebook™ provides academic as well as social benefits

Thus, many see the appropriation of the Internet by teachers as a learning tool to be an unwelcome intrusion on "their" turf. While that is perhaps understandable, it is ultimately short sighted.

First of all, claiming something as comprehensive as the Internet as one's own exclusive province is just a wee bit arrogant. Moreover, schools must keep up with technology to best serve students, and students must embrace that technology or be left behind. The truth is that these online resources are preparing us for the future. Face it: West students have an abundance of resources available to them to better ease the learning process. Moodle™ and Google Docs™ are just two of the available resources that teachers utilize in the classroom.

In the January issue of *West Word*, senior staff writer Sofiya Pershteyn profiled a number of such services, including DimDim™, which enables students to video and audio conference with their teachers as if they are in an online class. This provides students with the opportunity to "meet" with teachers the night before a test to discuss last minute questions, especially important when students are busy after school.

Moodle™ and sites such as Proboards™ (which *West Word* uses for composition and editing) provide students with the ability to see work submitted by their peers, to edit it and to reply to posts. This creates a learning environment that strives to recognize the importance of sharing information and editing.

Google Docs™ facilitates an email and file-sharing server in which students easily can e-mail any student or teacher in the school. Also, students can send their work to any student or teacher, and that person can edit or comment on the document. This eliminates the use of a flash drive and creates an easy-to-use word processor online. It also allows everyone, whether (s)he uses a PC or Macintosh computer, to access school files 24-7.

The online resources that West offers are useful. They enable students to stay up to date with classroom activity, especially when they cannot have their questions answered in class. They also help students stay connected with one another, allowing them to learn from such interaction.

These tools are enhancing our production. It is time that students start noticing the importance of this phenomenon. Furthermore, believe it or not, Facebook™ provides academic as well as social benefits. I utilize Facebook™ for information for newspaper articles and for homework help.

An added bonus is that people I have met through such academic pursuits via Facebook™, including students from other schools that I have met via extracurricular activities, are all my Facebook™ friends that I am able to contact.

It is necessary for students to realize the importance of the technology movement. The notion that the Internet is merely a fun diversion is passé. It is only after we notice the real importance of these resources that we can actual start using them properly.

Hardworking Go Green Club deserves better than trash



W Rexly Penaflores II
Editor in Chief

Back in the day, before iTunes™ and compact discs, people were fond of using the expression "like a broken record," a term that meant repeating oneself like the needle skipping in the groove of a damaged vinyl album. In that spirit, I will sound like that faulty bit of plastic in this column.

Last year, former Around Town and current Sports editor Naomi Prale wrote a column in which she advocated for the proper disposal of paper in the recycling bins in each room. Since that time, the school's Go Green Club has expanded its services, including providing and collecting bottle and can boxes in each classroom and large green can recycling tubs in the hallways. Unfortunately, the problem has not gone away.

Every Wednesday, the Go Green Club makes it way through West, collecting recyclable items. I applaud their efforts, and I applaud the school's initiative to become more eco-friendly and help the fight. However, there is one thing that must be addressed. Go Green Club sponsor Tatyana Gulak complained to *West Word* about the various pieces of garbage that do not belong but which end up in the recycling bins. If students are in support of a more environmentally-friendly school, then we should start by putting our trash or recyclable objects in the right bin.

During my interview with Gulak, I heard some disturbing stories about what has been found in the recycle bin, including non-recyclable food products and chewing gum. However, the winner of the most shocking discovery award has to be someone's underwear. In a school where it is expected to behave in a mature manner at this age level, I am shocked that anyone would cast his/her umentionables in a recycling bin.

"It is ridiculous," Gulak said.

While underwear might be the most disgusting thing found

in the bins, it is just the tip of the iceberg of what Gulak and her students have encountered while sorting through the bins.

Other than non-recyclable items, the major problem the group encounters is cups or open bottles still filled with liquid. While students are encouraged to recycle such items, Gulak said that her team often must deal with soda or juice spilling on the floor or inside the recycling bins.

