

PROGRAM TITLE: “**The Facebook Phenomenon: What Students Need to Know**”

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“The Facebook Phenomenon: What Students Need to Know” as presented by Tara L. Hurt and Brian R. Lashley provided a stimulating presentation based on a 2007 study concerning Facebook activity and awareness at Eastern Connecticut State University (ECSU). The introduction to Facebook included an overview of the main features of Facebook as well as information on profile creation, setting privacy restrictions, making “Friends”, sharing photos, viewing parties, personal whiteboards and joining groups. The point was clearly made that many students are unaware of the option to set privacy restrictions, as well as the fact that their personal information (birth date, cell phone numbers, email address, school address, AIM screen names, sexual orientation, relationship status, partner’s name, employer, etc) may render them vulnerable to stalking and identity theft. ECSU students, like students at many colleges, use Facebook to pass the time, post announcements, locate parties, chat about courses, and share photos with friends – sometimes embarrassing photos posted without their friend’s knowledge. Students find Facebook to be funny and like the fact that Facebook is easy and free, and view it as an integral part of campus life. ECSU students seem indifferent to the downsides of Facebook which include, but certainly are not limited to: identity theft, stalking, violations of student conduct codes (i.e. underage drinking on campus), public invitations to parties that result in private parties no longer being “private”, campus discipline officers may view the page, potential graduate school admissions staff may see it, and potential employers may see pictures uploaded by the student or the student’s friends as well as quotes and blogs which may contain text which is negatively viewed by the potential employer. The results of the study were communicated to campus advisors and Freshmen Year Experience (FYE) faculty to make them more aware of the internet image that ECSU students project to potential employers, and incoming students are also made aware of the impact that their Facebook and other social networking sites may have on their opportunities for employment and graduate school. The presentation was followed by a lively discussion in which attendees shared their encounters with youth with regard to various social networking tools, the similarities and differences between Facebook and MySpace, as well as their insight and experiences with social networking. When the session ended, those in attendance seemed to be in agreement that as librarians, we have the responsibility to not only educate students concerning the dangers of posting personal information, but also to educate ourselves about the vast world of constantly evolving social networking software.