

Challenges and Opportunities Posed by Online Video

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Websites that allow users to easily view and, more importantly, upload video present many challenges and opportunities to colleges and universities. YouTube, Dailymotion, and other similar sites allow visitors to upload and view videos such as homeshot movies, scenes filmed with cell phones, homemade animation, and commercial movies and television shows. There are educational, ethical, and legal implications for what our students choose to view and upload and how we choose to employ these tools. Student affairs administrators must become and remain aware of how these popular and useful.

Although other similar websites exist and are used by college and university students, including Google Video, Dailymotion, and CollegeHumor, the most popular website is YouTube. Founded in February of 2005 and acquired by Google in November of 2006 for 1.65 billion dollars, YouTube is the poster child of online video websites (YouTube, 2007; Reuters, 2006). YouTube was named the Best Invention of 2006 by Time Magazine (Grossman, 2006a), listed as one of the Best Products of 2006 by PC Magazine (Stafford, 2006), and played a prominent role in Time's subsequent naming of "You" as the 2006 Person of the Year (Grossman, 2006b). YouTube's success, however, has not been without controversy. For example, Viacom, a large corporation whose holdings include MTV and Comedy Central, is suing YouTube for over one billion dollars for "massive intentional copyright infringement" (Viacom, 2007).

Communications and media scholars assert that the availability and ease-of-use of video sharing websites are among the most prominent factors leading to a reshaping of how citizens understand and participate in the world. In work funded by the MacArthur Foundation's Digital Learning project, MIT professor Henry Jenkins describes the emergence of a "participatory culture" and asserts that "access to this participatory culture functions as a new form of the

hidden curriculum, shaping which youth will succeed and which will be left behind as they enter school and the workplace" (Jenkins, 2006, p 3). Similarly, others have focused on how growing access to video is reshaping democracy and politics. For example, City University of New York professor Jeff Jarvis is following the exploding use of YouTube by 2008 presidential hopefuls on his PrezVid website (Jarvis, 2008). In a move mixing both online availability of video and the shifting and confusing nature of copyright in a digital age, C-SPAN was recently challenged to make available its video for non-commercial, online use after Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi was asked to remove video of a congressional hearing on global warming from her blog (Cohen, 2007).

Challenges

The ease with which anyone can view and upload videos to YouTube and similar websites poses several challenges for student affairs administrators. Among these challenges are widespread and rapid awareness of on-campus incidents and student misbehavior, ethical issues surrounding and related to citizen journalism, and potential copyright and ethical issues.

The speed with which on-campus incidents and student misbehavior can be recorded, uploaded, and viewed by thousands of geographically disparate people is staggering. Prominent examples that have garnered national attention include:

- After resident assistants at Long Island University were fired after posting a "mock hostage video," they sued the institution and were reinstated when the suit was settled (Associated Press, 2007a)
- A UCLA student recorded campus police repeatedly used a taser on another student, raising questions about the appropriateness of both the police and student response (Taylor, 2006)

- A couple's public and hostile romantic break-up at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was recorded and uploaded to YouTube and initially raised questions about civility and ethical behavior; although it was later revealed to have been staged, those questions remain (Jaschik, 2007; Read, 2007)
- A University of Florida lecturer was asked to resign after videos of his in-classroom behavior were spread via websites such as YouTube and VH1's "Best Week Ever" blog (Smith, 2006).

Notable about most events in which online video play prominent role is that the video itself is rarely the event or incident that attracts attention. Instead, the online video usually serves to publicize the event or incident to an extremely broad audience. In essence, these websites are being combined with ubiquitous cell-phone cameras to allow nearly anyone to function as a de facto citizen journalist. Not only are journalists sometimes an unwelcome presence at times due to privacy, security, or public-relation concerns, but citizen journalists (by definition) often lack the training, education, and experience of professional journalists in important areas such as professional ethics (Glocer, 2006). The ethics of recording and sharing such video may be one aspect of a growing movement to educate youth about media literacy (Jenkins, 2006).