Gulak said that of the 42 minutes that each group has to collect the bins, 15 of those 42 minutes are usually spent sifting through the containers to eliminate garbage.

"Students have brains, but [some] either do not understand anything or they are mostly ignorant, and so they put garbage in the recycle bin," she said. "I thought that young people were supposed to understand and be educated on how important it is to properly recycle."

However, the winner of the most shocking discovery award has to be someone's underwear

If we are to understand and be educated on recycling, there a few steps that not only the student body, but also the staff can take in preventing mis/disuse. For students, the best thing to do is to say something when someone throws something in the recycling bin that is not supposed to be there. Better yet, take it out and put it in the proper receptacle. It is as simple as that. Teachers can help by encouraging students to put outdated handouts, test prompts and old quizzes and tests in the recycling bins.

I know that there are a lot of people who help out by knowing that paper, bottles and cans can be thrown in the recycling bins—and in which ones—but sometimes, people can be preoccupied or lazy, so they throw everything in the first bin that they see. We need to change that culture. It might seem like a small thing to tell someone to throw something away in the right receptacle, but it can make a big difference.

We owe it to ourselves, to the school, to the environment and especially to that hardy band of emerald tee-shirt clad volunteers who give up their free periods to keep the school green.

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WestWord

west opinions

Area school oversteps authority in Facebook™ case

Staff Editorial

Facebook™ has become a prevalent social networking tool at West, with even the Student Activities and Information Resource Center maintaining pages to disseminate information. Even *West Word* uses Facebook™ to communicate copy deadlines to its staff members. Students create and join groups and become fans of pages fairly commonly.

One such student, an Oak Forest High School sophomore named Justin Bird, created a Facebook™ page criticizing his teacher, exercising his right to free speech, and was later suspended for five days by his school, according to www.abc7chicago.com.

The *West Word* editorial board supports Bird's pursuit of a legal case against Oak Forest in order to expunge the offense from his permanent record. This case can only be framed into perspective if past school speech cases are evaluated.

In the 1969 Supreme Court case *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, a school speech precedent was established.

The suit involved students who wore black armbands to protest the Vietnam War and subsequently were told to leave school until they complied with the school administration's decision against such a protest.

The case was granted review by the Supreme Court, which ruled that students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate," according to Cornell University's Legal Information Institute (LII).

According to that ruling, schools are not allowed to discriminate against specific viewpoints because doing so violates the First Amendment rights of students. In other words, a school does not have the right to pick and choose what student expressions are allowed.

In defending the decision, Oak Forest's District 228 Superintendent Bill Kendall said Bird's expression was "disrespectful, inappropriate and lewd. Even though it was done at home, it disrupted the school," www.abc7chicago.com reported.

His rationale echoes that expressed in 2007 Supreme Court ruling in the case involving the reprimand of Juneau, AL student who wore a tee-shirt emblazoned with "BONG HiTS 4 JESUS" (*Morse v. Frederick*).

Joseph Frederick was suspended by principal Deborah Morse for supposedly promoting drug use across the street from school property during a school-sanctioned activity. Although he was never on school property, the Supreme Court ruled that Frederick was not protected under the First Amendment, according to LII. However, this was a very specific ruling only limiting free speech when there is promotion of illegal drug use.

Such displays are considered disruptive to the school's functioning and conflict with the school's mission, so it is fair for the school to have suspended that student.

However, Bird was not promoting illegal drug use, but merely

expressing his anger legally and outside of school.

Although Bird's comments might have been disrespectful, they in no way disrupted Oak Forest's daily educational functions. Bird created the page and approximately 50 students joined. He then deleted the page that day. The page was up for less than a day, and only a fraction of students even heard about the page.

Ironically, the only daily function disrupted at Oak Forest might be when District 228 school board members discuss the legal liability to which they opened themselves when the unfair suspension was handed down.

West is not a stranger to such situations. In a 2006 incident, several students were suspended from extracurricular activities over photos posted on Facebook™. In 2003, West alumna Rita Koganzon ('03) crossed rhetorical swords with the school administration over a website she designed as a sophomore at West.

She used it as "part as a personal blog and in part as a way to make fun of my classes and teachers by recording absurd or silly things they said in class," said Koganzon, now a graduate student at Harvard University.

Koganzon said that she ran afoul of the administration three times. The first time she included comments on her website about her chemistry class. The school administration "threatened all kinds of unlikely things (including a lawsuit) and ended up only removing me from an academic team I was on," Koganzon said. The second time, she called a physical education teacher an insulting name and was suspended for two days. Finally, she criticized her tennis coach's decision; however, that was just critical of a decision, so nothing substantial resulted from incident, she said.

In retrospect, however, Koganzon regrets some of her decisions.

"I am sure I was very indignant about being punished at the time and claimed all kinds of things about my right to free expression outside of school and all that, but I do not think now that the school's reaction was particularly unfair."

Although Koganzon feels different now, the fact remains that the school did intrude into what was mostly a legal matter.

Just as in the Bird case, the school became the judge, jury and executioner and unfairly punished a student. It was not the school's place to punish Bird or Koganzon. It should have been up to the teachers who were affected to decide if they wanted to pursue their legal options under libel protections. Koganzon admits she now considers her insult of the teacher to be "libel" and www.abc7chicago.com called Bird's words "derogatory."

This terminology suggests offense not toward a school, but toward an individual. In the opinion of the *West Word* editorial board, West administrators overstepped their bounds in 2003, a condition that currently is being repeated at Oak Forest.

Should students be suspended for criticizing teachers on Facebook™?

Staff



Shaun Waldron

There is no problem with a student saying I am the "most boring teacher in the world." But, I think a line is drawn like in society.

Senior



Mariam Ethezaz

No, because it is the [students'] personal choice what they write on their personal pages.

Junior



Alex Knorr

No, because every person has a right to [his/her] own opinions, as long as Facebook™ is not used as a tool of slander.

Sophomore



Tracy Hanaoka

No, because we have freedom of speech. If it [does not] endanger the safety of the person, then students should be safe from punishment.

Freshman



Demonte Hill

No, because it is Facebook™ and [students] are out of school and should be entitled to their opinion.



Letter to the Editor

To the Viewpoints Page Editor:

The column [on the Foreign Language Resource Center in the Feb. 26 issue] written by the [Wire] editor is sadly incorrect. While I would agree that missing school causes an inconvenience to making up tests and quizzes, saying that the Foreign Language Resource Center is one of the least conducive spaces imaginable for making up work seems to be an exaggeration. Several statements, in this article, seem to be an exaggeration: the resource center being compared to Grand Central Station; the continuous stream of teachers, substitutes continuously coming in and out of the room; the constant chatter and phone use; that the ELL students are appropriately loud, shouting and playing games. And perhaps the greatest inconvenience, the testing center for language classes poses is that it is only open after school until strictly 3:45 pm.

So I'll share the facts and allow the facts to speak for itself. This past summer, the resource room was moved from room 2303 to 2317. Room 2317 is larger and allows for nine desks. The lighting is much better. The room is equipped with a computer for student use, allowing for students to take the listening portion of their exam using headphones. Headphones are available, for

those students that may be easily distracted, upon request. The resource room is located adjacent to the ELL Teachers office and the designated quiet area of the ELL Resource Center. Recently, with the increase of immigrant students to our school district, only the students that need help with their studies are allowed in the main ELL resource room.

The Foreign Language resource room hours have remained the same 7:30 a.m.- 3:45pm. The 7:30 a.m. time frame does allow for students to take their exams and the 3:23 p.m. time frame allows for students to take their quizzes. Generally, if a student comes after school and explains their situation, consideration is given. Either the student has spoken with their teacher and will complete the test with their teacher, or the teacher and student have worked it out to have the student's test in the testing center. Or, the student will be given the needed extra time by being placed in the quiet area of the ELL Resource Center under the supervision of one of the ELL tutors.

So, something has been done...
Barbara Dracheberg
Executive Secretary for the ELL and Foreign Language Dept.