In those instances when videos uploaded to these websites are themselves the target of controversy, the issue at hand is usually copyright. By uploading copyrighted videos without authorization from the copyright holder, the uploader is often (but not always) violating copyright by distributing the video, an exclusive right of the copyright holder. Although all reputable websites respond promptly to allegations of copyright infringement as required by the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, the sheer volume of material uploaded to these websites can

easily make enforcement of copyright a challenge. As noted before, Viacom is currently pursuing a one billion dollar lawsuit and alleging that YouTube is "exploiting the devotion of fans to others' creative works in order to enrich itself and its corporate parent Google" (Viacom, 2007). With respect to copyright infringement, institutions are properly concerned about:

- Potentially being named in lawsuits as contributing to or failing to prevent students' copyright infringement. Although such a lawsuit would be very unlikely to succeed, a very skewed and incorrect reading of the Supreme Court's Grokster ruling could lead a copyright holder to attempt such a lawsuit.
- Enforcing their own copyrights and protecting intellectual property rights. Institutions should be closely monitoring these websites for videos that infringe on their intellectual property rights. Although closely linked to a general concern for an institution's portrayal and presentation in the public sphere, there may also be purely legal concerns. Intellectual property is a nuanced area of law and some rights, particularly in the area of trademark, can be lost merely by failing to protect them.
- Changing viewpoints and perception of copyright and intellectual property. Persuasive arguments have been put forth that perceptions of copyright and intellectual property are changing, often out of step with the law and others' perceptions. Although one may reject Downes' comparison of the Information Revolution with the Industrial revolution and its sometimes-bloody battles (Downes, 2007), one can not deny that numerous examples exist of these changing viewpoints and perceptions: Creative Commons licenses, open source and free software, mashups, and Google's ongoing book scanning project.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that YouTube and similar websites are posing significant challenges to some institutions as streaming video requires a significant amount of network bandwidth.

Given the above challenges and the opportunities described below, another more insidious challenge presents itself: how to best make use of these tools and allow students to make use of them in a responsible manner. At least one American institution of higher education, Brigham Young University, has joined countries like Turkey and Brazil in completely banning YouTube on either a permanent or temporary basis (McNeil, 2007; Associated Press, 2007b). Although the technology is relatively new, the challenges of protecting academic freedom, ensuring students can create and explore, protecting the institution, and wisely using its limited resources are old and familiar to student affairs administrators.

Opportunities

As is often the case, student affairs practitioners and scholars must work much harder to identify positive uses for this new technology than students have worked to creatively use and misuse it.

The most obvious use of these sites is to retain some level of familiarity with one's campus and students. Although the videos posted to these sites are certainly not representative of an entire campus, what videos are posted and which videos become popular (different sites have different metrics of popularity, including "most viewed" and "[received the] most comments") certainly gives some idea of the campus culture. More importantly, the searchability of these sites and the manner in which videos are "tagged" allows other viewers the opportunity to view videos that are described as being somehow associated with your institution. In addition to the obvious public relations and recruiting opportunities (and challenges), this also

has implications for those who monitor the campus climate with respect to social norming, hazing, and similar behavioral concerns. Similarly, online video may be useful in some forms of counseling or related educational efforts (Morrill, Oetting, & Hurst, 1974). Campuses are urged to develop and enforce policies related to consistent monitoring of online video and how online videos can and should be used in formal and informal disciplinary hearings.

Given the low-costs, ease-of-use, and widespread familiarity, online video sites present a rich opportunity for institutions and units within institutions to identify, promote, and brand themselves. In addition to allowing visitors to view videos on their main webpages, most of these tools allow users to "embed" videos from their site in other webpages, allowing users to easily add video content to nearly any webpage. Therefore an opportunity exists for anyone with the ability to record a video and transfer that video to a computer to place it on nearly any webpage. Such recordings may not be sufficient for formal or archival use but may be perfect for uses such as advertising an upcoming event, showing highlights of a recent event, recruiting students or staff, or other similar uses.

As illustrated vividly by Gallaudet University's ongoing video blog, videos have the potential to cross communication barriers and enable widespread communication. As current research into video games is exploring, video and other non-text media may help many with learning disabilities, different learning styles, or injuries and disabilities communicate. Most striking among online videos that illustrate this ability to help people cross a communication gulf is a video created by Amanda Baggs, a low-functioning autistic. She is unable to communicate as most people classify communication but given a keyboard she is able to type 120 words per minute. In a breathtaking video posted to YouTube, she narrates her recorded actions and shares her thoughts using a speech-synthesizer (Carvin, 2007). Although this is an extreme example, it

does not take much to imagine that there are students on our campus that could use these and similar tools to more effectively and comfortably communicate.

Although they present many challenges and open up our campuses to a wider audience than they have ever seen, online video sites like YouTube present unique and low-cost opportunities for student affairs administrators and scholars. More importantly, they are being actively and vigorously used by our students in ways that we must begin to understand. Given the changes these tools are bringing about in popular culture, mass media, communication, and politics, we must understand these tools and their effects.

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